

Heroic Legends

Agnes Grozier Herbertson

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The Two Brothers

Bellisant, the sister of King Pepin of France, sat in her round room, broidering. She had hair that was bright as the sun that stained her window, and eyes that were clear as pools of dew. She had a peaked chin and an air of wonderment. She held her needle with a grace that was fair to see.

Bellisant was fairest of all fair maidens, and there was that about her that won men's hearts, so that they loved her, not counting the cost of loving. But her heart was not less pure than her smile was tender; and when the peasant women chid their daughters, they would say, "Child, child, be careful --you will never be as good as the Princess Bellisant".

As Bellisant sat broidering she heard a step upon the stair, and she knew it was that of King Pepin, her brother, who held her dearest of all he loved. Yet would she not look upon him as he entered, for she knew that he came to speak of a suitor, who should take her from him; and Bellisant had had suitors beyond her reckoning, and liked them ill.

"What sewest thou, my sister?" asked the King, with gentleness.

Bellisant replied, "It is a robe for a child who hath lost her mother, and I have sewn into every stitch a sweet thought for her. But tell me, brother, what tidings are these I read upon thy face?"

King Pepin replied, "I bring tidings of Alexander, Emperor of Greece; for thy fair fame hath reached him. He seeks thy hand in marriage, and even now he waits below to look upon thy face."

Bellisant blushed rose-red. Then she said, "I will see no more suitors."

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But the King made answer, coaxing her, yet with something of sternness mingling the sadness of his tone, "He is a mighty monarch, and it is well that thou shouldst see him."

Therefore Bellisant left her broideries, that the Emperor of Greece should look upon her face. And she tripped down the long stair and met him. Now she would have given him but a glance and then have withdrawn herself—such was the intention that moved her—but as she gave the glance her heart leapt up and went with it; and she knew that she loved Alexander and would wed none other. As for him, he loved her with a love as fond.

Thus it came about that fair Bellisant was wedded to Alexander, Emperor of Greece, and went away with him; and all France was in tears.

But Bellisant was happy, so that her fairness increased day by day; and many folk travelled from far countries just to look upon her face. And her heart was full of love for all people, and of thoughtfulness for the poor; so that she feared no evil from any.

But Alexander had a friend and minister, a priest whom he loved, but one who was of little credit to his order, being full of evil thoughts and crafts. This man would have had the Empress Bellisant love him with a greater love than she bore her husband; and since she would not, he made himself her enemy. So he set himself to think upon her helplessness, and in what fashion he could work her undoing, and afterwards made a plot against her.

Now the Emperor loved and trusted this man, and when the false priest came before him, wringing his hands and with tears heavy upon his cheeks, he begged of him that he would relate that which caused his distress.

But the priest replied, his tears again overflowing, and with every manifestation of distress: "How can I bring myself to relate this thing and be the means of bringing grief upon the man I love and honour above all men?"

Then the Emperor, perceiving that he himself must be the object of the priest's solicitude, turned pale with anxiety, not knowing what should come upon him. "Nay, dear friend, tell thy tale, and tell it quickly," cried he, "for thou fillest my breast with fears that are worse than knowledge!"

Thereupon the false friend fell upon his knees, and related to the Emperor how he had learnt of the wickedness of the Empress Bellisant, that her virtue was no real virtue, and that her fair face hid a heart that was blacker than night, and how she had plotted most grievously against the Emperor, and had never loved him. And these things he declared had been told to him in confession, so that he might not reveal the names of those who were partners in the Empress's crime.

When Alexander heard of these things, he was filled with grief and anger so great that he threw himself upon the ground and would see no one. And the priest slipt away, well satisfied that his evil work was accomplished; for it did not occur to the Emperor to doubt his friend.

When the Emperor had recovered from his grief, he raised himself; and since his sorrow was dim and his anger exceedingly great against Bellisant, he gave orders that she should instantly be put to death.

"For I will not ", said he, "that others should look upon her beauty and be deceived." And he hid his face in his hands, remembering that virtuous Bellisant whom he had loved.

Then came Bellisant before the Emperor, stupefied with amazement at this evil thing which had come upon her, and knowing not how to defend herself from so cruel a charge. Pale were her cheeks as a lily, and heavy her eyes were with sorrow, and, dropping her little chin within her hands, she looked woefully at Alexander, declaring her innocence of any crime against him.

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But he, turning away, crushed his hands upon his ears, crying, "I will not listen to thy false words, false Bellisant, lest I be again undone. Neither will I behold thy beauty, lest I should be again deceived and think thee pure!"

And with that he left her. Yet because, despite himself, her sweet voice lingered in his ears, and because there were many who wept for the fate of the Empress Bellisant—for she was already greatly beloved of the people—the Emperor commanded that she should not be executed, but should be exiled and forbidden the country under pain of death.

And he ordered that none should accompany Bellisant when she went forth save only her squire Blandiman, whom she had brought with her from her brother's court.

Therefore the Empress and Blandiman went into exile. And Blandiman said:

"Let us seek the court of King Pepin, that he may espouse thy cause and, having pity upon thy wrongs, may avenge thee; or may give thee succour till thine enemy hath betrayed himself."

Therefore they journeyed toward France.

And having reached, at length, that forest which is called the Forest of Orleans, Blandiman left his mistress and went in search of food.

And while he was absent Bellisant's two children were born, and they were both sons.

Now Bellisant sat gazing upon them, and weeping; for she reflected how her sons would never behold their father, or that fair realm which should have been their home. And as she wept, a she-bear approached the tree beneath which the Empress reclined, and, seizing one of the babes in her mouth, padded swiftly away.

At this calamity the Empress was as one distraught, and with her hair wild about her, and her tears falling, she pursued the animal, breaking her way through the tangles of the forest with bleeding hands. From her mouth issued cries of distress, but, alas! there was none near to hear; and ere she could free herself from the thorns that caught at her, the bear had plunged into new thicknesses and disappeared.

Thereupon Bellisant fell to the ground in a swoon, and she lay there, with hands outstretched, like one dead.

At that moment King Pepin came riding through the forest, for he had been out hunting. He saw nothing of the Empress as she lay deathlike among the bushes, but rode past, his eyes upon the ground, his face misshapen with anger and shame.

When he came to that tree where the Empress had been resting, he perceived upon the ground beneath it a new-born infant whom no one guarded.

The King bade his courtiers bring the child to him, and when he had looked upon it he felt something—he knew not what—stir in his heart so that he had almost swooned for love of the child. And when he had recovered himself, he said to his gentlemen, turning away his face so that his weakness might be hidden, "Let us take this child with us whither we go, for he moves me strangely to love. And he shall be brought up in gentleness, and shall be as mine own son."

Now the courtiers murmured, but they did as he had said.

King Pepin passed on his way, bearing the boy with him; and a little while afterwards Blandiman returned, bringing with him food and divers things which he had purchased.

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But when he reached the tree where he had left Bellisant, there was no one by it. And near the tree the bushes were much broken. Then Blandiman went through the forest, crying the Empress's name in fear.

And when he had called several times, he heard a feeble cry, and discovered Betlisant, who had only now recovered from her swoon.

Then she lifted a stricken face and wept grievously. "Alas, Blandiman," cried she, "in one hour have joy and sorrow come upon me! For thou hadst left me but a little time, when my two sons were born, and hardly had this sweet joy been mine, when a great bear issued from the forest and carried one of them away. And the babe is even now devoured, since I could follow but a little way." And Bellisant bowed her head upon her knees. But Blandiman questioned her, fear stinging his heart. "Where, Madam, is the other babe, since thou hadst two sons?"

Bellisant replied, "In my haste to follow this cruel beast, I left him beneath the tree where I had rested".

"Alas, Madam," cried Blandiman, scarce able to restrain his tears, "Heaven hath seen fit to afflict thee cruelly! For I sought but a moment ago that tree, which I had marked well, and there was no living thing by it. Some other beast of the forest hath visited it in thine absence, and hath borne away the second babe!"

Bellisant sat still, stupefied with sorrow. After a time she said, "I will go to my brother, for he hath ever loved me and will regard my grief."

Blandiman hung his head and was silent. When the Empress lifted her great eyes to look at him, marvelling that he did not answer, he said, "As I passed through the forest I came upon King Pepin, who was a-hunting. On beholding me, he was seized with a great fury so that he lost power of speech. And when his voice returned to him, he told me how the Emperor had dealt all too tenderly by thee, and how he—the King—had dealt more had he been in the Emperor's place. For, King Pepin believes in thy guilt!"

Then rose the Empress to her feet, and with a sigh that almost broke her breast, she said, "I will seek some quiet place in the forest, that I may die there; for now my life is finished, and I am tired of the world with its sorrows and deceits."

But Blandiman said, "Nay, Madam, that were a pitiful thing to do, and an insult to Heaven who, one day, will prove thine innocence. Let us seek, instead, another country, and wait there with patience for a while."

And, having so decided, they left that realm, and, after passing through many vicissitudes, arrived at the castle of the giant Ferragus, which was in Portugal. And he, being a man of a great heart, though a pagan, had pity on those poor fugitives, and gave them hospitality for many years.

Of these things King Pepin knew nothing, for he had blotted out of his heart fair Bellisant, who had used to sit brooding in her round room, making garments for the poor. But he loved Valentine—for so he had named the child he found—and had great delight in him as he grew from a child to be a youth.

And Valentine was a youth of a high courage, and one having a great skill in all manly exercises. Besides this, he was so good to look upon that there was scarce a maid who did not turn her head as he passed by.

King Pepin had two half-sons, Haufry and Henry, whom he loved little. For these were clumsy men, loutish and slow, and were devoid of any generous thoughts. Little grace had they in aught that was manly, for their habit was to go about, as burrowing creatures, seeking to betray some secret, or ferret out some action done amiss.

These men harboured a great jealousy of Valentine, envying him his skill, his fine presence, and the King's affection—which they coveted only on account of the honours he might bestow. They would have done away

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with him in some dastardly fashion, had not they feared the King's enquiries and his wrath. As they might not work this evil, they ever sought other means of bringing him to his death.

Therefore Haufrý and Henry stood in the King's presence when a messenger arrived from a neighbouring king, besmirched, torn, and short of breath, craving the aid of one who would help regain a castle which had been taken by the heathen. "The post is one of great danger," cried the messenger. "Lend us, O King, a knight of a brave presence and a lion-like heart."

Then cried Haufrý and Henry, dropping their eyes to hide their hate, and making a pretence of love, "Send Valentine for who is like to him in battle? He is the bravest of all brave knights. Send Valentine!"

And Valentine, bending the knee, prayed, "King Pepin, bid me go."

And the King bidding him, he went with his men; and there were few who thought to see him again.

Then were Haufrý and Henry at a loss to know how to dissemble their joy, for they waited to hear tidings of Valentine's death.

But he returned, laden with costly spoil, and with many honours upon him; and King Pepin fell upon his neck and embraced him, doing him further honour.

Then Haufrý and Henry turned their faces to the wall, for they were dark with hatred, and, try as they would, they could not find words to utter in praise of Valentine.

After many months had passed by, an enemy came upon King Pepin, one who was cruel and treacherous, creeping into the country at an unsuspected spot, and bearing poisoned weapons. When the King gained tidings of this he was troubled, not knowing whom to send to defend him from such a foe. For that knight must have coolness, and wisdom, and much knowledge of strategy, and it might be that he would never return from the quest.

Then spake Haufrý and Henry, avoiding the eyes of the King, "Send Valentine, for is not he a knight of marvellous wisdom and a rapid wit? Hast not thou vaunted many a time to us his sagacity, saying that thou hadst never known the like? Send Valentine, that he may rid thee of thy foe."

But the King was loth, loving not the thought of sending him.

But Valentine bent the knee, with cheeks aglow and eyes afire. And he prayed, "King Pepin, let me acknowledge the debt I owe thee; let me rid thee of thine enemy."

And when the King had bidden him, all reluctantly, for he was heart-sore to utter the words, Valentine made his preparations in secret and set forth.

For many days the King waited, mourning secretly, and seeing no brightness in the sunlight; but at last Valentine returned, weary and wounded, yet triumphant. For the King's foe was crushed, and would trouble him no more.

Then King Pepin lavished new honours upon Valentine, and loved him with an increased love; and Haufrý and Henry withdrew themselves and went to lonely places, where they talked of Valentine as they were moved by their hate.

Now King Pepin swore that Valentine should go on no more hazardous adventures till a long time had passed; but the knight had been but a short space at court when a most woeful message came from the peasant people near the

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Forest of Orleans, begging King Pepin to send a valiant knight to deliver them from the ravages of a fearsome man—monster who dwelt in the forest.

"He is the most fearsome monster that hath ever been seen," said they, "and of a most terrible strength. It is said that he was nourished by a shebear and reared among her cubs; and, indeed, it is a likely story. For though his form be human, he hath a covering of hair upon his body; neither doth he utter sounds which can be understood by men, but strange groans and noises. And his strength is beyond that of any beast of the forest. He hath killed all who have come into conflict with him; therefore, O King, it were well that thou shouldst send the bravest knight of thy court to rid us of this wild man."

When King Pepin received this message, he was filled with uneasiness, and would in no wise consider who was his most valiant knight, for that he knew in his heart. And he looked about him for another knight whom he might send upon this quest.

But Haufray and Henry, who were secretly filled with joy at the message, spake in the King's ear, yet loudly, so that all men might hear, "Who is this knight most valorous, but Valentine? Hast not thou loaded him with honours and with riches beyond all other knights? Send him, therefore, to those poor people, that he may rid—them of their enemy."

Then spake the King, with anger hot in his breast, "Well I know why ye so advise me! Have not ye long envied Valentine and nourished hatred against him? It is your evil malice that now speaks, since ye would compass his death, if ye could."

But Haufray and Henry replied, smiling falsely, "Send Valentine. Otherwise, is not his honour assailed, since thou wilt have it that he is no longer thy bravest knight?"

King Pepin replied, trembling, "Valentine is not yet recovered from his wounds."

But Valentine, kneeling before the king, prayed, "Bid me, King Pepin, go upon this errand, for my wounds trouble me no more, and I would fain aid these poor people. Moreover, there is a voice within me that bids me go."

And the King having bidden him as he desired, he set out.

It was evening when he reached the Forest of Orleans. Therefore he tied his horse to a tree, and having climbed into the branches above, slept there the night through.

And in the morning he was awakened by a furious noise, which shook the tree in which he rested, and was unlike any he had ever heard.

Valentine looked through the leaves of the tree, and he beheld a creature in the form of a huge man, but covered with hair as a beast is covered, who was clawing at Valentine's horse and uttering the fearful sounds that had awakened him.

As Valentine watched the scene, the horse, affrighted, kicked out at this creature, so that he was wounded. Whereupon he flew at the animal as if to tear it to pieces, uttering a most fearful cry of rage.

"Nay, hold!" cried Valentine. "Hath not King Pepin sent me here to fight with thee, as man with man? I pray thee do no more mischief to my horse, since in one moment I shall descend to try thy skill."

Whereupon he climbed nimbly down the tree and swung to the ground.

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And the wild man had no sooner beheld him upright upon his feet than he flew at him, howling, and felled him to the ground—for his onslaught was in force like none Valentine had known.

But the knight speedily recovered himself, since he could move with a greater ease than the wild man, and, gripping hard at his sword, he rushed upon his enemy, dealing him vigorous thrusts, which the other easily beat aside by his huge strength.

They had contested in this way for some time when Valentine, finding that his strength was as nothing beside that of the wild man, nerved himself for a great blow, to be nicely delivered; but even as he made it, the wild man seized his arm in a grip of iron and threw him violently upon the ground.

Having done this, the wild man appeared strangely discomfited and disinclined to follow up his advantage, and he stood gazing at the knight the while he raised himself from the ground. Whereupon Valentine, giddy from his fall, and full of anger against the wild man, again rushed at him, repeating the stroke he had attempted; and since the other was ill—expecting the thrust, it chanced that he turned it aside carelessly, so that the sword's point pricked his flesh.

At that he gave a bellow of rage, and, running to the tree in which the knight had rested, plucked it up by the roots with one pull, and came rushing towards the knight, brandishing it in his hand.

But as he came upon Valentine, the desire to injure the knight again left him, whereupon he let the tree fall from his hand, and stood waiting.

And Valentine, thinking the creature to be weary, proposed that they should rest for a while before continuing the fight. Thus they rested, side by side, beneath the trees; and as he observed the wild man, Valentine was shaken by a strange sweetness, and found that the desire to fight with him was gone, and he was filled with a love which he did not understand.

"Wild man," said he, speaking gently, because of the love that was within him, "I have no longer desire to fight with thee. Wilt not thou quit this wild life and return with me whence I came? For I could love thee well, and I would have thee for my brother, and teach thee to be as other men."

To this the wild man assented, and, rising, he followed Valentine where he went.

And Valentine returned to King Pepin, scatheless, and bearing the wild man in his train; and he received new honours from the King.

Then Haufrý and Henry were affrighted, for they thought, "He bears a charmed life, and none may hurt him."

Now the wild man was baptised, and he was named Orson, because he had been found in a wood, and he became as other men, but ever with a strength beyond the strength of man.

Valentine and Orson went upon many adventures, some grave, some of a lighter humour, faring forth together, for the love between them was wondrous strong.

And they discovered their mother, the ill-used Bellisant, and they restored her to the Emperor her husband.

For—as wickedness is ever its own undoing—the false priest one day betrayed his falseness; and the Emperor knew Bellisant to be as innocent as she was unfortunate and as pure in heart as she was fair to see.

The Charcoal-Burner

All the afternoon the storm had been lowering; just before evening it broke. The lightning flashed in a yellow zigzag a forked fang thrust out of the sky; after it followed the thunder, rolling up behind the forest like mountains falling one against another. The noise was enough to deafen one, the darkness made one think one's self blind. When the lightning came, it only showed the forest trees shaking their boughs with fright, or revealed a glimpse of the undergrowth that crackled as the boughs shook.

The storm was at its worst in an hour; after that the rain fell like great drops spilt from a caldron in the sky. The darkness was still so great that one would have said the rain-drops were black as they fell with a splash upon the forest trees and onward to the ground. They made a brisk patter as they dropt, and ere the thunder had ceased the forest ways were gurgling with water, and every hollow was a pool.

The sky was still dark, with the end of the storm and with evening, when the charcoal-burner came winding through the forest, leading his mare. The panniers on the mare's back were empty, for she had been to town; but the man's pockets were by no means full. When you sell your wares to poor folk you get, more often than not, a poor price for them.

Ralph's collar was turned up, the hand that was not upon the mare's bridle was plunged deep into his pocket; and the water ran from his head and down his coat in great streams. His beard was in a tangle, his cap was over his eyes; he trudged on with never a glance round. Not a sound came from his lips as his feet plunged, squelch! squelch! into the soft ground.

The charcoal-burner was trudging along in this sober fashion when from the trees at his left hand emerged a horseman. The stranger was clad in what had been goodly garments, but these were so drenched and spoiled by the storm, and torn by battling with the trees, that they were now but a mass of rags and tatters. His steed's eye was rolling as if the animal had been affrighted, and both horse and rider were flecked with mud from head to foot.

Ralph, the charcoal-burner, would have passed this sight by with a fine indifference, and as if he saw such every day, had not the horseman hailed him eagerly, reining in his steed, and crying: "Hey there, friend, tell me in which direction does Paris lie?"

The charcoal-burner did not stop his mare, but plodded on as he replied, in a rough tone: "If you will turn your horse round, and go back the way you have come, you may chance upon the road to Paris."

"Is there no path, then, through the forest " cried the stranger.

"There is no path that can be seen", said Ralph, "in a storm like this." He took another step ahead, and the water flew out in sprays under his heavy feet.

As the stranger's horse stood still, and the charcoal-burner was moving on, the two men would soon have parted company, had not the new-comer suddenly dashed the drops from his forehead and urged his unwilling steed after the peasant.

"Tell me, good friend," said he in an earnest tone, "am I likely to reach Paris to-night? That I should do so is a matter of much moment."

"If your will and your horse's be good enough," said Ralph bluntly, "you may reach the city who knows? True, the way is long, the sky is dark, and there is no path through the forest; but these things are your affair, not mine."

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So speaking, he moved on.

The horseman considered. "Tell me," he said at last, "is there any place of shelter where I may pass the night, that when the storm is over I may pursue my way?"

"I know of no shelter," said the charcoal-burner, "save that of my hut, which lies in the centre of the forest, a good five miles hence. Its shelter is for any man: take it, or leave it, as you will."

"Gladly will I take it, friend," said the stranger. He pushed back his drooping shoulders, and began to utter his thanks.

But the charcoal-burner interrupted him curtly. "Nay, keep your thanks," said he. "I am a poor man, but I will accept nothing that I have not earned."

With that, on he went through the forest; and it may be that the way to his hut was written in his brain, for as he went he looked neither to right nor to left, but, as often as not, upon the ground.

The stranger rode slowly at his side, and when the water splashed on him in greater floods from the drenched branches of the trees, he shook his shoulders impatiently, and exclaimed; but Ralph the charcoal-burner, though the water fell light or heavy, uttered never a sound.

Thus he went on, in sombre silence; and still the rain fell.

"I can see the glimmer of a light before us," said the stranger at last.

"It is the bright eye of my hut," said the charcoal-burner ruminatingly, "looking out to welcome us."

Having said this, he gave a great shout, tilting his chin toward the house. "Hasten, good wife," cried he, "and open the door; and I pray of you heap a great fire, and make a good supper; for here am I, and a guest with me, wet, and cold, and hungry, and less alive than dead!"

Hardly was this speech from his lips when the door of the hut flew open; and the stranger could see, as he alighted from his horse, the bright light of the kitchen beyond.

He would have hung back, the while the charcoal-burner entered; but the latter with a great blow sent him reeling into the house. "I should be a pretty host," cried he, "to let my guest enter at my back!"

And, closing the door, he went whistling to the stable. When the two men had washed, and had donned the dry garments the charcoal-burner's wife had provided, they returned to the kitchen, to find a fire blazing there that crackled with a thousand sparks, and a supper on the table that sent steam up to the rafters.

"Come now, neighbour," said the charcoal-burner in a kindly tone, "here is a sight to make us forget the storm without! Take the hand of my good dame there, and lead her to the table; for I would fain begin."

At this speech the good woman blushed, and the stranger hung back, as if loth to take so much upon himself.

"Heavens!" cried the charcoal-burner; "think you that we have no manners, we forest people?" He faced the stranger with a flaming face. "This is the second time you have accused me of lack of courtesy to a guest!" With this speech he fetched the other a blow that all but sent him upon the stone floor. "Now will you take your place beside my good wife, as I have bidden you?" cried he.

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When the stranger had recovered his balance, and had rallied from the force of the blow, there was a colour in his cheeks; and for a second's space his eyes flashed in the firelight. But his anger quickly died in amusement; and throwing his head back he began to laugh. Ralph hardly knew what to make of this laughter, light and delicate as it was, and unlike his own; but having decided that it was goodnatured enough, he made no more ado. As for the stranger, when he had finished his merriment, he led the good dame to the board with as fine a grace as if she had been the Empress herself.

They made a quaint company: the good wife and the stranger on one side of the board, and on the other side Ralph the charcoal-burner, with his beard all a-tangle, and his legs stretched out far from his chair. The firelight fell upon their faces; and they could hear the rain falling with dull splashes upon the cottage roof.

"Eat, man, eat!" cried Ralph, as he heaped the stranger's plate with smoking viands. "May it never be said that the charcoal-burner ill-fed a friend! Saw you ever finer fare than this? Do not the Emperor's keepers complain, wife, that I help myself to the finest of his herds? But if I know Charlemagne, I say that he would not begrudge Ralph the charcoal-burner the wherewithal to keep himself alive, and to give comfort to a friend. Think you, comrade, the Emperor would have so mean a heart?"

"That I am sure he would not," said the stranger heartily. "If he were here to-night, be assured, he would say the same."

Having made this speech, the stranger laughed again, having, seemingly, much merriment in him; and Ralph the charcoal-burner laughed with him, albeit he knew not at what jest.

The while the rain beat down, and the fire blazed, the charcoal-burner pushed back his chair, and told many a tale of how he had outwitted the Emperor's foresters, and had supplied his own table; and his laughter at these good tales was like the wind that blows in the sunlight, having an edge to it, and yet an honest warmth. But the laughter of the stranger held still more mirth, for it endured till the tears ran down his cheeks with enjoyment of the jest.

Afterwards, when the night was older, the stranger told a tale. It was of the Emperor's court, and contained many a good jest, whereat Ralph laughed mightily. Yet in the midst of his laughter it occurred to him to look more closely at his guest; and he noted that, although he was a fine figure of a man, and stalwart, yet there was that about him which spoke of gentler ways than those of the forest.

"Since you know so much of the Court, you have perhaps been there, neighbour?" said he. The stranger looked toward the blaze of the fire. "Ay," said he, "I have been there."

"Then you have seen the good Emperor Charlemagne, and his Twelve Famous Peers?" asked the charcoal-burner, and his eyes lit with a great light.

"Ay, I have seen them, and that many a time," said the stranger, without looking away from the blaze.

"If I might but see him this great Charlemagne!" cried the charcoal-burner, his eye flaming. "Have not we heard, wife, of his famous deeds, of his wars with the heathen in the cause of the Cross?" The good wife nodded; and the stranger drew his glance from the fire to fix it upon the charcoal-burner's face.

"Hearken, friend," said he; "the Emperor is now at Paris with his Empress. As you may know, he sojourns there with his Court, to keep Yule in the fair city. What hinders you that you come not to Paris and catch a glimpse of him of whom you speak?"

But the charcoal-burner's head fell upon his breast. "Nay, I am Ralph the charcoal-burner," said he roughly. "My place is not at Paris, nor near the Emperor. I must go about my business, for I have my coal to sell."

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"Listen, my friend," said the stranger quietly. "I know the Court well, for my home is there. I am a gentleman of the Empress, a poor gentleman, Wymond by name; yet I have some influence, and I promise you that if you will bring your coal to Court, you shall have a good sale for it. There will be rare feasting at the Court this Yuletide, and I warrant you, you will sell all the coal you have for sale and mayhap see the Emperor into the bargain!"

At this speech the charcoal-burner slapped his great hand upon his knees. "Now there you have a good reason why I should journey to Court!" cried he. "And since you promise me a good price for my coal, you may expect to see me there."

"One good turn deserves another," said the stranger. "Do not forget, when you reach the Palace, to ask for Wymond. For the sake of this good dinner of yours, I shall see to it that you sell your coal at a good price."

A moment later he yawned, and as the charcoal-burner yawned immediately after, they went, all three, to bed.

The best bedroom was given to the stranger; and in the small chamber below slept the charcoal-burner and his wife.

In the morning the good woman was early up, and about household affairs. A short time after, the charcoal-burner was awakened by a voice at his bed-side; and, opening his sleepy eyes, beheld the stranger, already attired in his own garments, which the woman had dried.

"Friend," said he, "my way lies toward Paris, and I must be early upon it. Let me therefore bid you farewell, and pay to your good lady the fee for my stay."

Ralph thrust a great fist into his eyes, and rubbed them hard. Then he stared, and his face glowed like a poppy-bed. Pushing the bed-clothes from his neck, he half rose, with a roar of rage like that of a wild beast. "May your horse fall into a hole, and you after him!" he sputtered. "Is not this the third time that you have insulted my hospitality? Ralph the charcoal-burner is indeed a poor man, but not yet so poor that he must wring from a guest the price of his board!"

And he dashed his hands upon the blankets.

The stranger had prudently retired to a distance, for he had no desire to feel again the charcoal-burner's blows on his back.

"Well, well," said he soothingly, "we will say no more about the matter, since it appears to you in so ill a light. Nevertheless, because we are comrades, and you have done me a good turn, you will find your way to Court. Come, friend, you will let me do you a good office in my turn."

"Oh! as to that it is another affair," muttered Ralph, still grumbling. "My coal is good I know of none better and deserves a better price than I get for it. It may be that to-morrow morning shall see me on my way to Court."

"Good ! I shall look for you then," said the other. "You have but to ask for Wymond, a gentleman of the Empress."

Without further waste of words he departed, mounting his horse and riding away. The charcoal-burner lay for a moment listening. It seemed to him that he heard the sound of laughter mingling with the noise of the horse's hoofs, and with it dying away in the distance.

"A folly of the ears!" muttered Ralph, and turning over, he fell asleep.

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The following morning saw a great figure early on the road to Paris. That was Ralph the charcoal-burner, leading his mare with its panniers full of coal. He wore the rough garb he ever wore "of an everyday", and his thick boots clattered on the hard ground. The morning air was cold, and caught his ears and tweaked his nose, and filled his eyes with water.

The charcoal-burner hardly noticed these things. His thoughts held him: they were of his Emperor Charlemagne, and the good price he was to get for his coal.

Having reached the city, he was about to enter it, when he was stopped by a gay knight, finely accoutred, who appeared to keep watch upon the road.

"Halt, sir!" said he. "You may go no farther without my escort; for know that the great Charlemagne desires to see all men who enter the city by this road to-day. Therefore, with your will, or without your will, you must turn aside, and come with me now."

Of this story the charcoal-burner believed nothing. "It is a likely thing, is it not," said he "that the Emperor should desire to see the charcoal-burner! Nay, stand aside, and let me go on my way."

"Your way is with me," said the knight, "for I am bidden to bring to the Emperor all who travel to-day upon this road."

At this speech Ralph lost patience. "A plague upon you " cried he. "Is not my way already to the Palace, where I go, not to see the Emperor indeed, but to sell my coal! Cease this silly jesting, then, and let me pass on."

And he would have passed straightway, without more ado, had not the other moved forward, and barred the way.

"Now if you will not let me pass," cried the charcoal-burner, the blood rushing to his face, "I swear that with my two fists I will fight my way! An honest man am I, and plain-spoken; and I am in no mood for such fooling!"

"Gently, friend, gently," said the knight. "Truly you are in a great hurry about this business of yours!" For a moment he sat pondering, then he edged his horse warily aside. "Pass on, then, if you will," said he curtly. "Since your way lies to the Palace, there seems scant sense in taking you thither. I shall keep my post, and wait for the next man that travels this way."

"Heaven save his silly head from believing your story!" said Ralph in his beard. He hunched his great shoulders, and went on his way.

Enquiring of many whom he met, he found his way to the Palace, where, coming upon a knot of gossiping lackeys, he demanded admittance.

"There lives one Wymond here," said he, "a gentleman of the Empress; pray tell him that I have come, as he bade me, and that I have brought my coal."

At this speech the idle fellows stared at him as if all their senses lay in their organs of sight. "Hear you that?" cried one. "He has come to Court, as he was bidden, and he has brought his coal!" And they went, with one accord, into a fit of laughter, placing thick hands upon their sides, and wagging their heads to and fro.

The charcoal-burner had much ado to restrain his anger, which burnt like a fire in his breast at this treatment. Yet he remembered Wymond's face and pleasant smile; and he was loth to return with his coal unsold. So he sought another entrance to the Palace, which, being closed, he seized the knocker and belaboured the door with all his might.

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In answer to this summons came a saucy-faced page, clad in feathers as fine as any peacock.

When he saw who the intruder was, he poked out a face that grimaced from ear to ear. "Know you my Wymond, a gentleman of the Empress?" mocked he, ere Ralph could open his mouth. "Nay, we know him not. Have you brought his coal?"

"Heavens, here are fine manners, and a grace of which I knew nothing!" cried the countryman, and he would have nipped the boy by the ear had not the youngster flown off with as fine a flight as if he had had wings in his heels.

Behind him he left the door gaping wide. "Come now, have a brave heart!" said the charcoal-burner to himself. "Be assured that Wymond knows nothing of this welcome, and is waiting to help you gain a fine price for your coal!"

With that he put up his mare, and, stepping through the door, began to search for his friend.

At first the charcoal-burner moved boldly enough, for the rooms through which he passed were simple; and his thoughts were of Wymond and the coal he wished to sell. But as he pursued his way, through corridors in which quaintly-cut windows blinked and glittered, across halls hung with priceless tapestry, and over carpets that were softer than the deep new moss on the forest-edges, his courage began to fail. Ralph the charcoal-burner had doubts about his errand, and began to wish himself travelling with his mare through the forest under the leafstript trees.

At many a door he met knight and page; and of these he asked bluntly: "Tell me, where is my friend Wymond, he who bade me bring hither my coal?"

But his only replies were boisterous laughter, for through the Palace had run the jest of the countryman who had brought his coal to sell at Court.

Ralph's ears tingled, and his fists ached for a fight. Yet he restrained himself. "Let me, first of all, find Wymond," thought he. For a doubt of Wymond's good-will did not come to him.

But it seemed as if the search would never end. The day was well advanced when Ralph entered the largest room he had yet seen, a room of rich tints, in which he saw the sun setting in the forest behind autumn leaves.

The charcoal-burner paused, his brown beard shaking; so much beauty filling his soul with fear. "Ah, Wymond!" he cried, "why did you bring me here, to make Ralph the charcoal-burner for the first time feel afraid?"

His chin sank upon his breast, and he stood there sombre and still.

At that moment there rang in his ear a sound that lit his eye, and sent fear speeding from his heart. "That was certainly Wymond's voice!" shouted the charcoal-burner. With three great strides he flashed across the room, and drew aside the curtains that hid the apartment beyond.

"How now!" cried the knight who was stationed there, and had almost been pitched upon his face. "Good neighbour, you cannot enter. Know you not that the Emperor is at table? Here man fellow sir "

But the charcoal-burner brushed off his grasp as if it had been the touch of a fly; and in a trice he was in the room. "Let me tell you, that I heard Wymond!" cried he; "and have not I been seeking him the whole day long?"

Upright he stood in the middle of the room, a tall strong figure in rude garments and doltish shoes. "Why, Wymond, where are you?" he cried anxiously, and upon him every eye turned as he looked down the glittering

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table with his keen country gaze.

"Alas," cried he, "Wymond cannot be here! He was but a shabby fellow; and you, I perceive, are fine gentlemen, every one!"

At this speech there was such a clatter of laughter that the countryman's head fell into a maze; and he knew not where to turn his glance. So he stood, looking up the table, then down, here, there, everywhere.

"Come, out, silly foot !" cried the doorkeeper; but Ralph, with his senses so caught and dazzled, heard not a word.

Then the man would have seized him, but the charcoal-burner, with a cry, sprang aside. "Why, there you are, Wymond!" he cried. "I have been seeking for you everywhere; but they told me there was none at Court bearing your name. Queer manners have I met with, too; but let us say no more of that. I have brought my coal, as I promised you I have put the mare up not far hence, and when you have finished eating, we will settle upon a price!"

"Heavens !" cried the doorkeeper.

The laughter suddenly ceased as it had been the dropping of the wind after a storm. All eyes were turned upon the Emperor, for it was to him the charcoal-burner had appealed, and he had called him Wymond and his friend.

"Who is this mad fellow?" whispered the knights. They watched him under narrowed lids, and held their breath.

So great a silence held the room that the charcoal-burner turned pale. He now perceived that the guest of two nights ago had not been attired in such magnificence as was Wymond now. Why, Wymond was not his dress the finest of all? Did not he sit highest? Was not the finest air that of command his? Did not all eyes turn to him where he sat?

Ralph shivered with cold. "Alack," thought he, "what have I done? Your hospitality has done you an ill turn, Ralph, and you are likely to pay for it with your life!" So saying he looked across the great room, and would have met the glance of the Emperor straightly, as a brave man should, had not Charlemagne looked away.

He was telling his gentlemen the story of his adventure. The charcoal-burner listened to the tale with a head so stiffly held upright that you might have thought it had already parted company with his body, and had been merely stuck upon it. It was a tale well told, that of the hospitality of Ralph the charcoal-burner; and the knights had laughter out of it.

But there was one person who found no humour in the story, and that was Ralph himself. That was odd, for he was a fellow not without merriment, was Ralph the charcoal-burner.

When the tale was finished, the eyes of the Emperor turned to the man who stood statue-like in the middle of the room. They held an odd expression, one not easy to read.

"Come, neighbour," said he, "tell me what reward shall be given to the charcoal-burner for his hospitality?"

For a moment Ralph did not answer. Yet he gripped hard at his courage, and his head did not droop as he faced the Emperor and his riddle, and felt upon him the eyes of every gentleman in the room.

There was not one of them would have stood in the shoes of the charcoal-burner; and he read the feeling that showed in their gaze.

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His answer came boldly, for there is a courage of the forest and of forest ways that can never be cast down.

"Sire," said he, "I asked for no reward, and Wymond promised none. This pledge only he gave to me that he would help me sell my coal."

There are some that say his voice shook at the words. That may or may not be.

"A wise reminder, gentlemen !" cried Charlemagne. He began to laugh, a rich glad sound, as if in remembrance of a joke that had pleased him well. Then he leant across the table, a light shining in his bright eyes as they fell upon the silent man. "Wymond promised that you should sell your coal," said he, "and by my royal word it shall be sold. This is what Charlemagne promises that Ralph the charcoal-burner shall be a good knight of his, and shall plant his valiant blows upon the foes of France. Gentlemen, France has need of honest men see you aught amiss in this?"

While the room turned round about the charcoal-burner's head, he heard the cheer that made their one reply.

How my Cid the Campeador¹ won the Favour of his King

[1 My Lord the Champion, or Challenger.]

Don Alfonso, the second son of Don Fernando, King of Castile, Leon, Galicia, and of lands in Portugal, came to Zamora to hold counsel with his sister Urraca, who possessed that city. With him he brought twelve knights of Toledo, stalwart and brave to see; and Don Alfonso was as brave as any. And if he held himself with a proud air well, I warrant his errand pleased him. For after years of banishment a man may be forgiven a grace or two on returning to his own.

Don Fernando at his death had broken up that Kingdom of Spain which was being welded together, and had better have remained welded. For the King loved his second son Alfonso with a greater love than he bore to Don Sancho, who was his eldest son and should have been his heir. Therefore Don Fernando so disposed matters at his death:

To Don Sancho, the Kingdom of Castile.

To Don Alfonso, the Kingdom of Leon.

To Don Garcia, the Kingdom of Galicia and the lands in Portugal.

To his daughter Urraca, the city of Zamora.

To his daughter Elvira, the city of Toro.

And he bound them with an oath that they should not despoil one another.

But Don Sancho, aggrieved at being cheated of his full heritage, contrived to possess himself of his brothers' kingdoms, imprisoning Don Garcia, and sending Don Alfonso into exile; and, stretching rapacious hands, he would have wrested Zamora from his sister Urraca, but ere he had gained the city he was lured away by a traitor's strategy, and a spearthrust found his breast.

Then came Don Alfonso from Toledo whose king had harboured him with his eye afire, and his steps timing to some inner music of his brain, and with twelve brave knights to give him dignity. And when he had spoken with

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his sister Urraca, who bore him great love, Urraca called together a council, that Don Alfonso might declare his claims.

Whereafter, when many beards had wagged, and many wise saws had had an airing, it was made known to all persons that Don Alfonso was come from his banishment, and that he laid claim to the kingdoms of Leon, of Galicia, of Castile, and of the lands in Portugal.

And men from these kingdoms came pouring into Zamora, some grave, some gay, some wide-eyed to behold Don Alfonso, others with pursed lips ripe to pass an opinion upon him. But whereas the burghers of Leon were glad to see their king back again, and the burghers of Galicia and men from Portugal ready to receive Don Alfonso as their king without question, the men of Castile would have it that he should first swear to them that he had had no complicity in the death of Don Sancho. For there were those who hinted that Don Alfonso had prompted the assassin's spear with a gift of gold.

Now the Castilians had had Don Sancho for their lord rightfully, as he was King, in the first place, of Castile; and, having loved Don Sancho, they demanded this oath from Don Alfonso, for they would not own as their new lord one who had dipped his hands in the blood of the old.

"I will take the oath," said Don Alfonso; and to his twelve knights he said that he was well-pleased so to prove his innocence. But they, reading in the swell of his lip that which was not unfamiliar to them, whispered among themselves that Don Alfonso was not so well-pleased at the demand of the Castilians. For he was a proud man.

At the church of St. Gadea, which is in Burgos, Don Alfonso attended to take the oath of his innocence, and with him his twelve knights. And a great crowd gathered there to hear him take it.

But when the time came for the oath to be administered, it was found that no man present was willing to put the oath. For the nobles reasoned among themselves shrewdly, saying, "When Don Alfonso has sworn the oath to us, he will be King of Castile, and Leon, of Galicia, and the lands in Portugal, and one with great power in his hands. And how will he glance at that man who put the oath to him? Will he look warmly at him? I trow not; for Don Alfonso is a proud man."

And they would not put the oath to him.

Then arrived my Cid the Campeador, whose name was Ruydiz de Bivar. He was of all knights the most valorous and the wisest; and he had been high in honour with Don Fernando, for whom he had fought boldly as a youth, and with Don Sancho, whose counsellor he had been. When he heard how none would put the oath to Don Alfonso, he said:

"Fear not, O ye cautious ones, I will put the oath."

And, having gained the attention of Don Alfonso, he said, looking the King full in the eyes:

"Don Alfonso, I call upon thee to swear, and thy twelve knights with thee, before these people, that thou hast not had any concern in the death of thy brother Don Sancho, that thou hast not killed him with thine own hand, nor yet caused him to be killed."

Don Alfonso replied, and with him his twelve knights, in a bold voice:

"We swear truly that we had no concern in the death of Don Sancho."

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Then said my Cid, and the glance of his keen eyes was like a spear–thrust, "Thou hast sworn the oath, Don Alfonso. If thy word be a false one, and the blood of Don Sancho indeed be upon thy soul, then will I call this curse upon thee, that thy death come to thee also by a traitor's hand."

Don Alfonso dropped his eyes upon the ground and stood dumbly. And there were those who said that his face changed colour, because the words brought before him his brother's terrible end; but there were others who knew that it was anger against the Cid that troubled his blood so that it ran to his face. For Don Alfonso was a proud man.

My Cid saw that the King changed colour, yet he put the oath a second time, and again a third. And it may be that he doubted Don Alfonso because of that change of tint; but of that I can say nothing, for the Cid was a wise man, and spake not often his thoughts.

Thereafter Don Alfonso was made King of Galicia, and Castile, and Leon which was his own kingdom and the people rejoiced greatly.

And my Cid the Campeador considered with a knit brow whether it were well that he should absent himself from Castile; for he doubted the King's good–will toward him. Not that he guessed the sting at the King's heart regarding the matter of the oath for he supposed that Don Alfonso would perceive he but did his duty but on other grounds he expected the anger of the King.

For my Cid had been counsellor to Don Sancho, and Don Sancho had rid Don Alfonso of his kingdom with but scant ceremony. True, my Cid had been opposed to Don Sancho in that matter, but what of it? His loyalty had not snapt at the thread, and he had upheld Don Sancho in the matter, as well as in all else, when he had perceived the King's purpose to be unchanged.

But as my Cid took counsel with himself over the affair, there came a messenger demanding his presence before Don Alfonso.

Now the King met my Cid with a kindness that had a twist in it; as if, while he smiled, a sour taste dwelt in his mouth. Nevertheless, he uttered sweet words, saying, "Now welcome, my Cid Campeador. To–day I claim thine allegiance; for as thou hast been counsellor to Don Fernando my father, and to my brother Don Sancho, so I would have thee to be my counsellor. For I look upon thee as a worthy vassal, a man of much renown, and one of wisdom."

Then my Cid bowed the knee and swore his allegiance; and he believed that the twist in the King's humour was from remembrance of the days of his banishment.

"He shall forget those days, for I will serve him faithfully!" vowed my Cid.

Yet the King's thoughts were not of his banishment, but of his oath; and he was torn two ways. For whereas his pride was wounded sorely, he could yet perceive the valour of my Cid Ruydiez, how there was none like to him, and how none other among his vassals was held in such high esteem.

Therefore he chose to have Ruydiez as his counsellor, and he would fain have forgotten the matter of his oath. But there were those who whispered of it, not wishing him to forget; for many were jealous of my Cid the Campeador.

But my Cid went his way blithely, having given his allegiance to the King, and with his mighty deeds he made the country ring. Alone he went forth to meet many champions, returning ever, covered with honours, bringing news of victory with him.

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Then the black spot in the heart of Don Alfonso would cease to burn, and he would meet my Cid with a sparkling eye, showing him affection, and bestowing upon him towns and castles.

And as Ruydiez went from the King's presence, a noble would bend to whisper to his fellow: "Sawest thou the face of my Cid, how it was full of triumph? 'Twas such a look his face bore as he put the oath to the King."

Then Don Alfonso, hearing the whisper as, indeed, he was meant to do felt his cheeks flame, and in his heart anger burnt anew against the Campeador.

But my Cid suspected nothing of these things, for he was broad and generous, and not prone to think ill; and he rejoiced in the affection which the King showed to him, and meditated other brave deeds.

And the King brooded, being at times full of joy in the valour of this great vassal, and on other occasions heavy with anger against him.

Now the kings of Seville and Cordova had not paid to Don Alfonso the tribute they owed to him as vassals. Wherefore the King sent for my Cid, and told him how he must go and demand the tribute.

Little loth was my Cid! Having brought together his company, he set forth, his green pennon flying, his horse prancing, and all the people shouting to see him go.

And ere a great time was gone by he arrived with his company at Seville.

Then he found how the King of Seville was sorely beset by the King of Granada, who was making war against him. And the King of Granada was aided by many lords of Castile. And between them they were crushing the King of Seville as surely as a pumpkin is crushed between closing walls.

My Cid Ruydiez was wroth, and his eyes blazed with fire. Having given his word to the King of Seville that he would help him, he sent word to the lords of Castile that they should cease their hostilities, since they were waging war against a vassal of their King. But they gave no heed to him at all, and would not desist; neither would the King of Granada cease his hostilities.

Then my Cid fell upon them with a great fury, and he cut them down as a reaper cuts ripe corn, and took many prisoners, and wounded many of the lords. And his aspect was terrible, so that many fled before him.

Then, having put the lords to rout, my Cid returned to Castile, bringing with him the tribute to Don Alfonso, and with the tribute a valuable gift from the King of Seville. And the Campeador was himself laden with gifts, and with much spoil which he had won from the King of Granada and the rebellious lords of Castile.

"Right bravely hast thou done, my Ruydiez!" cried the King; and he lavished fresh honours upon my Cid, looking upon him as if he loved him. But as the Campeador went from the King's presence the knights whispered; and again the King was torn between two emotions, and he strove to forget the matter of the oath.

King Alfonso was angry with the Moors that they remained heathen, and that they continually molested him and his vassals. Therefore he planned a great expedition against them, and when he had made his preparations he set forth.

But my Cid Campeador, because he had been all ill and was not yet recovered, could not go.

And while the King was absent, other Moors fell upon Castile, hoping to plunder; but my Cid, who was almost recovered from his sickness, called his company together, and fell upon the Moors and drove them out. And with

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his men he followed the Moors, despoiling them as they went; and he followed them as far as Toledo, the territory of that king who had harboured Don Alfonso in his exile.

When news of these events came to Don Alfonso's ears, he was full of admiration for the courage of my Cid Ruydiez, who, while still weak, had driven out the Moors.

But the nobles came to him, fawning, and with uplifted hands.

"Behold, my lord," cried they, "how much my Cid Ruydiez takes upon himself, and how great his craft is! During thine absence he bestirs himself to encroach on the territory of the King of Toledo, with whom he well knows thou hast a treaty of friendliness. Doubtless he remembers that thou wilt pass through Toledo on thy way homeward. And is not this his hope that the King of Toledo will do thee an injury because of the broken treaty? Thus acts my Cid, hoping to make thee small in thine own eyes, as he did in the matter of the oath."

Don Alfonso listened to these evil words, and they moved his blood like a poison, so that he was for a time as a man demented; and with all haste he hied him back to Castile. Now the King of Toledo offered him no injury because of the Campeador's action, yet the anger of Don Alfonso remained hot; and meeting my Cid Ruydiez near Burgos, he told him how he was banished from that hour, but he said not straightly for what cause, nor would he listen to my Cid's defence.

"Get thee out of my land without delay," said he; and he turned his horse and would have ridden away.

But the Campeador replied, with anger, "I may have thirty days' grace, since that is the right of a noble."

"Nay," said the King hotly, "thou shalt have but nine days' grace."

And, fearing the force of his own anger, he left my Cid. And he gave orders that the Campeador should go alone into banishment, for any person who went with him should lose all he possessed; neither should any man give him food or drink.

All this my Cid Ruydiez believed the King did out of anger because he had inadvertently entered the territory of the King of Toledo; but Don Alfonso knew in his heart that he did it because of the oath which my Cid had put to him three times, and which he had not been able to forget.

My Cid Ruydiez rode to his castle at Bivar, and he found that it had been despoiled of everything, by order of the King. Then he journeyed to Burgos, and he found that his house there was closed against him.

Then he called together his friends, and kinsfolk, and vassals, a great company, and asked who would go into banishment with him; and they replied that they would all go. And Martin Antolinez, a good Burgalese, brought food to them, and wine to drink, and he cast in his fortunes with those of my Cid.

My Cid marched with his company to the Glera, where they encamped upon the sands.

Then was my Cid greatly troubled, for he knew not how he should provide for so great a company till he had gained spoils of war; for all his possessions had been taken from him.

And after much thought he filled two great iron-bound chests with sand, and locked each one with three locks. Thereafter he sent a messenger to the two Jews, Rachel and Vidas, to say that the Campeador had two great chests of treasure which he would fain leave with them till his return, if they would lend money upon the chests.

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The Jews, having received this message, came and felt the weight of the chests; and being filled with joy at the heaviness of them, they returned to their abode and, setting a carpet upon the floor, threw into it great handfuls of gold, and silver, and precious stones, till they had made up a loan for my Cid. When this was done, they fetched away the chests; and my Cid bound them with a promise that they would not open the chests till a year was past, and then only if he had not repaid the loan with interest, for he had good hopes of being able to pay it within a year's time.

Now my Cid felt ashamed that he had to resort to this device, but he saw no other way out of the difficulty.

Being thus provided, my Cid Ruydiez set out with his company from the lands of Don Alfonso. And he began to make war upon the heathen Moors, besieging town and castle; and in all things he was successful, so that he was greatly feared. And news of his successes came often to the ears of Don Alfonso, so that he frowned sometimes, and sometimes smiled, being not ill-pleased, despite himself, to be the lord of such a vassal.

Then came my Cid Ruydiez upon the city of Alcocer, which was held by the Moors, and was said to be so strong that it could not be taken.

"As to that we shall soon see!" quoth the Campeador, and he laid siege to the city. But when he had besieged it for fifteen weeks it was not yet taken, for the Moors would not surrender.

"Since the city will not fall to us by force, we must needs take it by strategy," said my Cid. And having conferred with Alvar Fanez, his cousin, and with Martin Antolinez, and with many others, he gathered his company together and withdrew from the city; and in great haste did my Cid go, leaving some of his tents behind him.

When the Moors beheld this retreat, they shouted in triumph. "See," cried they, "my Cid Campeador is forced to withdraw, and in such haste does he go that he leaves his tents behind him! Come, let us follow, and despoil him in his confusion, before he fall into other hands!"

And with that they sallied forth in great numbers, and followed fast after the Campeador.

But he, looking back upon them, spurred on his company, with shout and gesture, that they should move faster still; and they swept on like a whirlwind, as if in fear.

Then the Moors followed after, faster still, shouting as they went.

Now, when my Cid looked back again and saw that the Moors had left the city behind them, he wheeled round and, leading his men to the city gates, cut the Moors off from the city. And he encircled them round, and fell upon them suddenly, and with great fury, and put them utterly to rout. And he made many prisoners, and gained much spoil, gold, and silver, and pearls.

Then was my Cid's banner placed upon the highest point of the city, and he took possession of it. And such Moors as were in Alcocer he allowed to remain there, if without treachery they would serve him. From the spoil as much of it as was his share he sent a gift to Alfonso, as to his lord.

Now when the heathen Moors perceived this great victory of my Cid, which crowned many other victories, and that he was always successful, whether by force or by strategy, they despatched messengers to the King of Valencia, begging him that he would send an army to rid them of the Campeador, who, if he were not interfered with, would seize all their cities before he was done!

The King of Valencia sent two kings who were his vassals, and with them three thousand horsemen, and they were bidden to seize my Cid and to bring him to Valencia.

How my Cid the Campeador¹ won the Favour of his King

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Therefore they laid siege to Alcocer, and every day there came fresh horsemen, so that my Cid and his company were hemmed in by an army greater than any they had known.

The Moors besieged my Cid with ardour for many weeks, and with such closeness that neither food nor water could be brought into the city. Thus, after a time, my Cid Ruydiez perceived that for him and his company to remain longer in the city would be but to die as rats starved in a hole, for their stores were almost come to an end.

"My brave men," said he to his followers, "since our food is almost finished, and the Moors grow greater in number every day, which seemeth to ye the better to sally forth and meet the Moors, and so die like men or, by God's grace, win a marvellous victory; or to remain here and die a rat's death at the last?"

They replied, every one, "We will go out to meet the Moors."

Thereafter my Cid the Campeador gave orders that the Moors within the city should not be allowed to know of this decision. And on the morrow at sunrise, with their shields placed over their hearts and their lances lowered, my Cid and his men sallied out to meet the Moors.

And as they were few in number in comparison with the Moors and their action was therefore unexpected, it chanced that they killed many Moors, striking lustily with their lances, ere it was known that my Cid had left the city.

On they went, my Cid with his green pennon flying and his face aflame with the greatness of his ardour, and his men behind him in a long trail. Mighty thrusts they dealt, so that the Moors doubted if they fought with men, and the strength that they had seemed a strength not of earth.

"On, on, my brave knights!" cried the Campeador, urging his steed. "God is surely with us against the heathen. Remember the Cross! Remember Spain!" And with his company he swept through the Moors as it were a sword of fire cutting men down as it swept on.

With what vigour my Cid fought! And how those men fought who were with him! I warrant the Moors were affrighted at the sight of them. They fell like blades of mown grass, and where they fell they lay.

Now when the day was over, the victory was to my Cid the Campeador, and it was a most marvellous victory. Of the Moors there remained none of great authority, and those who were slain were as the sands of the sea.

My Cid had wounded both kings and taken them prisoner; and he had other prisoners beyond his counting, and great spoil beyond any that had been seen, gold and silver, and jewels of a great value, and horses richly caparisoned, and swords of much beauty, finely made.

From his share of the spoil, which was a fifth part, my Cid Ruydiez sent to his King fifty fine horses bearing swords. These Don Alfonso accepted with gladness, since they had been taken from the Moors, and his heart was full of joyfulness at this great victory which had fallen to my Cid, and which brought him much renown as the lord of so great a vassal. He would have pardoned my Cid straightway, had not he been ashamed to do so; but, failing this, he pardoned all who had accompanied him in his banishment, restoring his possessions to each man.

My Cid the Campeador remained at Alcocer for a time with his company; and afterwards he journeyed to Zaragoza in search of further adventure, and the Moors of Alcocer wept to see him go.

In Zaragoza my Cid Ruydiez did other valiant deeds, and he was still there when a message came from the King bidding him return to Castile.

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For Don Alfonso was in a difficulty in which only my Cid Ruydiez could be of service to him, and he longed for his return.

But my Cid sent back this message to the King, remembering his banishment: " These are the conditions which the Campeador makes ere he return to Castile : That no noble shall be banished without having had a chance to defend himself; and that every banished noble shall have the thirty days' grace which is his right."

Don Alfonso having agreed to these conditions, my Cid returned with his company to Castile; and there was rejoicing in the streets, for the people loved him.

And Don Alfonso forgot the oath which my Cid had put to him, and the anger he had borne my Cid, and he ordered that every town, city, and castle, which was won by the Campeador, should be to him and his heirs for ever.

Now these are but a few of the valorous deeds of my Cid Ruydiez, the Campeador; for if I were to relate the whole of them, this volume would contain naught else.

How the Minstrel Saved the King

There were once two strolling players who travelled much about the fair realm of England, playing at castle, and farmhouse, and at many a wayside inn. One carried a guitar, which he twanged with a careless hand, wakening quaint songs of a wondrous sweetness, and often strange marches in which could be heard the ring of horses' hoofs; the other of a stronger and fiercer type than his fellow sang, with a voice of stirring tones, of warlike deeds.

Many a heart waked to that sweet music, many a pulse bounded to the tune of the song; and many a maid and man questioned who were these strolling musicians, whose eyes were ever drooped as they played and sang, as if only the music held their hearts. Suddenly they came, and suddenly they went; and they wore masks upon their faces, and showed great love for each other. And there you have the beginning, and the end, and the middle of what folk knew.

Never a farmer who loudly applauded the couple, nor a good dame who proffered her fare with a joke, guessed that the singer was that reckless prince Richard, and the player his friend Blondel, his boon companion whom he dearly loved.

Prince Richard was wild and of a reckless valour which allowed him to think little of the safety of his head. His finger was ready for any pie that was like to burn it, and his sword the first to leap out in any brawl. Did any fair lady seek redress? my Prince was ready, nay, eager, to espouse her cause, careless of the cost. Was any mischief brewing? there went Richard, his sword ready to leap into his hand.

These diversions kept the Prince well occupied, for betwixt his chivalry and his love of partisanship, he was seldom out of a pother. When occasions of quiet did occur, he was off with that loved companion Blondel, his wild spirit finding in the gentle art of music a strange delight.

Richard could weave a song as readily as he could wield a sword, and he turned many a neat verse to Blondel's music.

"'Tis thy quaint melodies that ripen my brain," quoth he to Blondel.

But Blondel smiled, and, stroking a string so that it sang, he said, "There is no fruit on a barren tree to ripen; but

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where there be fruit, the sun will ripen it." And he played a melody so sweet that tears gushed to the wild Prince's eyes as he heard.

Richard and Blondel had gone upon many a journey together, and shared many a homely lodging, when a shaft fell upon their friendship, not severing it, but pinning it to quieter ways. For Richard became King.

Now he swore to Blondel that all should be as it had been; but Blondel replied:

"Nay, were I to desire that, I should be a false friend to thee. When thou art king, thou art king. If on any day there be an hour when no claim calls upon thy kingship, then remember Blondel. For friendship hangs not upon a string of words."

And he withdrew himself, and would not have it that Richard should seek him often as in olden days.

Then Richard loved him the better, and the friendship was not broken, but rather waxed stronger; for the King perceived the truth of the minstrel's words, and he reflected that Blondel had ever been a wise companion, and had often guided his steps safely where alone he had fared but ill.

Now if a hot-blooded prince be made king, his impetuosity may be tempered, but his spirit remains unchanged; and Richard had not long been head of the realm when he felt within him that fever of action which had sent him brawl-seeking in other days.

But, having much good in him, in spite of all his faults, he began to consider how he might bestir himself to do some deed that was noble and worthy a king. And having thought of many schemes, and discarded them, he decided to go on a Crusade. For the Sacred Tomb of our Lord was still in the hands of the Saracens, to the grief of Christian men, and the shame of the Faith.

Richard was determined to rescue it, and right well did the scheme commend itself to him, so that he was at once on fire to set about his preparations. And since he was not the first to institute a Crusade, he would not allow himself to think of those other monarchs who had sought to redeem the Tomb of our Lord from the Saracens and had failed.

Philip, King of France, decided that he would join with Richard in this attempt; and together they made many preparations, being resolved that this Crusade should be the bravest of any, and, by God's grace, the most successful. Therefore they took more soldiers than had ever been taken, and these were better equipped, and were of a very valorous intention. And by these means, and by making a sudden terrible onslaught, Richard hoped to overthrow the Saracens, and rescue the Sacred Tomb.

And when all was ready he set forth with his men, and at a place they had agreed upon he met Philip; and they went upon their quest.

But to Blondel it fell that he should remain behind, for he had no place in the expedition; and he set himself to guard and watch over the interests of his King. For while Richard was absent there were plots and jealousies in England, and also in Normandy where Richard had his dukedom; and there were many who hoped to work their own advantage from the absence of the King. These things Blondel perceived, and he was saddened by them. Then he yearned for the King's quick return.

But Richard came not quickly back, for he had taken a dangerous quest upon him, and was, besides, overtaken by many misfortunes by land and by sea. He made but ill journeys; and as for Philip of France, he was not the true companion to Richard that Blondel had been, and for that matter, the King liked him not as well.

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Nor were the Saracens as easily overthrown as Richard had imagined, for they were good fighters, and had a knowledge of strategy. Those things Richard won from them they gained speedily back, so that they were not often at a disadvantage. As for the French and English soldiers, there was a great jealousy between them; and Richard repented him many a time that he had joined with Philip in this expedition; for he saw that there had been little wisdom in the plan. And he believed he had done better with his own soldiers, and had gained a better victory over the heathen.

Now the Sacred Tomb was not yet won when Richard was summoned back to England that he might look after his crown, which he was in danger of losing. Therefore in great sorrow he withdrew himself, leaving his mission unfulfilled.

And having, gone a part of the way home by water which was the longer journey he decided to forsake his ship and finish the journey by land. For it seemed to him a good plan to arrive early in England, and so discover his enemies ere they dreamt of his coming.

And doubtless this had been a plan not so ill, had not the King's way lain through the territory of the Archduke Leopold of Austria, one of Richard's bitterest enemies, and of the King of Germany, with whom he had a quarrel.

Of these things Richard took little heed, though he knew well that his enemies sought him, and would treat him harshly for the sake of their quarrels. Had Blondel been by his side, he had not taken a step so rash; but without that boon companion his inclination led him, and he set out joyfully upon his adventure.

Now he gave out that he was a merchant passing on a pilgrimage through these lands; and there his discretion ended. For never a merchant pilgrim travelled attended as Richard was by his gentlemen. Nevertheless he went gaily. But he had gone but a part of his way when he received warning that the Archduke Leopold had heard that he fared across country and was not travelling by sea.

Said Richard to his gentlemen: "See ye, sirs, we must be cautious. I will press onward therefore with this page, and ye shall travel by other ways. For I have a grievous quarrel with the Archduke, and he is hot against me; and it were an ill thing that I should suffer capture ere I reach my realm." And with the little page he rode on.

But having so advised himself, Richard had done with discretion, and he gave no more heed to danger. Thus it happened that, ere he had gone a great way farther, the Archduke heard of him; for he was told of a merchant pilgrim whose page bought bread with gold pieces, and wore lace of a costly price; and well Leopold imagined who that pilgrim might be! Therefore he seized Richard, and, very joyful to have so easily possessed himself of an enemy so dangerous, he clapped him into a dungeon, and fastened a dozen stout bolts behind him.

But after he had been imprisoned for a time, it came to the ears of Henry of Germany how the Archduke had seized Richard, and had made him his prisoner. Therefore the King met the Archduke, and having shown to him how unseemly this thing was that he, who was only an Archduke, should have for prisoner the King of England, he bought Richard from him for a large sum of money, and bore him away.

And that the English King should be the better hidden, Henry conveyed him to a dark and desolate castle which stands alone upon a rock, and which has beside it the ruins of its fellows; for there were once three castles there. In that castle had been done many deeds of which men spake with changing face and pallid lip.

Now Blondel awaited Richard's coming. And when the ships were upon their way, he said, "In a little time he will be here," And when the ships arrived in England, he cried, "The King is come."

But Richard was not in any of the ships. And Blondel learned how the King had set out upon that other journey by land, which is the shorter journey; and how he ought to have reached England a long time before this day.

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Then he waited. And when he had waited a long time, and heard the people murmur how the King was surely dead, and when he had marked the murmur grow into open talk, and the talk into conviction, and still the King came not; then Blondel lifted his guitar, and set out to seek for him. And with him he took a few knights who were faithful and who did not believe in the death of the King.

Then they sought those places which Richard had passed through in his journey; and where they stopped a night, there they made sweet music that men should not discover their errand. And as if the story were but a tale that tickled the fancy, they asked questions about the English King who had passed alone through that country, and wondered aloud what had befallen him, and if he had met his death.

And some folk there were who whispered in reply, with an eye upon the door, lest a listener should be hiding: "We remember one of so high a courage that it may be it was he of whom ye speak. But he tarried but a little while to buy food from us, and we know not whence he came nor whither he fared. These are dangerous days, and we are a simple folk and know naught of wandering kings. Yet we remember him that he rode with a high courage, and looked fearlessly upon every man."

And others said: "As we sat at our doors at nightfall, we saw one pass through the woods on foot, yet without weariness. And there was a little page with him. And as the man went by, he piped a song that was as sweet and careless as a bird's. And mayhap he was not of earth, but a wraith of the dead King."

But there were others again, who said roughly: "' We are a folk of bended backs, for we toil till we are weary. What do we know of the strangers that pass by ?"

And Blondel replied to these, "He was a King." But they answered, "One looks as high to see a King as to see any other stranger; and one sees only a man when all is done."

And of Richard, Blondel could learn no more than this the meandering speech of country folk.

Then he began to question within himself whether the King were really dead, and his quest without an end to it; and his heart became heavy. And the knights that were with him saw the shadow on his face, that it was like the shadow of night. For his soul was sad nigh to tears.

Nevertheless, because his love would not allow him to weary of his quest, and because he had vowed that he would discover the fate of the King, he still went searching; and after a while, when he had passed through the neighbourhood of the Danube, and was searching that of the Rhine, he came into a wild and dark valley over which brooded a great shadow of silence.

Upon one side of the valley were great rocky hills, and on one of these stood a sombre castle, black and grim, and of an aspect most terrible. And beside it, on either side, were the ruins of two other castles of a like sternness. They lay there like huge animals of some other age that had fallen dead. Against the sky they lay in the shape of monstrous beasts.

Said the knights among themselves: "When the minstrel feels upon him the gloom of this valley, he will be like to die of sadness; for the silence upon it is that of darkness, of despair, and of death."

But when Blondel paused to look up at that desolate castle, a great quiet fell upon his soul, as if his search were near an end; and his face became illuminated.

Then said he to his followers: "It is evening, but not yet the time of darkness. Hide ye in yon thicket the while I climb to the castle; for if the spirit speak aright which is within me, I shall find there tidings of him we seek."

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And they obeyed him, wondering greatly at the light upon his face.

"There hath never been a greater love," said one, "than the love Blondel bears to the King."

And another said, "Pray God we may find King Richard, for I would like all to see that light put out which shone on the minstrel's face."

But of these words Blondel knew nothing; and when he had climbed a great part of the valley—side he came upon a young damsel who was stepping down from the place where she had been tending her sheep, and so glad with youth was the smile upon her lips that the gloom could not touch it.

Then Blondel questioned her about the castle, if it had a history, and what that history might be, and if any prisoners were kept there.

"Alas I sir," said she, "the history of the castle is one of crime and bloodshed, and I have liked little to hear it, and have remembered no more than I was made to remember. Yet this I can tell thee: it is of so great a strength it hath never been taken; and there are many soldiers there even to this day."

Now the minstrel would have questioned her further about these things, but the maid had fear and would make no answer. Whereupon he brought forth his guitar and would have sung a song to her so to reward her courtesy; but he had voiced no more than a few notes when the damsel cried, "Why, if it be not that song again which I have heard the poor knight in the north tower sing! I have listened many a time as I tended my sheep, for it is a wayward strain and comes close to the heart. Ay, and the poor knight hath a sweeter voice than thou, Sir Minstrel, though he singeth in a cage."

Having uttered these words, the damsel was filled with confusion that she had so spoken to a stranger; and with a fleet foot she passed from the minstrel and pursued her way.

But Blondel was filled with a gladness so great that it was close to tears, and when he had climbed to the castle, he found his way to that north tower of which the damsel had spoken. And when he had found it, he leant there, and, plucking out a note from his guitar, he sang that song which the damsel had known, a song sweet with youth and dreams.

Now the verses were those which Richard had written when the music of Blondel had stirred his heart in the days gone by. And when the first verse was finished, a voice within the tower took up the second, and sang it quaintly. And it was the voice of Richard.

"Art thou there, my faithful Blondel?" cried he. Blondel replied with a great joyfulness: "It is I, sire, for I have sought thee, and have now found thee. And in the thicket in the valley hide valiant men who will contrive for thee a way of escape; for they have sought with me, and that with fearless hearts."

Now after much glad discourse, those true friends had again to part. Blondel hastened to make search for the castellan, who proved to be of a good temper and overjoyed to greet him, since the castle was lonely and attracted few players of a light wit such as he imagined Blondel to be.

When the minstrel had told those knights who were with him on his quest of the imprisonment of the King, they began to recount among themselves the divers fashions in which brave men had escaped from the hands of their enemies, that they might contrive a like escape for the King.

But by every wind their thoughts took they came back to that spot from which they set out; for there were two difficulties that beset them. The first was, that they themselves were few in number; and the second was and it

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was equally potent that the castle had never been taken by force.

There remained to them only strategy, for by no other means might the King escape.

Therefore Blondel climbed to the castle day by day; and while he stood in the great hall and played, or sang beside the blaze of the kitchen coals, he let his eyes roam round the assembled roisterers, seeking a face that would fit into his scheme. But the soldiers were loutish fellows, rough and rude, and of a dull wit, their only virtue that pride which they took in the castle they defended; and the minstrel's eye ever returned to the floor beside his feet, not having found that which it sought.

Yet one day as the minstrel's eyes swept round the hall in a sombre glance they fell upon that which roused a new fire in them, and made his song more hotly tender; for a little maid walked between the men, serving them, and she was slim and fair, and sweet to see. And as the minstrel sang, she looked away.

On the morrow she was again serving, and again the minstrel marked her; and he saw that her eyes were blue, and her smile so quaintly tender that he smiled himself to see it, and her mouth of so gracious a curve that it could surely fashion but gentle words.

And afterwards she was away for a time, so that the minstrel saw not her face, and he learnt that she was the jailer's daughter, and that she was well beloved.

At last, as the minstrel sang one eve in the kitchen where the dancing flames made merry in the half-dark, he saw the jailer's daughter enter and place her stool beside the fire. And there she sat with her head upon her hand, dreaming; and she was right fair to see.

Then awoke Blondel's heart, and he sang a new glad song, for he knew that he loved the maiden; and he saw in his love a way of escape for his King, whom this new love but fixed the stronger in his heart.

Now the jailer loved Blondel but little, for he was a stranger, and a mysterious fellow withal, and he would have had none of him as a husband for his daughter. Therefore the little maid counselled silence for a time, when the minstrel spake of that love which was in his heart. But when he spake of the prisoned King, fear fell upon her. "My father is a harsh man, and a cruel," said she, "yet will he never betray his trust. He will not release the King." And she wept.

Now Blondel thought of many plans by which the King might be rescued; and in each one the maiden perceived that the life of the minstrel must be given for the life of the King. Then she clasped her hands hard, and pondered; and when she had thought well, she cried again with anguish, "My father will never let him go."

Thus the days passed. But at last a morn came when the jailer's daughter sought the minstrel secretly.

"To-morrow," said she, "my father goes to the town to report himself. Now it is a mad thing that I purpose, yet will I gain the key of the King's chamber, and release him unto thee. Do thou and thy followers do the rest." With that she turned away.

But when she had gone a little way, she returned and said: "It is very easy to see that when thou goest with thy King I must go with thee; for there will be no place for me in the castle when I have done this thing." And she went away, torn betwixt grief and joy, for she loved her father, despite his cruelty; but her love for Blondel went as far beyond that love as the sky is beyond the sea.

When the day came for the jailer to be absent, Blondel stole to the castle in secrecy. And the soldiers knew not that he was there, for the jailer's daughter gave him shelter, and they were about their business.

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Then took the jailer's daughter the key of the King's chamber in her hand, and when a given time was come, she went her way to the north tower, being met by no one; and she undid the door of that chamber in which the King was prisoner, and in a sweet voice she said to him, "Come gently, sire, for the way from the castle is a treacherous way and full of dangers." And she led him safely to the place in which she had hidden Blondel.

Now Blondel had brought for the King a shield and helmet, and a sword of quaint device. When Richard had put these as he would have them, Blondel said, "Now, my King, the hour is come."

And with that they issued from the castle, and fell upon the sentries, and overthrew them. And they crossed the courtyard with a great haste, and threw open the gates.

No sooner were the gates open than Blondel's knights rode in, one after another, with a most amazing swiftness. And they fell with a great fury upon those soldiers that showed themselves; for their purpose was that for a time no alarm should be given. And being brave men, and of a great skill in warfare, they had no difficulty in overcoming these men; and they disposed of them every one.

When these things were thus well accomplished, Richard mounted the horse which had been brought for him, one of a fleet race, and used to the mountain side. And when Blondel had likewise mounted, and that brave maiden who had done him such good service, they urged their horses to a great speed, and went all of them upon their way.

Thereafter followed many adventures, and the surmounting of dangers in which all showed a good courage; till at last they were able to leave that country, and to reach the fair realm of England toward which stretched their desires.

Now Richard became a King of much valour and generosity. And he bare great love to Blondel, and to Matilda, Blondel's wife. Many gifts he gave to them, of beauty, and great worth; but of all the gifts he gave them they valued most his love.

How Oliver Fought for France and the Faith

The French camp lay as still as a hive of drowsy bees. Scarce a sound of life issued from it. Above it the sky stretched in great blue vastnesses; beneath the sky the calm air hardly moved. Everywhere a deep stillness prevailed. Perhaps the stillness was the one sign of the great battle and victory of a few days since. It told of weary warriors within the tents; it told also of brave knights grievously wounded; it told of the peace that treads close upon the heels of victory.

But that peace was rudely broken. Suddenly upon the air came a heavy sound as of the thunder of horses' hoofs. It came nearer and nearer, a dull clamp-clamp upon the ground. The sunlight caught a moving glitter, and wrapped it round with radiance. As that radiance drew nearer the French camp, it grew greater, larger, an increasing flash of brightness, and as it grew there grew with it the loudness of that heavy clamping sound. Then there came into view, breaking the peace of the place, a horseman in armour, a horseman so immense that he seemed to fill the horizon and dominate the plain.

He rode upon a horse as great as he, and as he swept his furious way towards the French hosts, his steed's hoofs fell again and again upon the ground with a thunderous noise. He flashed across the plain like a lightning of sunlight, drawing rein at last before the royal tent of Charlemagne.

There he halted and upraised his voice, which was like the roar of some angry creature other than man.

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"Behold, great Charlemagne," said he, "I have sought thy camp, and would honour thy knights by doing battle with them. Send out Roland or Oliver, or another of like prowess, that by showing him his littleness I may take pleasure in mine own strength. Nay, send out Roland and Oliver, and another with them; send out seven knights if thou wilt. Have not I in my time slain kings, and is not my strength equal to that of ten men?"

This furious roar came to the ears of Charlemagne, and he halted in his speech to his knights.

"Tell me," said he to one of the dukes, "who is this champion whose mouth is so full of words?"

The duke replied: "He is Fierabras the giant, son of Balan, an admiral of the Moors. By repute I know him well, and it is true that in his time he hath slain many valiant men and overcome kings. Moreover, he hath done many evil deeds among Christians, and it is he who hath in his possession the sacred tomb of our Lord."

The Emperor's brow grew dark as he heard these words in the silence that followed after the great shout of Fierabras. And as he meditated upon the misdeeds of this heathen who had so misused his strength and valour, he saw not the angry and downcast looks of his young knights, as they communicated with one another by hurried signs.

"My brave knights," said Charlemagne, lifting his glance from the ground, "which from among ye shall do battle with this braggart, for the defence of our faith, and the fair fame of France?"

After this question there came a murmur, as of men who would fain speak yet would not suffer themselves; but after the murmur there came a silence, and the knights answered not a word.

Then cast the Emperor the lightning of his glance upon the company, but not yet with anger in it, for he was all amazed, and did not understand.

Now the glance of the Emperor rested last upon Roland, who was his own nephew. He was also one of the Twelve Peers of France, who were for their valour known of all men. And Roland, feeling the sting of the Emperor's wonder, found his voice, uttering bitter words.

"Sire," said he, "cast thine ear back to listen to thine own words, and so find understanding of to-day's lack of speech. After that fight in which we, thy knights, fought valiantly, bringing to thee victory and to Oliver, mine own friend, many wounds so that he is like to die didst not thou, letting loose thy tongue in unwise speech, make little honour of our valour? For it is said that thy praise ran lightly, since thou didst declare that we, thy knights, had indeed fought bravely, but that our deeds were as shadows compared with what thine old knights had done in our place."

At these words Charlemagne's eyes shot wrath, and his face was as the sun when it sets in anger. For, indeed, he remembered the foolishness with which he had chidden, yet had the speech been uttered when the Emperor was weary and ill-advised, having in the glamour of his victory partaken of too much wine.

Now in his anger, and lacking the wit to excuse himself, he uttered bitter words, and Roland replied as bitterly, the while the knights held their glances from the Emperor, and the older men grew grave.

"Good Uncle," said Roland, "it were a vain thing for one of us to offer to do battle with the giant. Of all these old knights of thine whose praise slipt so glibly from thy tongue, surely one remaineth! Bid him that he do battle with Fierabras."

Then indeed bitterness rose to the Emperor's lips and would have overflowed, had not the roar of the giant again burst forth, swallowing all lesser sounds.

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"Haste thee, Charlemagne," cried he, "and send forth one who shall do battle for thee! While I wait for him, I will refresh myself with sleep beneath yonder tree; let thy knight hail himself thither ere too long a time be past. But I swear to thee that, if thou send no one, then shall I come with my hosts, and when I have swung thy head in my hands, I will seize thy peers and degrade them, and I will wipe thine army out of this land."

When he had spoken these words, the giant wheeled about, and rode furiously to a tree that grew upon the plain. Having reached it, he stripped himself of his armour, and lay down as if he would sleep.

Then Charlemagne, pale with his great anger and the insults that the giant had offered him, broke into speech against Roland, and the quarrel between them waxed great, so that many were afraid. For Roland had ever been the favoured knight of the Emperor, as he had ever been the most valiant. Yet to-day the knight was bitter with remembrance of the Emperor's words and the wounds of Oliver; and Charlemagne was in great anger, so that he hardly knew what words he spake.

Fierabras the giant slept, but his challenge had carried far, reaching the ears of Oliver, Roland's friend, as he lay ill of his wounds.

Therefore Oliver called his squire, who was named Garin, and bade him that he should discover the meaning of the hubbub.

Garin was gone a long time. When he returned he related to Oliver, turning, shamed, his face toward the side of the tent, how Fierabras the heathen champion had offered battle; and with his head hanging he told how no knight would offer himself to fight with him, and of the great quarrel between Roland and Charlemagne.

Then was Oliver silent for a space, for he knew that his wounds ached in the body of Roland, making sorer the recollection of the Emperor's careless words.

And as Garin still waited, his breast full of shame, there came the voice of Oliver, bidding him that he should bring him his armour and set it upon him.

Garin brought the armour, and when Oliver had bathed his wounds and bound them, and had made himself ready, Garin would have put the armour upon him; but as Oliver stood up to receive it, his wounds gushed out afresh so that he was stained everywhere with his own blood.

"Sir Oliver," said Garin, trembling, "if thou goest forth, it is to thy death."

But Oliver replied, "If it be so, it be so but I do not believe I go to my death."

Then having bound himself afresh, and his armour being upon him, Oliver mounted his horse, and bearing spear and sword that good sword which he named Hautclere he made his way to the tent of the Emperor.

When he had found it, he came before Charlemagne, who sat silent, and with glowing eyes bent upon the ground; and Charlemagne at first believed him to be a vision. Then perceiving that this was indeed his knight Oliver, he cried: "Sir Oliver, Sir Oliver, get thee back to thy bed! What folly is this that thou so deftest thy wounds? Wouldst thou call Death ere he have thought of thee?"

Oliver replied, heeding not the throbbing of his wounds: "Sire, I have found thee that I may crave of thee a favour. And since for many a year I have fought, asking nothing, I beg of thee to grant this, my request."

Now Charlemagne believed that Oliver had a fever upon him, so that he understood not his own words. Therefore he answered him with tenderness: "My good Oliver, thy favour is granted thee. Ask what thou wilt; there is

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naught among my possessions I would refuse to so well-beloved a knight. But haste thee back to thy bed, that thy wounds may be quiet and grow whole."

Oliver replied in a voice that rang clear as a silver trumpet: "My request has nothing to do with great possessions. It is, sire, that I be allowed to do battle with this heathen. When I have done this thing I will take heed of my wounds."

Then the Emperor slid his head upon his hands, and was troubled; for he had granted Oliver his request, not knowing the purport of it, and might not take back his royal word; yet he was assured that Oliver had no strength with which to fight Fierabras, and that he would speedily die through the severity of his wounds.

"Nay, Oliver," said he, "rest thee, and grow whole. A wounded knight cannot fight the giant."

But Oliver replied firmly: "It is my request, which has been granted to me. Therefore, sire, let me go."

And while the knights about the Emperor grew pale with many emotions, looking one upon another with grief in their glances, Oliver took from Charlemagne his glove that he might bear it with him to the fight.

Bearing the glove, Oliver turned gladly, and lifting up his head he cried before he went, "If I owe aught to any man, it shall be paid to him; and if I have sinned against any man, I pray him to forgive me my sins before I go."

Whereupon all bent their heads with sorrow, so greatly was Oliver beloved; and Roland turned pale as ashes, for that Oliver should fight, thus wounded, was to him worse than the thought of death.

But Oliver went forth with gladness, and when he had found Fierabras, he cried to him, "Awake, Fierabras, the great Charlemagne hath sped me forth to do battle with thee."

And at the cry the giant bestirred himself though whether he had been asleep in reality is another matter; and when he perceived Oliver, he rose to his feet.

Then said Oliver, "This is the message of that great and Christian Emperor who hath sent me: 'Thou shalt forsake thine idols, and worship the one true God'"

But Fierabras replied, "I will not."

Then spake Oliver, "Wilt thou then leave this land, that we may make it Christian; and cease from thy persecutions?"

Then replied Fierabras, rearing his head and speaking proudly: "I am Fierabras, a heathen prince, and of great power. In my possession I hold the Tomb which is sacred to thee, and I have done evil to many Christians. These messages which thou bearest to me are but idle words, which I heed as lightly as I heed the wind that blows; for I hold in contempt thy country and thy faith."

Then was Oliver shaken with anger so that his wounds bled; and in a voice that was quiet because of his anger he answered, "Since thou hast spurned the alternative offered to thee, haste thee, heathen, and fight with me, for I am eager to begin."

"Help me, then," said Fierabras, "to put on mine armour, for it is of great weight." And Oliver helped him, fearing nothing; neither did the giant do him any ill.

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Then, when his armour was upon him, Fierabras spake, saying, "Tell me thy name, Sir Knight, that I may know whom it is I vanquish."

"My name," said Oliver, "is Garin, and I am a poor and humble knight, whom few men honour." And he cast his eyes upon the ground, feeling giddy with his wounds.

But Fierabras cried with a roar: "Where then are Roland and Oliver, and these mighty peers of whom ye brag so finely? Where are all these, that they have not come to do me battle?"

Then replied Oliver: "The Emperor holds thee and thy boasting too lightly to send these knights."

At these words so great an anger came upon the giant that he had shouted in a frenzy, had not his glance fallen upon the face of Oliver, which was so pale that it was as the face of the dead.

"Nay, Sir Garin," said he with more gentleness, "it were impossible that thou shouldest fight with me, for I can see that thou art wounded near to death."

"Come, cease thy talk," said Oliver impatiently. "Since thou wilt give no heed to the Emperor's message, I would put an end to thee."

"My strength is as the strength of ten men," said Fierabras; "how can I fight with one who is wounded? Nay, Sir Knight, thy blood stains thee as thou speakest; I pray thee, desist, and I will entreat thine Emperor that he send another knight."

"I will desist only when my life leaves me," cried Oliver. "As for thy vaunted strength, Fierabras, know that my God will give me strength beyond any that thou hast ever known, strength as much greater than thine as the sea is greater than the river." And he would parley no longer.

Therefore they betook them to a fair place on the plain in which to do battle, and from the French hosts came out many to watch the fight.

Fierabras, when he had made him ready, prayed to his idols, and having prayed he said to Oliver, "By that Cross and Tomb which thou holdest sacred, I ask of thee thy true name."

And Oliver replied, "I am Oliver, the friend of Roland, and one of the Twelve Peers of France."

"Now, it was plain to me," cried the giant, "that thou wert no knight of humble name and mean repute."

And with these words they flew together; and with such swiftness and force that their forms appeared but as quickly moving flashes of sunlight, and their spears in a trice were broken in twain.

Fierabras had three famous swords, which he named Pleasaunce, Baptism, and Grabon. From these he chose Pleasaunce, that he might give to that sword the joy of overcoming so brave a knight.

And, having gripped the sword, he flew again upon Oliver as if he would have cut him in pieces. But Oliver answered the thrust with one mightier and better placed, thus breaking off a part of the giant's helmet, which fell to the ground.

Said Charlemagne, under his breath, "God hath blessed us, and the fight is to our wounded Oliver."

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But the words had but stirred the air when Oliver's shield received a blow that brake it; and it seemed that the knight staggered from the force of the blow and from the weakness his wounds bred in him. And Charlemagne drooped his head, and prayed.

Yet Oliver recovered himself bravely, crushing his strength into a thrust that had almost finished the giant; and again the contest waxed fierce.

Heavily breathed Fierabras as he fought, and Oliver, that valiant knight, while his wounds burnt his flesh, pressed close upon the giant, his eyes darting glances that were like flames.

"It is a valiant knight," thought Fierabras, and for the first time he questioned the issue of the fight; then with a new strength he fell hard upon Oliver, and to such good purpose, that he struck the knight's sword from his hand and sent it hurtling to the ground.

"Ah, Sir Oliver!" cried Fierabras, lifting up his voice in mockery. "Where is now the strength thy God hath promised thee, and of what avail would it be to thee since thou mayest not recover thy sword?"

Oliver answered nothing, being hard put to it in his thoughts to discover a way out of his difficulty. For he would have sought his sword where it lay, covering himself with his shield meanwhile, had not the shield lain in pieces upon the ground. As for his armour, it was battered and broken upon him. And the pain of his wounds waxed intolerable.

By reason of his pain the knight turned pale, the which perceiving, and reading aright, Fierabras was filled with compassion for this brave knight, whom he liked not ill.

"See, Sir Oliver," said he, "I will wait while thou liftest thy sword."

"Nay," cried Oliver, "that would be no victory which I should owe to thy clemency!"

And even as he spoke, he prayed in his heart for strength and succour. Thereafter the prayer having left his lips, Oliver looked about him, and immediately perceived the giant's second sword Baptism which lay behind him close to his hand; for in the heat of the fight they had neared the spot where the giant had placed his other swords.

"Behold, Fierabras," cried he, "by the aid of thine own sword shall I work thine undoing!" and he gripped the sword hardly and ran upon him with a mighty force.

Now Fierabras, whether by reason of his confusion and dismay on perceiving his own sword turned against him, or by reason of his weariness, received the onslaught but ill, and having dealt Oliver a cut that miscarried, received one in his turn that caught him heavily, piercing his side, so that he fell with a crash upon the ground.

Oliver, seeing his adversary so defeated, durst not himself move, lest, since all his strength had gone into the blow he had given, he should fall for lack of it.

Thus he bowed his head in humble gladness upon his breast, the while the French hosts rent the air with great cries of joy; and his thoughts wound into a prayer of thanksgiving to that Great God who had given to him the victory through the strength that He had bestowed.

Fierabras the giant recovered from his wound, and was baptized into the true faith. For the evil he had done, he made generous recompense. Of the brave deeds he did thereafter, he made little boast. I trow there were few knights more valiant than he.

The Sword in the Stone (The Legend of Arthur and Excalibur)

The King was worse, was like to die.

The ominous news ran over the castle, and from the castle over the country, like the black brew from a pot that over-boils. At every street-corner women babbled it, men talked it over grave-faced and with surprise.

True, King Uther had ailed now for many weary months, and of a fatal malady. That the ardour of his illness should have increased surprised no one; it was the strange twist the malady had taken that awakened astonishment and dismay. For it was known that the King was dumb.

But a few days since, he had been borne, prone like a stricken lion, to the field of battle, that his presence might bring victory to his men. It had brought victory, victory for which the valiant monarch had paid dearly. He lay now facing death, and with dumb lips.

In the castle, in grey corners, the knights chattered. "All evil thing indeed is this that hath befallen the King, and the realm," murmured one, harping on the one note of complaint. "Since the King must die, the King must die –it is the lot of all men, and feared little by the valiant, rebut that King Uther should die having named no successor there one has a grievance indeed !"

"With so many barons eager to snatch at the crown of this fair realm, it had been a good thing had the King left a son to succeed him," said another.

"Ay, but since he hath not left a son," retorted the first, "it had been well had Providence left him the use of his tongue to declare his successor !"

Thus they brawled among them, till a sudden footstep made their glances turn, whereupon they became immediately silent.

Yet the footstep was not that of any mighty baron. Merlin the Enchanter it was who passed through the entrance-hall, his dark cloak drawn high around him, shadowing his face.

There was silence till he had passed.

"Merlin goes to the King's chamber," observed one of the gossips, his eye following the dark form.

"'Tis a sad day for Merlin, for he was a good friend of King Uther's," said another. "I have ever heard that by his charms he aided the King much in the matter of his marriage."

"He will aid him little now," muttered a third speaker. "Death is stronger than Merlin's arts, and he hath laid a finger upon the King."

At this moment appeared another loiterer, coming upon the group with eye agleam and a lip curled with the scorn of one who has knowledge of great events and would enlighten his neighbours' ignorance to the tune of his own rising importance.

"Saw ye Merlin pass?" asked he, with chin cocked and with an arrogant air.

"Ay, we saw him," was the response, "and right sombre was his step. He goes to visit the King, who may well expire before he reaches him."

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"May the Saints forbid " ejaculated the new-comer. "That would be an ill thing for Merlin. Hath he not promised that to-day, in the witness of the Queen and barons, he, by his witchcraft, and with the aid of Heaven, will make the King speak?"

At this choice news all mouths fell agape; and eyes were rounded at the speaker, the while the gossips drew close.

The newsmonger, relishing the effect he had produced, proceeded with his tale, pouring out particulars with the air of one who dispenses a choice wine. And, as if it were a choice wine, his listeners drank in the story.

Meanwhile Merlin the Enchanter had found the King's chamber.

The door being closed behind him, he drew down his cloak from his face, surveying the assembled barons and the weeping Queen.

"The King still lives?" queried he harshly.

"He still lives, but that is all," one answered in a lamentable voice.

"And hath not spoken?"

"He hath spoken not one word," murmured a baron. "Remember, Merlin, thy promise, given to us yester-eve: 'Gather ye in the King's chamber to-morrow at this hour, and by the grace of God and the aid of my charms King Uther shall name his successor to this realm '."

"It is a true remembrance," said the Enchanter indifferently. "Such indeed were the words I uttered."

He drew near to the King's bed, and a cloud gathered in his eyes as one may gather in the heavens before rain.

"It is the will of all," he spake, turning, "that I make the King speak, thus disturbing his drowsing spirit ? Shall he name his successor to ye?"

"It is our will," said the barons; and the Queen answered also: "It is our will."

Merlin covered his eyes for a moment, then, turning toward the bed, "Sire," said he to the King, "tell us thy will concerning the welfare of thy kingdom. Is it thy will that thy son Arthur succeed thee, becoming ruler of this fair realm?"

These words were scarcely uttered when the King replied, in his own voice, and without halt in the speech: "It is my earnest wish and desire that my son Arthur wear my crown. I bid him therefore that he claim it, when the right time comes, in a righteous and just spirit, knowing that to rule this realm is his duty and his responsibility. If he do not this thing, then shall he forfeit the blessing I bestow upon him now."

The King had hardly uttered these words, when, with a sigh, his breath went from him, and he died.

Then the barons, in despair and anger, began to accuse Merlin among themselves, calling him impostor, and other like names. "This is a trick of Merlin's," said they, "which he hath worked through the mouth of the King; for well does he know that King Uther hath no son! It were better had he made the King name one of us to succeed him; then had the matter been a plain one, and the land not turned to confusion!"

Whispering thus among themselves, they cast angry glances at the Enchanter. But he, shrouding his face from them, turned, and without a word went away.

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Thus died King Uther, having named as his successor a son, of whom the barons knew nothing; and for many years that fair realm which he had governed was torn by strife, by battle, and by bitter feud. For there was many a powerful baron who cast eyes upon the crown, and who would raise up a tempest of battle with a better grace than he would utter a prayer.

Thus the barons strove, quarrelled, and made warfare, the while the years passed, and the glory of the realm waxed dim. But there dawned a day when the barons were as weary of themselves, and their claims, as the country was, and were not unwilling that from among them one should be chosen to be king.

Then was Merlin the Enchanter seen again, passing in and out among the people, his dark cloak wrapping him round. It was known that he sought audience of the Archbishop of Canterbury. When he was come before the Archbishop, Merlin said:

"Is not this a grievous thing that the fair realm of England should be so torn, through the hopes of ambitious men? Yet dawns another day, and to thee may be a portion of its glory. Call together, I pray of thee, all the lords of this realm, and gentlemen of arms, that they may make prayer to God that by some sign He shall reveal the rightful king of the realm."

The Archbishop pondered these words, and when he had examined well this advice of Merlin's, it seemed good to him, and well worthy a Christian people. Therefore he said: "I will call them together."

Merlin rested his eyes upon the ground, hiding his thoughts. After a while he said: "Call them together at Christmas-time, for since at that time God gave us the great gift of His Son, His heart may be inclined to give us other gifts."

When he had said this he went away. Where he went I know not; but for many a day men saw naught Of Merlin the Enchanter.

The Archbishop called together the lords and gentlemen of arms; and none knew that he had followed any thought but his own.

To London came they, in response to the call, and many a knight had fasted first, and others had otherwise mortified themselves, that their prayers might be the better heard in Heaven.

On Christmas Day they gathered together, and with them the common People, a goodly company, either in St. Paul's, or some other great church; and all men prayed with a marvellous earnestness that the sign should be vouchsafed to them which they craved.

One knight was there who, as he prayed, felt before his closed eyes a sudden flash, as it were of some great light. Whether he prayed more earnestly than his fellows, that a great matter should first be revealed to him, we know not, for to judge of such things is beyond human wit. But it is known that, on uncovering his eyes and glancing about him, this knight beheld, through the open door of the church, something that shone with a great fury, and reminded him of the light he had seen. The which, when he had observed it for some time, he made out to be a great white stone, and in the stone an anvil, and, struck through the anvil and the stone, a golden sword.

When the youth was certain of these things, trembling seized him, for he perceived that they were not of earth. Whereupon he whispered to his neighbour of this strange happening, and his neighbour to another, and that other to whoso sat next; till at length the matter reached the ear of the Archbishop where he stood.

But he, setting first the glory of God, advised that the service should be finished before any should enquire into the thing.

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Thereupon, when the service was over, all men passed out of church, agape to see the miracle; and found the matter even as the knight had declared.

The white stone lay in the churchyard, and in the stone was the anvil, and through anvil and stone was a golden sword. And about the sword were words written that shone like flames.

The Archbishop read them, stooping, his hands upon his knees.

"Whoso shall lift this sword from the stone and the anvil " –so read he, for so it was written "the same is rightly born King of England."

At these words the lords and gentlemen looked one at another; and the commons shot out their lips and looked at the Archbishop. And he, having bent his head some minutes longer, as hearing some voice in the words which others heard not, said: "The sign is given, are ye content to abide by it?"

And they replied, with one voice: "We are content."

Then said the Archbishop: "God having vouchsafed us this sign of the sword in the stone and the anvil, at Twelfth Day it shall be given to any man to try his skill at withdrawing the sword. Until that day let all be patient, and until then shall certain knights of pure fame be set to guard the stone."

Having arranged these things, the Archbishop went his way, bearing a joyful heart within him; and he contrived that on New Year's Day there should be jousts and a tournament, and other fine doings, that the lords and commons should be kept together till the king should be revealed.

On New Year's Day the roads were gay with the bravery of the lords and commons who were on their way to the fields, the lords to show their skill, the commons to behold it and make holiday.

With the throng rode Sir Ector, a noble knight and one who had loved King Uther well, and in his company his son Sir Kay (who had received his knighthood but last Hallowmas), and young Arthur his adopted son, who was but a stripling.

Young Arthur rode a pace or two behind, but that was his own doing. In his eye was the glamour of the road, in his heart quaked a happy wonder at the gay world and its happenings. These emotions so held him that he perceived not the confusion of his brother, whose face grew suddenly red and halfshamed.

At length Sir Kay brought his horse up with so sudden a jerk that Arthur had almost been upon him.

"Why, brother," cried he, amazed, "what ails thee? My head was in the clouds, in truth, but thou hadst almost brought it to the earth in thy hurry!"

Sir Kay's visage was like a harvest moon, but held nothing of jollity: "I have forgotten my sword; a fool's trick!" mumbled he, sputtering over the words. "Now it falls upon me to wind back the length of the road and fetch it."

"Nay," said the boy quickly, "that were an unnecessary to do. Haste thee on with our father, I will return to the town at a great speed, and will fetch thy sword."

With that he turned about, 'right glad to have excuse to time his horse's pace nearer to that of his blood. Youth rose high in his heart, touched his pulse, quickened his eye. With a clatter he flew along the road upon which he alone turned his face to the city; and heedless of any glance, grave or tender, made his way to his lodging.

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Having reached the house, he reined in his horse, and battered hard upon the door. The blows rang out finely, but they brought never a response. Young Arthur twitched his brows, brought out another volley of blows, listened. There was a quiet in the street like that of the tomb.

The boy clapped his hand upon his side so that his horse started. "The tournament, the tournament! it hath sucked them in, every one of them !"

And so indeed it had.

Meanwhile Sir Ector and Sir Kay went plodding on, Sir Kay enlarging upon his plight, and young Arthur's tardiness. Ever and anon he would cast an anxious glance behind him, pitching a new lament to his father's ears as the glance found naught. At length he perceived a cloud of dust. It came nearer and nearer, thickened, rose high. Arthur rode from the midst of it, his hair blowing in the breeze he made.

"See, brother, a sword to thy hand!" cried he. "Say not that I failed thee, though thine own sword lay behind barred doors!"

Sir Kay grasped the sword, well satisfied. His eye ran down it, and as the glance grew, his cheek paled. He trembled, then rode on.

But young Arthur, perceiving nothing, fell again behind, taking up his thoughts.

Sir Kay hastened to rejoin his father, full of tidings.

"Sir," cried he in a tremulous tone, "surely I, and none other, am chosen to be King of England, since in my hand I bear the sword of the stone !"

At this speech Sir Ector turned, and, having beheld the sword which his son carried, he saw that it was indeed the sword of the stone.

"Tell me, didst thou pluck it from the stone " asked he.

Sir Kay's face fell, but he answered stoutly: "Nay, I plucked it not from the stone. My brother Arthur, who returned to seek what I had forgotten, he brought me the sword."

Then said Sir Ector to Arthur: "Tell me, didst thou pluck the sword from the stone?"

Thus was the boy awakened from his dreams of sweet wit, and he confessed how, having found all doors barred upon his brother's sword, he made all haste to the churchyard and plucked the sword from the stone that rested there.

"Were none there," asked Sir Ector, "to forbid the act?"

"Nay," said the boy, "they had gone, every one, to the tournament."

This was true, for the knights had gone to try their skill.

Then was Sir Ector thoughtful, and he would have it that they turned about, all three, and rode back to the churchyard, that lay some distance behind them. This being done, young Arthur replaced the sword in the anvil and the stone.

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"My son, draw out the sword," said Sir Ector to Sir Kay.

And Sir Kay essayed, bending down, the better to use his strength. Once he strove, and twice, his muscles cracking and his face aflame; but he could not withdraw the sword.

"Yield place to me," said Sir Ector, and, laying his hands upon the sword, he, too, strove to wrest it from the anvil and stone, but he could not move it one hair-breadth from its place.

But when Arthur laid his hand upon the sword, it slid from the stone as a sunbeam across a wall. And when he had replaced it, it stuck as fast as before.

Then said Sir Ector to the boy: "By King Uther's desire wert thou entrusted to me, whilst yet a babe, and of thy parentage would the King reveal nothing. Now I begin to think that thou art of a higher destiny than I thought of. Let us travel to the Archbishop, and tell him of these events."

And straightway they went to the Archbishop, who was struck with a great wonder on hearing their story; but he advised that nothing should be said of the matter, since Twelfth Day was near at hand, when it would be given to every man to try his skill.

Now when Twelfth Day was come all the world was agog, since there were few who did not wish to see the judgment of the sword. Like twining ribbons were the roads of the city, being gay with the costumes of those that thronged to the churchyard. Barons and gay gentlemen, young and old, rich and poor, lords and commons, these encountered at street corners, and jostled as they passed by. To the churchyard stretched the hopes of all; and in the churchyard were bright hopes to be shattered. For there the game went merrily, yet with a sharp echo to its music; many a fine fellow trying his skill with a cheerful heart, and having striven till he was like to break in two, going on his way with puckered chin, not having moved the sword the breadth of a hair. Ever the crowd of champions grew; but as it grew fat on one side it waxed thin on another, as one strong fellow after another grasped the sword with hope and left it with despair.

"'Tis as if some massive chain bound sword and stone," said one disappointed gentleman.

"'Tis as if great nails fastened it," said another, flourishing a white handkerchief about his brow.

"Here comes a fine fellow!" cried a spectator of a lower order. He nudged his neighbour. "'Tis a fine knight; surely if any can move the sword 'twill be this same."

"It is Sir Kay, son of Sir Ector; may he have joy of his task!" quoth the other, scowling. "He begins well. Ah, he means to have the sword!"

It was well said that Sir Kay meant to have the golden sword. Many a bold knight had striven hard, but he strove hardest of all. Evening was now come, and but few remained to try their skill. Everywhere were to be seen crowds of scowling or bantering faces it is as disappointment affects a man, the faces of those who had grasped the Sword, only to loose the grasp and leave it. Sir Kay's brows bent fiercely; had not the sword rested in his hand before to-day? If he did not gain it 'twould be because it was not to be gained. If he could not wrest it from the anvil, 'twould be because the task was beyond any man. His face grew livid, his teeth closed tight as he tugged, and pulled, bent himself over the sword, reared above it, knelt, doubled, twisted. That was a sight to see him! Of all gay knights he laid longest and bravest siege to the sword in the stone.

"What now, hath he gained the sword?" asked a rosy-cheeked lad at last of his elders. He reared upon his toes, kicking the heels of his neighbours.

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"Nay, he turns away in bitter confusion. Pale is his cheek, and cold his eye. But the sword remains in the stone."

"It is like to remain there!" said the boy. "Who comes now?"

"Young Arthur, Sir Ector's adopted son. 'Tis said he is one of Merlin's changelings, foisted upon Sir Ector when a babe. Nay, thou mayest turn thine eyes away; he is but a stripling, scarce of greater height than thou art. He cannot withdraw the sword."

"I would fain see him," said the lad. "I have fear of Merlin; his eyes are like the water that lies behind the mill. Show me this changeling." He craned, and craned again, stretching out his thin young neck. "Is he fine-looking, neighbour? I can see nothing of him. What a hub-bub! Speak, neighbour, what is the meaning of it?"

A thousand voices answered the question. "He hath worked the miracle, the sword is withdrawn! The stripling holds it! Didst thou notice? it sprang to his hand as if it but waited for the touch!"

"Lift me up," said Master Rosy-Cheeks, his eyes shining. "I would see him." Someone raised him: he caught a glimpse of a fair young figure, of bright tost hair, of eyes that seemed to flash into his soul.

He saw in the hand of the valiant figure a sword that glittered as it were shrouded in fire. About it were words written that shone with the brilliance of stars.

The boy dropt to his heels, covering his face.

"How now?" queried his benefactor.

"I have seen the sun," muttered the boy, blinking, and dashing water from his eyes.

Still the clatter of tongues uprose, angry voices that merged into dispute.

Master Rosy-Cheeks came back to earth.

"The barons complain," his neighbour told him. "They say he is but a boy in faith it is a true word! They say the realm cannot be rightly governed by an unbearded stripling. They complain that none knows whence he came; perchance, who knows, he may be some beggar's brat! See, he hath replaced the sword, and it sticks fast as before. The Archbishop hath yielded to the barons. At Candlemas men shall strive again to withdraw the sword."

It was a true word, the Archbishop had given way. At Candlemas there would be a new trial. The crowd, chattering over this, and, disputing, began to break.

At Candlemas young Arthur again withdrew the sword, and no other could move it from its place.

Wherefore again the barons disputed, casting waspish glances at the youth; and they demanded at Easter a new reckoning.

And at Easter the same matters befell, whereupon the matter was delayed till Pentecost.

And at Pentecost the sword leapt again to greet the stripling, and would yield itself to none other.

Then rose the commons, crying with one voice: "Arthur shall be our King! Hath not the sword revealed him to us, and the voice of God? We will have no other than he, and no further delay in the matter. And our prayer is that he will pardon us for what delay hath been!" So they cried, bending their knees.

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Whereupon many a gallant gentleman fell, too, to crying: "Arthur shall be our King !" and so great a noise was there, and clamour, that no other cry could be heard. And such as would have piped to a different tune had to swallow their grievance, with as good a grace as they could muster, and bend the knee with their fellows.

After this fashion was young Arthur acclaimed King of the realm of England, as revealed by God in answer to earnest prayer. The sword of the stone he laid straightway upon the altar, and he was made knight of the best man there.

Ere the year was old, Merlin the Enchanter was again seen among men, walking in ways few understood. Then, having come upon a concourse of barons who would have harboured still their discontent, he thus spake, throwing out at them the fire of his eyes.

"Know ye," said he, "that this beardless youth, whom ye have welcomed so tardily, is none other than the rightfully born son of King Uther, now rightfully reigning in his father's stead? Merlin the Enchanter it was who demanded the babe from the King as a price for service done to King Uther in the matter of his marriage, but privily for the babe's own weal. For the child was feeble, and the King near death and unable to protect him, and I knew the hearts of ye, that ye were bodeful men and would work the child ill. Wherefore I, Merlin, claimed this price from King Uther, bargaining that Sir Ector, that just knight, should rear the babe.

"Answer me now; ask ye from Heaven a truer King than this King is?"

Then were they all silent, hanging low their heads.

The Keeping of the Passes

The Emperor Charlemagne rested for a while at Cordova, and with him were his nobles, among whom were the Twelve Peers of France of great renown, and his vast army.

Charlemagne had made war in Spain for nigh seven years, and he had conquered almost the whole of that fair country; for there remained only the city of Saragossa over which King Marsilas still reigned. Charlemagne had great joy of his victories, for such lands as he conquered, these he made Christian, calling upon the heathen to renounce their idols and accept the true faith, before he would have mercy upon them.

The Emperor sat upon a fair throne in a spacious orchard, the while his young knights contested about him in many manly sports, and those who were old and wise commended their skill. And as he sat there, with a great nobleness of mien, and having much thankfulness in his heart, there came to him ten ambassadors from Saragossa, bringing word from that same King Marsilas.

The ambassadors rode upon white mules that were bedecked with much richness, they carried olive branches in their hands, and their bearing was courteous. And with them they brought four hundred mules that bore heavy burdens of gold and of silver; and they had with them besides, dogs, and noble lions, and bears, and camels, and other beasts.

When these men had approached near to the Emperor, they made due reverence, and said: "Sire, we are come as ambassadors from King Marsilas, who is in Saragossa; and we are among the noblest of his knights. Behold, the King hath sent to thee costly gifts: four hundred mules laden with gold and silver, with which thou mayest pay thy soldiers; and many stately beasts; and there are falcons besides.

"And the message that King Marsilas hath put into our lips is this message: that he wearies him of so much warfare, and perceives right well the valour of the noble knights of France; and it seems to him that the faith

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which is held by thee is a true faith. For these reasons his prayer is that thou wilt have pity on him. And if thou wilt leave this Kingdom of Spain to him, and wilt return to thine own country of France, he makes fair promise that he will follow thee thither within a month's time, and will be baptized into thy faith; and he will do thee homage, as thy vassal, for the Kingdom of Spain."

The Emperor sank his beard upon his breast and thought long upon this speech, and when he had reflected, he said: "The King, thy lord, hath long been mine enemy, how shall I know that he means well by me?"

The ambassadors replied: "He will send thee hostages, as many as thou wilt; for it is a true word that he is tired of warfare and would fain see this strife ended."

Said Charlemagne: "On the morrow we will speak again upon this matter; and if it be as ye have said, then shall my heart be glad."

And he ordered that provision should be made for the ambassadors.

And when the morrow was come, the Emperor called his nobles together; and he related to them how King Marsilas had sent ambassadors to him, and had professed himself to be weary of warfare, and had said that if Charlemagne would but return to France he would follow him thither, and would hold Spain as his vassal, and would be baptized into the true faith.

But Roland, who was nephew to the Emperor, and the knight feared most of all by the heathen, believed that King Marsilas harboured treachery in his heart, and that the message held false promises; and he recalled to the Emperor how King Marsilas had played him a trick in days gone by, and had slain two ambassadors who had been sent to him in good faith; and how he was a man of a crafty and ungenerous spirit.

But after Roland had spoken, there spake Gandon, he who would have been a most perfect knight had his word been as true as his body was fair; but he was a man of a weak character, who could be won over to evil things.

Ganelon said: "Sire, I see no reason to doubt the intention of King Marsilas. Hath not he, of his own accord, sent thee gifts of a great value, and ambassadors of a good name to speak for him? And is it not a true thing which he saith: that there hath been warfare enough to weary a man? For there remains only Saragossa, and, for my part, I esteem it wisdom in King Marsilas that he would treat with thee ere he lose all his lands; and he may well think that faith a true faith which hath worked for thee such victory as hath been thine.

"Now I say it were unseemly in a Christian King to reject the advances of a heathen when he would accept the true faith. For what, sire, have we conquered Spain, if not to bring glory to the Cross?"

When these words were spoken, they seemed to Charlemagne wise words, and generous counsel; and he turned to that wise and venerable noble, the Duke of Bavaria, and said: "What thinkest thou of these counsels which have been given to me by Roland and by Gandon?"

The Duke replied for albeit he was cautious, he was mellow with years, and without inclination to think ill of any man: "I think with Gandon that it were ill to refuse this offer of King Marsilas. Yet would I ask for hostages."

Charlemagne said: "It is good; we shall act on the advice. As for hostages, I may have as many of them as I will. Therefore I shall send a knight to treat with this King, and to bear to him a letter. Now which of ye shall go?"

Then proffered Roland, and Oliver, and the Duke of Bavaria, and many another. But the Emperor had good reasons why none of these should go. And, being weary with discussion of the matter, he said to the nobles: "Ye shall agree among yourselves who shall go."

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And after some discussion Roland said that Ganelon should go; nor had he any ill-will toward Ganelon in suggesting this thing, since he would himself have gone gladly upon the errand; and the other knights agreed.

But Ganelon, when he had given his counsel to the Emperor, had not thought of himself as messenger in the matter. Nor did he desire to be that knight who should treat with King Marsilas, for he remembered the fate of those other ambassadors. And because there was ill-will between him and Roland on account of another matter, which comes not into this story, he believed that Roland spake in hatred when he proposed that Ganelon should go.

Therefore he looked upon Roland with a glance that was evil; and all knights saw that Ganelon was ill-pleased to go; and there was not one that would not have gone in his place had that been possible.

When Ganelon was ready to set forth, having received advice from his Emperor, and the staff and gauntlet which the ambassador carries, and also that letter which he was to deliver to Marsilas from Charlemagne, he looked again upon Roland before he went; and in a low voice he said: "Have a care, Count Roland; where Ganelon loses a feather he claims a wing. And it may be that thou shalt hear again of this matter."

Roland replied: "I have worked thee no ill, Gandon, therefore I fear nothing."

And Gandon set out.

And when he had journeyed some little distance, he came up with the ambassadors of King Marsilas, who had started a little while before him, to return to their king.

On the way these men conversed with Ganelon, and having treated him very pleasantly they begged of him that he would tell them if the Emperor thought kindly of the petition of their king,

Gandon replied: "He hath thought kindly, and it may be that he had thought more kindly still, had it not been for my Count Roland."

For his heart was full of bitterness against Roland that he had sent him upon this quest, and also on account of other matters.

The ambassadors said, casting eyes upon Ganelon that went threading into his soul: "We have heard of that mighty peer Roland, who is the friend of Oliver, and nephew to the Emperor. What hath he to say in the matter?"

Said Gandon: "The Emperor will not have your King as vassal for the whole of Spain; for hath not he promised one-half to Roland, that he shall be lord of it?" And he spake hotly and without consideration, for he grudged Roland his place with the Emperor.

The ambassadors were silent for a moment. Afterwards they again questioned Ganelon, saying: "We know the prowess of the great Charlemagne and his men of France, but surely he becomes sated with victory, for his years grow full. Doth not he speak of a time when he shall cease from war?"

Then spake Ganelon: "Charlemagne is as strong now as he hath ever been, and his years sit lightly upon him. Nevertheless, but for Roland, he would content him with less warfare. Roland it is ever, that proud peer, who inciteth him to the taking of new cities."

The ambassadors said angrily: "We like not this Roland, for he is valorous beyond any other knight of Charlemagne; and he hath grievously robbed us. Tell us how Charlemagne may be rid of him, and we will give thee great treasure, we and our lord."

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And Ganelon, though at first he felt anger at this speech, and told himself he would work no evil against any brother-knight, afterwards consented to talk with the ambassadors about a means to compass Roland's downfall; for he felt his hate surge within him.

When Saragossa was reached, Ganelon came before King Marsilas, and, having saluted him with all courtesy, he related that message which he carried.

And he related it with truth, for the hate which he bore to Roland he bore only to Roland; to Charlemagne he was a faithful knight, where Roland was not concerned.

Said Gandon, standing straight and still: "This is the message of my lord, the great Charlemagne: that he is well pleased that ye desire baptism into the true faith, all ye of Saragossa, for so ye shall save your souls. As for Spain, he will yield to thee one-half of it, to hold as vassal; for the other half is for Count Roland. In one month's time ye shall follow him to France and be baptized, as hath been promised. But if ye follow not, saith my lord, then will he lay siege to Saragossa, and take the city; and thou and thy knights shall be degraded, and shall be carried away."

King Marsilas was so filled with anger at this speech, that, rising from his throne, he would have killed Ganelon had not his chiefs restrained him.

But, they having persuaded him to quiet, Ganelon presented that letter which he carried. And the King brake it open and read it.

And in the reading he was again filled with anger; for he saw that the Emperor had not forgotten his treachery in the slaying of the ambassadors, and was even now doubtful of his word.

And indeed the Emperor had grave reason for his doubts, for there was little but craft hidden in the petition of this heathen.

Then the ambassadors, having gained the ear of the King, declared to him how Ganelon would aid him in bringing about the downfall of that great knight Roland, and perchance of Oliver, and of others of the Twelve Peers of France.

"When Charlemagne hath been so maimed in his power and his affection, he will no longer incline toward warfare, and our country shall be left to us in peace," they said; and at the words King Marsilas looked again upon Ganelon, and he perceived that he was a brave man on occasion, but weak through his passions, and that his hatred of Roland would make him traitor, so that he would serve them.

Therefore, coming again to Ganelon, he treated him softly, and told him how he thought well of the message of his lord; and asked him how they should be rid of Roland.

Said Ganelon: "I am true to Charlemagne, and in all things I shall be true to Charlemagne; but as for Roland, my soul hates him. Now this is my advice to ye, that ye send to the Emperor the hostages he demands, and ye shall treat him fairly, and with a good heart; and ye shall declare to him how, if he hasten to France, ye will follow him in a short period. Now when Charlemagne goes he will leave some behind to guard the passes; and I promise ye that in the rear-guard there shall be Roland, and Oliver, and others of the Peers of France.

"They will have but twenty thousand men, for that will be the number assigned, and the number of ye all is four hundred thousand men. Therefore ye shall come upon Roland, having parted your hosts, in divisions, fighting with him one, two, or maybe three or four battles. Thus will his strength be wrested from him, and he shall be in your hands.

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"But if ye fall upon him in the pride of your full numbers, then will Roland blow a blast from that horn of his; and there will come Charlemagne, hastening back from that place where he may be; and ye shall suffer a great defeat. And Roland's fame shall be increased to your dismay."

When King Marsilas, his Vizier, and his chiefs heard these words, they were filled with admiration of the wisdom of Ganelon, and with joy at that which he proposed. And having loaded him with gifts for his Emperor, and promised further gold and silver and precious things, they allowed him to depart.

And ere he went the nobles of King Marsilas gave him presents of a kingly value, as to a comrade, and the Queen, too, gave him a gift and her smile, which was of a passing sweetness; and he swore again that he would aid them in the downfall of Roland.

And Ganelon went away, with joy and shame writ large upon his face.

When he returned to the Emperor, he found him at Volterra, for he had started upon his homeward way.

And Charlemagne, looking upon the face of Ganelon ere he saw it close, said: "I know not what news Ganelon brings, for he wears a look that bodes both good and ill."

The Duke, who was at his right hand, replied: "Sire, he bears with him much treasure. I trow that the King Marsilas thinks well of thy demands."

Then approached Ganelon, and he delivered to his lord the message of King Marsilas, that the King agreed to all that had been proposed; and he delivered also tribute which King Marsilas had sent to the Emperor, and the keys of Saragossa as a token that King Marsilas was the Emperor's vassal.

And Charlemagne said: "I take great pleasure in these things; for I would have Spain governed by Christian lords. To God be the glory!"

And he arranged that he would move on toward France without further delay.

Then came up the matter of the rear-guard which should remain to guard these narrow passes.

Ganelon said: "Sire, it would be well done to leave Roland, thy nephew, that valiant knight, for of his very name those heathen have a fear."

Charlemagne said: "The advice sounds good to me. What sayest thou, Roland?"

And Roland suspected the goodwill of Ganelon, for well he knew that the traitor had no love for him. He replied "Sire, I wish for naught better than to guard these passes for thee. And I thank Ganelon for his praise."

Then Ganelon changed colour, and he forbore to look at Roland.

And there remained with Roland, Oliver his comrade, and the Archbishop Turpin, a man of great wit and much valour, and in all, the Twelve Peers of France. And Charlemagne made offer to Roland of a great army of soldiers; but he would have no more than twenty thousand.

When all these things were arranged, Charlemagne departed, and he passed through the valley of Roncesvalles; and the noise of his army's passing grew fainter and fainter until it died.

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Now that sound was not long dead when Roland heard another sound upon the air. First it was feeble and soft, like the hum of insects, then it was stronger and louder, like the ring of horses' hoofs; and afterwards it was a great noise.

Then said Oliver to Roland: "Lo, the drums! The Saracens are upon us. Now do I understand that look on the face of Gandon! Rest assured, he has sold us to the enemy."

Roland mounted upon a high hill; and when he had stood there for a while, he returned, and said: "The enemy are indeed upon us, and I have never seen the like; for in number they are as the sands of the sea."

Then Oliver also mounted to the hill-top, and when he had returned, he said to Roland:

"Count Roland, set thy horn to thy lips, and blow; for the heathen are passing many, and we are but a few; and it were well that Charlemagne should hear thy blast, and should return, and should help us. For we know not the end of the mischief which Ganelon hath brought upon us."

"Nay," said Roland, "I shall not yet sound my horn. Hath not Charlemagne set us here to do service for him, and we have done nothing? Not till I am sore pressed will I sound my horn. As for Ganelon, blame him not, for we know not that he had a hand in this."

Oliver was sore troubled, for it lay upon his soul that the close of this day would bring great grief to the heart of France. And again he besought Roland to sound his horn, that the blast of it might pass through the valleys, and reach the ear of Charlemagne.

But Roland would not.

Now the men of France were drawn up in array upon the plain; and they beheld the heathen who were close upon them; and the numbers of the heathen were at least one hundred thousand men; for so many had King Marsilas sent to engage with Roland; and they were led by his nephew, a man of courage but of evil heart.

Roland saw that it would be a hard battle, but he knew not that these were but a quarter of the men whom King Marsilas and his chiefs held ready for battle; else had he not refused to sound his ivory horn.

Then Roland called upon the knights that they should wage war with a good will, and bring honour to Charlemagne; and he said how he knew not what treachery had worked this evil, but that it might be brought to a good issue, by God's grace, did they all work together with a good heart.

Then that brave Archbishop Turpin, of whom mention hath been made, gave them absolution from their sins, every man; and having prayed to God, they awaited the onslaught of the heathen.

Now the nephew of King Marsilas came on bravely, for he had longed for this hour, which he believed would bring him much glory, when he should meet Roland in battle. And he feared not for the issues of the fight.

Therefore, before he fought with them, he lifted his voice and taunted the knights of France, telling them how they had been betrayed by one of their number, and had been left now by Charlemagne to die; and how France would that day lose her fair fame.

But Roland replied: "Not so, heathen. Had I but raised my horn to my lips, Charlemagne had returned with his men. As for our numbers, I had had more men had I wished for them, but I desired only these. And I warrant thou wilt find them enough for thee before the day is done."

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Then said Aelroth for such was his name: "I have with me twelve knights of a great valour, and with these I shall wipe out the Twelve Peers of France; and their fame shall be in the dust."

Roland replied naught in words. But as the armies came together, he flew upon Aelroth with a great fury; and with one blow he laid the heathen upon the plain, so that his boasting was over and he rose no more.

And Roland laid about him with great blows, such blows as had made him famous, and Oliver fought with a fury as great, and the other Peers also fought with valour; and against these rode out the knights of King Marsilas, who came on, each one with bold words and looks, and thrust themselves upon the French with a mighty force.

And as each came forward, he was laid upon the field, so great was the valour of Roland, and of Oliver, and of others beside. And of the champions of whom Aelroth had boasted, they found their deaths every one; for there was not one of the Twelve Peers that failed to kill one of them.

Still the heathen came on, and their numbers were so great that they appeared to have no end. They fought passing well, those Peers of France! Yet were they sore beset, because of the numbers of the heathen.

King Almiras was one of those who held a division for King Marsilas. He wound with his men through an unknown way, and by another pass; and he found the rear of the Frenchmen, and fell upon them there.

It was Walter, that brave peer, who engaged with them there, and he fought till he was sore wounded, and till the heathen were beaten back; and he had done even better work had Roland been free to aid him; but Roland was busily enough engaged in his own place.

Now King Almiras betook himself to King Marsilas, where he remained on a high place with his army, and he told him how the Frenchmen fought furiously; and how the Peers fought with such skill and exceeding valour that they were wonderful to see.

"Yet," said he, "are they sore distressed by our numbers; and their ranks are broken; and it may well be, if thou fall upon them now in a new attack, thou mayest take them every one."

Then King Marsilas made his army into two great divisions, and mighty divisions they were; and he gave one division to the Emir Grandoigne, that he might lead it; and the other he kept by him.

And he cried to his men in a mighty voice: "Roland hath repulsed us in this first battle, yet will we wage a second with him, and, if need be, a third. For I am resolved to bring to an end the glories of this great warrior."

And the Emir Grandoigne urged forward with his men; and they threw themselves clown the hill with a great fury. And when the Peers of France beheld them, they were disturbed, for they were as a rushing flood, without end or limit. And the men of France thought of Gandon with hatred and with bitter reproach. But the Archbishop called to them that they should think, not of Ganelon's treachery, but of France, and their own duty, and how to die as brave men.

Thus were they minded of their duty, and they spoke no more of Ganelon; but instead held themselves ready to do great deeds.

And they said: "Charlemagne shall suffer no shame through our work this day. We shall die as brave men, and having taken our toll of the heathen."

Now they encountered the heathen, and the shock of the encounter was as the meeting of great waters; for there was no man who would shrink back, nay, not one.

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Right bravely they fought, and they thrust back Grandoigne once, nay, they thrust him back a second time. And Grandoigne fell upon their knights, and killed many. But when he came to Roland, then was his race run, and he would kill no more brave knights; for Roland gave him a blow that cleft him in twain, so that he fell immediately dead.

Yet the heathen came on again a fourth and a fifth time; and they were beaten back. Now the last time they were so beaten there remained of the Frenchmen less than one hundred.

Then was Roland sad almost to tears, looking upon what was left of the men of France; and he reproached himself in his heart that he had not, as Oliver had advised him, blown a blast upon his horn. For he had not fathomed Ganelon's treachery.

That time was over, and Charlemagne might not arrive now soon enough to help them. Nevertheless, that he might learn of their plight, and might avenge them, Roland raised his horn to his lips, and blew a blast that shook the air.

Now Charlemagne heard the sound, as it were an echo that faintly troubled the stillness. And he said: "It is the horn of Roland. Some evil hath come to him."

"Sire," said Ganelon, "what evil should come to Roland? Of a surety nothing evil hath befallen him. Thy thoughts are with him, and thy fancy plays on thee."

And the Emperor was silent, for he was not sure what he had heard.

But Roland blew again, a sharp shrill blast that cut the air and reached to the ear of the Emperor.

"Now," said he, "Roland surely calls. What hath befallen him I know not, but I know right well that he hath need of me." And he bade that they should return.

Now they had but turned them about, when Roland raised his horn to his lips for the third time; and he blew a call that went winding through the passes, full of sorrow, and grief, and farewell.

Said the Emperor: "There hath been treachery. Roland is nigh to death. Now if I lose him I lose half my life." And he went threading back the way he had come and with him his hosts.

Said Charlemagne a second time: "There hath been treachery." And after a while he said: "We can avenge Roland, if he be gone from us, but God grant that he be not gone.

Now the enemy was again upon that brave Roland and the remnant of the men of France; and it was King Marsilas who led the division, and with him was his only son. And they were minded to do great deeds. But Roland met them, and he slew the son of Marsilas, and cut off the King's right hand, and so fell upon him that he turned and fled.

But those who were with him fled not. Now among them was the King of Carthage, with his black warriors who knew not fear; and these fell upon the men of France; and the King wounded Oliver so that he might not live.

But Oliver, ere the breath went from his lips, slew the King so that he died from the one blow. And having called to Roland, he bade him farewell. And soon after Oliver died.

Then were there left of the men of France but three, Roland, and Walter, and that Archbishop whom they loved.

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And these three fought fiercely against the enemy, waging in them such great fear that they durst not advance closely but threw spears and javelins and other weapons.

In this fashion was slain Walter, and the Archbishop was wounded near to death.

And Roland stood alone, fighting most furiously; and such havoc did he alone, and with his horse killed under him, that the heathen fled from him, and left him there.

Then went Roland into the field, seeking the bodies of those he loved; and when he had found the Peers of France, he bore them with an exceeding tenderness to the Archbishop where he lay dying, and set them before him. And he found Oliver, and bore him with tears; and set him in his place beside the other dead men.

Now the Archbishop gave his last blessing, and when he had given it he died, laying his head upon the grass.

And Roland felt upon himself a great faintness, and he knew that his life was nearly done. Then he looked upon his comrades, and when he had looked upon them, he made his way to a little hill where there were marble steps; and upon these steps he would have broken his sword before he died; but that he could not break it.

Then he set his horn and his sword upon the hillside, and lay upon them so that they were hidden. And he prayed to God to forgive all his sins.

And when he had prayed this prayer a second time, he rested his head upon his arm, and died.

The Knight of the Ill-Shapen Coat

Upon a day of spring when the skies were bright, and the earth was fair with promise, there came to the court of King Arthur a young man of whom no knight present knew anything, and, making due reverence to the King, he besought him that he would make him one of his knights.

King Arthur looked upon the youth, and he saw that he was of a fair presence, and a likely form, and held himself nobly withal. And upon his back he bare a coat fashioned of cloth of gold, but which fitted him so ill that it mattered little what form lay beneath.

Said the King: "Tell me, thou valorous youth, what is thy name?"

The youth replied: "Sir, my name is Brewnor-le Noyre; and if thou wilt make me a knight of thine, thou wilt discover the quality of my blood."

Then said Sir Kay, who was the Seneschal: "Let thy name be what it may, the name thou meritest is La-Cote-Male-Taile; for never have I seen a less well-shapen coat."

Now King Arthur was ever a gentle knight, and he would not have it that this comely boy should be mortified. Wherefore he questioned him: "Tell me the meaning of the coat, for I trow it is not worn without a reason."

The youth replied: "Sir, I had a father, a good and gentle knight. And on a day it chanced that he fell asleep, wearing this coat. And, while he slept, one whose name I know not fell upon him, and hacked him to pieces a foul deed! Wherefore as the coat was then, so I wear it; and it shall be upon me till I have avenged my father's death."

When this story was related, and the youth related it right well, there spake two of King Arthur's knights, pleading

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for the boy, that he should be made a knight. "For he hath a pleasing presence," said they, "and an eye that falls not; and we say that there lies in him the making of a right noble knight."

Therefore the King consented, saying that on the morrow he would grant their prayer.

Now on the morrow, the King went a-hunting, taking a goodly company of his knights with him. And with those that were left behind, he left the stranger, whom Sir Kay had named La-Cote-Male-Taile; and they were, all of them, with the Queen Guenever.

And as they attended her in the King's absence there brake loose from its tower of stone, a great lion that was caged there, and came after the Queen and her knights very furiously.

Then the knights fled all but twelve of them; and these twelve knew not how to serve the Queen and themselves.

But the stranger, whom Sir Kay had so mock-named, drew out his sword, and without more ado he set himself upon the lion, granting it so lusty a blow upon the head that it fell dead.

Whereupon he betook himself to his place, and uttered no word.

Now when King Arthur was returned from the chase, he was told how the stranger had guarded the Queen in the absence of the older knights; how with his own hand, and with little consciousness of courage, he had slain the lion; and how no knight had thought to do this thing.

Said the King: "It was a true word which he spake to me that I should discover his blood's quality. This lad will prove a knight of renown." And with that he made him knight.

Then craved the youth permission that he should be known only by the name of La-Cote-Male-Taile. And that prayer the King granted him, though he was ill-pleased that the knight had been so named.

Later, but on the same day, there came to King Arthur's court, a damsel with eyes of fire, and a mouth of sweetness, who bare with her a great black shield. And the only device upon this shield was a white hand that held a sword.

When King Arthur beheld her, he asked her what her errand was; and she replied:

"Sir, I have travelled many nights and days, to bring this shield to thy court. For it belonged to a knight who had vowed to perform a great deed of arms. But an adventure fell upon him, wherein he was wounded full sore so that he died. Now he was a knight of a great purity and courage. Wherefore I seek one like unto him that he may take upon himself the quest of the shield; but I trow that it is an arduous quest."

Now no knight spake that he would take the quest upon himself.

Then reached forward Sir Kay, and took the shield in his hand and held it.

And the damsel asked of him what his name might be, and when she had heard it, she said: "The quest is not thine, for it requires a better knight than thou, Sir Kay."

Whereupon Sir Kay replied with anger: "I but took the shield to feel the weight of it, for I like not thee nor thy quest."

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But the damsel little heeded him or his wrath; and having looked long at the knights, she said not that she liked any of them.

Then proffered Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile, saying that he would take the quest upon himself with great joy, since he had but that day been made a knight and sought adventure.

"What name is thine ?" asked the damsel, fixing her glance upon him.

He replied, "My name is La-Cote-Male-Taile." "'Tis an apt title," said she, "for never have I seen such a coat. As for the adventure, it is likely that it will bruise thy skin to match thy coat, if thou take it upon thee."

"Nevertheless," said the knight, "I will take it, and whithersoever it leadeth me, thither will I go. Wherefore, I pray thee that we set forth speedily."

And immediately she made ready to go; and there was brought to the knight a great horse, and his armour, and his spear. And when he was ready, he bade them all farewell for a time; and with the damsel he set forth upon the quest.

And she, riding beside him, shed upon him the fire of her eyes; and from the sweetness of her mouth she sent out words that were not sweet, but passing sour. And the knight thought that she bare him contempt for his youth's sake, and because he had gone upon no other quest.

Now they had gone but a short distance when Sir Dagonet came riding behind them; and it was he who was the King's fool. And when he had overtaken Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile he called to him that he would joust with him.

Then Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile smote him over his horse's croup; and he left them.

And ever as they rode on, the damsel made greater mock of the knight, telling him that the King had sent a fool after him to joust with him, since he esteemed him worthy of no other knight. But the knight kept himself in patience, and answered her never a word.

Then rode they on, and when they had gone two days' journey they came upon Sir Bleoberis, who proffered to Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile that he would joust with him. And when Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile had agreed to this, Sir Bleoberis rained upon him blows of such a violence that they speedily sent him off his horse and laid him upon the ground.

"By my word," cried Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile, "thou shalt finish the fight on foot!" And he made himself ready in a fury.

"Nay," said Sir Bleoberis, "I am not minded to fight on foot, nor did I so proffer." And with that he rode away.

Then did the damsel cast the fire of her eyes anew upon Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile, and twisting the sweetness of her mouth, she said, "Thou hast failed in a new thing, coward knight!"

"Misname me not !" cried he. "Surely it were no cowardly thing to be unhorsed by such a knight as Sir Bleoberis! In a while I shall prove to thee that no craven's blood cools in my veins."

But the damsel would not be quieted; and she poured out upon him continually a flood of bitter speech. Thus they journeyed on, having no great pleasure in each other's company, I trow.

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And when they had gone another two days' journey, they came upon Sir Palomides, a goodly knight, who proffered to Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile that he would joust with him.

"Now shall we see the same thing as before!" cried the damsel in the knight's ear. And indeed so it proved, for Sir Palomides gave the younger knight so violent a blow that he sent him from his horse blundering to the ground.

Then was Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile again angry, the more so as he expected the damsel's derision; and he would have fought with Sir Palomides on foot, but the knight would have none of that. Therefore they parted.

And the damsel's speech waxed even more bitter against the knight of the ill-shapen coat.

Now they had gone on but a little way when they came upon Sir Mordred, who had been but a short distance in advance of them; and he journeyed with them.

"Now," thought Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile, "she will cease to beshrew me, being ashamed in another's company."

But not so: the damsel had no heed for Sir Mordred; and, if possible, her speech was less sweet than before. Whereat Sir Mordred wondered.

The three had journeyed another three days when they came upon the castle Orgulus. Now in passing this castle a knight shall either joust, or be taken prisoner. For such is the custom.

Then Sir Mordred and Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile made ready, and when they were abreast of the castle, there came out two knights, riding with skill, and being of a sinister presence.

"Now shall we see again that which we have seen!" said the damsel.

But the younger knight took no heed of her, and as for Sir Mordred, he understood not the speech.

Then came the knights of the castle Orgulus upon them; and one of them flew upon Sir Mordred, and so beset him that he laid him upon the ground. And the other flew upon Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile, and they fought so furiously that they came both of them upon the ground.

Now Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile sprang upon his opponent's horse, and rushing upon that knight who had unhorsed Sir Mordred, he wounded him so that he fought no more. Then returned he to his own man who had mounted the horse of Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile and fell upon him. And, having unhorsed him, he killed him. But this knight had taken flight into the castle ere he met his death, and Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile after him; and when he was dead, there came close upon one hundred knights and assailed Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile.

And he set his back against the wall of a lady's chamber and fought with them. Then came a lady and took the horse of Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile which he had left behind him; and she led it away while he fought with the hundred knights, and tied it to the postern.

Then came she near to him and whispered: "Knight, thou doest well, but how wilt thou gain thy horse and escape, for I have tied it to yonder postern; and all these knights lie in the way."

When Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile heard this whisper of the lady, he set his shield to cover him, and threw himself upon the knights where they were thickest, and won his way through them. And when he reached the postern, he saw four knights there, and two of these he slew, and the other two he put to such confusion that they fled. Then he mounted his horse, and rode away.

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And having come upon the damsel and Sir Mordred where they stood talking of him, for the damsel was well certain that he was slain, he told them how he had won his way out, despite the hundred knights and the device of the lady.

But the damsel professed not to believe him. And she called to her a courier in whom she had a great trust, who went with her on all her journeys; and before the face of the two knights, she bade the courier ride to the castle, and ask how the knight fared who had fought there.

Now the courier was not a long time gone; and when he returned he spake out, telling how the knights had cursed him, saying that never had they seen a knight such as that knight about whom he questioned, and how he had slain twelve of them, and had won his way to the postern, and had ridden away. "He is a fiend," they said, "and no earthly knight."

Then looked Sir MoMred sideways at the maiden; but Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile forbore to look at her. As for that ill-spoken wench she hung her head, and said not one word.

Now they rode on; and as they rode, Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile being silent, and wrapt in his thoughts, Sir Mordred thought well to rebuke the maiden for the wrong she did her knight. And, regarding the matter of Sir Bleoberis and Sir Palomides, he reminded her how easy it was for an older knight to unseat one younger, who was yet unused to his steed. And of the refusal of the knights to fight with Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile on foot, he told her that it might well be that they so refused lest they should be overcome by the young knight, who doubtless was better able to show his valour when his horse no longer hampered him.

To these speeches the damsel listened, making no reply; but when the day was over she was as uncourteous to the young knight as before.

For seven days they journeyed. At the end of that time there overtook them that knight, most renowned of all King Arthur's Round Table, Sir Launcelot du Lake.

Then went Sir Mordred from them, pursuing his own way, and Sir Launcelot was instead their companion; but they knew not who he was.

Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile thought: "Will she revile me again before this stranger?"

And indeed, the damsel began at once so to do, twitting him with all the untoward events that had happened in their journey; and as for such things as had happened to do the young knight honour, she either made no mention of them, or else twisted them to suit her mood.

Then was Sir Launcelot wroth, for he liked little this humour of the damsel, and he rebuked her sharply that she behaved so uncourteously to her knight.

Not a whit cared she. True she let Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile rest in peace for a time; but that was because her tongue's energy was directed toward Sir Launcelot. And, knowing him not, she stung him with the same reproofs as she had given her knight.

And when they had gone some distance in this fashion, Sir Launcelot left them for a time, to go upon a quest of his own.

Then came Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile and his damsel to the castle Pendragon. And from the castle there came riding out six knights, and one of them proffered that Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile should joust with him.

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Thereupon Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile smote him, and he had no sooner done so than the other five knights fell upon him in a body and all unexpectedly, in unknighly fashion; and they smote him from his horse, and took him prisoner into the castle, and the unkind damsel with him.

And after a little time came Sir Launcelot riding that way, for he had accomplished his quest, and would fain find Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile. And on the way, ere he had yet reached the castle Pendragon, he came upon a knight who proffered him to joust. And they fell to.

Then Sir Launcelot smote the knight from his horse, and they fought on foot, and that right mightily, till at last Sir Launcelot brought the knight to his knees.

Then the knight yielded himself, and he besought Sir Launcelot that he would tell him his name, for he had never before been brought to yield, nor had he endured such a fight as this with Sir Launcelot.

Sir Launcelot told him that he was Sir Launcelot du Lake. And the knight related to him how a knight had been taken prisoner at the castle Pendragon and a damsel with him.

"I trow well that he is my comrade," said Sir Launcelot; "and I must go and rescue him ;" and with that he departed. And the knight could scarce bring himself to believe that he had fought with that great Sir Launcelot; and he thought it small shame to be defeated by such a noble knight.

When Sir Launcelot reached the castle Pendragon there came out six knights to meet him; and they fell upon him, all at one time, and with great fury. Then Sir Launcelot drove his spear with such a skill that he sorely wounded three of them, and left them upon the ground; and as he went on he encountered the other three, who had drawn aside the better to fall upon him anew, and he wounded them also. And after that, he rode furiously into the castle. Then came the lord of the castle to do battle with Sir Launcelot; and they flew together with a great noise, and with such force that their horses fell to the ground.

Therefore they betook themselves to their swords, and fought on foot, and their strokes fell with such a swiftness that they could not be counted.

Then gave Sir Launcelot a blow so great that he brought the lord of the castle to his knees; and he pulled his helmet from him. Therefore the lord, seeing that he would be slain, yielded himself to Sir Launcelot; and Sir Launcelot bade him that he should release all the prisoners that he held within his castle.

When this was done, there was found among them the knight Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile and his damsel. And when they found themselves released, the knight sought his horse and harness that he might go on his way.

Then came into the castle a messenger from that knight with whom Sir Launcelot had jousted on his way to the castle Pendragon; and the messenger wished to know how Sir Launcelot had fared. But Sir Launcelot had already ridden from the castle.

Then was the lord of the castle exceedingly glad that he had been overcome by a knight of such great fame as Sir Launcelot. And Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile knew who it was who had ridden with them, and he was right joyful; but the damsel was heavy with shame and uttered not one word.

Now when the damsel and her knight had left that castle named Pendragon, and had journeyed on, they came upon Sir Launcelot, who was ahead, and overtook him.

Then they thanked him right courteously, for he had done many mighty deeds for them; and they implored him that he would still be their companion.

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"For a while yet will I ride with ye," said Sir Launcelot; "but on this condition be it; that the damsel shall no more upbraid her knight with evil words. For I esteem him a right noble knight; and it is for his sake, and to save him from destruction, that I go with ye now."

"Alack," cried the damsel, "think not that I reproved him because in my heart I thought ill of the knight! Nay, rather, was my heart filled with love. For that reason I chided him sorely, for I knew the quest to be a dangerous one; and I would fain have driven him away by my bitter speech."

And from that moment she chided him no more. Now they had done some days' journey when they came upon the borders of the country of Sursule, and they found there a village with a strong bridge like a fortress. And upon the bridge were gathered knights and yeomen who stopped the way.

When they beheld Sir Launcelot and Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile, they called to them how, because of the black shield which one of them carried, they might not enter within the bridge, excepting one at a time.

Then said Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile to Sir Launcelot: "I pray thee, let me enter first, for I would fain take upon me this adventure. If I fare well in it, then will I send for thee; and if I die, I die as should a knight."

Now Sir Launcelot was unwilling to suffer him to go; but after a time he granted his prayer.

Then Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile entered within the bridge; and there met him two brothers, and these were named Sir Plaine de Force and Sir Plaine de Amours; and they did battle with him. Now Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile smote first Sir Plaine de Force and afterwards Sir Plaine de Amours from his horse. Then did they seize their swords and rush upon him; and he, having alighted also from his horse, met them; and they rained upon him heavy blows with a great fury. And upon the head, and shoulders, and on his breast they wounded him.

"The pain of my wounds is bitter, but the pain of defeat were worse!" thought Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile; and he drew together what strength was within him. And falling upon them anew, with a mighty courage, he brought both knights to their knees, so that they had to yield them or be slain.

So they yielded them. And Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile chose that horse which was the best, and rode on. And having reached another bridge and fortress, he encountered another brother whose name was Sir Plenorius; and with him he fought till their horses fell. Whereupon they continued the fight on foot, and with their swords. And for two long hours they fought, and longer, and gave mighty strokes.

And Sir Launcelot as he stood watching, was filled with fear for the young knight, for he had already fought one battle with great skill, receiving many wounds.

At last Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile fell to the ground through weakness and the pain of his wounds.

But Sir Plenorius had pity on him, saying: "Hadst thou been fresh as I was when I met thee, this thing had not come about. Thou hast endured right well, and I will tend thee with all gentleness till thy hurt be cured."

And he carried him into the tower.

Then came a voice calling to Sir Plenorius, bidding him that he should give up his prisoner, or else do battle with the knight who called him. And Sir Plenorius got upon his horse, and rode violently to that spot where Sir Launcelot stood calling; and like two mighty rushing winds the two knights flew together.

Then smote they great blows with their spears, till their horses fell with the fury of them.

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And when the horses had fallen, they left them there, and fell upon each other with their swords. And they fought with a fury so great that no man has ever seen the like.

As for the damsel, she perceived that Sir Launcelot thought her knight of right good account, thus to fight for him.

And after a time, Sir Launcelot brought Sir Plenorius to his knees, but that after many sad blows, for he was a valorous knight and well-skilled.

And when Sir Plenorius had yielded himself, Sir Launcelot met three other of his brethren, and defeated these also. When he had done this he would have given to Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile the fortresses and the bridges.

But the knight would have none of them. "Nay," said he, "I will not take these from Sir Plenorius, for he is a right valiant knight, and of a generous heart. My lord, I pray thee instead to let them remain with Sir Plenorius and his brethren, bearing this condition that he come to King Arthur's court and be a knight of his, and his brethren with him."

Now Sir Launcelot agreed to this condition, for he had liking for Sir Plenorius, believing him to be a brave knight and of a pure life.

And Sir Launcelot remained in that country till Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile was recovered of his wounds; and he fared well, having pleasure in abundance, and many good games.

And when the days were passed of the knight's sickness they returned to the court of King Arthur, the quest of the black shield being accomplished. And as they passed the castle of Pendragon Sir Launcelot gave that castle to Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile, since the lord of it would not become King Arthur's knight.

At Pentecost following, Sir La-Cote-Male-Taile was made a knight of the King's Round Table; and he proved a mighty knight and noble.

For his wife he chose that damsel who had brought to him the black shield. And she twisted no more the sweetness of her lips; but gave him kindly words.

The Archer of Schwitz

Long, long ago, before Switzerland became the united nation she is to-day, her cantons being more or less independent and knowing little of one another, one of her most powerful nobles became Emperor of Germany, and Switzerland came to be under the protection of the German Empire.

That was hardly an evil while Rudolph of Hapsburg ruled Germany. Rudolph was fiery, impetuous, often indiscreet; but he recognized the independence of the Swiss people, and had no desire to rob them of it. While they rendered him homage as their lord, and Emperor of Germany, he was willing to give them his protection, and to keep his fingers from too much meddling with their government and laws.

Germany in those days chose her rulers by election, so that wise men shook their heads dolefully when a good man's reign came to an end. A good son usually follows a good father; but the son of an unknown man comes with mixed credentials. Thus the Swiss rejoiced when, but a short time after Rudolph's death, his son Albrecht, Duke of Austria, was elected Emperor of Germany.

Switzerland's joy was short-lived. Albrecht proved to be an unworthy son of his father. His character was cruel, and harsh, and treacherous. The independence of the Swiss only roused in him a desire to crush them. So far,

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things were bad; but worse was to come.

Albrecht had ever a fine idea of his own importance. When, one day, a means occurred to him by which he might add to that importance, he hastened joyfully to use it.

The Emperor's idea was that he would make the Swiss subservient to him as Duke of Austria, not allowing them to remain an independent people under Germany's protection.

With this motive prompting him, he recalled the stewards who had visited the various cantons from time to time as the Emperor's representatives; and installed in each canton a governor to live there, and report of the people.

Albrecht chose for governors the harshest and most overbearing of men; for he meant by the aid of these men to oppress the people, and bring them into his power. But to the forest cantons he sent the worst of all, knowing that independent spirit which wind and space and storm breed in a man.

"Break ye the wings of these eagles," said he; "and with the fetters I put upon them I will fetter all Switzerland."

Then he smiled cruelly, for he hated the men of the forest cantons with their stanch beliefs and love of freedom; and he would have liked to pay off many an old score against them.

Round the Lake of Lucerne lay the three forest cantons of Schwitz, Uri, and Unterwalden. When Switzerland awakened to the fact of her oppression, and groaned beneath the yoke of the tyrant, these three cantons rebelled and claimed their freedom. For they had suffered most cruelly of all.

Albrecht had set over Uri and Schwitz a man of a haughty and cruel character, named Gesler; over Unterwalden he had put one not a whit better, named Landenberg. These men and their troopers so harassed the simple folk in their power that a mention of their names was enough to crush gladness out of the liveliest. The men of the forest cantons walked as men walk who are under an evil spell. For the governors lost no opportunity of showing their power. They fined those simple folk for every trivial offence, real or fancied, taxed them till they almost starved in order to meet the taxes, imprisoned them on any pretext, and used other means, even more cruel, to break their spirit.

Gesler, having observed a fine house which had been built by a rich freeman of Schwitz named Werner Stauffacher, stopped and enquired whose house it was.

But Stauffacher, looking into those crafty eyes, replied with caution, knowing well that the governor knew the house to be his: "The house is mine. I hold it through the Emperor, thy lord, and mine."

At this reply Gesler flew into a fury. "Shall it be," cried he, "that boors shall live in houses such as this? I trow not! The Emperor hath a better taste than to allow it. We shall soon see what his will is in the matter!"

And he rode away in anger, while Werner, a free man on his own land which he held from the Emperor, as might any noble, set himself to bear the insult as best he could, the while his thoughts ran into the future with heavy feet.

The folk of the forest cantons were simple in thought and deed. Their men pursued no complex occupations, some were fishermen, others hunters, others merely peasants. Their desire was to live out their lives at peace with all men and in the fear of God.

But the many acts of injustice and oppression they suffered from the governors roused them at last; the insults that flowed so glibly from the governors' lips began to work like a poison in their veins: the people of the forest cantons murmured.

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Yet matters had not suddenly come to an issue, had not Landenberg, the governor of Unterwalden, stirred up with a careless hand this smouldering fire, and set it ablaze.

One of the richer farmers of Unterwalden possessed a fine team of oxen which Landenberg, casting an eye upon them, coveted.

Having cudgelled well his brains, he discovered an excuse which might serve his purpose, and priming his men with it, he sent them to seize the oxen.

Now when the governor's men appeared, the farmer's son was guiding this same team across a field. When he perceived the messengers, he asked them with what purpose they were come.

"The governor hath sent us to fetch his oxen," said they. Without more ado they began to release the oxen from the plough. And as they released them they made themselves merry with the joke.

"Sirs, ere ye steal my father's oxen," cried Arnold hotly, "I pray ye tell me of what offence he hath been guilty."

At this speech one of the fellows but half-jerked an ear toward him, continuing his task. Said he: "That matter it is permitted to thee to discover, since thou art of a curious turn of mind. For the rest, I am bidden to say that, if the peasants of Unterwalden desire their land ploughed, they may plough it themselves, since it is a task for which they are well fit."

When he heard this speech, the youth was so incensed that he struck the fellow, breaking two of his fingers. And immediately after, fearing the governor's wrath, which he knew would be out of all proportion to his offence, he fled.

The path through the mountains was better known to him than to Landenberg's men, who pursued him; and in no great period of time young Arnold Melchtal reached the lake.

A storm was upon it, lashing the waters into great billows and showers of spindrift spray. The sky was dark and violent, the wind ran down from the mountains in a roar.

At the side of the lake the fishermen were gathered, watching this war of the elements. When young Melchtal arrived they listened with darkening faces to his story, casting glances of sympathy at the youth's set pale face. But they refused him his prayer, that they would bear him across the lake.

"Look upon the waters!" cried they. "A boat launched there would be as an egg-shell upon the stream. Nay, to put out would be to court death. We cannot do it."

"I court a—more cruel death by remaining here, where Landenberg's troopers will surely find me!" said the youth gloomily; and the others shuddered, thinking of the governor's revenge. But they had wives and children, every one, and they would not put out a boat.

"Then I go alone," said Melchtal in a reckless tone.

He had done so, there and then, had not the figure of a man at that moment been seen coming down from the hills.

"'Tis Tell; he knows the lake as well as any fisher," said the fishermen. "Ask him if any boat can cross the lake in a storm such as this."

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But Tell, having heard the young man's story, had but one reply to give. "Bear him across," said he to the fishers, "and may God speed ye! If ye gain the other side, ye gain the other side; but if the lad remains here, he surely dies."

"We cannot put out in such a storm," said a fisherman moodily. "We have wives and children; we have to think of these."

And this was the answer of them all. "I, too, have a wife and children," said William Tell. "Yet, rather than have this man's death upon my soul, I will bear him across the lake."

And without more ado, and in spite of their remonstrance, for he was a bold man, Tell leapt into a boat, and called to the fugitive to come after.

"God speed us " said he under his breath. "Only His power can hold up the boat."

And, indeed, a dozen times it seemed as if they must have gone to the bottom; and none of the fishermen who watched with bated breath had hope of a good end to the boat's journey. Yet, by the grace of God, and by virtue of the stout arm and cool head of William Tell, that good end was secured; and Arnold Melchtal sought refuge in the house of the brave free-man Werner Stauffacher, knowing well that his hiding-place would not be betrayed.

Landenberg sought him high and low, but without hearing the spot in which he lay hidden. Whereupon, finding that the young man had escaped him, he summoned to him the father of the youth, a man of a good age, grey-headed and feeble, and had his eyes put out.

This cruel deed sent the forest cantons into a blaze, so that the people would have risen with one voice to protest against it had not they feared that the protest would but double the governor's cruelties.

There is a steep promontory that rears its jutting head over the Lake of Lucerne. On this promontory lay a lovely meadow, secluded and lonely, which was named Rutli. Here, when the night was still and the lucent skies sparkling with stars, three men met to discuss a matter that had little to do with the brilliant stars and quiet lake: how to rid the cantons of their oppressors and prevent the recurrence of evil deeds.

These three men were: Werner Stauffacher of Schwitz, he who was threatened with the loss of the house he had built; Arnold Melchtal of Unterwalden, who burned to avenge his father's wrongs; and Walter Furst of Uri, who was the father-in-law of William Tell.

As for William Tell, he met not in the council. "I am a man of deeds," said he, "and of words I know little. When ye have a work for me to do, then comes mine hour."

And they, knowing well the great bravery of the man, his dauntless heart, and the skill he had in archery, were well content this should be so.

These three men offered prayer to God to direct them, and having done so, they decided after much discussion that they were not required to bear the wrongs that had been put upon them by Albrecht and his governors though they doubted somewhat whether Albrecht knew of all the ill deeds of his men and might defend themselves from them.

Therefore they decided to discover, each man in his own canton, if the people were minded to make a stand against their oppressors.

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On St. Martin's Eve, a little time later, they met again, and each man brought with him ten trusty men from his own district, that in a wider council the true mind of the people might be discovered.

And the true mind of the people was that they should rise against the governors; but whereas the men of Schwitz and Uri were for immediate action, those of Unterwalden, being of a more cautious mind, counselled a further waiting that the people might be the better prepared, and victory the more sure.

Now it is likely that Unterwalden would have prevailed in her counsel of delay had not a new act of tyranny hastened matters, sending the cantons into action almost before they realized what they did.

Gesler, governor of Schwitz and Uri, being drunk with power, and stupid with his own harrying of the people, bethought him of a new tyranny, as dangerous as it was absurd. In his folly he commanded that the ducal hat of Austria should be raised on a pole in the market-place, and that every man should do obeisance to it as he passed by. (And there are chroniclers who declare that the hat was the hat of Gesler, making the matter so much the worse; but as to that I can say nothing, for it is not properly known what hat it was.)

Said Gesler: "To this hat every man shall bow the knee as he passes by, in token of his fealty. And if any be traitor, and will not do this thing, he shall be cast into prison, and lose all that he hath."

And he stationed soldiers by the pole that they should see to the observance of his command.

Then were the people of the cantons greatly troubled, for they had no wish to bow to the power of Austria, since they recognized in Albrecht their lord only as Emperor of Germany; but neither did they wish to fall into the hands of the governor's soldiers, and suffer insult and disgrace.

Then came forward a good priest, who was fain to save the honour of the men of Uri and Schwitz, and he set himself by the pole, so that men doing reverence there might give that reverence to Heaven. But when Gesler heard of this evasion he was filled with anger, and although he dared not molest the man of God, he ordered that he should be removed from beside the pole.

Now it happened that William Tell, the archer, was passing through the market-place of Altopf with his son when he observed a group of men talking together, as if there were some disturbance, and coming close upon them, he perceived the pole which the soldiers guarded, and upon it the ducal hat.

And, not understanding the meaning of these things, he was about to question a neighbour, when a soldier seized him roughly by the arm, and commanded him that he should make his obeisance to the hat.

"This is a fool's trick," said Tell, "and I will not be deceived by it." And with that he turned away.

But the soldier, retaining his grip of him, replied: "This is no fool's trick, but an invention of Gesler, the lord governor, by which he may test the loyalty of the men of Uri and Schwitz. For well the governor knows that there are traitors in these cantons. Now, look well upon the hat, for it is the ducal hat of Austria; and when thou hast observed it, yield the reverence which thou owest and the governor demands."

"Nay," said Tell, "I am a freeborn Swiss, and owe no allegiance to Austria. I will never bow to the Austrian yoke."

These words he could not be made to retract, no matter what was said.

Therefore the soldiers seized him and his son, and brought them before the governor.

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"This man," said they, "hath refused with contempt to obey thine order and do reverence to the hat, for which reason we have seized him and brought him before thee."

When Gesler heard this report he was seized with an anger so great that he would have had Tell put to death there and then had he dared. But since the prisoner was a man of some fame as an archer, and well esteemed in the cantons, he dared not do this. Therefore Gesler meditated some other device of cruelty.

And when he had meditated for some time a smile began to grow upon his lips, and it grew greater and greater, as if the governor harboured some thought that pleased him well.

Then said he at last to his soldiers: "Is not this William Tell that cunning archer of whose skill as a marksman I have heard great things?"

"He is indeed that archer, my lord," said the guard. "So great is my father's skill," cried young Walter Tell, "that he can hit a bird on the wing; or, at one hundred paces, split an apple so that it falls from the tree."

"I am well content," said Gesler. "Listen, good archer, and know my merciful punishment of thine offence. Know that my first purpose was that thou shouldst suffer death for this great disobedience. Later came more merciful thoughts as is ever the case with me and I considered how by thine own skill thy life might be gained to thee.

"Guard, take the boy, bind him to yonder linden tree, and place an apple upon his head. Archer, if thine eye be as true, and thine arm as steady as hath been said, all goes well with thee. Let the apple on the boy's head be pierced and fall, and thy life is again thine. 'My father can make the hit at one hundred paces,' saith the boy. I will be generous, and will allow thee twenty paces. Therefore, guard, set the archer but eighty paces distant from the boy; and let no man say that I am not merciful."

The governor had no sooner finished speaking than a cry of horror broke from the soldiers, and from the nobles who were with Gesler; for even the most hardened liked little to see a father thus forced to risk the life of his son. But Tell was silent. One might have said that he was a man carved of stone.

"If his skill be as great as hath been said, he chances little," said Gesler coldly. "If not, then had he better have restrained the boasting of his son."

Tell had heard nothing of the cry from the nobles or of the governor's reply; but he woke now from his stupor to throw himself at Gesler's feet.

"My lord," cried he in anguish, "take my life if thou wilt, for a brave man fears not his own death; but bid me not thus threaten the life of my son! The hand of the marksman should be sure and steady when he speeds the shaft; how shall mine be calm, when my son's life hangs upon my skill?"

"Nay," said Gesler cruelly, "the hunter's aim is surest when danger presses closest. Haste thee, Tell, take thy bow into thy hand, lest men ask of thee where is thy vaunted cunning."

"My father," cried Walter, "have no fear for me. Well I know the sureness of thine aim, and that I shall come to no ill by thy shaft. But, sirs, I pray ye, bind me not to the tree. I shall stand quite still the while I await my father's aim. Is not this the best day of my life when I show my belief in him?"

Hearing those brave words from the boy, the nobles besought Gesler that he would consider another means of punishment; but he turned a deaf ear, declaring that the archer should send his arrow, and prove his skill.

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Now the child took up his position beneath the linden tree, and his face said that he was not afraid. And Tell was placed eighty paces distant, amid the murmurs of the lookers-on.

And when Tell had lifted one arrow, and set it ready to use it, he lifted another, and hid that one in his bosom.

Then he made ready, and, taking aim, the shaft sped through the air. And its flight had almost been heard, so great was the silence, for there was not a man that dared to draw a breath.

Now the silence was broken by the fall of the apple, and close upon the heels of that click-click came a shout from the nobles near Gesler, for they forgot the governor, and thought not what his humour must be as the apple fell.

Gesler was indeed dark and silent, for as William Tell bent his head in thanksgiving, the governor saw the second arrow fall from his bosom.

And when the silence had endured for a few moments so that all the crowd began to wonder at it, the governor spake.

"See," said he to Tell, "the arrow which hath fallen from thy bosom to the ground. Thinkest thou that I marked not thy choice of a second arrow? Full well I marked the deed. Now tell me why thou madest choice of more arrows than one?"

Tell would not at first answer this question. But when the governor pressed him rudely, his anger became too much for him, and remembering how his life was promised to him, he replied: "My lord, had the first shaft taken my son's life, the second had surely found a resting-place in thine own heart."

At these words Gesler turned pale with wrath and dread, fearing the desperation of this man; and he regretted that he had promised him his life. Nor dared he break that promise, since it had been given in the hearing of all.

"Wretch," cried he in a fury, "it is true that thy life is promised thee, but know that it shall be spent where neither the sun's light nor the moon's shall reach thee!"

And he ordered that the archer should be bound and borne to his Gesler's boat; for the governor's intention was to bear him to his castle, Kussnacht, which stood at the other end of the lake.

The people who had gathered to watch the trial, murmured at this unjust order; but none would interfere; and the governor's boat, containing him, his men, and the prisoner, went on its way.

But it had not gone far before a storm arose, such as is common upon that lake; and there was none present in the boat who could guide it, save only William Tell.

Therefore the governor commanded that Tell should be released from his bonds that he might guide the boat. And when he had taken it some distance, the archer steered his course toward a rocky peak on the side of the great Axenberg. And having neared the peak, he seized bow and arrows, and with a great leap left the boat, which went onward down the lake.

This last act of injustice on Gesler's part had so excited the archer that he decided to rid his country of this tyrant. With this intention he secreted himself near the governor's castle, and when Gesler, having escaped in some marvellous fashion the fury of the lake, passed on his way, the archer gave the second arrow the lodgment he had promised it in the tyrant's heart.

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Thus died Gesler, and of Tell's share in the matter this only shall be said, that it was the action of a man sorely tried, and distraught with anxiety and grief.

Gesler's last act of tyranny so roused the cantons that they forgot any difference of opinion, and rose together forthwith against the governors. With the help of the God they served they seized the castles of these men and destroyed them, overthrew their soldiers, and defied the harsh laws they had made.

Having succeeded in these things, and swearing to stand by one another, the forest cantons were able to prove to Austrian power that they were, and would remain, a free people. And with the Emperor they made this condition on which rested their allegiance to Germany that they should never be asked to receive a governor who was not a man of Uri, Schwitz, or Unterwalden.

These things having been accomplished, they were content to go on living their simple lives.

Beaumains, the Knight of the Kitchen

King Arthur was gone with his knights of the Round Table to Kin-Kenadon, which is upon the sand near Wales, there to keep the great feast of Pentecost. And, as his custom was, he would taste no meat till he had heard of some adventure.

Then looked Sir Gawaine out of the castle window, and he beheld three men on horseback who came rapidly toward the castle; and behind them a dwarf who ran on foot.

Then said he to the King: "My lord, wait no longer for thy dinner, for here cometh adventure toward thee, hard and fast."

Then went King Arthur to the banqueting hall, and with him other kings that were his guests, and all his knights.

And they had but seated themselves when there came into the hall these three men whom Sir Gawaine had seen.

Now two of them were exceedingly tall, but the third was taller still; and as he came he leant upon the shoulders of the other men for he walked between them as if he could not walk alone.

Yet was he strong of frame, and of a healthy colour, and he bare no wounds.

When he had come to that place where King Arthur sat, the young man raised himself and with ease, as if he had leaned for some other reason than necessity.

Then spake he to the King, saying: "Sir, here have I come to ask of thee the granting of three gifts; but of these I will ask but one on this occasion, and the other two on Pentecost a year hence."

Now King Arthur, looking upon the young man, found him straight and fair, and manly; and, although he knew nothing of him, he liked him right well. Said he, "Ask, my son, and thy petition shall be granted thee."

"Sir," said the stranger, "the gift I ask is this, that for twelve months thou wilt provide me with meat and drink."

"Nay," said the King, "call not my hospitality a gift. Is it not the due of any man who hath need of it? Eat and drink what thou wilt, but require of me that which shall be more worthy of thee, for I believe thy blood to be noble."

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"Of that I can tell thee nothing," said the young man; "neither do I ask aught but hospitality till these twelve months be past."

Then the King called Sir Kay, who was steward, and bade him that he should give the young man such sustenance as he needed day by day, for one year.

And the King, who was ever generous, charged Sir Kay that he should provide the young man with gentle food. "For," said he, "I trow he is of gentle blood."

But Sir Kay was wroth and scornful, liking ill the stranger, and caring not for the task with which the King had charged him. "This lout hath no gentle blood," said he, "or he had asked for a horse and harness, as becomes a knight, that he might do noble deeds. Nay, he is some low fellow, who would sup from a full dish. For as his petition is, so is he. To-day I give him a name that will serve him well. He shall be called Beaumains, that is to say, fair hands, for his hands are large and fair; and I warrant he plies them diligently when he sups from the King's bowl!"

At this speech two knights were exceedingly wroth; and these were that valiant knight Sir Launcelot, and Sir Gawaine, who was son to the King's sister. These bade Sir Kay that he should cease his mocking, for which he would surely repent, since they believed the stranger would prove one day a knight most noble.

"Nay," said Sir Kay, "he shall be a kitchen knight, for there his place is. I shall feed him in the kitchen till he be as broad as he is long."

With that Sir Kay found his own place at table, and seated himself.

And the two men who had accompanied the young man having left him, the stranger went to the hall door, sitting among the boys and servingmen, and sharing their fare.

And at night he slept with the youths of the kitchen, for so Sir Kay would have it. And in the daytime he supped with them again.

Then were Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawaine again angry; but Sir Kay took no heed of their speech. And they would have had it that Beaumains should have meat and drink and lodging from them; but the young man would accept nothing.

In all things he would have himself treated as Sir Kay ordered; and with meekness he bore that knight's ungentle words. Yet was the young man of a high spirit, and a good courage. Nor was he without skill in the casting of bar or stone, for none could throw as far as he. And where there was jousting of knights, or other brave play, there Beaumains hied him, taking a great delight in these things.

Now twelve months were well past, and King Arthur kept again the great feast of Pentecost; and, as before, he would not sit down to meat till news of some adventure came to him.

And as he waited there came into the hall a damsel, one of a proud mien, but with a smile that was wondrous sweet though in truth she could be moved to smile but seldom and saluting the King, she asked him for a knight who would succour a lady in distress.

"Who is this lady?" asked the King. "And from what distress doth she suffer?"

"Nay," said the damsel, "what her name is that I may not divulge to thee; but she is of right noble blood, and owns wide lands. And her trouble is that she is besieged by a tyrannous knight, so that she may not leave her own

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castle. And the knight is that knight who is known as the Knight of the Reed Lands."

"I know nothing of him," said King Arthur.

But Sir Gawaine said: "I know more of him than I well care to know. For I once escaped from this knight, and that with a great difficulty. He hath, it is said, the strength of seven men."

Then spake the King: "Fair maid, I doubt not that many a knight here present would ride with gladness to the succour of thy lady; but because thou wilt neither state her name nor where she dwelleth, I am loth to let any knight go."

"Then I must fare farther," said the damsel. And she would have withdrawn herself.

But at that moment there advanced Beaumains, who had come from the kitchen, and making his reverence to the King, he said: "Sir, the time is come when I would ask of thee those other two gifts of which I told thee. The first gift I ask is that thou wilt permit me to go with the damsel and take this adventure upon me. And the second is that Sir Launcelot may ride after me to make me knight when the time arrives. For I would fain be made knight of him."

Then said the King, "My son, I grant thee thy requests."

Thereupon was the damsel ill-pleased, and she cried at the King that he should refuse her a knight for her quest, and put a kitchen knave upon her; and she was exceedingly angry.

But Beaumains heeded not at all her anger. And one came to him telling him that a dwarf had arrived bringing him his horse and armour. Therefore he went away to make himself ready for the adventure.

And when he was made ready, there was none that did not wonder at the richness of his gear; but he was without spear or shield.

When Beaumains had ridden away with the damsel, and with the dwarf following after, Sir Kay said, "I will pursue this kitchen-boy of mine, and see if the fellow knows his master."

"Nay," said Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawaine, "leave the youth in peace. Thou hast already slighted him grievously, and hast laid up for thyself future shame."

But Sir Kay heeded them not, and getting upon his horse, he rode after Beaumains.

And when he was yet some distance behind him, he cried out to the youth to wait for him.

"It is I. Dost not thou know me, Beaumains?" cried he.

Then Beaumains drew in his horse, and waited; and the damsel looked upon the youth scornfully. And when Sir Kay approached, Beaumains cried boldly, "Indeed I know thee well, for thou art a knight of little kindliness, and hast ever used me ill."

At these words Sir Kay flew into a fury, and rushed at him with his spear. But Beaumains, having no spear, gripped his sword and turned the blow aside, and then another blow. Then leant Beaumains forward, and thrust the knight through with his sword; and it was a neat thrust that he gave, and Sir Kay fell to the ground, with a great wound.

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Then Beaumains took the spear and shield of Sir Kay, and had them for his own; and he bade the dwarf that he should mount Sir Kay's horse and go no more on foot. And he had but done this when he beheld Sir Launcelot, who was following him.

Then he proffered Sir Launcelot to joust with him, and immediately they flew together, the while the damsel looked on with a raised chin.

"I wonder at thee, Sir Launcelot, that thou shouldst joust with a kitchen knave !" cried she, mocking.

But neither Sir Launcelot nor Beaumains gave her heed, for they were thinking of a different matter. Great blows did the kitchen-boy deal, and much ado had Sir Launcelot to hold himself against them, for they were more like the blows of a giant than a man. At length they came upon the ground by reason of the force of their blows, and Sir Launcelot helped Beaumains to come clear of his horse, whereupon they fell upon each other with their swords.

And after they had fought till they were weary and Sir Launcelot was almost overcome with the difficulty of defending himself from Beaumains, for the kitchen-boy fought with as great an ardour on foot as on his horse Sir Launcelot cried: "Hold, Beaumains! have not we fought enough to show thy skill? Our quarrel is not so serious that we need fight further."

Said Beaumains, dropping his hand: "I have no quarrel with thee, Sir Launcelot, and I give thee thanks that thou didst not disdain to joust with me. Fain would I be knighted of thee ere I go farther upon my adventure; thinkest thou that I may prove a true knight?"

"Indeed I have little doubt of it!" said Sir Launcelot, "for I had difficulty with thee beyond what I have had in jousting with any champion."

And with that he made Beaumains knight with a right good-will; afterwards setting himself to see to Sir Kay and his hurt.

Sir Beaumains and his damsel rode on, and immediately she began to upbraid him, calling him the kitchen knight, and by other means making little of him. And ever she wondered that Sir Launcelot should have deigned to joust with him, and ever she mourned that Sir Kay should have been wounded by a knight so sorry.

But Sir Beaumains would not leave her, in spite of all her uncivil words; for he was determined to go upon this adventure.

And as they pressed on through the woods, there came running toward them as fast as he could a fellow whose garments were grievously torn, as if others had wrestled with him, and upon his face fear was written.

Then called Sir Beaumains to him, asking him what ailed him; and he replied how his lord had been set upon in the wood by six thieves, and how he himself was fleeing from these plunderers, who had maltreated him; but that they had bound his lord that he could not flee.

Sir Beaumains had no sooner heard this story, than he bade the fellow guide him to the spot where his master lay. And having reached it he fell furiously upon the thieves, slaying three of them, and putting the other three to rout. Then he followed these three, and slew them also, lest they should do mischief to other good knights.

And having carried this adventure to its end, he went with the rescued knight to his castle, which was at no great distance; and there he and the damsel passed the night, proceeding the next morning upon their way.

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Now they came upon a great forest, and when they had traversed but a part of it they found a river which had but one crossing. And this crossing two knights held, waiting on the other side.

"Come, wilt thou fight with those bold knights, kitchen knave?" asked the damsel; "or shall we return, and go by another way?"

"I will not return," said Sir Beaumains; "and I think ill of thee that thou shouldst so question me."

Then, without further waste of words, he rode into the stream, and immediately one of the knights advanced to meet him.

Half-way across the stream they encountered, and there they fought valiantly; but Sir Beaumains gave the strange knight a blow upon the head that was too strong for him, and he was overcome and fell into the stream.

Then rode Sir Beaumains forward to meet that other knight, and having encountered him, he slew him also. And when he had done this, he brought the damsel across the stream.

But she had no thanks for him. "Keep thee at a distance, kitchen knight," cried she, "for I like little the air of the kitchen which hangs about thee! Think not that I esteem thee more highly on account of thy deeds! For I know well that the first knight fell into the stream and was drowned because his foot caught upon a stone. As for the second, thou hadst wit to creep behind him, else hadst thou not slain him. Away from me! I like thee little by my side."

But Sir Beaumains moved from her not one inch. As for her bitter words, he rode on with an air as if he had not heard them. For this she liked him the less.

And after a time they came to a black country, and in the black country grew a black hawthorn, and on the black hawthorn hung a black shield, and by the shield was a black spear, and by the spear a great black horse, and a black stone was hard by the horse.

"Now are we in the lands of the Black Knight," said the damsel. "Fly, kitchen knight, while there be time, ere he catch sight of thee."

"Nay, it comes to me that I like better to ride forward," said Sir Beaumains; "for I have a fancy to see this Black Knight." And he cast her not a glance.

Then came the Black Knight riding toward them on a horse even blacker than the first they had seen, and clad in black armour; and his eyes were as black as coals. And immediately the damsel began to make moan to him, as if in pity, that he would spare Sir Beaumains.

"For this is but a kitchen knave," said she, "whose head hath been turned through riding with a lady of my quality. I pray thee, Sir Knight, do him no ill."

Said the Black Knight, "He is not garbed as a kitchen knave, but as a knight."

"It is so he imagines himself," said she scornfully. "Nevertheless he is of King Arthur's kitchen, as I have said. Many knightly deeds hath he done, but all by misadventure, not by skill. For Chance hath this fellow in her care, and ever favours him. And he hath killed good knights."

"Damsel," said the Black Knight, "I shall do him no evil. Bid him only that he leave with me his horse and armour, for I would have him wage no more mischief."

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Then cried Sir Beaumains in a high voice: "Sir, thou talkest lightly of my horse and armour, but know that they are mine, not thine, and that I will not yield them. Yet will I pass through thy lands, and from them, and go upon my way."

At these words the Black Knight became wrathful, and he warned Sir Beaumains that he would fight with him. So they drew apart some distance, and then rushed together; and with the force of the blow he gave the spear of the Black Knight broke. And at the same moment Sir Beaumains thrust his spear into the Black Knight's side, so that it brake also, and a part of it remained there.

Yet the Black Knight drew his sword, and fought with that, and he wounded Sir Beaumains sorely ere he died from his wound.

Then Sir Beaumains, seeing the fineness of the Black Knight's armour, alighted, and clad himself in it; and he took the Black Knight's horse also, and mounted it. Then rode he after the damsel, who had gone on ahead.

"Behold him! how pleased he is with himself!" cried she. "So thou hast slain the Black Knight, kitchen knave? Be not so high in the glance thou givest. He whom thou shalt meet, if thou followest out this quest, will be a worse knight to joust with than the Black Knight. Yet would I fain be rid of thee before then. I would not see thee discomfited, kitchen knave."

"Damsel," said Sir Beaumains, "whether I be a kitchen knave or not is not known to thee; but this thou mayest know, that I will not leave thee till this quest be done."

"Upon thine own head be it !" said the damsel; and Sir Beaumains thought she sighed. Then rode they on in silence.

And when they had gone some days' journey they came upon a knight clad all in green, who rode toward them; and the trappings of his horse were also green.

And he called to the damsel, "Is it my brother the Black Knight that I see with thee?"

"Alack," cried she, "it is not thy brother the Black Knight, but a kitchen knave who hath slain him through some evil chance."

When the Green Knight heard these words, he plucked from under a thorn a green horn that hung there, and blew on it three notes. And immediately there appeared three fair maidens clad in green. And these drest him in green armour, and brought him a green horse, and a spear that was green.

"Now, fellow," cried the Green Knight, "I am ready to do battle with thee." And he flew at Sir Beaumains.

Forthwith they thrust at each other with their spears, mighty blows and fierce. And afterwards they came upon their feet, and fought furiously with their swords, and in a long time the fight was not over.

"For shame, Green Knight," cried the damsel, "that thou fightest so long with a kitchen knave who hath the odour of meats yet upon him!"

When the Green Knight heard this speech, he was angry anew, and anew he ran at Sir Beaumains; and with a fierce thrust he struck at him, and brake his shield in twain.

But Sir Beaumains repaid the blow with one as fierce, and followed it with a buffet upon the helmet which sent the Green Knight to his knees. Then the Green Knight prayed for mercy, for he perceived by the fury of Sir

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Beaumains that he stood near to his death.

"Nay," said Sir Beaumains, "withhold thy prayer, Green Knight, for there is nothing that will win me to have mercy upon thee, save only if this damsel petition me for thy life."

Quoth the damsel, "I will never petition thee, kitchen knight!"

"Then shall the Green Knight die!" said Sir Beaumains.

The Green Knight prayed again, saying, "My life shall be at thy service, Sir Knight, and the lives of thirty knights whom I command."

Said Sir Beaumains: "Thy words avail thee nothing. I will spare thee only on the petition of this maid."

Then the Green Knight besought the damsel that she would petition for him.

"Shall I petition to a kitchen knave?" asked she, with high chin.

"Nay," said the Green Knight, "I warrant this is no kitchen knave, but a right noble knight.

"Yet the damsel stood pouting.

Then made Sir Beaumains a movement to unlace the helmet of the Green Knight as if to slay him.

"Hold!" cried the maid. "An thou wilt have it so, thou wilt have it so, and I am loth that the Green Knight should perish. I pray thee spare him."

And immediately the knight Beaumains held back his hand, and spared the Green Knight.

And that night they abode at the Green Knight's castle, which was near, and enjoyed good fare; and on the morrow they went on their way.

Then when they had left the lands of the Green Knight, the damsel again began to gibe at Sir Beaumains, saying: "What? art thou still with me, kitchen knave? Think not that I esteem thee better for this adventure with the Green Knight. For thou shalt, ere this quest be ended, meet one worse than he. Wherefore, I counsel thee to say farewell and go."

Sir Beaumains replied: "Cease thine idle words! Hast thou not yet learnt that I will not leave thee till this quest be accomplished?"

And they rode on, she with pouting mouth, and casting glances at him, but he perceiving her not at all.

Now they had gone but two days' journeying when they came upon a tower as white as snow, and a fair meadow about it. And the lord of the tower looked out of a window and saw them approach. Then he forsook the tower, and came to meet them. And when he had come pretty near, he cried to Sir Beaumains: "Brother, is it thou? Where lies thine errand?"

But the damsel cried, "This is not thy brother, the Black Knight, but a kitchen knave who hath by an evil chance slain him."

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Now the lord of the tower was clad in red, and he mounted upon a horse that was of a ruddy colour, and he fetched him a red spear. And when he had thus made ready, he fought with Sir Beaumains, first with his spear, and afterwards on foot and with his sword. And to him it happened as had befallen the Green Knight, his brother, for he was overthrown, and Sir Beaumains saved his life only on the petition of the damsel.

Then the Red Knight promised his service, and the service of fifty knights; when Sir Beaumains should call upon them.

And Sir Beaumains and his damsel abode with him that night at his castle, and afterwards went upon their way.

And again the damsel made mockery of Sir Beaumains, and would have driven him from her side.

Then came they to the lands of Sir Persaunt of Ind, whose armour and spear were of that same colour of Ind; and with him also Sir Beaumains did battle, and had victory. And Sir Persaunt promised the service of one hundred knights.

And having passed the night at his castle, they went on; but the damsel chided no more, for she began to perceive how valiant a knight was this Sir Beaumains, and she believed he was, in spite of all, of noble blood.

Thus she remained silent, ashamed of her former speech; and in this wise they drew near to the castle of the lady, Dame Lyones, round which a siege was laid.

"Now are we come to the perilous adventure," said the damsel; "for yonder is the castle of the Lady Lyones, who is my sister. And the knight who thus ungraciously besieges her, is not he the Red Knight of the Reed Lands, than whom there is none greater? Alas, Sir Knight, I would thou hadst not come as far as this, for thou shalt surely be vanquished of him."

"Nay," said Sir Beaumains, "fear not for me. Willingly I took this adventure upon me, and right willingly I carry it to its end. If I speed well, I relieve that most noble lady whom the Red Knight of the Reed Lands thus persecuteth. If I fall, I die as becomes a knight."

And she could not make him feel sorrow for himself.

Now the dwarf had gone on to the castle, and he brought to them food and drink from the lady, Dame Lyones. But as he returned to the lady he was found by the Red Knight of the Reed Lands, and was constrained to tell of the arrival of Sir Beaumains to do battle with the Red Knight.

"Is he a good champion?" asked the Red Knight of the Reed Lands.

"I trow yes," said the dwarf. "He hath done on this quest more valiant adventures than thou hast done in thy whole life."

Then was the Red Knight wroth.

There was a great horn which hung upon a sycamore tree, and by this horn was the Red Knight summoned to meet those who would do battle with him. And these had been many, and their bodies made innumerable trees hideous, for it was the Red Knight's custom so to hang brave knights upon the trees around.

Now did my knight Sir Beaumains ride up and blow the horn, and he sounded it right lustily, and he sounded it at noontide when the strength of the Red Knight of the Reed Lands was at its greatest.

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Then came the Red Knight riding down upon him. That was fire that flew from his eyes, red fire, and his horse was blood-red, and his armour, and his spear, and so was his shield.

And they met in a little valley that was near to the castle, so that all might behold the encounter.

Now the Lady Lyones looked out of the window, and she was wondrous fair, and gentler than her sister. Then she beheld the knight Sir Beaumains, who fought the Red Knight with his spear, giving him mighty blows; and she thought she had never beheld so goodly a knight.

And as she watched, the knights brake their spears. And immediately they leapt from their horses, and seizing their swords ran at one another.

Till it was late in the day they fought, and all were astonished, for there was never a knight had so long withstood the Red Knight of the Reed Lands.

And when they had rested awhile, for both were weary, they fell to again; and they were like fierce lions in the fight.

Now when the encounter had lasted for a great time longer, Sir Beaumains struck the Red Knight so heavy a blow that all cried out who witnessed it.

Then was the Red Knight wroth, and suddenly he smote the knight's sword from his hand, and dealt him a buffet that sent him over.

Then cried that damsel of the quest, "Sir Beaumains, Sir Beaumains, my sister weepeth and watcheth; fail her not in this fight!"

And no sooner had Sir Beaumains heard the cry than he was upon his feet, and despite the Red Knight he ran for his sword and seized it. And with a mighty strength that came suddenly upon him he smote the Red Knight so that he fell, and could not rise.

Then would he have slain him had not many knights pleaded, making great excuse for the Red Knight, why he had done as he had done.

And Sir Beaumains, giving heed to their excuses, spared the knight. Thereafter he unlaced his helmet to have air, for he was weary with much fighting. And as he looked up at the window of the castle he saw there the Lady Lyones, and she was fair, and full of radiance and joy.

And he considered how he should best tell her that he had but played at kitchen-boy, to discover who might be his friends.

"For this lady," said he to his heart, "shall be my wife."

With Bow and Arrow

The sun shone brightly upon merry England, giving a sweeter richness to the blossoming flowers, and a sparkle to the forest's green. The wind rose, heavily laden with scents, the sky was like a sea that never a ripple breaks, the fields lay gently drowsing, and Sherwood Forest held a quaint stillness, as it were a child holding its breath.

In a fine house, at no great distance from Sherwood Forest, a pair of bright eyes turned often in the direction in

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which the forest lay. The brow above them frowned, but the eyes held the gaiety that was on flower and sky. The brave fellow to whom they belonged craned his head for some time toward the window and the light; but finally, settling himself flat upon his heels, he gave vent to a huge sigh. Having thus relieved himself, he moved toward the table in the middle of the room.

It was strewn as thickly with papers as a forest is with autumn leaves. Their owner viewed these documents dubiously, the gaiety of his face coming and going like the light of a fitful sun. Finally he raised one curling scroll delicately with the tips of his fingers, and cast an eye over the written sheet. As he did so there came a crack and a rattle from below, as if the house were falling; and presently rose a babel of voices, each one more clamorous than the last.

"Carrion! They sell my house before I am out of it 'Tis an indecent haste!" exclaimed the listener. The fact appeared to distress him little; he returned to his perusal of the sheet before him, running his finger along one line of it. "Poor Richard! he owes me a king's ransom, but of what avail to pester him for the amount, since he hath not a penny? His cousin, too, hath poked his fingers deep into my purse; but he owns as empty a coffer, if I mistake not." He dropped the sheet, and made careless choice of another. "The tale is the same!" he muttered. After a pause he tore the sheets across and across.

"As for the remainder," he reflected, regarding the table with a disinterested eye, "these are no doubt bills and reckonings; and behind them I see but one door open to welcome me the prison door! Since I have no liking to enter, and since I may no longer live a life of ease, it remains to me to make a quick choice among such things as be the beggar's portion."

Leaning on one foot, he ticked off upon his fingers the items for which he had no liking.

"To beg, it is a calling little to my taste; and who would bestow alms upon so well-known a spendthrift! To borrow," he laughed gaily, "can one drink from a dry fountain? To steal, well, lacka-day, who would rob the poor man of his penny? 'Twere a task ill done.

"Nay, there remains to me only one way of escape, and, to tell the truth, I like it not ill. I will away to Sherwood, to find in the forest glades my home, in the green grass my bed o' nights, in the King's fat deer my fare. Better a dweller in the King's forest than in the King's prison. My stout bow shall bear me company, and the Sheriff shall see no more of me than a clean pair of heels."

With that the gay fellow turned his back upon the table and its contents, and left the room with a new light in his eye.

The roisterers heard not a sound as he went his way down the stair with a nimble quietness. When the bird was sought at length, the seekers found that it had flown.

But the World was not long in doubt as to the direction in which it had winged its flight. After a week or two of pleasant idling in Sherwood Forest, with nothing more serious to his account than the death of a few of the King's deer, Robin Hood cast his wits about in search of adventure.

He was not long in finding it. Many a stout friar and many a prosperous knight made a part of his journey lie through Sherwood's glades; and of these Robin, with a flourish of his cap, and that ease of bearing which proclaimed his quality, took a generous toll. From the poor man he exacted no more than "Good-day"; but the rich fellow must show his purse, and must spill something of its contents before departure.

"'Tis a poor stream that will leave empty a hollow," said Robin; and he held out a cupped hand that cried out to be filled.

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But the joke no comrade shares has a sting in the tail of it; and Robin cast his eye back upon his former companions. There were not a few of them in the same quandary as he had been in; and in the ears of these he found means to whisper a word concerning the joys of a free life in Sherwood Forest, and the gay adventure that lay in it.

The whisper acted like a charm upon many a gay spirit, and there appeared beside Robin Hood a little band of followers, all and each in as hungry a condition, and as fond of the bow, as was he.

But Robin Hood could gauge a distance, and direct a shaft, more surely than any; cracking one joke as he notched his arrow and another as it sped. For this reason, and for a certain generous quality of mind which was peculiarly the spendthrift's, King Henry viewed him not unkindly. In spite of his escape from his creditors, and his theft of a fat buck or two, the King bent but a wavering frown upon those who sued for Robin's pardon. And it is said that Robin had been forgiven, and received back into favour, had not it been for an idea that lodged in the head of the Sheriff of Nottingham Town.

The Sheriff had not too many ideas, and it was a pity that one of the brood should have meshed itself in Robin's fortunes and have hatched mischief; but so it fell out.

For the Sheriff, who was fain to be popular despite his sour looks, contrived a trial of archery at Nottingham Town, at which trial clever fellows might exhibit, not without glory, their skill with the bow.

Of this contest tidings came to Robin's ear as he disported himself in Sherwood's glades, whereupon nothing would serve him but that he must speed a shaft for the Sheriff of Nottingham's prize notwithstanding the fact that the Sheriff would have clapt him into prison, and have shot a stout bolt behind him, with a glad heart.

Robin set out with a fine strut, and as gay as a peacock, in his plume hat and suit of Lincoln green—which dress he had devised for himself and his band. But, as ill-luck would have it, ere he had left the shadow of Sherwood he came upon a company of rangers, hot in discussion concerning the contest at Nottingham, and what was like to be the result of it.

To be sure, it needed no shrewd observer to discover that the nearest tavern held the reason of their heat. This same reason it was that turned their tongues to an acid wit, which wit they bent upon the stranger.

With legs straddled upon the grass, they turned a mocking gaze upon Robin, pointing fingers at his bow, which was indeed of a great size and unusual in the shaping.

"He betakes himself to Nottingham, no doubt—to win the Sheriff's prize!" cried one, brimming over with humour. And as if the wit were of the finest, the whole company laughed, shaking with mirth till the tears ran down their cheeks.

Little as their laughter was to Robin's liking, he would have passed on without retort. Indeed, he had almost left their company when another bright spirit was moved to divert his companions.

"Hast ever heard of a flying house, good friends?" cried he.

"Nay," said they, "we have heard naught of one."

"Nor have I," cried the wit; "but, given a flying house, it seems to me our neighbour might find a target for his shafts!"

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At this sally the party burst into greater laughter than before; and Robin, turning with a twist of the shoulder, viewed the revellers with a glance compounded of anger and disdain.

"See ye yon buck," cried he, "where three trees grow abreast? I wager ye my head against any money the tavern may have left to ye, that with this same bow I hit it whence I stand!"

"Done!" cried they, one and all. 'Twas a wager that pleased them well; and, giving their muddled wits to the task, they scrambled to their feet.

"Having parted with his head, he will appear a less handsome fellow," said one, "and less cock—ahoop!"

"Nay," said another, "give thy tongue a rest, friend; it is ill to taunt the man ere he show his skill."

"Of little avail to taunt him after, since he will be without ears to lend to the jest!" muttered the first.

And, being a base fellow, he gave fresh play to his humour as the arrow waited to speed, that by so doing he might breed a flaw in the marksman's aim.

Nevertheless, the arrow found its home, and the buck fell.

"'Twas a good shot," muttered one stout fellow grudgingly; the while the others gaped with starting eyes.

Robin Hood answered never a word. His rancour was sped with the arrow, and he made no joy over their discomfiture, being of a generous nature, as hath been said.

Nay, more, he returned to every rascal the money he had wagered, excepting only that base fellow who had sought to make his arm tremble as he loosed the shaft.

From that same exception ensued a pretty quarrel, since the man was little inclined to forego his money. And anent the quarrel, some say that Robin was concerned in it, and some say not. By reason of the potions they had swallowed the rangers were little able to reason clearly, and whereas one fellow saw the justice of the stranger's act, a second sided with the malcontent. Words grew to blows, and blows to worse than blows. The upshot of all being that two rangers lost their lives by random shots.

Maybe Robin deserved the odium of their end, maybe not; but, guilty or no, it is certain he was credited with having despatched the knaves; the consequence of this being that he was forced to flee back to the forest, the Sheriff now at his heels in earnest, and King Harry's pardon a bubble burst in the air.

Thereupon Robin Hood turned his thoughts from his old life, and bent them entirely upon the new. And having been sought many times by the Sheriff and his men, whom he ever outwitted and sent home with dragged plumes, it occurred to him to make an order of his band of followers, to which order should be admitted only such brave fellows as had won renown at quarter-staff or by skill with the bow, or had otherwise proved themselves of a good courage and a manly disposition.

Following this fancy, Robin found means to set himself in the way of such good fellows; and, having provoked each one by gibe or strategy, Robin would put his courage to the proof. Thereafter, if the victim came well out of the encounter, he was offered a free life in Sherwood Forest under the leadership of merry Robin. And I can well believe what is said, that none refused the offer; for the fame of the archers of Sherwood was spreading far; and of Robin it is reputed that he had great skill, not only in archery, but in winning men's hearts.

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By such means as have been here reported, he won to himself Midge the Miller's son, Will Scarlet, Little John whom he loved most dearly of all, and who was second to him in authority, and many another skilful fellow.

With these he led a gay life in Sherwood Forest, practising with bow and arrow; and compelling many a traveller to spend a night at Robin Hood's Inn as they termed it, for which hospitality travellers paid generously ere they departed. And some there were who paid not unwillingly, declaring that so fine a supper as Robin provided, and so sweet a bed as that on the green sward, deserved their price.

One day, as Robin lay upon the grass day-dreaming, with the summer sun shining on him to sweeten the dreams, it chanced that Midge the Miller's son, who practised with his bow but a short space distant, made a shot finer than any Robin had seen.

"'Twas a good shot, Midge," said he. "I wager no man has made a better;" and his eye wandered the way the arrow had sped.

But the Miller's son replied: "My master, 'twas but a chance hit, and the Curtal Friar of Fountaine Abbey can make any day, of intention, a shot as fine."

At these words the archer raised himself, and the dream died out of his eyes as a mist dies before the sun. "Now who is this Curtal Friar?" asked he; "and where may he be found?"

"He is one who hath great skill with the bow," said Midge the Miller's son, "and with the sword also. Indeed he is a man of great courage as well as of great learning. As for Fountaine Abbey, it lieth not far distant;" and he proceeded to describe where it lay.

Thereupon Robin called together fifty of his men, and proceeded in search of the Curtal Friar. And having come near the good man's dwelling, he perceived the Friar sitting beside the stream, reading a godly book.

Having assured himself that this was indeed the fellow he sought, Robin hid his men in a thicket that grew near, and advanced upon the Friar, who, he perceived, was armed with a steel buckler and a trusty sword.

"Friend," said Robin, "I have great need to cross this stream, and since thou art likely to be better acquainted with it than I, I beg of thee to bear me across."

The Curtal Friar set aside his volume and regarded the stranger with a shrewd eye. At length he rose to his feet. And without having uttered a word, he bore Robin Hood to the other bank, as he had prayed.

But in crossing the stream the Friar found means to release his sword. The reason of this soon became apparent. As the Curtal Friar set down his heavy burden, he brought the sword before Robin's notice. "Lo," said he, "here am I upon a side of the stream on which I have no business, wherefore I beg thee to perform, in thy turn, a good office, and bear me back to my stool and my book."

At this speech Robin changed countenance, but, seeing no means of escape, he replied: "It is a good retort, Friar. I will bear thee across; but, I pray thee, put up thy sword."

The Curtal Friar replaced his sword, and without further word Robin took him upon his back.

But in crossing the stream the archer made a pretence of clasping his burden, and so unfastened the Curtal Friar's sword, which slid into the water.

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Thereupon, when they were again upon the first side of the stream, Robin exclaimed, with an angry look: "Behold, I have served thee! It is my turn to demand service. Bear me, therefore, across the stream, that I may go on my way."

At this peremptory speech the ears of the Curtal Friar tingled. He perceived, however, the trick Robin had played upon him in the loss of his sword, and made no demur. And again he started to cross the stream.

But in the middle of the stream the Friar made a pretence of stumbling, and to such good effect that Robin shot over his head and into the water.

"Ah," cried the Friar, "'twas that trusty sword of mine upon which my foot slipt!" And, having sought about in the water for some time, he discovered his sword and bore it back with him to the spot where he had been resting.

But the archer, his mouth full of water, and his clothes heavy with it, stumbled to the opposite bank, where he began to shoot at the Curtal Friar, taking careful aim.

The Friar marvelled at the accuracy of the shafts, yet he caught them every one upon his steel buckler; and that without a word.

Thereafter the combatants came to close quarters, using each one his sword, and that with energy as well as skill, for his ducking had not cooled Robin's blood, and the Curtal Friar was minded to punish this saucy fellow.

Thus the blows fell fast and furious, and so well matched were the combatants that, when evening came, both were weary yet neither had won the day.

Thereupon Robin Hood, liking well the Curtal Friar's skill though he liked not so well his jest, made offer to him of a place in his band of followers and a fee for his services on Sundays and holy-clays; which offer the Friar joyfully accepted, his shrewd eye twinkling with satisfaction over his adventure with Robin Hood.

But a few weeks had passed when there came upon Robin another adventure, one not of his own seeking, which he liked, at the moment, less than his adventure with the Curtal Friar.

Since the fortunes of the band were fallen somewhat low, Will Scarlet and Little John betook them one morning to the forest fringes to look out for likely travellers to sup at Robin Hood's Inn. All day long were they absent, returning at eve with a knight in their company so dejected of mien that to look at him was to feel one's heart fall into one's boots.

"A melancholy fellow !" cried Robin. "One much in need of our fare and our company!" And he ordered a supper that had scarce its fellow on the King's table. But when it was set before him, the captive knight murmured an excuse with a changing cheek, and would have partaken of nothing had not Robin all but thrust the food down his throat, listening not at all to the excuse he offered. Whereupon the knight ate, being forced so to do; and, indeed, he appeared greatly in need of a meal, and in his heart inclined to do it justice; a matter which Robin marked, ill-pleased, reading in his guest's former reluctance to partake, a future reluctance to produce his purse.

When the meal was over, many a story rose to the merry host's lips; and right well he told them; but the melancholy knight had never the ghost of a smile with which to greet a jest. Indeed, Robin marked that with each hour his face grew longer. As for words, he uttered none, good or ill.

On the morrow the knight would have departed as silently, saving a quiet "Thanks be to thee", and wrapt round with the same gloom, had not Robin laid a restraining hand upon his horse, a smile upon his lips.

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"A moment, good sir," said he. "Know that he who sups at Robin Hood's Inn doth not depart without showing his purse. We would fain have a sight of thine."

At this speech the knight appeared greatly embarrassed, changing colour swiftly, hanging his head, and clapping a hand upon his pocket. But he answered nothing.

Robin received this silence with coldness, letting his eye roam disdainfully from the downcast face of his guest to the shades of Sherwood.

"It is an ill thing," quoth he in an icy tone, and bowing with some mockery, "to observe so mean a spirit in so great a man; and methinks such a spirit cries for punishment. Haste thee, Sir Knight; find a gift for us, lest, being driven to harsher measures, we seek it for ourselves."

This contemptuous address appeared to rouse the stranger suddenly to speech and to dignity.

"Sir," said he, raising his head, "I would have refused thy hospitality had I been able. As for my purse, I hold it back for shame of the mean sum it contains, so unfitting to one of my station and name. For I carry but a few shillings, the which, if I were robbed of them, I should be robbed of my all, and be unable to pursue my way."

As the stranger uttered these words the archer let his eye observe, though not too evidently, the trappings of the knight's horse, and the costume in which he journeyed; and he found them of the poorest, ill befitting the traveller's rank.

"Tell me," said he, "how one of thy gentle blood hath reached so sad a state."

Whereupon the melancholy knight related how his name was Sir Richard Lea, and how, by reason of many misfortunes, not of his own seeking nor to his discredit, his lands and estates were become mortgaged to the Priory of St. Mary, the which, if they were not redeemed in a few hours' time, he—Sir Richard must lose everything. "And I am now on my way to declare that I cannot redeem them," said the knight.

"But the Prior will surely await a little thy convenience!" cried Robin Hood.

"Nay," said the knight, "he will wait not one moment longer than he need. For he hath long intrigued to bring my estates into his hands, as many can testify."

"If the sum be so great "

"It is but three hundred pounds," said the knight; "but if it were but one hundred, I should be as little able to pay it."

"It is hard that so just a knight should be so used," said the archer. His face lightened with hope, then clouded with anger; for he had heard of Sir Richard Lea and knew him to be a knight of right fair fame.

Thereupon Robin had consultation with his men, discovering at length, with a rueful humour, that their joint coffers contained the sum of three hundred pounds, neither more nor less. This sum the archers bestowed upon good Sir Richard, despite his protestations, and to the lifting of his despair.

"So rides away our guest," quoth Robin to his men, "leaving us leaner than he found us! Good Will Scarlet and Little John, I like not this fashion of replenishing our coffers. Have ye other guests in store with coats of a like pattern? If so be, we are likely to fare ill!"

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At this rueful speech Will Scarlet hung his head and Little John wore a shamefaced air. Yet were all merry, sending no repentance after their generosity, and bearing ill fortune with a good grace.

Little John and Will Scarlet had it upon their minds that they must redeem their reputation; and but a few weeks had passed by when they brought to Robin Hood's Inn a stout Prior, so laden about with baggage that he could scarce stir on his horse.

Right well did the Prior sup, right well did the Prior sleep, but when, before departure, the Prior's score was presented to him, up went the Prior's eyebrows as if they were minded to seek the hair he had lost.

"Good Robin," said he, whining, "I am but the poor Prior of St. Mary's, with but twenty marks in my purse. I know thee well that thou wouldst not seek to rob a man so poor."

But Robin, lounging upon one foot, then upon the other, made as if he had not heard the speech. He bade his men search the Prior's baggage, whereupon four hundred pounds were discovered, wrapt about in silks and other costly things.

"'Tis a miracle!" said Robin, and the corners of his lips twitched to a smile, the while the Prior's mouth drew in as if he had bitten into a sour apple. "See, good Prior," continued he, "Heaven hath regarded thy poverty, yet hath not forgotten our need. Here is payment of thy score, and with good interest; it hath been given for thee into our hands. Keep, then, the twenty marks which are thine. Since Heaven hath paid us, we will forgive thee the debt."

And, setting the Prior upon his horse, the archers, laughing, sent him upon his way.

When good Sir Richard Lea returned, after many months, to repay the archers, Robin Hood related to him how the Prior of St. Mary's, being a just man, had paid the debt for him, and with good interest! But, since Sir Richard would not have the money he had brought returned to him, Robin Hood distributed it, debt and interest, among the poor.

In many other ways, of which I may not speak now, did Robin Hood assist such poor men as sought him or came by chance across his path; so that he was beloved, despite his wild deeds.

After many years he was pardoned by brave King Richard, and brought back to his own estate. Yet, when the time came for him to die, Robin Hood shot an arrow once more in his beloved glades of Sherwood; and where the arrow fell, there he prayed his body should find a grave.

St. George and the Dragon:

The King of Selene, a city in Libya, had one daughter, named Cleodolinda.

Cleodolinda was a sweet maid, moving gently, and thinking gentle thoughts. Her form was fair, her eyes were clear and lustrous, and her heart was pure. She was as sweet as a summer morning, and as brave as a winter sun. Wherever she went she was welcome, for she carried joy with her. It seemed as if the earth were fairer where her shadow fell.

The King loved this Princess with a love that filled his whole heart with gladness. He knew her thoughts, felt her emotions, and shared her griefs. She was dearer to him than aught else in the world.

When Cleodolinda was fourteen years of age, the King thought he had never seen anything more beautiful than she. On that day he said to one of his courtiers: "Of all men on earth I am most happy. My country is at peace, the

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Queen my consort is amiable, and my daughter is as fair as she is good. I have nothing left to desire."

The courtier replied: "Sire, so gracious a monarch deserves only happiness."

But as the words were spoken a shadow fell, none knew whence, and encircled the King. And looking upon it, he replied, though fearing nothing: "There is none so gracious that grief may not fall upon him, and I know not why I have been more blest than other men."

That night, as the watchman went round the walls of Selene, he felt upon the air a most poisonous vapour that came from without the walls. And even as he wondered, the fumes of the poison became too much for him, and he fell over, and in a little time expired.

Now he had not long been lying there when a knight passed that way, and he had gone but a short distance beyond the spot where the body of the watchman lay, when he felt upon the air an odour most subtle and unpleasant. And it seemed to him that it came from without the city walls, where lay bogs and marshes and damp grounds. But even as the thought passed through his brain, the poisonous fumes became too much for him, and he, too, fell to the ground.

And in the morning another watchman, making his round, found his fellow dead beside the city wall, and, a little distance from him, the dead knight. And upon the air was a faint odour that was unpleasant to the nostrils.

Then the watchman scaled the wall, and, having glanced over, he perceived a huge beast which crawled away from the city and toward the marshes. As it crawled it flapped two great black wings, and from its nostrils belched out a black flame which contained those poisonous fumes of which the watchman felt the trace. Its body was covered with scales, so strong and smooth that they were like a knight's armour; and in shape it was half crawling beast, half loathsome bird. As the watchman observed it, the dragon crawled into the farther part of the marshes, and lay still.

Then the watchman hurried him to those in authority to report this affair; and when the matter came to the King's ears, he was greatly disturbed, for he remembered the shadow that had fallen upon him, and, despite himself, he was filled with fears. Yet the fears were not for his own safety.

And he roused himself to give orders that none should go outside the city walls till the dragon had gone back whence it came.

So the long day through no man went outside the city walls, but many adventurous persons, having gained a perch upon the walls, observed the dragon, which had come into the sunlight, and could be seen lying there.

These saw when, in the evening, the dragon roused itself, and rolling over its loathsome body, started to crawl toward the city. It crawled on four twisted feet, and pushed itself with its wings; and its eyes shone like red flames. As this vile creature approached, the people were afraid, and retreated into the city, for they knew not for what purpose the dragon came.

When it had reached the gates of the city, it took up a position close to them; and from its nostrils it poured terrible fumes, so that the people were like to die.

Then the King called together his knights, and one, who was braver than any other, declared that he would discover from the dragon its purpose in so haunting the city. And having entreated the dragon to cease casting out its poison while he spake with it, he approached and asked for what purpose it had come to the gates of Selene.

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The dragon replied, by signs and hoarse noises, that it would only depart from the city gates and cease troubling the people of Selene with its poison, if it were granted a meal of two sheep a day.

When the King heard of this reply, he ordered that two sheep should be set aside every day for the dragon, and put without the city walls.

And when the dragon had on that day received two sheep, it devoured them, and crawled back to its lair.

But it remained in the marshes, and not far from the city, so that none might enter the city or come out of it for fear of the dragon. And every day it roused itself, and crawled to the gates to receive its meal of two sheep.

But after a time the sheep became few in number, so that there would not long be enough to feed the dragon; and the people were possessed with fear.

Then came to the King the bravest knights of Selene, praying him that he would allow them to go out and do battle with the dragon.

"For the sheep are few in number," said they; "and what is to be the fate of the people of Selene when they have nothing with which to feed the dragon?"

The King replied: "My brave knights, I fear me that ye go to your deaths. Yet can I neither forbid nor dissuade ye, for the fate of my people lies heavy on my heart."

Having so spoken he became silent, for the foreboding was upon him that darker trouble was to come upon the people of Selene.

Then went out the knights to do battle with the dragon. And when it perceived them issue from the city gates, it forsook its lair and ran toward them with a most incredible speed, resting partly upon its body, and partly upon its wings. And, having come near, it fell upon them, breathing out its terrible poison, and lashing them with its wings. And, since the knights could neither pierce the scales with which its body was covered, nor stun the creature with the hardest blow, they were speedily overcome by the fumes that emanated from it. And they perished, one and all.

Then there was weeping in Selene for the fate of the bravest of her knights. And while the people wept, they trembled, for the sheep that remained were few.

When there was no longer one left to offer to the dragon, it lay again by the city gates, and threw its poison into the city.

And the King, moving as one moves in an evil dream, facing a horror only half understood, went to the gates of the city, and called upon the dragon to cease its poison for a time since he would talk with it.

And he asked of it why it had come to torment the people of Selene. But to that the dragon would answer nothing.

Then said the King: "Our sheep are all finished, and indeed there is little food of any kind in Selene. Since this be so, wilt not thou leave our gates, and return to thine own place?"

But the dragon, lifting its loathly head, made answer, by signs and noises: "I will not return to it. Let me be granted one child a day for my meal, and I will not molest the people of Selene." And it would say no more.

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Then the King went back the way he had come, and he walked heavily, for in his breast his heart was turned to stone. And he was filled with one great fear.

Cried the people of Selene: "We care no longer to live, since our children are to be taken from us!"

Nevertheless, because the poison from the dragon was reaching everywhere, so that none could escape, they promised, with bitter weeping, to offer up one child a day, hoping that the dragon would return to its home ere all the children were devoured.

And every day lots were cast. And upon whom fell the lot, a child of his was delivered to the dragon. And any child was sacrificed who was not yet fifteen years of age.

The Princess Cleodolinda was aged fourteen. Every day her eyes were dim with tears for the child who was that day sacrificed. But her father, the King, never wept. His eyes were dry, and his face pale. For his heart contained but one fear.

Then came a day when the lot fell upon the Princess Cleodolinda, and she must be delivered to the dragon.

The King's fear was fulfilled, yet he could not weep. And flinging out his hands he cried: "The Princess shall not be sacrificed! I will yield to ye everything, my wealth, my possessions, myself but not my daughter."

But the people replied, yet without anger: "Have not we yielded our children, whom we loved; and shalt thou do less than we, O King?" And the King could not answer.

But after a while he said: "Ye will grant to me eight days to mourn for her, and to learn by heart her beauty, for I have loved her passing well."

The people replied: "We will sacrifice our own children for eight days."

Thus for eight days the King mourned his daughter Cleodolinda, whom he loved beyond aught else in the world; and the people mourned with him, for she was well beloved. But the Princess would not weep. For she said: "I am ashamed to weep for myself, I who am a King's daughter; and I die gladly for the people of Selene."

When the eight days were over, women clad the Princess in white garments, and she was placed outside the city wall to await the coming of the dragon.

Then, to still her heart's loud beating, she crossed her hands upon her breast; and to keep her eyes from wavering, she bent them upon the ground; and she thought of the people of Selene, for whom she was to die.

Now she had been standing thus but a short time, when she heard upon the ground the noise of a horse's hoofs, and looked up to see who it was that approached so near to the city of Selene.

And, having looked, her heart was filled with fear, for she beheld a knight of a fairer presence than any she had seen, and of a wondrous gentleness; and she perceived that he knew not of the dragon.

This knight was a soldier of the Emperor Diocletian, one who had risen to high honour in the army, and who was passing through Libya to join his men. When he perceived the Princess, standing pale and trembling outside the walls of the city, he paused on his way, to ask what was her distress.

But the Princess, in a great agitation, replied: "Ah, sir, do not wait to question me, but press on thy way! For know, in yon marshes lurks a fearful dragon who has been the death of many a noble knight. Press on, I beseech

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thee, ere it issue from its lair."

But the knight replied: "I cannot press on and leave thee unprotected against the dragon."

And at that moment the dragon bestirred itself, and began to crawl from its hiding-place.

"Alas," cried Cleodolinda, "the dragon is upon us! I beseech thee, Sir Knight, leave me before it be too late!"

But the knight, turning him about, bade her remain where she was, and went out to meet the dragon.

When it observed him approach, the beast was struck with amazement, and, having paused for but a moment, it ran toward the knight with a great swiftness, and beating its dark wings upon the ground as it ran.

When it drew near to him, it puffed out from its nostrils a smoke so dense that the knight was enveloped in it as in a cloud; and darted hot flames from its eyes. Rearing its horrid body, it beat against the knight, dealing him fearful blows; but he, bending, thrust his spear against it, and caught the blows upon his shield.

And having cast all his strength into it, he dealt the dragon a deadly thrust; but the spear glanced aside, for the scales of the beast were like steel plates, and withstood the blow. Then the dragon, infuriated by the thrust, lashed itself against the knight and his horse, and threw out a vapour deadlier than before, and cast lightnings upon him from its eyes. And it writhed, an evil thing, about him, so that one would have said he must have been crushed; and wherever he thrust at it, that part was as if it had been clad in mail.

The fight lasted a long time, and the knight grew weary, though he fought with as great an ardour as at first. Through the deadly fumes that issued from the dragon the Princess could see his face shine out, and she saw that it was pale, yet lighted up by some radiance that shone from within. As he thrust at the dragon, this radiance grew greater, so that at last it was like the light of the sun.

But the dragon looped itself about the knight, and its poison was heavy upon him, so that to breathe was almost more pain than he could bear. Then he perceived that, no matter how the dragon writhed, it sought always to protect one place in its body that place which lay beneath its left wing. And, nerving himself for a great blow, the knight bent himself downward, and thrust his spear with a turn into that place.

So great was the strength required for the thrust that the knight left the spear in the wound for weariness; and as he raised himself he felt the dragon's clasp upon him loosen. Then the smoke ceased to belch from its nostrils, and the great beast fell to the ground.

Perceiving that the dragon was now helpless, though not dead, the knight called joyfully to the Princess; and he bade her that she should loosen her girdle, and give it to him. When this was done, the knight bound it about the neck of the dragon, and gave the girdle-ends into the hand of the Princess that she might lead the dragon toward the city.

Thereafter, when they had reached the city gates, these were opened to them with great joy by the people of Selene, who had watched from the city this great fight; and all were astonished to behold the loathsome dragon so guided by the Princess.

With his sword, and in the presence of all people, the knight despatched the dragon; and when this was done, he would have gone on his way.

But the King said: "What shall be given to this brave knight, who hath so rid us of our enemy, and hath restored to us the Princess Cleodolinda, and saved our children?"

St. George and the Dragon:

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And the people cried of honours, and wealth, that should be given to the knight.

But he, when all had finished, thus replied: "I desire only that ye believe in the God who strengthened my hand to gain this victory, and be baptised."

And when he had baptised the city into the Christian faith, he went on his way.

The Quest of Offero

It is said that when Offero the Canaanite walked abroad, men shook like leaves to see him. Other giants were seen in Canaan, for these were the days of men of great stature, but none was like Offero. His limbs were huge, strong as the branches of some forest tree; his back was broad, his head reared itself proudly.

When Offero put forth his strength, it was beside the strength of other men as the blaze of the sun beside the flicker of a fire. Much skill had he, and an undaunted courage; few tasks perplexed him, and none lay beyond his strength. When men spoke of Offero the giant, they spoke with admiration, yet halting over their words. Offero was indeed admired, but he was also greatly feared. Very terrible was his aspect, and few dared seek beyond it and find the man of true and simple heart.

On a day when he had performed many feats of strength, Offero took counsel with himself.

"The time is come," thought he, "when I should enter into service. And since my strength is greater than that of any man, it is but fitting that I should serve a prince greater than any other prince. Therefore I will serve only the greatest prince in the world."

Having come to this conclusion he raised himself with a great sigh, and, leaving his house and his people, set forth to seek for this greatest prince.

His quest was a difficult one. Offero travelled far and wide, the wondering glances of men ever upon him, and found no prince who fulfilled the condition of his vow. For the world is like a starlit heaven, where one may find a star and say, "This one is the brightest", and afterwards find another brighter still, and then another. Many a prince would gladly have made use of the giant's services, but each had over him one greater than he, or knew an enemy whose power was greater than his own.

Offero was weary of wandering, and sick with the sickness that springs from the splendours of palaces, when there came to his ears tidings of a prince so great that it was said none on earth was like him. Of all courts his was the most magnificent, of all armies his was the finest. He feared no other monarch, whether friend or enemy. Many a great battle had fallen to him; and it was said of him that he had never known defeat.

"Here surely is my prince !" thought the giant; and he set out to find him.

When he reached the famous court he sought, he pleaded for audience of its monarch; and because of his great stature and simple words his plea was granted.

"What wouldst of me, thou giant among men?" asked the King. His eyes, tired and sad, fell upon the form of the stranger with a wonder in them and delight.

Offero replied: "Sire, my name is Offero, and I am a Canaanite. Because of this great strength of mine which is beyond that of any man, I have made a vow that I will serve only a prince whose power is beyond that of any other prince. I have heard that of all princes thou art mightiest; if these be true tidings, I would offer thee my

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service, in accordance with my vow."

The King replied: "These be true tidings which have reached thee, for I am indeed the greatest of all great princes. Look about thee, Offero, and observe my court. Hast ever seen splendours like its splendours? By so much is my power greater than any power. I fear no man, and owe none allegiance. Wherefore I do accept thy service, claiming it in accordance with thy vow."

Offero bowed his head, and in his heart sprang up great gladness that he had found his mightiest prince. From that day he abode at the court, wearing, with a face awry at the fineness of them, such clothes as were provided for him, and eating delicate foods.

Great skill had Offero in many directions, and he put his vast strength into many a difficult task. His wit was fine to devise strange feats for his master's edification, and by his valour he brought him glory. Only Offero the giant could make the King's dark eyes brighten and kindle into fire, only Offero could break the melancholy that clapsed in its deadly embrace the mightiest prince.

There were tongues that said ill things of the giant in their jealousy; but his simplicity passed these things by.

One stormy eve brought a minstrel to the court, a minstrel who twanged wild strings and sang in a subtle strain before the King. In many of the songs was mention of one whom the minstrel called "the devil". As he sang this name his tone grew sombre; and the King drooped his head, and with his fingers drew a cross from brow to breast.

When the minstrel was gone, and the courtiers were scattered, Offero came out from among the shadows, and dropt on his knees before the King where he sat brooding, his head upon his hand.

"Sire," said he, "as the minstrel sang his songs, he made mention of one who was named the devil. And as often as he uttered the name, didst not thou bow thy head, making a strange sign? Tell me now, I pray thee, the meaning of this thing; for because of it my heart is heavy with a burden which I do not understand."

Now the King's glance was cast down, and he uttered not one word.

"Alas," cried Offero, trembling, "now I know well that thou concealest something from me! Answer me my question, I beseech thee, lest in my doubt I leave thee without further word."

The King raised his head, and his eyes were full of gloom. "My good Offero," said he, "knowest thou not of the devil who is called Satan? He it is who works dread evil, casting his dark spells about men's souls. I am but as other men in my fear of him, for at his name the bravest hearts grow chill. When I make this sign upon my breast it is to avert from me his evil power." And with his fingers he drew again the cross.

But Offero stumbled to his feet, groping, as if he had found blindness.

The King cast sombre eyes upon him, drawing his robes tight across his knees. "The power of Satan is not of earth," he muttered, "and what man may defy it?" And he sat staring, as if he saw things that chilled his soul.

But Offero called out, in the tones of one that wept: "Alas, my Prince, who feared no man, has fear come upon thee? Who is this Satan that makes thee tremble? Since thou fearest him, he is surely greater than thou. Behold my vow, which I have broken; and now I may see thy face no more!"

And, with his head bent, he turned away. And the King was silent, for he was sorrowful that he had wronged Offero, and very loth to see his servant go.

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Offero left the palace straightway. The King had clothed him in fine garments, and in these he wandered, searching in town, and hamlet, and wild, for Satan, that dread prince whose name could blanch the cheek of a valiant man.

The dust of many days' travel was upon him, when he came upon a desert so lonely that it seemed as if the silence spoke. And he set himself to traverse this vast plain.

Now he had not gone far when he heard in the distance a great rushing sound, and piercing far ahead with his eyes, beheld a vast cloud moving toward him as it were with the movement of swiftly flapping wings.

Offero had hardly perceived the cloud when it was close upon him, so rapid was its motion; and he beheld a great host of horsemen, wild and sinister fellows, their jaws peaked as it were with hunger, their eyes casting hither and thither with the keen glance of carrion birds.

At their head rode one more terrible than they: a figure in the shape of a man, whose face was hidden in so curious and close a covering that one doubted if it were the face of one who was human.

Through the folds, which concealed what one felt to be a visage most terrible, Offero could feel the glance of two burning eyes. When the masked man spoke he heard the sound of a voice that was both harsh and sweet, like some fruit that is sweet to eat yet leaves a sting upon the tongue.

"Tell me," cried the stranger harshly, "who art thou who darest to wander alone where companies are loth to travel? What is thy errand, bold fellow, that it should breed in thee a courage so great?"

The giant replied: "I am Offero, a strong man, and one who has vowed to serve only the mightiest prince of all. For as my strength is great, so must my master be, lest I should be ashamed of my service. For this reason, and for the fulfilment of my vow, I seek that mighty prince who is called Satan; for it is said by men that he is the mightiest of all princes, and owes allegiance to none."

Again Offero felt upon him those burning eyes, with their glance that turned suddenly to coldness so that he shivered under it, and back to a heat that seemed to burn his flesh.

"Seek no farther," said the stranger. "Know that I am Satan, that great and terrible prince whom all men fear. Enter into my service, for thou shalt find none higher. I am he before whom all men tremble and are afraid."

With that he wheeled him about abruptly and rode on, and into the silence there fell a laughter that was like a drop of blood.

Offero rode on with that dark host. For many long days he travelled with his master Satan, doing him service in bitter pain and travail. For the service of Satan was not as that of the King. No longer was the giant clothed in soft garments and fed with pleasant foods: he wore the dull coarse dress of his companions, and shared their bitter fire. His gracious service was at an end, for the service he rendered Satan was one of harsh and sullen deeds.

Nor was he cheered by any words from his companions: these dark horsemen spoke seldom, and what speech they uttered was of bitter lamentation over their fate, or of harsh hope that others should share it. Thus Offero performed his difficult service in loneliness, and with a troubled heart, his one consolation the knowledge that he kept his vow.

They left the desert far behind. They left, too, dark tangled woods where lost men had emerged with wild hair and sorrowful eyes to swell the ranks of Satan, and where rocks of strange shapes had frowned at the dark host as it passed by.

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At length the great army came upon a space where four roads met. And in the midst of the space, lonely and weather-beaten, stood a little cross.

Offero bent his eyes upon it, he knew not why; and having gazed, he was overpowered by a great sweetness that lay about the cross.

But he who led the host, perceiving the cross through the thick covering that shrouded his face, trembled violently. And he turned his horse aside, leading his followers in a wide curve that they might avoid the cross. As he rode he bent himself, still trembling, and beneath its covering the hidden face twisted into hideous shapes.

Then Offero was troubled, asking himself why his master had trembled and had turned aside to avoid the cross.

Having asked himself this question and found no answer, he left his place and came before Satan. When he had done this, and felt upon himself the glance of those terrible eyes, he felt afraid; but because he was sorely troubled, and was a simple man, he spoke out boldly what was in his heart.

"Tell me, Satan," said he, "why dost thou tremble like a shaking leaf, and hold thyself so meanly? And why hast thou led us by a devious way that thou mightst avoid so slight a thing as this a little twisted cross?"

Satan held out his hand, pointing it with a proud gesture that the intruder might return to his place; but, despite him, it shook and fell to his side; and he answered nothing.

"Fear comes upon my soul," said Offero in a troubled voice, "lest again I should have broken my vow. Answer my question, I pray thee, lest I depart straightway."

"Know then," said Satan, and he trembled anew with anger, "that upon that cross died One whom men call Jesus Christ. When I see it, fear and trembling seize me, for by that cross are men's souls strangely won; and it is said that He who died will return again, and will vanquish me, and will rule over the earth."

Having so spoken, anger and fear so struggled in Satan that he was like to be rent in pieces; and, urging his black horse forward, he dashed across the plain, leading his men at such a pace that they appeared as a moving cloud.

But Offero struck aside, beginning his search for this new prince, Jesus Christ, whose name held a sweet music for his ears. And he moved warily, and by byways, lest he should be found and carried away by Satan and his hosts.

He had been journeying for some days when he came upon a scattered wood, sweet with the scents of green leaves and fragrant herbs; and found in its heart a humble hut that bore a cross upon its door.

Offero knocked, and received no answer. Whereupon, setting his knee against the door, he pushed it open and entered.

This rude entrance roused the hermit who dwelt within, and who sat reading from a book upon his knees. When he beheld the giant he showed no fear, but with a quiet air closed the book and placed it upon a shelf. "Tell me, good friend," said he, turning, "what thou seekest? If it be aught of mine, ask, and it shall be given to thee."

Offero replied, in a dull tone, for he was weary of his failures, "My name is Offero, and I am a Canaanite. I seek one Jesus Christ, the mightiest prince, of whom even Satan, that dread monarch, stands in fear. Behold my great stature; hast thou ever seen the like? Neither hast thou ever known strength like mine. This is the vow I vowed, that with my great strength I would serve only the greatest prince of all. Wherefore I seek for this Jesus Christ, that I may serve him."

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"He is my master," said the hermit. And he fell to pondering; for he perceived that Offero understood nothing of the service of which he spoke.

At length, having given thought to the matter, he answered further: "Knowest thou, Offero, that this great prince, Jesus Christ, is not an earthly ruler? Thou canst serve him only by fasting and by prayer.

"Then I waste my time in seeking him," said the giant; and he turned, and would have gone without further ado, had not the hermit restrained him.

"Nay, good friend," said Offero, "seek not to stay me. I desire no service of fasting. Far be it from me to weaken this great strength of mine, which is all I have to offer in my master's service."

"Then serve him by worship and by prayer," said the holy man; "for it may be that my master does not require of thee what would make thine arm weaker, thy step less sure. Rest upon this wooden bench, and I will instruct thee concerning the Lord Jesus Christ."

With that he found again his book, and, having placed a finger upon the open page, spake with a burning tongue of the holy things he loved.

But the giant waxed uneasy, turning upon his seat; and the good man perceived that he understood nothing, knowing not what prayer or worship meant.

Then the hermit prayed in his heart. And having prayed, he said: "Not a day's journey from this spot flows a little stream which at times becomes a foaming torrent. Haste thee thither, Offero, and with thy great strength assist travellers who would cross the stream. Bear those that are helpless, assist such as are weak. And it may be that thy master, Jesus Christ, will accept thy service, and will reveal Himself to thee."

"At last," said Offero, "thou speakest of a service I understand." And he rose joyfully, and went out to seek the stream.

Having found it, he built by its side a hut of rude bushes; and plucking a young palm-tree from the ground, he made use of that for a staff. Thus housed and provided, he set about his task, being at the service of any who sought him by day or by night.

Thus the days passed till there came a night of storm and rain and wind, when the stream thrust out its arms, and rushed along with a roar. The wind cried, the rain fell in angry splashes, the torrent waxed greater and greater and swirled by with a madder fury.

The giant sought the shelter of his hut. "This is no night for travellers," thought he. He threw himself upon his rude couch, and being weary with much labour, fell asleep.

But he had hardly drawn a dozen breaths when he was awakened by some sound that escaped his knowledge. For a moment he listened, raising himself upon his arm; then, upon the roar of the storm he heard a wailing cry as it were a child's voice calling "Offero, Offero, come and help me!"

"I am coming !" cried the giant, and he leapt from his couch with such force that the hut shook. Grasping his staff, he stepped into the storm; but, although he searched the bank high and low, calling lustily, and peering into the darkness, he could find no one, and hear no sound save the sounds of the storm.

"'Twas the end of my dream, a cry from mine own brain," muttered the giant; and he strode back to his hut.

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But he had hardly thrown himself upon the couch and rested his head on the pillow, when he was again upon his feet, listening to a cry.

"Offero, Offero, come and help me!" The wailing voice lifted itself from the clamour of the waters and reached his ear.

"It is surely the voice of a child," cried the giant, perplexed. He seized his staff, and pulled open the heavy door.

Again he sought the traveller, shouting more lustily than before: "It is I Offero. Here I am." So crying, he paced up and down.

But none answered him, and he could find no one. At last, tired and wet, he returned to the hut. "My dream hath troubled me, making me imagine strange things," he thought; and he determined to think of it no more.

It seemed to him that the storm was quietening, the wind was not so angry, the waters were less turbulent, the splash of the rain upon the hut fell less violently on his ears.

As he listened to it, the giant's face changed; he turned his head quickly, sprang to his feet.

Very clearly and insistently came the cry, "Offero, Offero, come and help me!"

The giant seized his staff, and lifting his lighted lantern, set forth.

He had not gone far when the lantern's light showed him a boy's short, slight form upon the bank. Offero caught a glimpse of wet, storm-driven hair, and clear, sad eyes that seemed to search into his soul.

"Offero, I have need of thee. Help me across the stream," said a sweet voice.

It reminded the giant of another sweetness that had drawn his heart, but he could not rightly remember when. He lifted the child upon his shoulders.

"Offero will serve thee gladly," said he; and with a strange joy at his heart he stepped into the stream.

He had not gone far when he perceived that the violence of the storm had abated less than he had thought. Nay, more than that, it seemed to him that the water's fury was waxing greater, that the wind blew its breath with a new violence, that the blinding rain was thickening into a veil.

The lantern's light, which had shown the other side of the stream, showed it no longer. Its gleam fell upon inky waters that bubbled and frothed in dangerous currents, or dashed along in a mad rush.

He staggered! What was that? Offero leant upon his staff, and great drops started upon his brow. His foot had fallen upon a huge stone which turned beneath his tread. Offero knew that stepping-stone, he had as soon expected to find the forest turn. He dashed a hand across his brow and pressed on.

Every step had to be tested. The stream, which he had known and loved even in its fury, was minded to betray him. Aids he had relied upon before, he might not rely upon to-night. He sought the less dangerous places: these appeared most dangerous of all. The stream was deep where it had been most shallow, heavy with weeds where it had been clear; its bed was fretted with hollows where it had been smooth, and it rocked beneath his feet. Offero moved uncertainly, warily, fearfully.

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There was not a star in the sky, and the lantern's light was growing thinner and thinner. Very soon he must plunge with his burden into the inky darkness that lay beyond its light.

The water was rising as he pressed onward, and as it rose the burden on the giant's shoulders grew heavier. To Offero it seemed that the waters were a whirlpool into which the burden he bore sought to press him.

He had begun his journey bearing a child upon his shoulders, the child had grown to the weight of a man, had gained more than the weight of a man, was fast becoming a load that must bend him to the ground.

Offero groaned. He was stumbling, and the roar of the storm encircled him. His way was now in darkness: he could see nothing.

"Clasp me firmly," said he to the boy on his back.

Of what avail? He must surely perish, and with him the clinging child who had brought him to this pass.

Offero made another difficult step forward: and his foot sank. His next step must be his last: the waters would sweep over him. He was tired, distressed, weakened; his great strength had been wrested from him by the violence of the stream and the heaviness of his burden.

Offero grasped his staff between his numb fingers and, bending his shoulders to a last effort, moved blindly forward. Courage, Offero! For a moment he swung round helplessly in the torrents then his foot found a resting-place, the waters steadied about him. With a few short, struggling steps, Offero reached the bank of the stream.

He stood there helpless the while his burden slipped from his shoulders to the ground. He saw the waters that they suddenly stilled. And with a strange suddenness he felt his strength return, and found eyes to look upon the lad whom he had served.

"Thou art but a lad," said he in wonder, "yet it seemed to me that I bore the whole world upon my shoulders as I crossed the stream." And he raised his stiff body, and stretched out his arms.

The boy looked at him with glad eyes. "It may well be that thou hast borne the world," said he, "since thou hast carried Him who bore the sins of the whole world. Know, Offero, that thy service has been accepted by thy Lord, who hath chosen in this fashion to reveal Himself unto thee. And as a sign of it, thou shalt plant thy staff in the ground, and watch it spring forth, and bear fruit."

Whereupon Offero planted the staff which his hand gripped; and immediately it struck root, and bore leaves and fruit.

And when he turned from beholding it, he was alone.

Then a great light flashed upon Offero the giant, by which he saw and understood many things; and, falling upon his knees, he worshipped and uttered prayer.

And from that day he was called by men Christopher, because he had borne Christ.