

















THE  
BOOK OF ROMANCE

EDITED BY  
ANDREW LANG



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WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. J. FORD

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*P R E F A C E*

It is to be supposed that children do not read Prefaces; these are Bluebeard's rooms, which they are not curious to unlock. A few words may therefore be said about the Romances contained in this book. In the editor's opinion, romances are only fairy tales grown up. The whole mass of the plot and incident of romance was invented by nobody knows who, nobody knows when, nobody knows where. Almost every people has the Cinderella story, with all sorts of variations: a boy hero in place of a girl heroine, a beast in place of a fairy godmother, and so on. The Zuñis, an agricultural tribe of New Mexico, have a version in which the moral turns out to be against poor Cinderella, who comes to an ill end. The Red Indians have the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, told in a very touching shape, but without the music. On the other hand, the negroes in the States have the Orpheus tale, adapted to plantation life, in a form which is certainly borrowed from Europeans. This version was sent to me some years ago by Mr. Barnet Phillips, Brooklyn, New York, and I give it here for its curiosity. If the proper names, Jim Orpus and Dicey, had not been given, we might not feel absolutely certain that the story was borrowed. It is a good example of adaptation from the heroic age of Greece to the servile age of Africans.

*D I C E Y   A N D   O R P U S*

Dat war eber so long ago, 'cause me granmammy tell me so. It h'aint no white-folks yarn — no Sah. Gall she war call Dicey, an' she war borned on de plantation.

Whar Jim Orpus kum from, granmammy she disremember. He war a boss-fiddler, he war, an' jus' that powerful, dat when de mules in de cotton field listen to um, dey no budge in de furrer. Orpus he neber want no mess of fish, ketched wid a angle. He just take him fiddle an' fool along de branch, an' play a tune, an' up dey comes, an' he coteh 'em in he hans. He war mighty sot on Dicey, an' dey war married all proper an' reg'lar. Hit war so long ago, dat de railroad war a bran-new spiek an' span ting in dose days. Dicey once she lounge 'round de track, 'cause she tink she hear Orpus a fiddlin' in de fur-fur-away. Onyways de hengine smash her. Den Jim Orpus he took on turrible, an' when she war buried, he sot him down on de grave, an' he fiddle an' he fiddle till most yo' heart was bruk.

An' he play so long dat de groun' crummle (crumble) an' sink, an' nex' day, when de peoples look for Jim Orpus, dey no find um; oney big-hole in de lot, an' nobody never see Jim Orpus no mo'. An' dey do say, dat ef yo' go inter a darky's burial-groun', providin' no white man been planted thar, an' yo' clap yo' ear to de groun', yo' can hear Jim's fiddle way down deep belo', a folloin' Dicey fru' de lan' of de Golden Slippah.<sup>1</sup>

The original touch, the sound of Orpus's fiddle heard only in the graveyards of the negroes (like the fairy music under the fairy hill at Ballachulish), is very remarkable. Now the Red Indian story has no harper, and no visit by the hero to the land of the dead. His grief brings his wife back to him, and he loses her again by breaking a taboo, as Orpheus did by looking back, a thing always forbidden. Thus we do not know whether or not the Red Indian version is borrowed from the European myth, probably enough it is not. But in no

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Phillips, writing in 1896, says that the tale was told him by a plantation hand, thirty years ago, 'long before the Uncle Remus period.'

case — not even when the same plot and incidents occur among Egyptians and the Central Australian tribes, or among the frosty Samoyeds and Eskimo, the Samoans, the Andamanese, the Zulus, and the Japanese, as well as among Celts and ancient Greeks — can we be absolutely certain that the story has not been diffused and borrowed, in the backward of time. Thus the date and place of origin of these eternal stories, the groundwork of ballads and popular tales, can never be ascertained. The oldest known version may be found in the literature of Egypt or Chaldæa, but it is an obvious fallacy to argue that the place of origin must be the place where the tale was first written down in hieroglyph or cuneiform characters.

There the stories are: they are as common among the remotest savages as among the peasants of Hungary, France, or Assynt. They bear all the birth-marks of an early society, with the usual customs and superstitions of man in such a stage of existence. Their oldest and least corrupted forms exist among savages, and people who do not read and write. But when reading and writing and a class of professional minstrels and tellers of tales arose, these men invented no new plots, but borrowed the plots and incidents of the world-old popular stories. They adapted these to their own condition of society, just as the plantation negroes adapted Orpheus and Eurydice. They elevated the nameless heroes and heroines into Kings, Queens, and Knights, Odysseus, Arthur, Charlemagne, Diarmid, and the rest. They took an ancient popular tale, known all over the earth, and attributed the adventures of the characters to historical persons, like Charlemagne and his family, or to Saints, for the legends of early Celtic Saints are full of fairy-tale materials. Characters half historic, half fabulous, like Arthur, were endowed with fairy gifts, and inherited the feats of nameless imaginary heroes.

The results of this uncritical literary handling of elements really popular were the national romances of

Arthur, of Charlemagne, of Sigurd, or of Etzel. The pagan legends were Christianised, like that of Beowulf; they were expanded into measureless length, whole cycles were invented about the heroic families; poets altered the materials each in his own way and to serve his own purpose, and often to glorify his own country. If the Saracens told their story of Roland at Roncevalles, it would be very different from that of the old Frankish *chansons de geste*. Thus the romances are a mixture of popular tales, of literary invention, and of history as transmitted in legend. To the charm of fairy tale they add the fascination of the age of chivalry, yet I am not sure but that children will prefer the fairy tale pure and simple, nor am I sure that their taste would be wrong, if they did.

In the versions here offered, the story of Arthur is taken mainly from Malory's compilation, from sources chiefly French, but the opening of the Graal story is adapted from Mr. Sebastian Evans's 'High History of the Holy Graal,' a masterpiece of the translator's art. For permission to adapt this chapter I have to thank the kindness of Mr. Evans.

The story of Roland is from the French Epic, probably of the eleventh century, but resting on earlier materials, legend and ballad. William Short Nose is also from the *chanson de geste* of that hero.

The story of Diarmid, ancient Irish and also current among the Dalriadic invaders of Argyle, is taken from the translations in the Transactions of the Ossianic Society.

The story of Robin Hood is from the old English ballads of the courteous outlaw, whose feast, in Scotland, fell in the early days of May. His alleged date varies between the ages of Richard I. and Edward II., but all the labours of the learned have thrown no light on this popular hero.

A child can see how *English* Robin is, how human,

and possible and good-humoured are his character and feats, while Arthur is half Celtic, half French and chivalrous, and while the deeds of the French Roland, and of the Celtic Diarmid are exaggerated beyond the possible. There is nothing of the fairylike in Robin, and he has no thirst for the Ideal. Had we given the adventures of Sir William Wallace, from Blind Harry, it would have appeared that the Lowland Scots could exaggerate like other people.

The story of Wayland the Smith is very ancient. An ivory in the British Museum, apparently of the eighth century, represents Wayland making the cups out of the skulls. As told here the legend is adapted from the amplified version by Oehlenschläger. Scott's use of the story in 'Kenilworth' will be remembered.

All the romances are written by Mrs. Lang, except the story of Grettir the Strong, done by Mr. H. S. C. Everard from the saga translated by Mr. William Morris.

A. LANG.





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TALES OF THE ROUND TABLE



## THE DRAWING OF THE SWORD

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LONG, long ago, after Uther Pendragon died, there was no King in Britain, and every Knight hoped to seize the crown for himself. The country was like to fare ill when laws were broken on every side, and the corn which was to give the poor bread was trodden underfoot, and there was none to bring the evildoer to justice. Then, when things were at their worst, came forth Merlin the magician, and fast he rode to the place where the Archbishop of Canterbury had his dwelling. And they took counsel together, and agreed that all the lords and gentlemen of Britain should ride to London and meet on Christmas Day, now at hand, in the Great Church. So this was done. And on Christmas morning, as they left the church, they saw in the churchyard a large stone, and on it a bar of steel, and in the steel a naked sword was held, and about it was written in letters of gold, 'Whoso pulleth out this sword is by right of birth King of England.' They marvelled at these words, and called for the Archbishop, and brought him into the place where the stone stood. Then those Knights who fain would be King could not hold themselves back, and they tugged at the sword with all their might; but it never stirred. The Archbishop watched them in silence, but when they were faint from pulling he spoke: 'The man is not here who shall lift out that sword, nor do I know where to find him. But this is my counsel — that two Knights be chosen, good and true men, to keep guard over the sword.'

Thus it was done. But the lords and gentlemen-at-

arms cried out that every man had a right to try to win the sword, and they decided that on New Year's Day a tournament should be held, and any Knight who would, might enter the lists.

So on New Year's Day, the Knights, as their custom was, went to hear service in the Great Church, and after it was over they met in the field to make ready for the tourney. Among them was a brave Knight called Sir Ector, who brought with him Sir Kay, his son, and Arthur, Kay's foster-brother. Now Kay had unbuckled his sword the evening before, and in his haste to be at the tourney had forgotten to put it on again, and he begged Arthur to ride back and fetch it for him. But when Arthur reached the house the door was locked, for the women had gone out to see the tourney, and though Arthur tried his best to get in he could not. Then he rode away in great anger, and said to himself, 'Kay shall not be without a sword this day. I will take that sword in the churchyard, and give it to him'; and he galloped fast till he reached the gate of the churchyard. Here he jumped down and tied his horse tightly to a tree, then, running up to the stone, he seized the handle of the sword, and drew it easily out; afterwards he mounted his horse again, and delivered the sword to Sir Kay. The moment Sir Kay saw the sword he knew it was not his own, but the sword of the stone, and he sought out his father Sir Ector, and said to him, 'Sir, this is the sword of the stone, therefore I am the rightful King.' Sir Ector made no answer, but signed to Kay and Arthur to follow him, and they all three went back to the church. Leaving their horses outside, they entered the choir, and here Sir Ector took a holy book and bade Sir Kay swear how he came by that sword. 'My brother Arthur gave it to me,' replied Sir Kay. 'How did you come by it?' asked Sir Ector, turning to Arthur. 'Sir,' said Arthur, 'when I rode home for my brother's sword I found no one to deliver it to me, and as I resolved he should not



be swordless I thought of the sword in this stone, and I pulled it out.' 'Were any Knights present when you did this?' asked Sir Ector. 'No, none,' said Arthur. 'Then it is you,' said Sir Ector, 'who are the rightful King of this land.' 'But why am I the King?' inquired Arthur. 'Because,' answered Sir Ector, 'this is an enchanted sword, and no man could draw it but he who was born a King. Therefore put the sword back into the stone, and let me see you take it out.' 'That is soon done,' said Arthur, replacing the sword, and Sir Ector himself tried to draw it, but he could not. 'Now it is your turn,' he said to Sir Kay, but Sir Kay fared no better than his father, though he tugged with all his might and main. 'Now you, Arthur,' and Arthur pulled it out as easily as if it had been lying in its sheath, and as he did so Sir Ector and Sir Kay sank on their knees before him. 'Why do you, my father and brother, kneel to me?' asked Arthur in surprise. 'Nay, nay, my lord,' answered Sir Ector, 'I was never your father, though till to-day I did not know who your father really was. You are the son of Uther Pendragon, and you were brought to me when you were born by Merlin himself, who promised that when the time came I should know from whom you sprang. And now it has been revealed to me.' But when Arthur heard that Sir Ector was not his father, he wept bitterly. 'If I am King,' he said at last, 'ask what you will, and I shall not fail you. For to you, and to my lady and mother, I owe more than to anyone in the world, for she loved me and treated me as her son.' 'Sir,' replied Sir Ector, 'I only ask that you will make your foster-brother, Sir Kay, Seneschal<sup>1</sup> of all your lands.' 'That I will readily,' answered Arthur, 'and while he and I live no other shall fill that office.'

Sir Ector then bade them seek out the Archbishop with him, and they told him all that had happened concerning the sword, which Arthur had left standing in the

<sup>1</sup> 'Seneschal' means steward.

stone. And on the Twelfth Day the Knights and Barons came again, but none could draw it out but Arthur. When they saw this, many of the Barons became angry and cried out that they would never own a boy for King whose blood was no better than their own. So it was agreed to wait till Candlemas, when more Knights might be there, and meanwhile the same two men who had been chosen before watched the sword night and day; but at Candlemas it was the same thing, and at Easter. And when Pentecost came, the common people who were present, and saw Arthur pull out the sword, cried with one voice that he was their King, and they would kill any man who said differently. Then rich and poor fell on their knees before him, and Arthur took the sword and offered it upon the altar where the Archbishop stood, and the best man that was there made him Knight. After that the crown was put on his head, and he swore to his lords and commons that he would be a true King, and would do them justice all the days of his life.

## *THE QUESTING BEAST*

BUT Arthur had many battles to fight and many Kings to conquer before he was acknowledged lord of them all, and often he would have failed had he not listened to the wisdom of Merlin, and been helped by his sword Excalibur, which in obedience to Merlin's orders he never drew till things were going ill with him. Later it shall be told how the King got the sword Excalibur, which shone so bright in his enemies' eyes that they fell back, dazzled by the brightness. Many Knights came to his standard, and among them Sir Ban, King of Gaul beyond the sea, who was ever his faithful friend. And it was in one of these wars, when King Arthur and King Ban and King Bors went to the rescue of the King of Cameliard, that Arthur saw Guenevere, the King's daughter, whom he afterwards wedded. By and by King Ban and King Bors returned to their own country across the sea, and the King went to Carlion, a town on the river Usk, where a strange dream came to him.

He thought that the land was over-run with gryphons and serpents which burnt and slew his people, and he made war on the monsters, and was sorely wounded, though at last he killed them all. When he awoke the remembrance of his dream was heavy upon him, and to shake it off he summoned his Knights to hunt with him, and they rode fast till they reached a forest. Soon they spied a hart before them, which the King claimed as his game, and he spurred his horse and rode after him. But the hart ran fast and the King could not get near it, and

the chase lasted so long that the King himself grew heavy and his horse fell dead under him. Then he sat under a tree and rested, till he heard the baying of hounds, and fancied he counted as many as thirty of them. He raised his head to look, and, coming towards him, saw a beast so strange that its like was not to be found throughout his kingdom. It went straight to the well and drank, making as it did so the noise of many hounds baying, and when it had drunk its fill the beast went its way.

While the King was wondering what sort of a beast this could be, a Knight rode by, who, seeing a man lying under a tree, stopped and said to him: 'Knight full of thought and sleepy, tell me if a strange beast has passed this way?'

'Yes, truly,' answered Arthur, 'and by now it must be two miles distant. What do you want with it?'

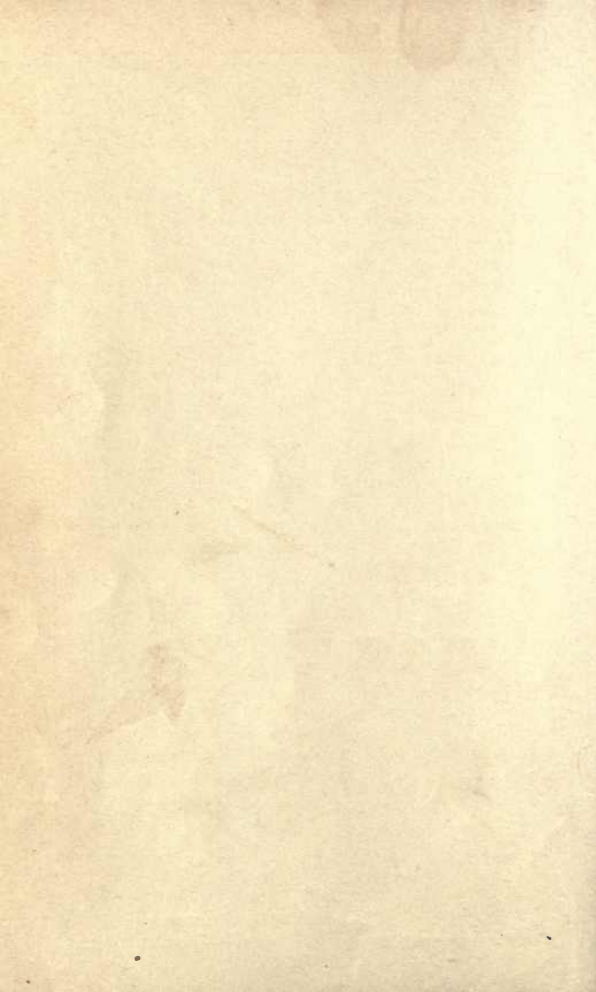
'Oh sir, I have followed that beast from far,' replied he, 'and have ridden my horse to death. If only I could find another I would still go after it.' As he spoke a squire came up leading a fresh horse for the King, and when the Knight saw it he prayed that it might be given to him, 'for,' said he, 'I have followed this quest this twelvemonth, and either I shall slay him or he will slay me.'

'Sir Knight,' answered the King, 'you have done your part; leave now your quest, and let me follow the beast for the same time that you have done.' 'Ah, fool!' replied the Knight, whose name was Pellinore, 'it would be all in vain, for none may slay that beast but I or my next of kin'; and without more words he sprang into the saddle. 'You may take my horse by force,' said the King, 'but I should like to prove first which of us two is the better horseman.'

'Well,' answered the Knight, 'when you want me, come to this spring. Here you will always find me,' and, spurring his horse, he galloped away. The King watched



ARTHUR AND THE QUESTING-BEAST



him till he was out of sight, then turned to his squire and bade him bring another horse as quickly as he could. While he was waiting for it the wizard Merlin came along in the likeness of a boy, and asked the King why he was so thoughtful.

‘I may well be thoughtful,’ replied the King, ‘for I have seen the most wonderful sight in all the world.’

‘That I know well,’ said Merlin, ‘for I know all your thoughts. But it is folly to let your mind dwell on it, for thinking will mend nothing. I know, too, that Uther Pendragon was your father, and your mother was the Lady Igraine.’

‘How can a boy like you know that?’ cried Arthur, growing angry; but Merlin only answered, ‘I know it better than any man living,’ and passed, returning soon after in the likeness of an old man of fourscore, and sitting down by the well to rest.

‘What makes you so sad?’ asked he.

‘I may well be sad,’ replied Arthur, ‘there is plenty to make me so. And besides, there was a boy here who told me things that he had no business to know, and among them the names of my father and mother.’

‘He told you the truth,’ said the old man, ‘and if you would have listened he could have told you still more: how that your sister shall have a child who shall destroy you and all your Knights.’

‘Who are you?’ asked Arthur, wondering.

‘I am Merlin, and it was I who came to you in the likeness of a boy. I know all things; how that you shall die a noble death, being slain in battle, while my end will be shameful, for I shall be put alive into the earth.’

There was no time to say more, for the man brought up the King’s horse and he mounted, and rode fast till he came to Carlion.

## THE SWORD EXCALIBUR

KING ARTHUR had fought a hard battle with the tallest Knight in all the land, and though he struck hard and well, he would have been slain had not Merlin enchanted the Knight and cast him into a deep sleep, and brought the King to a hermit who had studied the art of healing, and cured all his wounds in three days. Then Arthur and Merlin waited no longer, but gave the hermit thanks and departed.

As they rode together Arthur said, 'I have no sword,' but Merlin bade him be patient and he would soon give him one. In a little while they came to a large lake, and in the midst of the lake Arthur beheld an arm rising out of the water, holding up a sword. 'Look!' said Merlin, 'that is the sword I spoke of.' And the King looked again, and a maiden stood upon the water. 'That is the Lady of the Lake,' said Merlin, 'and she is coming to you, and if you ask her courteously she will give you the sword.' So when the maiden drew near Arthur saluted her and said, 'Maiden, I pray you tell me whose sword is that which an arm is holding out of the water? I wish it were mine, for I have lost my sword.'

'That sword is mine, King Arthur,' answered she, 'and I will give it to you, if you in return will give me a gift when I ask you.'

'By my faith,' said the King, 'I will give you whatever gift you ask.' 'Well,' said the maiden, 'get into the





ARTHUR MEETS THE LADY OF THE LAKE AND GETS THE SWORD EXCALIBUR FROM



barge yonder, and row yourself to the sword, and take it and the scabbard with you.' For this was the sword Excalibur. 'As for *my* gift, I will ask it in my own time.' Then King Arthur and Merlin dismounted from their horses and tied them up safely, and went into the barge, and when they came to the place where the arm was holding the sword Arthur took it by the handle, and the arm disappeared. And they brought the sword back to land. As they rode the King looked lovingly on his sword, which Merlin saw, and, smiling, said, 'Which do you like best, the sword or the scabbard?' 'I like the sword,' answered Arthur. 'You are not wise to say that,' replied Merlin, 'for the scabbard is worth ten of the sword, and as long as it is buckled on you you will lose no blood, however sorely you may be wounded.' So they rode into the town of Carlion, and Arthur's Knights gave them a glad welcome, and said it was a joy to serve under a King who risked his life as much as any common man.

## *THE STORY OF SIR BALIN*

IN those days many Kings reigned in the Islands of the Sea, and they constantly waged war upon each other, and on their liege lord, and news came to Arthur that Ryons, King of North Wales, had collected a large host and had ravaged his lands and slain some of his people. When he heard this, Arthur rose in anger, and commanded that all lords, Knights, and gentlemen of arms should meet him at Camelot, where he would call a council, and hold a tourney.

From every part the Knights flocked to Camelot, and the town was full to overflowing of armed men and their horses. And when they were all assembled, there rode in a damsel, who said she had come with a message from the great Lady Lile of Avelion, and begged that they would bring her before King Arthur. When she was led into his presence she let her mantle of fur slip off her shoulders, and they saw that by her side a richly wrought sword was buckled. The King was silent with wonder at the strange sight, but at last he said, 'Damsel, why do you wear this sword? for swords are not the ornaments of women.' 'Oh, my lord,' answered she, 'I would I could find some Knight to rid me of this sword, which weighs me down and causes me much sorrow. But the man who will deliver me of it must be one who is mighty of his hands, and pure in his deeds, without villainy, or treason. If I find a Knight such as this, he will draw this sword out of its sheath,

and he only. For I have been at the Court of King Ryons, and he and his Knights tried with all their strength to draw the sword and they could not.'

'Let me see if I can draw it,' said Arthur, 'not because I think myself the best Knight, for well I know how far I am outdone by others, but to set them an example that they may follow me.' With that the King took the sword by the sheath and by the girdle, and pulled at it with all his force, but the sword stuck fast. 'Sir,' said the damsel, 'you need not pull half so hard, for he that shall pull it out shall do it with little strength.' 'It is not for me,' answered Arthur, 'and now, my Barons, let each man try his fortune.' So most of the Knights of the Round Table there present pulled, one after another, at the sword, but none could stir it from its sheath. 'Alas! alas!' cried the damsel in great grief, 'I thought to find in this Court Knights that were blameless and true of heart, and now I know not where to look for them.' 'By my faith,' said Arthur, 'there are no better Knights in the world than these of mine, but I am sore displeased that they cannot help me in this matter.'

Now at that time there was a poor Knight at Arthur's Court who had been kept prisoner for a year and a half because he had slain the King's cousin. He was of high birth and his name was Balin, and after he had suffered eighteen months the punishment of his misdeed the Barons prayed the King to set him free, which Arthur did willingly. When Balin, standing apart, beheld the Knights one by one try the sword, and fail to draw it, his heart beat fast, yet he shrank from taking his turn, for he was meanly dressed, and could not compare with the other Barons. But after the damsel had bid farewell to Arthur and his Court, and was setting out on her journey homewards, he called to her and said, 'Damsel, I pray you to suffer me to try your sword, as well as these lords, for though I am so poorly clothed, my heart is as high as theirs.' The damsel stopped and

looked at him, and answered, 'Sir, it is not needful to put you to such trouble, for where so many have failed it is hardly likely that you will succeed.' 'Ah! fair damsel,' said Balin, 'it is not fine clothes that make good deeds.' 'You speak truly,' replied the damsel, 'therefore do what you can.' Then Balin took the sword by the girdle and sheath, and pulled it out easily, and when he looked at the sword he was greatly pleased with it. The King and the Knights were dumb with surprise that it was Balin who had triumphed over them, and many of them envied him and felt anger towards him. 'In truth,' said the damsel, 'this is the best Knight that I ever found, but, Sir, I pray you give me the sword again.'

'No,' answered Balin, 'I will keep it till it is taken from me by force.' 'It is for your sake, not mine, that I ask for it,' said the damsel, 'for with that sword you shall slay the man you love best, and it shall bring about your own ruin.' 'I will take what befalls me,' replied Balin, 'but the sword I will not give up, by the faith of my body.' So the damsel departed in great sorrow. The next day Sir Balin left the Court, and, armed with his sword, set forth in search of adventures, which he found in many places where he had not thought to meet with them. In all the fights that he fought, Sir Balin was the victor, and Arthur, and Merlin his friend, knew that there was no Knight living of greater deeds, or more worthy of worship. And he was known to all as Sir Balin le Savage, the Knight of the two swords.

One day he was riding forth when at the turning of a road he saw a cross, and on it was written in letters of gold, 'Let no Knight ride towards this castle.' Sir Balin was still reading the writing when there came towards him an old man with white hair, who said, 'Sir Balin le Savage, this is not the way for you, so turn again and choose some other path.' And so he vanished, and a horn blew loudly, as a horn is blown at the death of a beast. 'That blast,' said Balin, 'is for me, but I am still

alive,' and he rode to the castle, where a great company of Knights and ladies met him and welcomed him, and



The Damsel Warns Sir Balin.

made him a feast. Then the lady of the castle said to him, 'Knight with the two swords, you must now fight a

Knight that guards an island, for it is our law that no man may leave us without he first fight a tourney.'

'That is a bad custom,' said Balin, 'but if I must I am ready; for though my horse is weary my heart is strong.'

'Sir,' said a Knight to him, 'your shield does not look whole to me; I will lend you another'; so Balin listened to him and took the shield that was offered, and left his own with his own coat of arms behind him. He rode down to the shore, and led his horse into a boat, which took them across. When he reached the other side, a damsel came to him crying, 'O Knight Balin, why have you left your own shield behind you? Alas! you have put yourself in great danger, for by your shield you should have been known. I grieve over your doom, for there is no man living that can rival you for courage and bold deeds.'

'I repent,' answered Balin, 'ever having come into this country, but for very shame I must go on. Whatever befalls me, either for life or death, I am ready to take it.' Then he examined his armour, and saw that it was whole, and mounted his horse.

As he went along the path he beheld a Knight come out of a castle in front, clothed in red, riding a horse with red trappings. When this red Knight looked on the two swords, he thought for a moment it was Balin, but the shield did not bear Balin's device. So they rode at each other with their spears, and smote each other's shields so hard that both horses and men fell to the ground with the shock, and the Knights lay unconscious on the ground for some minutes. But soon they rose up again and began the fight afresh, and they fought till the place was red with their blood, and they had each seven great wounds. 'What Knight are you?' asked Balin le Savage, pausing for breath, 'for never before have I found any Knight to match me.' 'My name,' said he, 'is Balan, brother to the good Knight Balin.'





The Death of Balin and Balan



‘Alas!’ cried Balin, ‘that I should ever live to see this day,’ and he fell back fainting to the ground. At this sight Balan crept on his feet and hands, and pulled off Balin’s helmet, so that he might see his face. The fresh air revived Balin, and he awoke and said: ‘O Balan, my brother, you have slain me, and I you, and the whole world shall speak ill of us both.’

‘Alas,’ sighed Balan, ‘if I had only known you! I saw your two swords, but from your shield I thought you had been another Knight.’

‘Woe is me!’ said Balin, ‘all this was wrought by an unhappy Knight in the castle, who caused me to change my shield for his. If I lived, I would destroy that castle that he should not deceive other men.’

‘You would have done well,’ answered Balan, ‘for they have kept me prisoner ever since I slew a Knight that guarded this island, and they would have kept you captive too.’ Then came the lady of the castle and her companions, and listened as they made their moan. And Balan prayed that she would grant them the grace to lie together, there where they died, and their wish was given them, and she and those that were with her wept for pity.

So they died; and the lady made a tomb for them, and put Balan’s name alone on it, for Balin’s name she knew not. But Merlin knew, and next morning he came and wrote it in letters of gold, and he ungirded Balin’s sword, and unscrewed the pommel, and put another pommel on it, and bade a Knight that stood by handle it, but the Knight could not. At that Merlin laughed. ‘Why do you laugh?’ asked the Knight. ‘Because,’ said Merlin, ‘no man shall handle this sword but the best Knight in the world, and that is either Sir Lancelot or his son Sir Galahad. With this sword Sir Lancelot shall slay the man he loves best, and Sir Gawaine is his name.’ And this was later done, in a fight across the seas.

All this Merlin wrote on the pommel of the sword.

Next he made a bridge of steel to the island, six inches broad, and no man could pass over it that was guilty of any evil deeds. The scabbard of the sword he left on this side of the island, so that Galahad should find it. The sword itself he put in a magic stone, which floated down the stream to Camelot, that is now called Winchester. And the same day Galahad came to the river, having in his hand the scabbard, and he saw the sword and pulled it out of the stone, as is told in another place.

## HOW THE ROUND TABLE BEGAN

It was told in the story of the Questing Beast that King Arthur married the daughter of Leodegrance, King of Cameliard, but there was not space there to say how it came about. And as the tales of the Round Table are full of this lady, Queen Guenevere, it is well that anybody who reads this book should learn how she became Queen.

After King Arthur had fought and conquered many enemies, he said one day to Merlin, whose counsel he took all the days of his life, 'My Barons will let me have no rest, but bid me take a wife, and I have answered them that I shall take none, except you advise me.'

'It is well,' replied Merlin, 'that you should take a wife, but is there any woman that you love better than another?' 'Yes,' said Arthur, 'I love Guenevere, daughter of Leodegrance, King of Cameliard, in whose house is the Round Table that my father gave him. This maiden is the fairest that I have ever seen, or ever shall see.' 'Sir,' answered Merlin, 'what you say as to her beauty is true, but, if your heart was not set on her, I could find you another as fair, and of more goodness, than she. But if a man's heart is once set it is idle to try to turn him.' Then Merlin asked the King to give him a company of Knights and esquires, that he might go to the Court of King Leodegrance and tell him that King Arthur desired to wed his daughter, which Arthur did gladly. Therefore Merlin rode forth and made all

the haste he could till he came to the Castle of Cameliard, and told King Leodegrance who had sent him and why.

‘That is the best news I have ever had,’ replied Leodegrance, ‘for little did I think that so great and noble a King should seek to marry my daughter. As for lands to endow her with, I would give whatever he chose; but he has lands enough of his own, so I will give him instead something that will please him much more, the Round Table which Uther Pendragon gave me, where a hundred and fifty Knights can sit at one time. I myself can call to my side a hundred good Knights, but I lack fifty, for the wars have slain many, and some are absent.’ And without more words King Leodegrance gave his consent that his daughter should wed King Arthur. And Merlin returned with his Knights and esquires, journeying partly by water and partly by land, till they drew near to London.

When King Arthur heard of the coming of Merlin and of the Knights with the Round Table he was filled with joy, and said to those that stood about him, ‘This news that Merlin has brought me is welcome indeed, for I have long loved this fair lady, and the Round Table is dearer to me than great riches.’ Then he ordered that Sir Lancelot should ride to fetch the Queen, and that preparations for the marriage and her coronation should be made, which was done. ‘Now, Merlin,’ said the King, ‘go and look about my kingdom and bring fifty of the bravest and most famous Knights that can be found throughout the land.’ But no more than eight and twenty Knights could Merlin find. With these Arthur had to be content, and the Bishop of Canterbury was fetched, and he blessed the seats that were placed by the Round Table, and the Knights sat in them. ‘Fair Sirs,’ said Merlin, when the Bishop had ended his blessing, ‘arise all of you, and pay your homage to the King.’ So the Knights arose to do his bidding, and in every seat was the name of the Knight who had sat on it, written in

letters of gold, but two seats were empty. After that young Gawaine came to the King, and prayed him to make him a Knight on the day that he should wed Guenevere. 'That I will gladly,' replied the King, 'for you are my sister's son.'

As the King was speaking, a poor man entered the Court, bringing with him a youth about eighteen years old, riding on a lean mare, though it was not the custom for gentlemen to ride on mares. 'Where is King Arthur?' asked the man. 'Yonder,' answered the Knights. 'Have you business with him?' 'Yes,' said the man, and he went and bowed low before the King: 'I have heard, O King Arthur, flower of Knights and Kings, that at the time of your marriage you would give any man the gift he should ask for.'

'That is truth,' answered the King, 'as long as I do no wrong to other men or to my kingdom.'

'I thank you for your gracious words,' said the poor man; 'the boon I would ask is that you would make my son a Knight.' 'It is a great boon to ask,' answered the King. 'What is your name?'

'Sir, my name is Aries the cowherd.'

'Is it you or your son that has thought of this honour?'

'It is my son who desires it, and not I,' replied the man. 'I have thirteen sons who tend cattle, and work in the fields if I bid them; but this boy will do nothing but shoot and cast darts, or go to watch battles and look on Knights, and all day long he beseeches me to bring him to you, that he may be knighted also.'

'What is your name?' said Arthur, turning to the young man.

'Sir, my name is Tor.'

'Where is your sword that I may knight you?' said the King.

'It is here, my lord.'

'Take it out of its sheath,' said the King, 'and

require me to make you a Knight.' Then Tor jumped off his mare and pulled out his sword, and knelt before the King, praying that he might be made a Knight and a Knight of the Round Table.

'As for a Knight, that I will make you,' said Arthur, smiting him in the neck with the sword, 'and if you are worthy of it you shall be Knight of the Round Table.' And the next day he made Gawaine Knight also.



## THE PASSING OF MERLIN

SIR TOR proved before long by his gallant deeds that he was worthy to sit in one of the two empty seats of the Round Table. Many of the other Knights went out also in search of adventures, and one of them, Sir Pellinore, brought a damsel of the lake to Arthur's Court, and when Merlin saw her he fell in love with her, so that he desired to be always in her company. The damsel laughed in secret at Merlin, but made use of him to tell her all she would know, and the wizard had no strength to say her nay, though he knew what would come of it. For he told King Arthur that before long he should be put into the earth alive, for all his cunning. He likewise told the King many things that should befall him, and warned him always to keep the scabbard as well as the sword Excalibur, and foretold that both sword and scabbard should be stolen from him by a woman whom he most trusted. 'You will miss my counsel sorely,' added Merlin, 'and would give all your lands to have me back again.' 'But since you know what will happen,' said the King, 'you may surely guard against it.' 'No,' answered Merlin, 'that will not be.' So he departed from the King, and the maiden followed him whom some call Nimue and others Vivien, and wherever she went Merlin went also.

They journeyed together to many places, both at home and across the seas, and the damsel was wearied of him, and sought by every means to be rid of him, but he would not be shaken off. At last these two wandered back to

Cornwall, and one day Merlin showed Vivien a rock under which he said great marvels were hidden. Then Vivien put forth all her powers, and told Merlin how she longed to see the wonders beneath the stone, and, in spite of all his wisdom, Merlin listened to her and crept under the rock to bring forth the strange things that lay there. And when he was under the stone she used the magic he had taught her, and the rock rolled over him, and buried him alive, as he had told King Arthur. But the damsel departed with joy, and thought no more of him: now that she knew all the magic he could teach her.

## HOW MORGAN LE FAY TRIED TO KILL KING ARTHUR

KING ARTHUR had a sister called Morgan le Fay, who was skilled in magic of all sorts, and hated her brother because he had slain in battle a Knight whom she loved. But to gain her own ends, and to revenge herself upon the King, she kept a smiling face, and let none guess the passion in her heart.

One day Morgan le Fay went to Queen Guenevere, and asked her leave to go into the country. The Queen wished her to wait till Arthur returned, but Morgan le Fay said she had had bad news and could not wait. Then the Queen let her depart without delay.

Early next morning at break of day Morgan le Fay mounted her horse and rode all day and all night, and at noon next day reached the Abbey of nuns where King Arthur had gone to rest, for he had fought a hard battle, and for three nights had slept but little. 'Do not wake him,' said Morgan le Fay, who had come there knowing she would find him, 'I will rouse him myself when I think he has had enough sleep,' for she thought to steal his sword Excalibur from him. The nuns dared not disobey her, so Morgan le Fay went straight into the room where King Arthur was lying fast asleep in his bed, and in his right hand was grasped his sword Excalibur. When she beheld that sight, her heart fell, for she dared not touch the sword, knowing well that if Arthur waked and saw her she was a dead woman. So she took the scabbard, and went away on horseback.