

ГОВАРД ПАЙЛ

THE STORY OF SIR
LAUNCELOT AND HIS
COMPANIONS

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and His Companions**

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Howard Pyle

The Story of Sir Launcelot and His Companions

Foreword

With this begins the third of those books which I have set myself to write concerning the history of King Arthur of Britain and of those puissant knights who were of his Court and of his Round Table.

In the Book which was written before this book you may there read the Story of that very noble and worthy knight, Sir Launcelot of the Lake; of how he dwelt within a magic lake which was the enchanted habitation of the Lady Nymue of the Lake; of how he was there trained in all the most excellent arts of chivalry by Sir Pellias, the Gentle Knight – whilom a companion of the Round Table, but afterward the Lord of the Lake; of how he came forth out of the Lake and became after that the chiefest knight of the Round Table of King Arthur. All of this was told in that book and many other things concerning Sir Launcelot and several other worthies who were Companions of the Round Table and who were very noble and excellent knights both in battle and in court.

So here followeth a further history of Sir Launcelot of the Lake and the narrative of several of the notable adventures that he performed at this time of his life.

Wherefore if it will please you to read that which is hereinafter set forth, you will be told of how Sir Launcelot slew the great Worm of Corbin; of the madness that afterward fell upon him, and of how a most noble, gentle, and beautiful lady, hight the Lady Elaine the Fair, lent him aid and succor at a time of utmost affliction to him, and so brought him back to health again. And you may herein further find it told how Sir Launcelot was afterward wedded to that fair and gentle dame, and of how was born of that couple a child of whom it was prophesied by Merlin (in a certain miraculous manner fully set forth in this book) that he should become the most perfect knight that ever lived and he who should bring back the Holy Grail to the Earth.

For that child was Galahad whom the world knoweth to be the flower of all chivalry; a knight altogether without fear or reproach of any kind, yet, withal, the most glorious and puissant knight-champion who ever lived.

So if the perusal of these things may give you pleasure, I pray you to read that which followeth, for in this book all these and several other histories are set forth in full.

Prologue

It befel upon a very joyous season in the month of May that Queen Guinevere was of a mind to take gentle sport as folk do at that time of the year; wherefore on a day she ordained it in a court of pleasure that on the next morning certain knights and ladies of the court at Camelot should ride with her a-maying into the woods and fields, there to disport themselves amid the flowers and blossoms that grew in great multitudes beside the river.

How the Lady Guinevere rode a-maying.

Of this May-party it stands recorded several times in the various histories of chivalry that the knights she chose were ten in all and that they were all Knights of the Round Table, to wit, as followeth: there was Sir Kay the Seneschal, and Sir Agravaine, and Sir Brandiles, and Sir Sagramour the Desirous, and Sir Dodinas, and Sir Osanna, and Sir Ladynas of the Forest Sauvage, and Sir Persavant of India, and Sir Ironside and Sir Percydes, who was cousin to Sir Percival of Gales. These were the ten (so sayeth those histories aforesaid) whom the Lady Guinevere called upon for to ride a-maying with her all bright and early upon the morning of the day as aforesaid.

And the Queen further ordained that each of these knights should choose him a lady for the day. And she ordained that each lady should ride behind the knight upon the horse which he rode. And she ordained that all those knights and ladies and all such attendants as might be of that party should be clad entirely in green, as was fitting for that pleasant festival.

Such were the commands that the Queen ordained, and when those who were chosen were acquainted with their good fortune they took great joy therein; for all they wist there would be great sport at that maying-party.

So when the next morning was come they all rode forth in the freshness of dewy springtide; what time the birds were singing so joyously, so joyously, from every hedge and coppice; what time the soft wind was blowing great white clouds, slow sailing across the canopy of heaven, each cloud casting a soft and darkling shadow that moved across the hills and uplands as it swam the light blue heaven above; what time all the trees and hedgerows were abloom with fragrant and dewy blossoms, and fields and meadow-lands, all shining bright with dew, were spread over with a wonderful carpet of pretty flowers, gladdening the eye with their charm and making fragrant the breeze that blew across the smooth and grassy plain.

For in those days the world was young and gay (as it is nowadays with little children who are abroad when the sun shines bright and things are a-growing) and the people who dwelt therein had not yet grown weary of its freshness of delight. Wherefore that fair Queen and her court took great pleasure in all the merry world that lay spread about them, as they rode two by two, each knight with his lady, gathering the blossoms of the May, chattering the while like merry birds and now and then bursting into song because of the pure pleasure of living.

They feast very joyously.

So they disported themselves among the blossoms for all that morning, and when noontide had come they took their rest at a fair spot in a flowery meadow that lay spread out beside the smooth-flowing river about three miles from the town. For from where they sat they might look down across the glassy stream and behold the distant roofs and spires of Camelot, trembling in the thin warm air, very bright and clear, against the blue and radiant sky beyond. And after they were all thus seated in the grass, sundry attendants came and spread out a fair white table-cloth and laid upon the cloth a goodly feast for their refreshment – cold pasties of venison, roasted fowls, manchets of white bread, and flagons of golden wine and ruby wine. And all they took great pleasure when they gazed upon that feast, for they were anhungered with their sporting. So they ate and drank and made them merry;

and whilst they ate certain minstrels sang songs, and certain others recited goodly contes and tales for their entertainment. And meanwhile each fair lady wove wreaths of herbs and flowers and therewith bedecked her knight, until all those noble gentlemen were entirely bedight with blossoms – whereat was much merriment and pleasant jesting.

Thus it was that Queen Guinevere went a-maying, and so have I told you all about it so that you might know how it was.

A knight cometh forth from the forest.

Now whilst the Queen and her party were thus sporting together like to children in the grass, there suddenly came the sound of a bugle-horn winded in the woodlands that there were not a very great distance away from where they sat, and whilst they looked with some surprise to see who blew that horn in the forest, there suddenly appeared at the edge of the woodland an armed knight clad cap-a-pie. And the bright sunlight smote down upon that armed knight so that he shone with wonderful brightness at the edge of the shadows of the trees. And after that knight there presently followed an array of men-at-arms – fourscore and more in all – and these also were clad at all points in armor as though prepared for battle.

This knight and those who were with him stopped for a little while at the edge of the wood and stood regarding that May-party from a distance; then after a little they rode forward across the meadow to where the Queen and her court sat looking at them.

Now at first Queen Guinevere and those that were with her wist not who that knight could be, but when he and his armed men had come nigh enough, they were aware that he was a knight hight Sir Mellegrans, who was the son of King Bagdemagus, and they wist that his visit was not likely to bode any very great good to them.

For Sir Mellegrans was not like his father, who (as hath been already told of both in the Book of King Arthur and in The Story of the Champions of the Round Table) was a good and worthy king, and a friend of King Arthur's. For, contrariwise, Sir Mellegrans was malcontented and held bitter enmity toward King Arthur, and that for this reason:

A part of the estate of Sir Mellegrans marched upon the borders of Wales, and there had at one time arisen great contention between Sir Mellegrans and the King of North Wales concerning a certain strip of forest land, as to the ownership thereof. This contention had been submitted to King Arthur and he had decided against Sir Mellegrans and in favor of the King of North Wales; wherefore from that time Sir Mellegrans had great hatred toward King Arthur and swore that some time he would be revenged upon him if the opportunity should offer. Wherefore it was that when the Lady Guinevere beheld that it was Sir Mellegrans who appeared before her thus armed in full, she was ill at ease, and wist that that visit maybe boded no good to herself and to her gentle May-court.

Sir Mellegrans affronts the May-party.

So Sir Mellegrans and his armed party rode up pretty close to where the Queen and her party sat in the grass. And when he had come very near he drew rein to his horse and sat regarding that gay company both bitterly and scornfully (albeit at the moment he knew not the Queen who she was). Then after a little he said: "What party of jesters are ye, and what is this foolish sport ye are at?"

Then Sir Kay the Seneschal spake up very sternly and said: "Sir Knight, it behooves you to be more civil in your address. Do you not perceive that this is the Queen and her court before whom you stand and unto whom you are speaking?"

Then Sir Mellegrans knew the Queen and was filled with great triumph to find her thus, surrounded only with a court of knights altogether unarmed. Wherefore he cried out in a great voice: "Hah! lady, now I do know thee! Is it thus that I find thee and thy court? Now it appears to me that Heaven hath surely delivered you into my hands!"

To this Sir Percydes replied, speaking very fiercely: "What mean you, Sir Knight, by those words? Do you dare to make threats to your Queen?"

Quoth Sir Mellegrans: "I make no threats, but I tell you this, I do not mean to throw aside the good fortune that hath thus been placed in my hands. For here I find you all undefended and in my power, wherefore I forthwith seize upon you for to take you to my castle and hold you there as hostages until such time as King Arthur shall make right the great wrong which he hath done me aforetime and shall return to me those forest lands which he hath taken from me to give unto another. So if you go with me in peace, it shall be well for you, but if you go not in peace it shall be ill for you."

Then all the ladies that were of the Queen's court were seized with great terror, for Sir Mellegrans's tones and the aspect of his face were very fierce and baleful; but Queen Guinevere, albeit her face was like to wax for whiteness, spake with a great deal of courage and much anger, saying: "Wilt thou be a traitor to thy King, Sir Knight? Wilt thou dare to do violence to me and my court within the very sight of the roofs of King Arthur's town?"

"Lady," said Sir Mellegrans, "thou hast said what I will to do."

At this Sir Percydes drew his sword and said: "Sir Knight, this shall not be! Thou shalt not have thy will in this while I have any life in my body!"

Then all those other gentlemen drew their swords also, and one and all spake to the same purpose, saying: "Sir Percydes hath spoken; sooner would we die than suffer that affront to the Queen."

"Well," said Sir Mellegrans, speaking very bitterly, "if ye will it that ye who are naked shall do battle with us who are armed, then let it be even as ye elect. So keep this lady from me if ye are able, for I will herewith seize upon you all, maugre anything that you may do to stay me."

Then those ten unarmed knights of the Queen and their attendants made them ready for battle. And when Sir Mellegrans beheld what was their will, he gave command that his men should make them ready for battle upon their part, and they did so.

Then in a moment all that pleasant May-party was changed to dreadful and bloody uproar; for men lashed fiercely at men with sword and glaive, and the Queen and her ladies shrieked and clung in terror together in the midst of that party of knights who were fighting for them.

Of the battle with the party of Sir Mellegrans.

And for a long time those ten unarmed worthies fought against the armed men as one to ten, and for a long time no one could tell how that battle would end. For the ten men smote the others down from their horses upon all sides, wherefore, for a while, it looked as though the victory should be with them. But they could not shield themselves from the blows of their enemies, being unarmed, wherefore they were soon wounded in many places, and what with loss of blood and what with stress of fighting a few against many without any rest, they presently began to wax weak and faint. Then at last Sir Kay fell down to the earth and then Sir Sagramour and then Sir Agravaine and Sir Dodinas and then Sir Ladynas and Sir Osanna and Sir Persavant, so that all who were left standing upon their feet were Sir Brandiles and Sir Ironside and Sir Percydes.

But still these three set themselves back to back and thus fought on in that woful battle. And still they lashed about them so fiercely with their swords that the terror of this battle filled their enemies with fear, insomuch that those who were near them fell back after a while to escape the dreadful strokes they gave.

So came a pause in the battle and all stood at rest. Meantime all around on the ground were men groaning dolorously, for in that battle those ten unarmed knights of the Round Table had smitten down thirty of their enemies.

So for a while those three stood back to back resting from their battle and panting for breath. As for their gay attire of green, lo! it was all ensanguined with the red that streamed from many sore and grimly wounds. And as for those gay blossoms that had bedecked them, lo! they were all gone, and instead there hung about them the dread and terror of a deadly battle.

Then when Queen Guinevere beheld her knights how they stood bleeding from many wounds and panting for breath, her heart was filled with pity, and she cried out in a great shrill voice: "Sir Mellegrans, have pity! Slay not my noble knights! but spare them and I will go with thee as thou wouldst have me do. Only this covenant I make with thee: suffer these lords and ladies of my court and all of those attendant upon us, to go with me into captivity."

Then Sir Mellegrans said: "Well, lady, it shall be as you wish, for these men of yours fight not like men but like devils, wherefore I am glad to end this battle for the sake of all. So bid your knights put away their swords, and I will do likewise with my men, and so there shall be peace between us."

The Queen putteth an end to the battle.

Then, in obedience to the request of Sir Mellegrans, the Lady Guinevere gave command that those three knights should put away their swords, and though they all three besought her that she should suffer them to fight still a little longer for her, she would not; so they were obliged to sheath their swords as she ordered. After that these three knights went to their fallen companions, and found that they were all alive, though sorely hurt. And they searched their wounds as they lay upon the ground, and they dressed them in such ways as might be. After that they helped lift the wounded knights up to their horses, supporting them there in such wise that they should not fall because of faintness from their wounds. So they all departed, a doleful company, from that place, which was now no longer a meadow of pleasure, but a field of bloody battle and of death.

Thus beginneth this history.

And now you shall hear that part of this story which is called in many books of chivalry, "The Story of the Knight of the Cart."

For the further history hath now to do with Sir Launcelot of the Lake, and of how he came to achieve the rescue of Queen Guinevere, brought thither in a cart.

PART I

The Chevalier of the Cart

Here followeth the story of Sir Launcelot of the Lake, how he went forth to rescue Queen Guinevere from that peril in which she lay at the castle of Sir Mellegrans. Likewise it is told how he met with a very untoward adventure, so that he was obliged to ride to his undertaking in a cart as aforesaid.

Chapter First

How Denneys Found Sir Launcelot, and How Sir Launcelot Rode Forth for to Rescue Queen Guinevere from the Castle of Sir Mellegrans, and of What Befell him upon the Assaying of that Adventure.

Now after that sad and sorrowful company of the Queen had thus been led away captive by Sir Mellegrans as aforetold of, they rode forward upon their way for all that day. And they continued to ride after the night had fallen, and at that time they were passing through a deep dark forest. From this forest, about midnight, they came out into an open stony place whence before them they beheld where was built high up upon a steep hill a grim and forbidding castle, standing very dark against the star-lit sky. And behind the castle there was a town with a number of lights and a bell was tolling for midnight in the town. And this town and castle were the town and the castle of Sir Mellegrans.

How Denneys escaped.

Now the Queen had riding near to her throughout that doleful journey a young page named Denneys, and as they had ridden upon their way, she had taken occasion at one place to whisper to him: "Denneys, if thou canst find a chance of escape, do so, and take news of our plight to some one who may rescue us." So it befel that just as they came out thus into that stony place, and in the confusion that arose when they reached the steep road that led up to the castle, Denneys drew rein a little to one side. Then, seeing that he was unobserved, he suddenly set spurs to his horse and rode away with might and main down the stony path and into the forest whence they had all come, and so was gone before anybody had gathered thought to stay him.

Then Sir Mellegrans was very angry, and he rode up to the Queen and he said: "Lady, thou hast sought to betray me! But it matters not, for thy page shall not escape from these parts with his life, for I shall send a party after him with command to slay him with arrows."

So Sir Mellegrans did as he said; he sent several parties of armed men to hunt the forest for the page Denneys; but Denneys escaped them all and got safe away into the cover of the night.

And after that he wandered through the dark and gloomy woodland, not knowing whither he went, for there was no ray of light. Moreover, the gloom was full of strange terrors, for on every side of him he heard the movement of night creatures stirring in the darkness, and he wist not whether they were great or little or whether they were of a sort to harm him or not to harm him.

How Denneys rideth through the forest.

Yet ever he went onward until, at last, the dawn of the day came shining very faint and dim through the tops of the trees. And then, by and by, and after a little, he began to see the things about him, very faint, as though they were ghosts growing out of the darkness. Then the small fowl awoke, and first one began to chirp and then another, until a multitude of the little feathered creatures fell to singing upon all sides so that the silence of the forest was filled full of their multitudinous chanting. And all the while the light grew stronger and stronger and more clear and sharp until, by and by, the great and splendid sun leaped up into the sky and shot his shafts of gold aslant through the trembling leaves of the trees; and so all the joyous world was awake once more to the fresh and dewy miracle of a new-born day.

So cometh the breaking of the day in the woodlands as I have told you, and all this Denneys saw, albeit he thought but little of what he beheld. For all he cared for at that time was to escape out of the thick mazes of the forest in which he knew himself to be entangled. Moreover, he was faint with weariness and hunger, and wist not where he might break his fast or where he could find a place to tarry and to repose himself for a little.

But God had care of little Denneys and found him food, for by and by he came to an open space in the forest, where there was a neatherd's hut, and that was a very pleasant place. For here a

brook as clear as crystal came brawling out of the forest and ran smoothly across an open lawn of bright green grass; and there was a hedgerow and several apple-trees, and both the hedge and the apple-trees were abloom with fragrant blossoms. And the thatched hut of the neatherd stood back under two great oak-trees at the edge of the forest, where the sunlight played in spots of gold all over the face of the dwelling.

How Denneys findeth food.

So the Queen's page beheld the hut and he rode forward with intent to beg for bread, and at his coming there appeared a comely woman of the forest at the door and asked him what he would have. To her Denneys told how he was lost in the forest and how he was anhungered. And whilst he talked there came a slim brown girl, also of the woodland, and very wild, and she stood behind the woman and listened to what he said. This woman and this girl pitied Denneys, and the woman gave command that the girl should give him a draught of fresh milk, and the maiden did so, bringing it to him in a great wooden bowl. Meanwhile, the woman herself fetched sweet brown bread spread with butter as yellow as gold, and Denneys took it and gave them both thanks beyond measure. So he ate and drank with great appetite, the whiles those two outland folk stood gazing at him, wondering at his fair young face and his yellow hair.

After that, Denneys journeyed on for the entire day, until the light began to wane once more. The sun set; the day faded into the silence of the gloaming and then the gloaming darkened, deeper and more deep, until Denneys was engulfed once more in the blackness of the night-time.

Then lo! God succored him again, for as the darkness fell, he heard the sound of a little bell ringing through the gathering night. Thitherward he turned his horse whence he heard the sound to come, and so in a little he perceived a light shining from afar, and when he had come nigh enough to that light he was aware that he had come to the chapel of a hermit of the forest and that the light that he beheld came from within the hermit's dwelling-place.

As Denneys drew nigh to the chapel and the hut a great horse neighed from a cabin close by, and therewith he was aware that some other wayfarer was there, and that he should have comradeship – and at that his heart was elated with gladness.

Denneys cometh to the chapel of the hermit.

So he rode up to the door of the hut and knocked, and in answer to his knocking there came one and opened to him, and that one was a most reverend hermit with a long beard as white as snow and a face very calm and gentle and covered all over with a great multitude of wrinkles.

(And this was the hermit of the forest several times spoken of aforetime in these histories.)

When the hermit beheld before him that young lad, all haggard and worn and faint and sick with weariness and travel and hunger, he took great pity and ran to him and caught him in his arms and lifted him down from his horse and bare him into the hermitage, and sat him down upon a bench that was there.

Denneys said: "Give me to eat and to drink, for I am faint to death." And the hermit said, "You shall have food upon the moment," and he went to fetch it.

Then Denneys gazed about him with heavy eyes, and was aware that there was another in the hut besides himself. And then he heard a voice speak his name with great wonderment, saying: "Denneys, is it then thou who hast come here at this time? What ails thee? Lo! I knew thee not when I first beheld thee enter."

Then Denneys lifted up his eyes, and he beheld that it was Sir Launcelot of the Lake who spoke to him thus in the hut of the hermit.

Denneys findeth Sir Launcelot.

At that, and seeing who it was who spake to him, Denneys leaped up and ran to Sir Launcelot and fell down upon his knees before him. And he embraced Sir Launcelot about the knees, weeping beyond measure because of the many troubles through which he had passed.

Sir Launcelot said: "Denneys, what is it ails thee? Where is the Queen, and how came you here at this place and at this hour? Why look you so distraught, and why are you so stained with blood?"

Then Denneys, still weeping, told Sir Launcelot all that had befallen, and how that the Lady Guinevere was prisoner in the castle of Sir Mellegrans somewhere in the midst of that forest.

Sir Launcelot rides forth to save the Queen.

But when Sir Launcelot heard what Denneys said, he arose very hastily and he cried out, "How is this! How is this!" and he cried out again very vehemently: "Help me to mine armor and let me go hence!" (for Sir Launcelot had laid aside his armor whilst he rested in the hut of the hermit).

At that moment the hermit came in, bringing food for Denneys to eat, and hearing what Sir Launcelot said, he would have persuaded him to abide there until the morrow and until he could see his way. But Sir Launcelot would listen to nothing that might stay him. So Denneys and the hermit helped him don his armor, and after that Sir Launcelot mounted his war-horse and rode away into the blackness of the night.

So Sir Launcelot rode as best he might through the darkness of the forest, and he rode all night, and shortly after the dawning of the day he heard the sound of rushing water.

So he followed a path that led to this water and by and by he came to an open space very stony and rough. And he saw that here was a great torrent of water that came roaring down from the hills very violent and turbid and covered all over with foam like to cream. And he beheld that there was a bridge of stone that spanned the torrent and that upon the farther side of the bridge was a considerable body of men-at-arms all in full armor. And he beheld that there were at least five-and-twenty of these men, and that chief among them was a man clad in green armor.

Then Sir Launcelot rode out upon the bridge and he called to those armed men: "Can you tell me whether this way leads to the castle of Sir Mellegrans?"

They say to him: "Who are you, Sir Knight?"

"I am one," quoth Sir Launcelot, "who seeks the castle of Sir Mellegrans. For that knight hath violently seized upon the person of the Lady Guinevere and of certain of her court, and he now holds her and them captive and in duress. I am one who hath come to rescue that lady and her court from their distress and anxiety."

Upon this the Green Knight, who was the chief of that party, came a little nearer to Sir Launcelot, and said: "Messire, are you Sir Launcelot of the Lake?" Sir Launcelot said: "Yea, I am he." "Then," said the Green Knight, "you can go no farther upon this pass, for you are to know that we are the people of Sir Mellegrans, and that we are here to stay you or any of your fellows from going forward upon this way."

Then Sir Launcelot laughed, and he said: "Messire, how will you stay me against my will?" The Green Knight said: "We will stay you by force of our numbers." "Well," quoth Sir Launcelot, "for the matter of that, I have made my way against greater odds than those I now see before me. So your peril will be of your own devising, if you seek to stay me."

How Sir Launcelot assailed his enemies.

Therewith he cast aside his spear and drew his sword, and set spurs to his horse and rode forward against them. And he rode straight in amongst them with great violence, lashing right and left with his sword, so that at every stroke a man fell down from out of his saddle. So fierce and direful were the blows that Sir Launcelot delivered that the terror of his rage fell upon them, wherefore, after a while, they fell away from before him, and left him standing alone in the centre of the way.

Sir Launcelot, his horse is slain.

Now there were a number of the archers of Sir Mellegrans lying hidden in the rocks at the sides of that pass. These, seeing how that battle was going and that Sir Launcelot had driven back their companions, straightway fitted arrows to their bows and began shooting at the horse of Sir Launcelot. Against these archers Sir Launcelot could in no wise defend his horse, wherefore the steed was presently sorely wounded and began plunging and snorting in pain so that Sir Launcelot could hardly hold him in check. And still the archers shot arrow after arrow until by and by the life began to go out of the horse. Then after a while the good steed fell down upon his knees and rolled over into the dust; for he was so sorely wounded that he could no longer stand.

But Sir Launcelot did not fall, but voided his saddle with great skill and address, so that he kept his feet, wherefore his enemies were not able to take him at such disadvantage as they would have over a fallen knight who lay upon the ground.

So Sir Launcelot stood there in the midst of the way at the end of the bridge, and he waved his sword this way and that way before him so that not one of those, his enemies, dared to come nigh to him. For the terror of him still lay upon them all and they dreaded those buffets he had given them in the battle they had just fought with him.

Wherefore they stood at a considerable distance regarding Sir Launcelot and not daring to come nigh to him; and they stood so for a long time. And although the Green Knight commanded them to fight, they would not fight any more against Sir Launcelot, so the Green Knight had to give orders for them to cease that battle and to depart from that place. This they did, leaving Sir Launcelot standing where he was.

Thus Sir Launcelot with his single arm won a battle against all that multitude of enemies as I have told.

But though Sir Launcelot had thus won that pass with great credit and honor to himself, fighting as a single man against so many, yet he was still in a very sorry plight. For there he stood, a full-armed man with such a great weight of armor upon him that he could hardly hope to walk a league, far less to reach the castle of Sir Mellegrans afoot. Nor knew he what to do in this extremity, for where could he hope to find a horse in that thick forest, where was hardly a man or a beast of any sort? Wherefore, although he had won his battle, he was yet in no ease or satisfaction of spirit.

Thus it was that Sir Launcelot went upon that adventure; and now you shall hear how it sped with him further, if so be you are pleased to read that which followeth.

Chapter Second

How Sir Launcelot rode in a cart to rescue Queen Guinevere and how he came in that way to the castle of Sir Mellegrans.

Now after Sir Launcelot was thus left by his enemies standing alone in the road as aforetold of, he knew not for a while what to do, nor how he should be able to get him away from that place.

As he stood there adoubt as to what to do in this sorry case, he by and by heard upon one side from out of the forest the sound of an axe at a distance away, and thereat he was very glad, for he wist that help was nigh. So he took up his shield on his shoulder and his spear in his hand and thereupon directed his steps toward where he heard that sound of the axe, in hopes that there he might find some one who could aid in his extremity. So after a while, he came forth into a little open glade of the forest where he beheld a fagotmaker chopping fagots. And he beheld the fagotmaker had there a cart and a horse for to fetch his fagots from the forest.

But when the fagotmaker saw an armed knight come thus like a shining vision out of the forest, walking afoot, bearing his shield upon his shoulder, and his spear in his hand, he knew not what to think of such a sight, but stood staring with his mouth agape for wonders.

Sir Launcelot said to him, "Good fellow, is that thy cart?" The fagotmaker said, "Yea, Messire." "I would," quoth Sir Launcelot, "have thee do me a service with that cart," and the fagotmaker asked, "What is the service that thou wouldst have of me, Messire?" Sir Launcelot said: "This is the service I would have: it is that you take me into yonder cart and hale me to somewhere I may get a horse for to ride; for mine own horse hath just now been slain in battle, and I know not how I may go forward upon the adventure I have undertaken unless I get me another horse."

Now you must know that in those days it was not thought worthy of any one of degree to ride in a cart in that wise as Sir Launcelot said, for they would take law-breakers to the gallows in just such carts as that one in which Sir Launcelot made demand to ride. Wherefore it was that that poor fagotmaker knew not what to think when he heard Sir Launcelot give command that he should be taken to ride in that cart. "Messire," quoth he, "this cart is no fit thing for one of your quality to ride in. Now I beseech you let me serve you in some other way than that."

But Sir Launcelot made reply as follows: "Sirrah, I would have thee know that there is no shame in riding in a cart for a worthy purpose, but there is great shame if one rides therein unworthily. And contrariwise, a man doth not gain credit merely for riding on horseback, for his credit appertains to his conduct, and not to what manner he rideth. So as my purpose is worthy, I shall, certes, be unworthy if I go not to fulfil that purpose, even if in so going I travel in thy poor cart. So do as I bid thee and make thy cart ready, and if thou wilt bring me in it to where I may get a fresh horse, I will give thee five pieces of gold money for thy service."

Now when the fagotmaker heard what Sir Launcelot said about the five pieces of gold money, he was very joyful, wherefore he ran to make ready his cart with all speed. And when the cart was made ready, Sir Launcelot entered into it with his shield and his spear.

Sir Launcelot rideth in a cart.

So it was that Sir Launcelot of the Lake came to ride errant in a cart, wherefore, for a long time after, he was called the Chevalier of the Cart. And many ballads and songs were made concerning that matter, which same were sung in several courts of chivalry by minstrels and jongleurs, and these same stories and ballads have come down from afar to us of this very day.

Meantime Sir Launcelot rode forward at a slow pass and in that way for a great distance. So, at last, still riding in the cart, they came of a sudden out of the forest and into a little fertile valley in the midst of which lay a small town and a fair castle with seven towers that overlooked the town. And this was a very fair pretty valley, for on all sides of the town and of the castle were fields of growing

corn, all green and lush, and there were many hedgerows and orchards of fruit-trees all abloom with fragrant blossoms. And the sound of cocks crowing came to Sir Launcelot upon a soft breeze that blew up the valley, and on the same breeze came the fragrance of apple blossoms, wherefore it seemed to Sir Launcelot that this valley was like a fair jewel of heaven set in the rough perlieus of the forest that lay round about.

So the fagotmaker drove Sir Launcelot in the cart down into that valley toward the castle, and as they drew near thereunto Sir Launcelot was aware of a party of lords and ladies who were disporting themselves in a smooth meadow of green grass that lay spread out beneath the castle walls. And some of these lords and ladies tossed a ball from one to another, and others lay in the grass in the shade of a lime-tree and watched those that played at ball. Then Sir Launcelot was glad to see those gentle folk, for he thought that here he might get him a fresh horse to take him upon his way. So he gave command to the fagotmaker to drive to where those people were.

But as Sir Launcelot, riding in the fagotmaker's cart, drew near to those castle-folk, they ceased their play and stood and looked at him with great astonishment, for they had never beheld an armed knight riding in a cart in that wise. Then, in a little, they all fell to laughing beyond measure, and at that Sir Launcelot was greatly abashed with shame.

Then the lord of that castle came forward to meet Sir Launcelot. He was a man of great dignity of demeanor – gray-haired, and clad in velvet trimmed with fur. When he came nigh to where Sir Launcelot was, he said, speaking as with great indignation: "Sir knight, why do you ride in this wise in a cart, like to a law-breaker going to the gallows?"

"Sir," quoth Sir Launcelot, "I ride thus because my horse was slain by treachery. For I have an adventure which I have undertaken to perform, and I have no other way to go forward upon that quest than this."

The lord of a castle chideth Sir Launcelot.

Then all those who heard what Sir Launcelot said laughed again with great mirth. Only the old lord of the castle did not laugh, but said, still speaking as with indignation: "Sir Knight, it is altogether unworthy of one of your degree to ride thus in a cart to be made a mock of. Wherefore come down, and if you prove yourself worthy I myself will purvey you a horse."

But by this time Sir Launcelot had become greatly affronted at the laughter of those who jeered at him, and he was furthermore affronted that the lord of the castle should deem him to be unworthy because he came thither in a cart; wherefore he said: "Sir, without boasting, methinks I may say that I am altogether as worthy as any one hereabouts. Nor do I think that any one of you all has done more worthily in his degree than I have done in my degree. As for any lack of worship that may befall me for riding thus, I may say that the adventure which I have undertaken just now to perform is in itself so worthy that it will make worthy any man who may undertake it, no matter how he may ride to that adventure. Now I had thought to ask of you a fresh horse, but since your people mock at me and since you rebuke me so discourteously, I will ask you for nothing. Wherefore, to show you that knightly worthiness does not depend upon the way a knight may ride, I herewith make my vow that I will not mount upon horseback until my quest is achieved; nor will I ride to that adventure in any other way than in this poor cart wherein I now stand."

So Sir Launcelot rode away in his cart from those castle-folk. And he rode thus down into the valley and through the town that was in the valley in the fagotmaker's cart, and all who beheld him laughed at him and mocked him. For, as he passed along the way, many came and looked down upon him from out of the windows of the houses; and others ran along beside the cart and all laughed and jeered at him to see him thus riding in a cart as though to a hanging. But all this Sir Launcelot bore with great calmness of demeanor, both because of his pride and because of the vow that he had made. Wherefore he continued to ride in that cart although he might easily have got him a fresh horse from the lord of the castle.

Now turn we to the castle of Sir Mellegrans, where Queen Guinevere and her court were held prisoners.

First of all you are to know that that part of the castle wherein she and her court were held overlooked the road which led up to the gate of the castle. Wherefore it came about that one of the damsels of the Queen, looking out of the window of the chamber wherein the Queen was held prisoner, beheld a knight armed at all points, coming riding thitherward in a cart. Beholding this sight, she fell to laughing, whereat the Queen said, "What is it you laugh at?" That damsel cried out: "Lady, Lady, look, see! What a strange sight! Yonder is a knight riding in a cart as though he were upon his way to a hanging!"

The Queen beholds Sir Launcelot riding in a cart.

Then Queen Guinevere came to the window and looked out, and several came and looked out also. At first none of them wist who it was that rode in that cart. But when the cart had come a little nearer to where they were, the Queen knew who he was, for she beheld the device upon the shield, even from afar, and she knew that the knight was Sir Launcelot. Then the Queen turned to the damsel and said to her: "You laugh without knowing what it is you laugh at. Yonder gentleman is no subject for a jest, for he is without any doubt the worthiest knight of any who ever wore golden spurs."

Sir Percydes is offended with Sir Launcelot.

Now amongst those who stood there looking out of the window were Sir Percydes and Sir Brandiles and Sir Ironside, and in a little Sir Percydes also saw the device of Sir Launcelot and therewith knew who it was who rode in the cart. But when Sir Percydes knew that that knight was Sir Launcelot, he was greatly offended that he, who was the chiefest knight of the Round Table, should ride in a cart in that wise. So Sir Percydes said to the Queen: "Lady, I believe yonder knight is none other than Sir Launcelot of the Lake." And Queen Guinevere said, "It is assuredly he." Sir Percydes said: "Then I take it to be a great shame that the chiefest knight of the Round Table should ride so in a cart as though he were a felon law-breaker. For the world will assuredly hear of this and it will be made a jest in every court of chivalry. And all we who are his companions in arms and who are his brethren of the Round Table will be made a jest and a laughing-stock along with him."

Thus spake Sir Percydes, and the other knights who were there and all the ladies who were there agreed with him that it was great shame for Sir Launcelot to come thus to save the Queen, riding in a cart.

But the Queen said: "Messires and ladies, I take no care for the manner in which Sir Launcelot cometh, for I believe he cometh for to rescue us from this captivity, and if so be he is successful in that undertaking, then it will not matter how he cometh to perform so worthy a deed of knighthood as that."

Thus all they were put to silence by the Queen's words; but nevertheless and afterward those knights who were there still held amongst themselves that it was great shame for Sir Launcelot to come thus in a cart to rescue the Queen, instead of first getting for himself a horse whereon to ride as became a knight-errant of worthiness and respect.

Now you are to know that the Green Knight, who was the head of that party that tried to stand against Sir Launcelot at the bridge as aforesaid, when he beheld that the horse of Sir Launcelot was shot, rode away from the place of battle with his men, and that he never stopped nor stayed until he had reached the castle of Sir Mellegrans. There coming, he went straightway to where Sir Mellegrans was and told Sir Mellegrans all that had befallen, and how that Sir Launcelot had overcome them all with his single hand at the bridge of the torrent. And he told Sir Mellegrans that haply Sir Launcelot would be coming to that place before a very great while had passed, although he had been delayed because his horse had been slain.

Sir Mellegrans feareth Sir Launcelot.

At that Sir Mellegrans was put to great anxiety, for he also knew that Sir Launcelot would be likely to be at that place before a very great while, and he wist that there would be great trouble for him when that should come to pass. So he began to cast about very busily in his mind for some scheme whereby he might destroy Sir Launcelot. And at last he hit upon a scheme; and that scheme was unworthy of him both as a knight and as a gentleman.

So when news was brought to Sir Mellegrans that Sir Launcelot was there in front of the castle in a cart, Sir Mellegrans went down to the barbican of the castle and looked out of a window of the barbican and beheld Sir Launcelot where he stood in the cart before the gate of the castle. And Sir Mellegrans said, "Sir Launcelot, is it thou who art there in the cart?"

Sir Launcelot replied: "Yea, thou traitor knight, it is I, and I come to tell thee thou shalt not escape my vengeance either now or at some other time unless thou set free the Queen and all her court and make due reparation to her and to them and to me for all the harm you have wrought upon us."

Sir Mellegrans speaketh to Sir Launcelot.

To this Sir Mellegrans spake in a very soft and humble tone of voice, saying: "Messire, I have taken much thought, and I now much repent me of all that I have done. For though my provocation hath been great, yet I have done extremely ill in all this that hath happened, so I am of a mind to make reparation for what I have done. Yet I know not how to make such reparation without bringing ruin upon myself. If thou wilt intercede with me before the Queen in this matter, I will let thee into this castle and I myself will take thee to her where she is. And after I have been forgiven what I have done, then ye shall all go free, and I will undertake to deliver myself unto the mercy of King Arthur and will render all duty unto him."

At this repentance of Sir Mellegrans Sir Launcelot was very greatly astonished. But yet he was much adoubt as to the true faith of that knight; wherefore he said: "Sir Knight, how may I know that that which thou art telling me is the truth?"

"Well," said Sir Mellegrans, "it is small wonder, I dare say, that thou hast doubt of my word. But I will prove my faith to thee in this: I will come to thee unarmed as I am at this present, and I will admit thee into my castle, and I will lead thee to the Queen. And as thou art armed and I am unarmed, thou mayest easily slay me if so be thou seest that I make any sign of betraying thee."

But still Sir Launcelot was greatly adoubt, and wist not what to think of that which Sir Mellegrans said. But after a while, and after he had considered the matter for a space, he said: "If all this that thou tellest me is true, Sir Knight, then come down and let me into this castle as thou hast promised to do, for I will venture that much upon thy faith. But if I see that thou hast a mind to deal falsely by me, then I will indeed slay thee as thou hast given me leave to do." And Sir Mellegrans said, "I am content."

Sir Mellegrans kneels to Sir Launcelot.

So Sir Mellegrans went down from where he was and he gave command that the gates of the castle should be opened. And when the gates were opened he went forth to where Sir Launcelot was. And Sir Launcelot descended from the fagotmaker's cart, and Sir Mellegrans kneeled down before him, and he set his palms together and he said, "Sir Launcelot, I crave thy pardon for what I have done."

Sir Launcelot said: "Sir Knight, if indeed thou meanest no further treachery, thou hast my pardon and I will also intercede with the Queen to pardon thee as well. So take me straightway to her, for until I behold her with mine own eyes I cannot believe altogether in thy repentance." Then Sir Mellegrans arose and said, "Come, and I will take thee to her."

So Sir Mellegrans led the way into the castle and Sir Launcelot followed after him with his naked sword in his hand. And Sir Mellegrans led the way deep into the castle and along several passageways and still Sir Launcelot followed after him with his drawn sword, ready for to slay him if he should show sign of treason.

Sir Launcelot falleth into the pit.

Now there was in a certain part of that castle and in the midst of a long passageway a trap-door that opened through the floor of the passageway and so into a deep and gloomy pit beneath. And this trap-door was controlled by a cunning latch of which Sir Mellegrans alone knew the secret; for when Sir Mellegrans would touch the latch with his finger, the trap-door would immediately fall open into the pit beneath. So thitherward to that place Sir Mellegrans led the way and Sir Launcelot followed. And Sir Mellegrans passed over that trap-door in safety, but when Sir Launcelot had stepped upon the trap-door, Sir Mellegrans touched the spring that controlled the latch with his finger, and the trap-door immediately opened beneath Sir Launcelot and Sir Launcelot fell down into the pit beneath. And the pit was very deep indeed and the floor thereof was of stone, so that when Sir Launcelot fell he smote the stone floor so violently that he was altogether bereft of his senses and lay there in the pit like to one who was dead.

Then Sir Mellegrans came back to the open space of the trap-door and he looked down into the pit beneath and beheld Sir Launcelot where he lay. Thereupon Sir Mellegrans laughed and he cried out, "Sir Launcelot, what cheer have you now?" But Sir Launcelot answered not.

Then Sir Mellegrans laughed again, and he closed the trap-door and went away, and he said to himself: "Now indeed have I such hostages in my keeping that King Arthur must needs set right this wrong he hath aforetime done me. For I now have in my keeping not only his Queen, but also the foremost knight of his Round Table; wherefore King Arthur must needs come to me to make such terms with me as I shall determine."

As for Queen Guinevere, she waited with her court for a long time for news of Sir Launcelot, for she wist that now Sir Launcelot was there at that place she must needs have news of him sooner or later. But no news came to her; wherefore, as time passed by, she took great trouble because she had no news, and she said: "Alas, if ill should have befallen that good worthy knight at the hands of the treacherous lord of this castle!"

But she knew not how great at that very time was the ill into which Sir Launcelot had fallen, nor of how he was even then lying like as one dead in the pit beneath the floor of the passageway.

Chapter Third

How Sir Launcelot was rescued from the pit and how he overcame Sir Mellegrans and set free the Queen and her court from the duress they were in.

Now when Sir Launcelot awoke from that swoon into which he was cast by falling so violently into the pit, he found himself to be in a very sad, miserable case. For he lay there upon the hard stones of the floor and all about him there was a darkness so great that there was not a single ray of light that penetrated into it.

Sir Launcelot lyeth in the pit.

So for a while Sir Launcelot knew not where he was; but by and by he remembered that he was in the castle of Sir Mellegrans, and he remembered all that had befallen him, and therewith, when he knew himself to be a prisoner in so miserable a condition, he groaned with dolor and distress, for he was at that time in great pain both of mind and body. Then he cried out in a very mournful voice: "Woe is me that I should have placed any faith in a traitor such as this knight hath from the very beginning shown himself to be! For here am I now cast into this dismal prison, and know not how I shall escape from it to bring succor to those who so greatly need my aid at this moment."

So Sir Launcelot bemoaned and lamented himself, but no one heard him, for he was there all alone in that miserable dungeon and in a darkness into which no ray of light could penetrate.

Then Sir Launcelot bent his mind to think of how he might escape from that place, but though he thought much, yet he could not devise any way in which he might mend the evil case in which he found himself; wherefore he was altogether overwhelmed with despair. And by that time it had grown to be about the dead of the night.

Now as Sir Launcelot lay there in such despair of spirit as aforetold of, he was suddenly aware that there came a gleam of light shining in a certain place, and he was aware the light grew ever brighter and brighter and he beheld that it came through the cracks of a door. And by and by he heard the sound of keys from without and immediately afterward the door opened and there entered into that place a damsel bearing a lighted lamp in her hand.

The Lady Elouise findeth Sir Launcelot.

At first Sir Launcelot knew not who she was, and then he knew her and lo! that damsel was the Lady Elouise the Fair, the daughter of King Bagdemagus and sister unto Sir Mellegrans; and she was the same who had aforetime rescued him when he had been prisoner to Queen Morgana le Fay, as hath been told you in a former book of this history.

So Elouise the Fair came into that dismal place, bringing with her the lighted lamp, and Sir Launcelot beheld that her eyes were red with weeping. Then Sir Launcelot, beholding that she had been thus weeping, said: "Lady, what is it that ails you? Is there aught that I can do for to comfort you?" To this she said naught, but came to where Sir Launcelot was and looked at him for a long while. By and by she said: "Woe is me to find thee thus, Sir Launcelot! And woe is me that it should have been mine own brother that should have brought thee to this pass!"

Sir Launcelot was much moved to see her so mournful and he said: "Lady, take comfort to thyself, for whatever evil thing Sir Mellegrans may have done to me, naught of reproach or blame can fall thereby upon thee, for I shall never cease to remember how thou didst one time save me from a very grievous captivity."

The Lady Elouise said: "Launcelot, I cannot bear to see so noble a knight as thou art lying thus in duress. So it is that I come hither to aid thee. Now if I set thee free wilt thou upon thy part show mercy unto my brother for my sake?"

"Lady," said Sir Launcelot, "this is a hard case thou puttest to me, for I would do much for thy sake. But I would have thee wist that it is my endeavor to help in my small way to punish evil-

doers so that the world may be made better by that punishment. Wherefore because this knight hath dealt so treacherously with my lady the Queen, so it must needs be that I must seek to punish him if ever I can escape from this place. But if it so befalls that I do escape, this much mercy will I show to Sir Mellegrans for thy sake: I will meet him in fair field, as one knight may meet another knight in that wise. And I will show him such courtesy as one knight may show another in time of battle. Such mercy will I show thy brother and meseems that is all that may rightly be asked of me."

Then Elouise the Fair began weeping afresh, and she said: "Alas, Launcelot! I fear me that my brother will perish at thy hands if so be that it cometh to a battle betwixt you twain. And how could I bear it to have my brother perish in that way and at thy hands?"

"Lady," said Sir Launcelot, "the fate of battle lyeth ever in God His hands and not in the hands of men. It may befall any man to die who doeth battle, and such a fate may be mine as well as thy brother's. So do thou take courage, for whilst I may not pledge myself to avoid an ordeal of battle with Sir Mellegrans, yet it may be his good hap that he may live and that I may die."

"Alas, Launcelot," quoth the Fair Elouise, "and dost thou think that it would be any comfort to me to have thee die at the hands of mine own brother? That is but poor comfort to me who am the sister of this miserable man. Yet let it be as it may hap, I cannot find it in my heart to let thee lie here in this place, for thou wilt assuredly die in this dark and miserable dungeon if I do not aid thee. So once more will I set thee free as I did aforetime when thou wast captive to Queen Morgana le Fay, and I will do my duty by thee as the daughter of a king and the daughter of a true knight may do. As to that which shall afterward befall, that will I trust to the mercy of God to see that it shall all happen as He shall deem best."

The Lady Elouise bringeth Sir Launcelot out of a pit.

So saying, the damsel Elouise the Fair bade Sir Launcelot to arise and to follow her, and he did so. And she led him out from that place and up a long flight of steps and so to a fair large chamber that was high up in a tower of the castle and under the eaves of the roof. And Sir Launcelot beheld that everything was here prepared for his coming; for there was a table at that place set with bread and meat and with several flagons of wine for his refreshment. And there was in that place a silver ewer full of cold, clear water, and that there was a basin of silver, and that there were several napkins of fine linen such as are prepared for knights to dry their hands upon. All these had been prepared for him against his coming, and at that sight he was greatly uplifted with satisfaction.

So Sir Launcelot bathed his face and his hands in the water and he dried them upon the napkins. And he sat him down at the table and he ate and drank with great appetite and the Lady Elouise the Fair served him. And so Sir Launcelot was greatly comforted in body and in spirit by that refreshment which she had prepared for him.

Then after Sir Launcelot had thus satisfied the needs of his hunger, the Lady Elouise led him to another room and there showed him where was a soft couch spread with flame-colored linen and she said, "Here shalt thou rest at ease to-night, and in the morning I shall bring thy sword and thy shield to thee." Therewith she left Sir Launcelot to his repose and he laid him down upon the couch and slept with great content.

So he slept very soundly all that night and until the next morning, what time, the Lady Elouise came to him as she promised and fetched unto him his sword and his shield. These she gave unto him, saying: "Sir Knight, I know not whether I be doing evil or good in the sight of Heaven in thus purveying thee with thy weapons; ne'theless, I cannot find it in my heart to leave thee unprotected in this place without the wherewithal for to defend thyself against thine enemies; for that would be indeed to compass thy death for certain."

Sir Launcelot hath his weapons again.

Then Sir Launcelot was altogether filled with joy to have his weapons again, and he gave thanks to the Lady Elouise without measure. And after that he hung his sword at his side and set his shield

upon his shoulder and thereupon felt fear of no man in all of that world, whomsoever that one might be.

After that, and after he had broken his fast, Sir Launcelot went forth from out of the chamber where he had abided that night, and he went down into the castle and into the courtyard of the castle, and every one was greatly astonished at his coming, for they deemed him to be still a prisoner in that dungeon into which he had fallen.

Sir Launcelot challenges the castle.

So all these, when they beheld him coming, full armed and with his sword in his hand, fled away from before the face of Sir Launcelot, and no one undertook to stay him in his going. So Sir Launcelot reached the courtyard of the castle, and when he was come there he set his horn to his lips, and blew a blast that sounded terribly loud and shrill throughout the entire place.

Meantime, there was great hurrying hither and thither in the castle and a loud outcry of many voices, and many came to the windows and looked down into the courtyard and there beheld Sir Launcelot standing clad in full armor, glistening very bright in the morning light of the sun.

Meantime several messengers had run to where Sir Mellegrans was and told him that Sir Launcelot had escaped out of that pit wherein he had fallen and that he was there in the courtyard of the castle in full armor.

At that Sir Mellegrans was overwhelmed with amazement, and a great fear seized upon him and gripped at his vitals. And after a while he too went by, to a certain place whence he could look down into the courtyard, and there he also beheld Sir Launcelot where he stood shining in the sunlight.

Now at that moment Sir Launcelot lifted up his eyes and espied Sir Mellegrans where he was at the window of that place, and immediately he knew Sir Mellegrans. Thereupon he cried out in a loud voice: "Sir Mellegrans, thou traitor knight! Come down and do battle, for here I await thee to come and meet me."

But when Sir Mellegrans heard those words he withdrew very hastily from the window where he was, and he went away in great terror to a certain room where he might be alone. For beholding Sir Launcelot thus free of that dungeon from which he had escaped he knew not what to do to flee from his wrath. Wherefore he said to himself: "Fool that I was, to bring this knight into my castle, when I might have kept him outside as long as I chose to do so! What now shall I do to escape from his vengeance?"

Sir Mellegrans taketh counsel.

So after a while Sir Mellegrans sent for several of his knights and he took counsel of them as to what he should do in this pass. These say to him: "Messire, you yourself to fulfil your schemes have brought yonder knight into this place, when God knows he could not have come in of his own free will. So now that he is here, it behooves you to go and arm yourself at all points and to go down to the courtyard, there to meet him and to do battle with him. For only by overcoming him can you hope to escape his vengeance."

But Sir Mellegrans feared Sir Launcelot with all his heart, wherefore he said: "Nay, I will not go down to yonder knight. For wit ye he is the greatest knight alive, and if I go to do battle with him, it will be of a surety that I go to my death. Wherefore, I will not go."

Then Sir Mellegrans called a messenger to him and he said: "Go down to yonder knight in the courtyard and tell him that I will not do battle with him."

So the messenger went to Sir Launcelot and delivered that message to him. But when Sir Launcelot heard what it was that the messenger said to him from Sir Mellegrans, he laughed with great scorn. Then he said to the messenger, "Doth the knight of this castle fear to meet me?" The messenger said, "Yea, Messire." Sir Launcelot said: "Then take thou this message to him: that I will lay aside my shield and my helm and that I will unarm all the left side of my body, and thus, half naked, will I fight him if only he will come down and do battle with me."

So saying, the messenger departed as Sir Launcelot bade, and came to Sir Mellegrans and delivered that message to him as Sir Launcelot had said.

Sir Launcelot offers to fight Sir Mellegrans in half-armor.

Then Sir Mellegrans said to those who were with him: "Now I will go down and do battle with this knight, for never will I have a better chance of overcoming him than this." Therewith he turned to that messenger, and he said: "Go! Hasten back to yonder knight, and tell him that I will do battle with him upon those conditions he offers, to wit: that he shall unarm his left side, and that he shall lay aside his shield and his helm. And tell him that by the time he hath made him ready in that wise, I will be down to give him what satisfaction I am able."

So the messenger departed upon that command, and Sir Mellegrans departed to arm himself for battle.

Then, after the messenger had delivered the message that Sir Mellegrans had given him, Sir Launcelot laid aside his shield and his helm as he had agreed to do, and he removed his armor from his left side so that he was altogether unarmed upon that side.

After a while Sir Mellegrans appeared, clad all in armor from top to toe, and baring himself with great confidence, for he felt well assured of victory in that encounter. Thus he came very proudly nigh to where Sir Launcelot was, and he said: "Here am I, Sir Knight, come to do you service since you will have it so."

Sir Launcelot said: "I am ready to meet thee thus or in any other way, so that I may come at thee at all."

After that each knight dressed himself for combat, and all those who were in the castle gathered at the windows and the galleries above, and looked down upon the two knights.

Then they two came slowly together, and when they were pretty nigh to one another Sir Launcelot offered his left side so as to allow Sir Mellegrans to strike at him. And when Sir Mellegrans perceived this chance, he straightway lashed a great blow at Sir Launcelot's unarmed side with all his might and main, and with full intent to put an end to the battle with that one blow.

But Sir Launcelot was well prepared for that stroke, wherefore he very dexterously and quickly turned himself to one side so that he received the blow upon the side which was armed, and at the same time he put aside a part of the blow with his sword. So that blow came to naught.

Sir Launcelot slayeth Sir Mellegrans.

But so violent was the stroke that Sir Mellegrans had lashed that he overreached himself, and ere he could recover himself, Sir Launcelot lashed at him a great buffet that struck him fairly upon the helm. And then again he lashed at him ere he fell and both this stroke of the sword and the other cut deep through the helm and into the brain pan of Sir Mellegrans, so that he fell down upon the ground and lay there without motion of any sort. Then Sir Launcelot stood over him, and called to those who were near to come and look to their lord, and thereat there came several running. These lifted Sir Mellegrans up and removed his helmet so as to give him air to breathe. And they looked upon his face, and lo! even then the spirit was passing from him, for he never opened his eyes to look upon the splendor of the sun again.

Then when those of the castle saw how it was with Sir Mellegrans and that even then he was dead, they lifted up their voices with great lamentation so that the entire castle rang presently with their outcries and wailings.

But Sir Launcelot cried out: "This knight hath brought this upon himself because of the treason he hath done; wherefore the blame is his own." And then he said: "Where is the porter of this castle? Go, fetch him hither!"

So in a little while the porter came, and Sir Launcelot made demand of him: "Where is it that the Queen and her court are held prisoners? Bring me to them, Sirrah?"

Then the porter of the castle bowed down before Sir Launcelot and he said, "Messire, I will do whatever you command me to do," for he was overwhelmed with the terror of Sir Launcelot's wrath as he had displayed it that day. And the porter said, "Messire, have mercy on us all and I will take you to the Queen."

Sir Launcelot rescueth the Queen.

So the porter brought Sir Launcelot to where the Queen was, and where were those others with her. Then all these gave great joy and loud acclaim that Sir Launcelot had rescued them out of their captivity. And Queen Guinevere said: "What said I to you awhile since? Did I not say that it mattered not how Sir Launcelot came hither even if it were in a cart? For lo! though he came thus humbly and in lowly wise, yet he hath done marvellous deeds of knightly prowess, and hath liberated us all from our captivity."

After that Sir Launcelot commanded them that they should make ready such horses as might be needed. And he commanded that they should fetch litters for those knights of the Queen's court who had been wounded, and all that was done as he commanded. After that they all departed from that place and turned their way toward Camelot and the court of the King.

But Sir Launcelot did not again see that damsel Elouise the Fair, for she kept herself close shut in her own bower and would see naught of any one because of the grief and the shame of all that had passed. At that Sir Launcelot took much sorrow, for he was greatly grieved that he should have brought any trouble upon one who had been so friendly with him as she had been. Yet he wist not how he could otherwise have done than as he did do, and he could think of naught to comfort her.

So ends this adventure of the Knight of the Cart with only this to say: that after that time there was much offence taken that Sir Launcelot had gone upon that adventure riding in a cart. For many jests were made of it as I have said, and many of the King's court were greatly grieved that so unworthy a thing should have happened.

His kinsmen chide Sir Launcelot.

More especially were the kinsmen of Sir Launcelot offended at what he had done. Wherefore Sir Lionel and Sir Ector came to Sir Launcelot and Sir Ector said to him: "That was a very ill thing you did to ride to that adventure in a cart. Now prythee tell us why you did such a thing as that when you might easily have got a fresh horse for to ride upon if you had chosen to do so."

To this Sir Launcelot made reply with much heat: "I know not why you should take it upon you to meddle in this affair. For that which I did, I did of mine own free will, and it matters not to any other man. Moreover, I deem that it matters not how I went upon that quest so that I achieved my purpose in a knightly fashion. For I have yet to hear any one say that I behaved in any way such as a true knight should not behave."

"For the matter of that," said Sir Ector, "thy knighthood is sufficiently attested, not only in this, but in many other affairs. But that which shames us who are of thy blood, and they who are thy companions at arms, is that thou shouldst have achieved thy quest in so unknightly a fashion instead of with that dignity befitting a very worthy undertaking. For dost thou not know that thou art now called everywhere 'The Chevalier of the Cart' and that songs are made of this adventure and that jests are made concerning it?"

Sir Launcelot covereth his shield.

Then Sir Launcelot was filled with great anger, and he went to his inn and took his shield and laced a sheet of leather over the face thereof. Thereafter he painted the leather covering of the shield a pure white so that it might not be known what was the device thereon, nor who was the knight who bare that shield. Then after he had done this he armed himself and took horse and rode forth errant and alone, betaking his way he knew not whither but suffering his horse to wander upon whatsoever path it choose.

Thus Sir Launcelot departed in anger from the court of King Arthur, and after that, excepting one time, he was not seen in the court of the King again for the space of two years, during which time there was much sorrow at the court, because he was no longer there.

PART II

The Story of Sir Gareth of Orkney

And now followeth the history of Sir Gareth of Orkney, who came unknown to the court of his uncle, King Arthur; who was there treated with great indignity by Sir Kay the Seneschal; who was befriended by his brother, Sir Gawaine, and who afterward went errant with a damsel hight Lynette, meeting whilst with her several bel-adventures which shall hereinafter be duly told of.

So if you would know how it fared with that young knight, you must cease to consider the further adventures of Sir Launcelot at this place, and must now read of those other adventures of this youth, who was the youngest son of King Lot and Queen Margaise of Orkney. But after they are ended, then shall the further history of the adventures of Sir Launcelot be considered once more.

Chapter First

How Sir Gareth of Orkney came to the Castle of Kynkennedon where King Arthur was holding court, and how it fared with him at that place.

Of Gareth of Orkney.

The youngest son of King Lot of Orkney and of his Queen, who was the Lady Margaise, sister of King Arthur, was a youth hight Gareth of Orkney. This young, noble, high-born prince was the most beautiful of all his royal race, for not only was he exceedingly tall and stalwart of frame – standing a full head bigger than the biggest of any at his father's court – and not only was he the strongest and the most agile and the most skilful at all knightly sports, and not only was he gentle in speech and exceedingly courteous in demeanor to all with whom he held discourse, but he was so beautiful of countenance that I do not believe that an angel of Paradise could be more fair to look upon than he. For his hair was bright and ruddy, shining like to pure gold, his cheeks were red and they and his chin were covered over with a soft and budding bloom of beard like to a dust of gold upon his face; his eyes were blue and shining and his neck and throat were round and white like to a pillar of alabaster.

How they of the court praise Gareth.

Now King Lot and Queen Margaise loved Gareth above any of their other children, and so it befell that all those who dwelt at the King's court took every occasion to praise young Gareth, both to his face and before the faces of the King and Queen, his father and mother. For these would sometimes say: "Lo! this youth sendeth forth such a glory of royal beauty and grace and dignity from him that even were he clad in fustian instead of cloth of gold yet would all the world know him to be of royal strain as plainly as though he were clothed in royal attire fitting for such a princely youth to wear. For, behold! the splendor of his royalty lieth in his spirit and not in his raiment, and so it is that it shineth forth from his countenance."

Queen Margaise bespeaketh Gareth.

Now it came to pass that when Gareth was twenty years of age, his mother, Queen Margaise, called him to her in her bower where she was with her maidens, and she bade him to sit down beside her and he did as she commanded, taking his place upon a couch spread with purple cloth embroidered with silver lions whereon the Queen was sitting at that time. Then Queen Margaise gazed long upon her beautiful son, and her heart yearned over him with pride and glory because of his strength and grace. And by and by she said: "My son, now that thou hast reached to the fulness of thy stature and girth and art come to the threshold of thy manhood, it is time for thee to win for thyself the glory of knighthood such as shall become thee, earning it by such deeds as shall be worthy of the royal race from which thou hast sprung. Accordingly, I would now have it that thou shouldst go to the court of my brother, King Arthur, and that thou shouldst there take thy stand with that noble and worthy companionship of the Champions of the Round Table, of whom thy brothers shine forth like bright planets in the midst of a galaxy of stars. So I would have it that thou shouldst go to the court of the great King, my brother, a week from to-day, and to that end I would have it that thou shouldst go in charge of three of the noblest lords of this court and in such a state of pomp and circumstance as may befit one who is, as thou art, the son of a royal father and mother and the nephew of that great King who is the overlord of this entire realm."

Gareth departeth for the court of King Arthur.

Thus spake Queen Margaise, and in accordance with that saying Gareth set forth a sennight from that time for the court of King Arthur. With him there rode three very noble haughty lords of

the court as the Queen had ordained, and with these went esquires and attendants to the number of threescore ten and four. In the midst of that company young Gareth rode upon a cream white horse, and all the harness and furnishings of the horse upon which he rode were of gold, and the saddle upon which he sat was stamped with gold and riveted with rivets of gold, and Gareth himself was clad all in cloth of gold, so, what with all of these and his fair beautiful face in the bright sunlight (the day being wonderfully clear and fair) the royal youth appeared to shine with such a glistering splendor that it was as though a star of remarkable glory had fallen from the heavens and had found lodgment in his person upon the earth.

So it was that the young Gareth rode forth upon his way to the court of his uncle, the King.

That evening, he and his company rested for the night in a glade of the forest and there the attendants set up a pavilion of purple silk for him. Around about this pavilion were other pavilions for those three lords who accompanied him as his companions in the journey and for their esquires and attendants.

Now that night Gareth lodged alone in his pavilion saving only that his dwarf, Axatalese, lay within the tent nigh to the door thereof. And it came to pass that Gareth could not sleep that night but lay awake, looking into the darkness and thinking of many things. And he said to himself: "Why is it that I should go thus in state to the court of the King and in that wise to win his especial favor? Lo! It were better that I should go as any other youth of birth and breeding rather than in this royal estate. For, if I am worthy, as men say of me, then my worth shall be made manifest by my deeds and not because of the state in which I travel."

Thus Gareth communed within himself and he said: "I will go to the court of mine uncle the King as a simple traveller and not as a prince travelling in state."

So somewhat before the dawning of the day, he arose very softly and went to where the dwarf lay, and he touched Axatalese upon the shoulder, and he said, "Axatalese, awake." Thereupon the dwarf awoke and sat up and looked about him in the darkness of the dawning, bewildered by the sleep that still beclouded his brain.

Then Gareth said, still speaking in a whisper: "Listen to what I say, but make no noise lest you arouse those who lay around about us." And Axatalese said, "Lord, I listen, and I will be silent."

Then Gareth said: "Axatalese, arise and fetch me hither some garments of plain green cloth, and aid me to clothe myself in those garments. Then thou and I will go forward alone and without attendants to King Arthur's court. For so I would come before the King in that guise and not travelling in the estate of a prince who may claim his favor because of the chance of birth. For I would have it that whatsoever good fortune I win, that fortune should come to me by mine own endeavor, and not because of the accident of birth."

Then Axatalese was greatly troubled, and he said: "Lord, think well of what you do, for, lo! your mother, the Queen, hath provided this escort for you; wherefore, haply, she will be very angry if you should do as you say, and should depart from those whom she appointed to accompany you."

"No matter," quoth Gareth; "let that be as it may, but do you as I tell you and go you straightway, very quietly, and carry out my commands. And see to it that no one shall be disturbed in your going or coming, for it is my purpose that we two shall go privily away from this place and that no one shall be aware of our going."

Gareth escapeth from his companions.

So spake Gareth, and Axatalese was aware that his command must be obeyed. So the dwarf went very quietly to do Gareth's bidding, and anon he returned with the clothes of a certain one of the attendants, and the clothes were of plain green cloth, and Gareth clad himself in that simple raiment. Then he and the dwarf went forth from the pavilion and they went to where the horses were, and they chose two of the horses and saddled them and bridled them with saddles and harness and trappings of plain leather, such as the least of the attendants might use – and in all of that time no one of those

in attendance upon Gareth was aware of what he had done. Then Gareth and the dwarf rode away from that place and still all the others slept, and they slept for a long while after.

And be it here said that when those three lords who were in charge of Gareth awoke and found that he and Axatalese were gone, they were filled with terror and dismay, for they wist not why he was gone nor whither, and they dreaded the anger of the Queen, Gareth's mother. Then the chief of those lords said: "Lo! here are we betrayed by this young prince and his dwarf. For he hath left us and taken himself away, we know not whither, and so we dare not return to the court of Orkney again. For should we return without him they will assuredly punish us for suffering him to depart, and that punishment may come even to the taking of our lives."

Then another of those lords said: "Messire, those words are very true, so let us not return unto the court of Orkney, but let us escape unto some other part of the realm where the wrath of the King and Queen may not reach us."

So it was as that lord said, for straightway they departed from that place and went to a part of the realm where neither the King and Queen of Orkney nor King Arthur might hear of them, and there they abode for that time and for some time afterward.

How King Arthur sat at feast.

Now at this time King Arthur was celebrating the Feast of Pentecost at the Castle of Kynkennedon. With him sat all the great lords of his court and all the Knights-companion of the Round Table who were not upon adventure in some other part of the realm. As they so sat at high feast, filling the hall with a great sound of merriment and good cheer, commingled with the chanting of minstrels and the music of harps and viols, there came one to where the King sat, and he said to him: "Lord, there is a fellow without who demandeth to have speech with you, face to face. Nor know we what to do in this case, for he will not be gainsaid, but ever maketh that demand aforesaid."

Then King Arthur said: "Hah! say you so? Now what manner of man is he? Is he a king or a duke or a high prince that he maketh such a demand as that?" "Lord," said the messenger, "he is none of these, but only a youth of twenty years, tall and very large of frame and beautiful of face, and very proud and haughty in bearing. And he is clad like to a yeoman in cloth of plain green, wherefore we know not what to think of that demand he maketh to have speech with you." King Arthur said, "What attendants hath he with him?" And the messenger said, "He hath no attendants of any kind, saving only a dwarf who followeth after him."

Quoth the King: "Well, at this Feast of Pentecost far be it from me to deny any man speech with me. So fetch this one hither that we may see what manner of man he is."

Gareth cometh before the King.

Therewith in obedience to the King's command, that attendant went forth and anon he returned, bringing Gareth and the dwarf Axatalese with him. And Gareth walked very proudly and haughtily up the hall and all who looked upon him marvelled at his height and his girth and at the beauty of his countenance. And many said: "Certes, that is a very noble-appearing man to be clad in such plain raiment of green, for, from his manner and his bearing, he would otherwise appear to be some nobleman's son, or some one of other high degree."

So Gareth walked up the length of the hall with all gazing upon him, and so he came and stood before the King and looked the King in the face, regarding him very steadfastly and without any fear or awe – and few there were who could so regard King Arthur.

Now Sir Kay the Seneschal stood behind the King's seat and when he beheld how young Gareth fronted the King, look for look, he was very wroth at the demeanor of that youth who stood thus before that royal majesty. So he spoke aloud before all those who sat there in hall, saying, to Gareth: "Sirrah, who are you who darest thus to stand with such assurance in the presence of the Great King? Wit you it is not for such as you to stand before such majesty, and have speech with it. Rather you should veil your face and hang your head in that awful presence."

Then Gareth looked at Sir Kay very calmly and he said, "Who are you who speak such words to me?" and all were amazed at the haughtiness of his tones and voice.

And King Arthur was also much astonished that a youth, clad thus like a yeoman, should thus speak to a great lord of the court such as Sir Kay. Wherefore the King wist not what to think of such a bearing. Then anon he said: "Fair youth, whence come you and who are you who speaketh thus so boldly to a great lord of our court and before our very face?" And Gareth said: "Lord, I am one who hath come hither from a great distance to crave two boons of you."

Quoth the King: "At this time, and at this Feast of Pentecost I may not refuse any one a boon who asketh it of me. So, if these two boons are fit for one of your condition to have, they shall be granted unto you."

Gareth asketh his boon.

Then Gareth said: "Lord, this is the first boon that I would ask of thee. I ask not for knighthood nor for courtly favor. All that I ask is that thou wilt permit me to dwell here at court for a year and that thou wilt provide me with lodging and with clothing and with meat and with drink for that time. Then at the end of a year, if I have proved myself patient to wait, I shall crave a second boon of thee."

Now many who were there heard what it was that strange youth asked as a boon, and that he besought not knighthood or honor at the King's hands, but bread and meat and drink and lodging, wherefore several of them laughed a great deal at the nature of that boon. As for the King, he smiled not, but he inclined his head very calmly and said: "Fair youth if that is all the boon thou hast to ask of us at this time, then thou shalt have thy will with all welcome." And he said: "Kay, see to it that this youth hath his desires in these things, and that he hath lodging and clothing and food and drink for an entire year from this time."

Then Sir Kay looked very scornfully upon Gareth and said: "It shall be as you will. As for thee, fellow, I will see to it that thou art fed until thou art as fat as any porker."

So spake Sir Kay, and when young Gareth heard the words his face flamed red with wrath and the veins stood out upon his forehead like cords. But he controlled his anger to calmness and anon he said: "Messire, you do but hear my words, knowing nothing of the purpose that lyeth within my mind. Wherefore then do you scorn me since you know naught of my purpose?"

Then Sir Kay looked upon the youth with anger and he said: "Sirrah, thou speaketh very saucily to those who are thy betters. Learn to bridle thy tongue or otherwise it may be very ill with thee."

So spake Sir Kay, but Gareth answered him not. Otherwise he turned to the King and bowed low, as though he had not heard the speech that Sir Kay had uttered.

Then he turned and went away from the King's presence with the dwarf Axatalese following close after him.

Sir Gawaine loveth Gareth.

Now Sir Gawaine sat not far distant from the King and so he had heard all that had passed. And he beheld the indignation of Gareth against Sir Kay, and the heart of Sir Gawaine went out very strongly toward this haughty and beautiful youth – albeit he wist not why it was that he felt love for him, nor that Gareth was his own brother. So it befell that after Gareth had departed from the King's presence in that wise, Sir Gawaine arose and followed after him; and when he had come up with Gareth he touched him upon the arm and said, "Come with me, fair youth." And Gareth did so. So after that Sir Gawaine led Gareth to another place, and when they were come thither he said to him: "Fair youth, I prythee tell me who you are and whence you come, and why it is that you asked such a boon as that from the King's Majesty."

Then Gareth looked upon Sir Gawaine and knowing that it was his brother whom he gazed upon he loved him a very great deal. Ne'theless he contained his love and said: "Messire, why ask you me that? See you not from the raiment I wear who I am and what is my degree? As for the boon

which I asked, wit you that I asked it because I needed a roof to shelter me and meat and drink to sustain my life."

Then Sir Gawaine was astonished at the pride and haughtiness of the youth's reply, wherefore he said: "Fair youth, I know not what to think; yet I well believe it was not for the sake of the food and drink and lodging that thou didst so beseech that boon of the King, for methinks that thou art very different from what thou appearest to be. Now I find that my heart goeth out to thee with a very singular degree of love, wherefore I am of a mind to take thee into my favor and to have thee dwell near me at mine inn." And Gareth said to his brother, "Sir, thou art very good to me."

Sir Gawaine traineth Gareth in knightly skill.

So it was that after that time Sir Gawaine took Gareth into his favor and did many acts of kindness unto the youth. And so Gareth dwelt nigh to Sir Gawaine, and Sir Gawaine instructed him in the use of arms. And ever Sir Gawaine was astonished that the youth should learn so quickly and so well the arts of chivalry and of knighthood. For Sir Gawaine wist not that Gareth had been taught many of these things, and that others came easily to him by nature, because of the royal and knightly blood from which he had sprung.

Sir Kay scorneth Gareth.

And ever in the same measure that Sir Gawaine bestowed his favor upon Gareth, in that degree Sir Kay scorned him. So it came to pass that when Sir Kay would meet Gareth he would say to whomsoever was present at that time, some such words as these: "Lo! you! this is our kitchen knave who had no spirit to ask of the King's Majesty any higher boon than this, that he be allowed to sup fat broth in the kitchen." So Sir Kay ever called Gareth a kitchen knave, and so calling him he would maybe say, "Sirrah, get thee upon the other side of me, for the wind bloweth toward me and thou smellest vilely of the kitchen." And because Sir Kay perceived that the hands of Gareth were soft and very white he named the youth "Beaumains," saying, "Look you at this kitchen knave, how fat and white are his hands from dwelling in lazy idleness." So Gareth was known as "Beaumains" by all those who were of the King's court.

But when Sir Gawaine heard this talk of Sir Kay he remembered him of how Sir Percival had been one time scorned by Sir Kay in such a manner as this. And Sir Gawaine said: "Messire, let be, and torment not this youth, lest evil befall thee. Remember how thou didst hold Sir Percival in scorn when he was a youth, and how he struck thee such a buffet that he nigh broke thy neck."

Then Sir Kay looked very sourly upon Sir Gawaine, and said, "This Beaumains is not such as Sir Percival was when he was young." And Sir Gawaine laughed and said, "Nevertheless, be thou warned in season."

So it was that Gareth dwelt for a year at the King's court, eating the meat of idleness. And many laughed at him and made sport of him who would have paid him court and honor had they known who he was and what was his estate. Yet ever Gareth contained himself in patience, biding his time until it should have come, and making no complaint of the manner in which he was treated.

And now if you would hear how young Gareth won him honor and knighthood, I pray you read that which followeth, for therein are those things told of at some length.

Chapter Second

How Gareth set forth upon an adventure with a young damsel hight Lynette; how he fought with Sir Kay, and how Sir Launcelot made him a knight. Also in this it is told of several other happenings that befell Gareth, called Beaumains, at this time.

So passed a year as aforetold, and Gareth lodged with the household of King Arthur and had food and drink as much as he desired. And in all that time Gareth ate his food and drank his drink at a side table, for Sir Kay would not permit him to sit at the same table with the lords and knights and ladies of the King's court. For Sir Kay would say, "This kitchen knave shall not eat at table with gentle folk but at a side table by himself," and so Gareth fed at a table by himself. And ever Sir Kay called Gareth "Beaumains" in scornful jest and all the court called him "Beaumains" because Sir Kay did so.

King Arthur sitteth again at feast.

Now at the end of that year when the Feast of Pentecost had come again, King Arthur was holding his court at Caerleon-upon-Usk, and at the high Feast of Pentecost there sat, as usual at the King's table, the lords and the ladies of the court and all the Knights of the Round Table who were not upon adventure that took them elsewhither.

A damsel appeareth before the King.

As they so sat eating and drinking there came into the hall a slender maiden of not more than sixteen years old. And the maiden was exceedingly beautiful, for her hair was as black as ebony and was like to threads of fine black silk for softness and brightness. And her eyes were as black as jet and very bright and shining, and her face was like ivory for clearness and whiteness and her lips were red like to coral for redness. She was clad all in flame-colored satin, embroidered with threads of gold and she wore a bright shining chaplet of gold about her brows so that what with her raiment of flame-color and with her embroidery and ornaments of shining gold, the maiden came up the hall like to a fiery vision of beauty, insomuch that all turned to behold her in passing, and many stood in their places that they might see her the better.

The damsel asketh for a champion.

Thus the damsel came up the hall until she had reached to that place where King Arthur sat at the head of the feast, and when she had come there she kneeled down and set her hands together as in prayer, palm to palm. And King Arthur looked upon her and was pleased with her beauty, and he said, "Damsel, what is it thou wouldst have of us?" The damsel said: "Lord, I would have the aid of some good worthy knight of thy court who should act as champion in behalf of my sister." And the King said, "What ails thy sister?"

Quoth the damsel: "Lord, my sister is tormented by a very evil disposed knight who maketh demand of her for wife. But my sister hateth this knight and will have naught to do with him, wherefore he sitteth ever before her castle and challengeth whomsoever cometh thitherward, and will not suffer any one to go in to the castle or come out thence without his permission. Now I come hither upon my sister's behalf to seek a champion who shall liberate her from this duress."

Then said the King, "Who is thy sister and who is this knight who tormenteth her?" To the which the damsel made reply: "I may not tell you my sister's name, for she is very proud and haughty, and is very much ashamed that she should be held in duress by that knight against her will. But as for the knight who tormenteth her, I may tell you that he is hight the Red Knight of the Red Lands."

Then King Arthur said: "I know not any such knight as that. Is there any one of you hereabouts who knoweth him?" And Sir Gawaine said: "Lord, I know him very well, for I met him one time in battle and it was such hard ado for me to hold mine own against him that even to this day I know not rightly whether he was better than I or whether I was better than he." Then King Arthur said: "Fair

damsel, that must be a very strong and powerful knight, since Sir Gawaine speaketh of him in this wise. But touching this affair of thy sister, know you not that it is not likely that any knight of renown will be found to champion a lady of whose name or degree he knoweth naught? If thou wilt tell the name of thy sister and wilt declare her degree I doubt not there are many good worthy knights of this court any one of whom would gladly champion her cause."

So spake the King, but the damsel only shook her head and said, "Lord, I may not tell my sister's name, for I am forbidden to do so."

Then the King said: "That is a pity for I fear me thou wilt not easily find thee a champion in that case." And he said, "Damsel, what is thy name?" And she said, "Sir, it is Lynette." The King said, "That is a fair name and thou art very fair of face."

Then the King looked about him and he said: "Is there any knight in this court who will undertake this adventure in behalf of that fair lady, even though she will not declare her name and degree? If such there be, he hath my free will and consent for to do so."

So spake the King, but no one immediately answered, for no one cared to take up such a quarrel against so strong a knight, not knowing for whom it was that that quarrel was to be taken up.

Now he whom all called Beaumains was at that time sitting at his side table a little distance away, and he heard all that passed. Likewise he observed how that no one arose to assume that adventure and at that he was very indignant. For he said to himself: "This damsel is very fair, and the case of her sister is a very hard case, and I wonder that no good and well-approved knight will take that adventure upon him."

But still no one appeared to assume that quarrel of the unknown lady and so, at last, Beaumains himself arose from where he sat, and came forward before them all to where the King was and at that time the damsel was still kneeling before the King.

Gareth asketh his second boon.

Then the King beholding Beaumains standing there said, "Beaumains, what is it thou wouldst have?" and Beaumains said: "Lord, I have now dwelt in this court for a year from the time that I first came hither. That time when I first stood before thee I besought two boons of thee and one of them thou didst grant me and the other thou didst promise to grant me. According to that first boon, I had since that time had lodging beneath thy roof and food and drink from thy table, as much as ever I desired. But now hath come the time when I would fain ask that other boon of thee."

Then King Arthur wondered a very great deal, and he said, "Speak, Beaumains, and ask what thou wilt and the boon is thine."

"Lord," said Beaumains, "this is the boon I would ask. I beseech thee that thou wilt suffer me to assume this adventure upon behalf of that lady who will not tell her name."

Now when they of the court who sat near to the King heard what boon it was that the kitchen knave, Beaumains, besought of the King, a great deal of laughter arose upon all sides, for it seemed to all to be a very good jest that Beaumains should assume such an undertaking as that, which no knight of the court chose to undertake. Only King Arthur did not laugh. Otherwise he spake with great dignity saying: "Beaumains, methinks thou knowest not what boon it is thou hast asked. Ne'theless, be the peril thine. For since thou hast asked that boon, and since I have passed my promise, I cannot refrain from granting that which thou hast besought of me."

Then Sir Kay came forward and he spake to the damsel, saying, "Fair damsel, know you who this fellow is who asketh to be appointed champion for to defend your lady sister?" and Lynette said, "Nay, I know not; but I pray you tell me who he is."

"I will do so," quoth Sir Kay. "Wit you that this fellow is a kitchen knave who came hither a year ago and besought as a royal boon from the King that he should have meat and drink and lodging. Since then he hath been well fed every day at a table I have set aside for him. So he hath grown fat

and proud and high of spirit and thinketh himself haply to be a champion worthy to undertake such an adventure as that which he hath besought leave to assume."

The damsel Lynette is angry.

So said Sir Kay, and when the damsel Lynette heard his words her face flamed all as red as fire and she turned to King Arthur and said: "My Lord King, what shame and indignity is this that you would put upon me and my sister? I came hither beseeching you for a champion to defend my sister against her oppressor and instead of a champion you give me a kitchen knave for that service."

"Lady," quoth King Arthur very calmly, "this Beaumains hath besought a boon of me and I have promised him that favor. Accordingly, I must needs fulfil my promise to him. But this I tell thee, that I believe him to be very different from what he appeareth to be; and I tell thee that if he faileth in this adventure which he hath assumed, then will I give thee another champion that shall haply be more to thy liking than he."

But Lynette was very exceedingly wroth and she would not be appeased by the King's words; yet she dared say no word of her indignation to the King's Majesty. Accordingly she turned and went away from that place very haughtily, looking neither to the one side nor to the other, but gazing straight before her as she went out from that hall.

Then after she was gone Sir Gawaine came and stood before the King and said: "Messire and Lord, I have faith that greater things shall come of this adventure than any one hereabouts supposeth it possible to happen. For Beaumains is no such kitchen knave as Sir Kay proclaimeth him to be, but something very different from that, as Sir Kay himself shall mayhap discover some day. For a year this Beaumains hath dwelt nigh me and I have seen him do much that ye know not of. Now I pray you, Lord, to suffer me to purvey him with armor fit for this undertaking and I believe he will some time bring honor both to you and to me – to you because you granted him this boon, to me because I provided him with armor." Then King Arthur said to Sir Gawaine, "Messire, let it be as you say."

Sir Gawaine armeth Beaumains.

So Sir Gawaine took Beaumains away with him to his own lodging-place and here he provided the youth with armor. And he provided him with a shield and a sword and a good stout spear. And he provided him with a fine horse, such as a knight who was to go errant might well care to ride upon. Then when Beaumains was provided in all this way, Sir Gawaine wished him God-speed and Beaumains took horse and departed after the maiden Lynette. And Axatalese the dwarf rode with Beaumains upon a gray mule, as his esquire.

Now by the time all this had been accomplished – to wit, the arming and horsing of Beaumains – Lynette had gone so far upon her way that Beaumains and Axatalese were compelled to ride for two leagues and more at a very fast pace ere they could overtake her.

Lynette scorneth Beaumains.

And when they did overtake her she was more angry than ever to behold that misshapen dwarf accompanying the kitchen knave who was her appointed champion. Wherefore when Beaumains had come nigh to her, she cried out, "Sirrah, art thou Beaumains, the kitchen knave?" And Gareth said, "Aye, I am he whom they call Beaumains." Then she cried out upon him, "Return thee whence thou hast come for I will have none of thee!"

To this angry address Beaumains replied, speaking very mildly and with great dignity: "Lady, the King hath appointed me to ride with you upon this adventure, wherefore, with you, I must now do as I have been commanded. For having embarked in this affair, I must needs give my service to you, even if you should order me to do otherwise." "Well," quoth she, "if you will not do as I bid you, then I tell you this; that I will straightway take a path that will lead you into such dangers as you have no thought of, and from which you will be not at all likely to escape with your life."

To this Beaumains replied, speaking still very calmly and with great courtesy: "Lady, that shall be altogether as you ordain. And I venture to say to you that no matter into what dangers you may bring me, still I have great hope that I shall bring you out thence with safety and so be of service to you and your lady sister. Wherefore, whithersoever you lead, thither will I follow you."

Then Lynette was still more angry that Beaumains should be so calm and courteous to her who was so angry and uncourteous to him, wherefore she hardened her heart toward him and said: "Sirrah, since I cannot rid me of you, I bid you ride upon the other side of the way, for methinks you smell very strongly of the kitchen in which you have dwelt."

To these words Beaumains bowed his head with great dignity and said, "Lady, it shall be as you command." And therewith he drew rein to the other side of the highway to that upon which she rode. Then Lynette laughed, and she said: "Ride a little farther behind me, for still methinks I smell the savor of the kitchen." And Beaumains did as she commanded and withdrew him still farther away from her.

Sir Kay followeth Beaumains.

Now some while after Beaumains had ridden after Lynette as aforetold, Sir Kay said to certain of those who were nigh him: "I am of a mind to ride after our kitchen knave and to have a fall of him, for it would be a very good thing to teach him such a lesson as he needs." So according to that saying, Sir Kay went to his inn and donned his armor. And he chose him a good stout spear and he took horse and rode away after Beaumains with intent to do as he had said. So he rode at a good pace and for a long time and by and by he beheld Lynette and Beaumains and the dwarf where they rode along the highway at some distance before him. Then Sir Kay called out in a great voice, saying: "Stay, Beaumains, turn thou thitherward. For I am come to overthrow thee and to take that damsel away from thee."

Then Lynette turned her head and beheld Sir Kay where he came, and with that she pointed and said: "Look, thou kitchen knave, yonder cometh a right knight in pursuit of thee. Now haply thou hadst best flee away ere harm befall thee."

But to this address Beaumains paid no heed, otherwise he turned about his horse and straightway put himself into array for defence. And as Sir Kay drew nigh, Beaumains beheld the device upon his shield and knew who was the knight who came thitherward and that it was Sir Kay who followed after him and called upon him to stay.

Then Beaumains remembered him of all the many affronts that Sir Kay had put upon him for all that year past and with that his anger grew very hot within him. And he said to himself: "This is well met; for now my time hath come. For either this is the day of satisfaction for me or else it is the day in which I shall lay my dead body down beside the highroad."

Meantime Sir Kay had come nigh, and finding that Beaumains had prepared himself, he also made himself straightway ready for battle. Then Lynette drew her palfrey to one side of the way and to a place whence she might behold all that befell.

Sir Kay doeth battle with Beaumains.

So when Beaumains and Sir Kay were in all ways prepared, each gave shout and drave forward very violently to the assault. And they met in the midst of that course and in that encounter the spear of Sir Kay held and the spear of Beaumains, because it was not very well directed, was broken into several pieces, so that he would have fallen only for the address of horsemanship that Sir Gawaine had taught him in the year that had passed.

But when Lynette beheld how that the spear of Beaumains was broken in that wise, and how that he was nearly cast out of the saddle in that encounter, she laughed very high and shrill. And she cried out in a loud voice: "Hah! thou kitchen knave, if thou showest not better address than that, thou wilt not be likely to succeed in this adventure that thou hast undertaken."

Now Beaumains heard the high laughter of Lynette and the words that she called out to him and with that he was more angry than ever. So therewith he ground his teeth together, and, casting aside the stump of his spear which he still held in his hand, he drew his sword and made at Sir Kay with all his might and main. And he put aside Sir Kay's defence with great violence, and having done so he rose up in his stirrups and lashed a blow at Sir Kay that fell upon his helm like to a bolt of lightning. For in that one blow Beaumains lashed forth all his rage and the indignation of a whole year of the scorn of Sir Kay. And he launched forth all the anger that he felt against the damsel Lynette who had also scorned him.

Beaumains smiteth down Sir Kay.

So fierce and terrible was that blow he struck that I misdoubt that any knight in all the world could have stood against it, far less could Sir Kay stand against it. For straightway upon receiving that stroke the senses of Sir Kay scattered all abroad and darkness fell roaring upon his sight and he fell down from off his horse and lay there upon the ground as though he was dead. Then Beaumains stood above him smiling very grimly. And he said, "Well, Sir Kay, how like you that blow from the hands of the kitchen knave?" but Sir Kay answered him not one word as you may suppose.

Therewith, having so spoken, Beaumains dismounted from his horse and he called the dwarf Axatalese to him and he said: "Axatalese, dismount from thy mule and tie it to yonder bush and take thou the horse of this knight and mount upon it instead." And Axatalese did as his master commanded. And Beaumains said to Sir Kay when he still lay in his swoon, "Sir Knight, I will borrow of you your spear, since I now have none of mine own," and therewith he took the spear of Sir Kay into his hand. And he took the shield of Sir Kay and hung it upon the pommel of the saddle of the horse of Sir Kay that he had given to Axatalese, and after that he mounted his own horse and rode away from that place, leaving Sir Kay lying where he was in the middle of the way.

And Lynette also rode away and ever Beaumains followed her in silence. So they rode for a while and then at last and by and by the damsel fell alaughing in great measure. And she turned her to Beaumains, and said, "Sirrah, thou kitchen knave, dost thou take pride to thyself?" and Beaumains said, "Nay, Lady." She said: "See that thou takest no pride, for thou didst but overcome that knight by the force of thy youth and strength, whilst he broke thy spear and wellnigh cast thee out of thy saddle because of his greater skill."

Then Beaumains bowed his head and said, "Lady, that may very well be." At that Lynette laughed again, and she said, "Sirrah, thou art forgetting thyself and thou ridest too near to me. Now I bid thee ride farther away so that I may not smell the savor of the kitchen," and Beaumains said, "As you command, so it shall be," and therewith he drew rein to a little greater distance.

And here it may be told of Sir Kay that some while after Beaumains had gone he bestirred himself and arose and looked about him, and for some while he knew not what had befallen him nor where he was. Then anon he remembered and he wist that he had suffered great shame and humiliation at the hands of Beaumains the kitchen knave. And he saw that in that encounter he had lost his shield and his spear and his horse and that naught was left for him to ride upon saving only that poor gray mule upon which the dwarf of Beaumains had been riding.

Sir Kay returneth to court, ashamed.

Then Sir Kay wist not what to do, but there was naught else left for him but to mount that mule and ride back again whence he had come. So he did and when he reached the King's court there was such laughing and jesting concerning his adventure that he scarce dared to lift his voice in speech or to raise his face in the court for a week from that time. But Sir Gawaine made no speech nor jest of the mishap that Sir Kay had suffered, only he smiled very grimly and said, "Sir, you would have done well to have hearkened to what I said to you," and Sir Kay, though at most times he had bitter speech enough and to spare, had naught whatever to say to Sir Gawaine in reply.

And now we turn again to Beaumains and Lynette as they rode onward upon their way as aforetold.

They behold a white knight.

For after that last speech of Lynette's, they went onward in silence, and ever Lynette looked this way and that as though she wist not that any such man as Beaumains was within the space of a league of that place. So travelling they came, toward the sloping of the afternoon, to a place nigh to the edge of a woodland where was a smooth and level space of grass surrounded on all sides but one by the trees of the forest. Here they beheld a knight who was just come out of the forest, and he was clad all in white armor and he rode upon a white horse. And the sun was shining so far aslant at that time that the light thereof was very red, like to pure gold. And the beams of the sun fell upon the skirts of the forest so that all the thick foliage of the woodland was entirely bathed in that golden light. And the same light flashed upon the polished armor of the knight and shone here and there very gloriously as though several stars of singular radiance had fallen from heaven and had caught upon that lonely knight-rider, who drew rein at their approach and so sat watching their coming.

Then Lynette turned to Beaumains and she said: "Sir kitchen knave, look you! yonder is a right knight with whom you may hardly hope to have ado. Now turn you about and get you gone while there is yet time, otherwise you may suffer harm at his hands."

To this Beaumains made no reply; otherwise, he rode forward very calmly and when he had come pretty nigh he bespoke that single knight in a loud clear voice, saying, "Sir Knight, I pray you do me battle."

At this address that knight aforesaid was very much astonished, and he said: "Sir, what offence have I done to you that you should claim battle of me in so curt a fashion? Gladly will I give you your will, but wit you not that all courtesy is due from one knight to another upon such an occasion?"

To this Beaumains made no reply, but turning his horse about he rode to a little distance and there made him ready for the encounter that was about to befall. For at that time his heart was so full of anger at the scorn of Lynette that he could not trust himself with speech, and indeed I verily believe that he knew not very well where he was or what he did.

Meantime the White Knight had also put himself into array for battle and when all was prepared they immediately launched the one against the other with such violence that the ground trembled and shook beneath their charge.

So they met with great crashing and uproar in the midst of the course and in that meeting the spear of Beaumains was broken into a great many pieces and he himself was cast out of his saddle and down to the ground with such violence that he was for a little while altogether stunned by the force of his fall.

Then Lynette laughed so high and so shrill that Beaumains heard her even in the midst of his swoon, and with that his spirit came back to him again and straightway he leaped up to his feet and drew his sword. And he cried out to the White Knight: "Sir Knight, come down from off thy horse and do battle with me afoot, for never will I be satisfied with this mischance that I have suffered."

Then the White Knight said: "Messire, how is this? I have no such cause of battle with you as that." But all the more Beaumains cried out with great vehemence, "Descend, Sir Knight, descend and fight me afoot."

"Well," quoth the White Knight, "since you will have it so, so it shall be."

Beaumains doeth battle with the White Knight.

Thereupon he voided his horse and drew his sword and straightway setting his shield before him, he came forward to the assault of Beaumains. Then immediately they met together, each lashing very fiercely at the other, and so that battle began. And so it continued, each foining and tracing this way and that like two wild bulls at battle, but ever lashing stroke upon stroke at one another. Soon the armor of each was stained in places with red, for each had suffered some wound or hurt at this

place or at that. Yet ever Beaumains fought with might and main, for he was so strengthened by his passion of rage that rather would he have died than yield in that battle.

So they fought with astounding fierceness for a considerable while, and then, at last, the White Knight called out, "Sir, I pray you stay this battle for a little," and with that Beaumains ceased his lashing and stood leaning upon his sword, panting for breath.

And the White Champion also leaned upon his sword and panted, and anon he said, "Sir, I pray you tell me your name. For I make my vow to you that never have I met any knight who hath fought a greater battle than you have fought this day – and yet I may tell you that I have fought with a great many of the very best knights of this realm."

"Messire," quoth Beaumains, "I may not declare my name at this present, for there are several good reasons why I will not do so. But though I may not do as you demand of me, nevertheless I beseech you that you will extend that favor unto me and will declare to me your name and your degree."

"Well," said the White Knight, "never yet have I refused that courtesy to any one who hath asked it of me. Wit ye then that I am called Sir Launcelot of the Lake."

Beaumains knoweth Sir Launcelot.

Now when Beaumains heard this that the White Knight said and when he wist that it was none other than Sir Launcelot against whom he had been fighting for that while, he was filled with great wonder and astonishment and a sort of fear. So straightway he flung aside his sword and he kneeled down before Sir Launcelot and set his palms together. And he said: "Messire, what have I done, to do battle against you? Rather would I have done battle against mine own brother than against you. Know you that you are the man of all others whom I most revere and admire. Now I pray you, Messire, if I have done well in your sight in this battle which I have fought, that you grant me a boon that I have to ask of you and of no other man."

Quoth Sir Launcelot: "What boon is it thou wouldst have? Ask it and if it is meet that I grant it to thee, then assuredly it shall be thine. As for that battle which thou hast done, let me tell thee of a truth that I believe that I have never before met a stronger or a more worthy champion than thou art. So now I prithe thee ask thy boon that I may have the pleasure of granting it to thee."

Then Beaumains said: "Sir, it is this. Wit you that I am not yet made knight, but am no more than a bachelor at arms. So if you think that I am not unworthy of that honor, I pray you make me a knight at this present and with your own hand."

"Sir," said Sir Launcelot, "that may not be until I know thy name and of what degree and worthiness thou art. For it is not allowed for a knight to make a knight of another man until first he is well assured of that other's degree and estate, no matter what deed of arms that other may have done. But if thou wilt tell me thy name and thy degree, then I doubt not that I shall be rejoiced to make a knight of thee."

Unto this Beaumains said, "Sir, I will tell you my name and degree if so be I may whisper it in your ear." And Sir Launcelot said, "Tell it to me as you list and in such manner as may be pleasing to you." So Beaumains set his lips to Sir Launcelot's ear and he told him his name and his degree. And he told Sir Launcelot many things that had befallen him of late, and Sir Launcelot was astonished beyond measure at all that he heard. Then when Beaumains had told all these several things, Sir Launcelot said: "Messire, I wonder no more that you should have done so great battle as you did against me, seeing what blood you have in your veins and of what royal race you are sprung. Gladly will I make you knight, for I believe in time you will surpass even your own brothers in glory of knighthood, wherefore I shall have great credit in having made you a knight."

Sir Launcelot maketh Sir Gareth a knight.

Therewith Sir Launcelot took his sword in his hand, and Beaumains kneeled. And Sir Launcelot laid the blade thereof upon the shoulder of Beaumains and so made him knight by accolade. And he

said, "Rise, Sir Gareth!" and Sir Gareth arose and stood upon his feet, and his heart was so expanded with joy that it appeared to him that he had the strength of ten men rather than one man in his single body.

Now the damsel Lynette had been observing all this from afar, and from that distance she could hear naught of what one champion said to the other, and she beheld what they did with very great wonderment and perplexity. Anon came Sir Launcelot and Sir Gareth to where she was, and when they were come near she said to Sir Launcelot, "Know you, Messire, who is this with whom you walk?" And Sir Launcelot said, "Yea, damsel, methinks I should know him." Lynette said: "I believe that you do not know him, for I am well assured that he is a kitchen knave of King Arthur's court. He hath followed me hither against my will, clad in armor which I believe he hath no entitlement to wear, and I cannot drive him from me."

Then Sir Launcelot laughed and he said: "Damsel, you know not what you say. Peace! Be still, or else you will bring shame upon yourself."

Then Lynette regarded Sir Launcelot for a while very seriously and anon she said, "Messire, I pray you tell me who you are who take me thus to task." And at that Sir Launcelot laughed again and said: "Damsel, I will not tell you my name, but mayhap if you ask my name of this worthy gentleman who is with you, he will tell you what it is."

Sir Launcelot leaveth Sir Gareth.

Then Sir Launcelot turned him to Sir Gareth and he said: "Friend, here I must leave you, for I have business that taketh me in another direction. So God save you and fare you well until we shall meet again. And if you will keep upon yonder path and follow it, it will bring you by and by to a fair priory of the forest, and there you and your damsel may have lodging for the night."

Thereupon Sir Launcelot bowed in courtesy both to Sir Gareth and to the damsel Lynette and so took his departure, wending his way whither he was minded to go and so in a little was lost to sight.

Then Lynette and Sir Gareth and the dwarf also went their way, taking that path that led to the priory of which Sir Launcelot had spoken; and there they found lodgment for the night – the damsel at one place, Sir Gareth at another.

And now if you would hear more concerning Sir Gareth and Lynette and of what befell them, I pray you read further, for these things shall there be duly set forth for your entertainment.

Chapter Third

How Sir Gareth and Lynette travelled farther upon their way; how Sir Gareth won the pass of the river against two strong knights, and how he overcame the Black Knight of the Black Lands. Also how he saved a good worthy knight from six thieves who held him in duress.

Now when the next morning had come, all bright and dewy and very clear like to crystal, Lynette arose and departed from that forest priory where she had lodged over-night, giving no news to Sir Gareth of her going. And at that time the birds were singing everywhere with might and main. Everywhere the May was abloom, the apple orchards were fragrant with blossoms, and field and meadow-land were spread thick with a variegated carpet of pretty wild flowers of divers colors, very fair to see.

So Lynette rode alone, all through the dewy morn, amid these fair meadow-lands and orchards belonging to the priory, making her way toward the dark and shady belt of forest that surrounded those smooth and verdant fields upon all sides. And ever she gazed behind her very slyly, but beheld no one immediately following after her.

For it was some while ere Sir Gareth arose from his couch to find the damsel gone. And when he did arise he was vexed beyond measure that she had departed. So he donned his armor in all haste and as soon as might be he followed hard after her, galloping his horse very violently through those fair and blooming meadows aforesaid, with the dwarf Axatalese following fast after him upon Sir Kay's war-horse.

Sir Gareth followeth Lynette again.

So Sir Gareth made all speed, and by and by he perceived the damsel where she was, and at that time she was just entering into the forest shades. So he drove forward still more rapidly and anon he came up with her and thereupon he saluted and said, "Save you, Lady!" Upon that salutation Lynette looked about, as though in surprise, and said, "Hah, thou kitchen knave, art thou there?" And Sir Gareth said, "Yea, Lady." And Lynette said: "Methought thou hadst enough of adventure yestereve when that same White Knight rolled thee down into the dust and beat thee in a fair fight afterward." Sir Gareth said, "Lady, thou speakest bitter words to me!" and Lynette laughed, and she said: "Well, Sir Knave, it seems that I cannot speak words that are so bitter as to prevent thee from following after me for I see that I am not to be free from thee in spite of my will to that end." And then she said: "Now I bid thee to ride a little farther away from me, for even yet thou savorest very strongly of the kitchen, and the savor thereof spoileth the fair savor of the morning."

So spake Lynette, and thereupon Sir Gareth drew rein a little farther, and so followed after her some distance away as he had done the day before.

Lynette telleth Sir Gareth of the robber knights.

After that they went a considerable ways in silence, and then by and by Lynette turned her head toward Sir Gareth and spake, saying: "Sirrah, knowest thou whither this path upon which we travel will lead us?" And Sir Gareth said, "Nay, Lady, I know not." "Alas for thee," quoth Lynette, "for I am to tell thee that this path leadeth toward a certain ford of a river, which same ford is guarded by two strong and powerful knights who are brothers. Of these two knights I heard yesternight at the priory that they are very savage robbers, and that, of those who would pass the ford of the river, some they slay and others they rob or else make captive for the sake of ransom. Now I am making my way toward that place where are these two knights in the belief that they may rid me of thee. So be thou advised whilst there is yet time; withdraw thee from this adventure and return whither thou hast come, or else, mayhap, a very great deal of harm may befall thee."

"Lady," quoth Sir Gareth, "were there twenty knights instead of two at that ford and were each of those twenty ten times as strong as either of the two are likely to be, yet would I follow after thee

to the end of this adventure. Mayhap it may be my good fortune to rid the world of these two evil knights."

Then Lynette lifted up her eyes toward Heaven. "Alas," quoth she, "I see that never will I be rid of this kitchen knave until all the pride is beaten out of his body." And after that they rode their way without saying anything more at that time.

Anon, and when the sun had risen pretty high toward the middle of the morning, they came out of the forest and into a fair open plain of considerable extent. Here Sir Gareth perceived that there was a smooth wide river that flowed down through the midst of the plain. And he perceived that the road ran toward the river and crossed it by a shallow gravelly ford. And he perceived that upon the other side of the river was a tall, grim, and very forbidding castle that stood on high and overlooked the ford, and so he wist that this must be the ford guarded by those two knights of whom Lynette had spoken.

So as they drew nearer to the ford, Sir Gareth beheld a pillar of stone beside the way, and he saw that a great bugle horn of brass was chained fast to this pillar. Then Lynette pointed to the bugle horn and she said: "Sir Kitchen Knave, seest thou yon bugle horn? Thou had best not blow upon that horn for if thou dost thou will arouse those two knights who guard this ford and they will come forth from the castle and it will certes fare very ill with thee."

Sir Gareth challengeth the robber knights.

Then Sir Gareth said, "Say you so, Lady?" Therewith he went straight to where the horn hung by its chain, and he seized it in both hands and blew upon it so violently that it was as though the brazen horn would be burst with his blowing. For the sound thereof flew far and wide, and came echoing back from the distant walls of the castle as though the trump of doom had been sounded in those parts.

Therewith, and after a little while, the portcullis of the castle was uplifted and the drawbridge let fall and there issued forth two knights very large and stout of frame and very forbidding of appearance. These two knights rode down toward the ford and when they had come nigh to it he who was the bigger of the two drave down to the edge of the water and called across to Sir Gareth, "Who are you who darest to blow so loudly upon our bugle horn?" And to him Sir Gareth replied: "Sir, I blew upon that horn to let you know that I was here and that I come with intent to rid the world of you, if so be God shall be with me in mine endeavor."

At that the knight upon the other bank was so enraged that he cast aside his spear and drew his sword and drave straightway into the waters of the ford, splashing with a noise like to thunder. And Sir Gareth also cast aside his spear and drew his sword and drave into the ford with great violence.

Sir Gareth overthroweth the knight of the ford.

So they met in the midst of the river and the knight of the ford lashed at Sir Gareth a most terrible and vehement blow, which stroke Sir Gareth put aside with great skill so that it harmed him not. Then Sir Gareth upon his part lifted himself on high and lashed at the knight so woful and terrible a blow that his horse tottered under the stroke and the knight himself caught at the pommel of his saddle to save himself from falling. Then Sir Gareth lashed at him another stroke and with that the knight swooned away into darkness and fell out of his saddle and into the water. And the river where he fell was very deep so that when he sank beneath the water he did not rise again, although Sir Gareth waited some while for him to do so.

Sir Gareth overthroweth the second knight.

Then Sir Gareth, perceiving how that he had finished this enemy, drave his horse very violently across the ford, and to the farther bank, and the knight who was there upon that side of the river drave down against Sir Gareth with his spear in rest with intent to thrust him through the body. But Sir Gareth was aware of his coming and so when the knight of the river was immediately upon him,

he put aside the point of the spear with his shield with great skill and address. Then he rode up the length of the spear and when he had come nigh enough he rose up in his stirrup and lashed at the knight of the river so dreadful deadly a blow that nor shield nor helm could withstand that stroke. For the sword of Sir Gareth clave through the shield of the knight, and it clave through the helm and deep into his brain-pan. And with that the knight of the river fell headlong from his saddle and lay upon the ground without life or motion wherewith to rise again. Then Sir Gareth leaped very nimbly out of his saddle and ran to him to finish the work that he had begun. And Sir Gareth plucked away the helm of the knight and looked into his face and therewith beheld that his work was very well done, for already that fallen knight was in the act of yielding up the ghost.

Then Sir Gareth wiped his sword and drave it back again into its sheath; and he remounted his horse and rode very quietly back to where the damsel waited for him upon the farther bank. And the damsel looked at Sir Gareth very strangely but Sir Gareth regarded her not at all.

So Sir Gareth brought Lynette safely across the ford and afterward they rode on their way as they had aforetime done – the damsel in the lead and Sir Gareth and Axatalese following after at a distance.

Lynette mocketh at Sir Gareth.

So after they had ridden a long while the damsel turned her about in the saddle and looked at Sir Gareth and she said, "Hah, Beaumains, dost thou take pride in what thou hast done?" And Sir Gareth said, "Nay, Lady; God forbid that I should take pride in any such thing as that." Quoth Lynette: "I am glad that thou dost not take pride in it; for I beheld thy battle from afar and I saw how fortune favored thee. For the first of those two knights, his horse stumbled in the river and so he fell into the water and was drowned; and thou didst strike the second knight with thy sword ere he was well prepared for his defence and so thou wert able to slay him."

"Lady," quoth Sir Gareth very calmly, "that which thou sayest doth not in anywise change the circumstances of what I did. For now my work is done and so I leave it to God His mercy to judge whether I did that thing well or whether I did it ill." "Hah," said Lynette, "meseemeth you speak very saucily for a kitchen knave." And Sir Gareth said, still speaking very calmly, "Think you so, Lady?" And Lynette said, "Yea," and she said, "I see that thou still ever forgettest my commands, for thou art riding so nigh to me that methinks I smell the kitchen. Now I prythee draw a little farther away." And Sir Gareth said, "Damsel, it shall be as you command." And therewith he drew rein so as to ride at a little greater distance, and Lynette laughed to see him do so.

Now some little while about the prime of the day they came to a certain grassy place of considerable extent, and at that place was a black hawthorn bush, very aged and gnarled and full of thorns that stood alone beside the highroad, and as they drew nigh to it they perceived that there was hung upon the thorn bush a great black shield bearing the device of the red gryphon, and they saw that a great black spear, bearing a black pennon with the device of a red gryphon leaned beside the shield. And they beheld that near by the bush was a noble black horse with trappings and housings all of black, and the horse cropped the grass that grew at that place.

They behold the black knight at his meal.

All this they beheld, and as they came still nearer they perceived that upon the other side of the hawthorn bush there was a knight clad all in black armor, and they saw that the knight sat beside a great flat stone and ate his midday meal that lay spread out upon the stone. And the knight was unaware of their coming but ever ate with great appetite of the food that was spread before him.

Then Lynette drew rein while they were yet at some distance and she laughed and pointed toward the hawthorn bush, behind which sat the knight, and she said: "Sir Kitchen Knave, look you yonder and behold that knight. Seest thou the device upon his shield? I know that device very well and so I may tell thee that that knight is hight Sir Perard and that he is brother of Sir Percevant of Hind, and that he is a very strong, worthy, noble knight and one of great renown in deeds of arms. This

is a very different sort of knight from those thou didst overcome at the ford of the river, wherefore be thou advised by me and turn thee about and get thee gone ere yonder knight seest thee, or else harm will certainly befall thee."

Quoth Sir Gareth: "Damsel, having followed you so far and through several dangers it is not very likely that I shall turn back at this, even if there be as much peril in it as you say."

"Very well," said Lynette, "then if ill befall thee thou art to blame thyself therefor and not blame me." Therewith speaking, she tightened the rein of her palfrey and so rode forward toward that hawthorn bush aforesaid.

Now when they had come a little more close to that place, the Black Knight, Sir Perard, was aware of their coming and looked up and beheld them. Then, seeing that it was an armed knight and a damsel that were coming thitherward, Sir Perard arose very slowly and with great dignity and set his helm upon his head, and so he made him ready for whatsoever might befall. Then when he had so prepared himself he came out into the road for to meet them. Then when Sir Gareth and the damsel were come pretty nigh, Sir Perard bespake Sir Gareth, saying: "Sir Knight, I pray you of your courtesy for to tell me who you are and whither you go?"

Quoth Sir Gareth: "I may not tell you who I am, but ask you this damsel and she will tell you."

Then Sir Perard was greatly surprised at that reply and he said, "Is this a jest?" And he said: "Damsel, since I am directed to you, I pray of you tell to me the name and the degree of this knight."

Upon this Lynette fell alaughing in great measure and she said: "Messire, since you ask me that thing, I have to tell you that this fellow is a certain kitchen knave, hight Beaumains, who hath followed me hither from the court of King Arthur, and I have to tell you further that many times I have bid him begone and leave me, but he will not do so, but continually followeth after me."

"Fair damsel," quoth the Black Knight, speaking with great dignity, "you are pleased to jest with me, for this is no kitchen knave I trow but a very good worshipful knight of whom you are pleased to say such things."

Then Sir Gareth spake very sternly, saying, "Messire, I will not have you or any man gainsay what this lady sayeth." And the Black Knight, still speaking with great dignity, said: "How may I do otherwise than gainsay her, seeing that you wear armor that is indented with the marks of battle? For who ever heard of a kitchen knave wearing such armor?" "Ne'theless," quoth Sir Gareth, "either you must acknowledge what this lady sayeth of me, or else you must do battle with me so that I may defend what she sayeth."

"Sir," said the Black Knight, "in that case I will do battle with you, for I cannot accept the saying of this lady."

Sir Gareth doeth battle with the Black Knight.

So therewith Sir Perard took down his shield from off the blackthorn bush and he took his spear into his hand and whistled his horse to him. And he mounted his horse and made him in all ways ready for battle. Meanwhile Sir Gareth waited very composedly and with great calmness of bearing until the other was in all wise prepared. Then Sir Perard said, "I am ready, Messire." And therewith each knight drew rein and withdrew to such a distance as was fitting for a course to an assault. Then when this was accomplished, each knight shouted to his steed and each charged forward against the other with a terrible speed and violence. So they met in the midst of the course with a crash that might have been heard for two furlongs. In that meeting the spear of each knight was broken into many pieces, even to the hand that held it, and the horse of each staggered back and would haply have fallen had not the knight rider brought him to foot again with shout and prick of spur and with great address of horsemanship. Then each knight voided his horse and each drew his sword and therewith rushed to an assault at arms. And each smote the other again and again and yet again, lashing such blows that it sounded as though several blacksmiths were smiting amain upon their anvils, and for a while neither knight had any advantage over the other, but each fought for that time a well-matched

battle. Then of a sudden Lynette cried out very shrilly: "Sir Perard! Sir Perard! Noble, worthy knight! Wilt thou suffer a kitchen knave to have his will of thee?"

So she cried out very loud and shrill and Sir Gareth heard the words she uttered. Then a great anger came upon him so that he was uplifted by it, as though the strength of several had entered into his body. So straightway he redoubled his battle to twice what it had been before, giving stroke upon stroke, so that the Black Knight was forced to bear back before the fierceness and violence of his assault. Then Sir Gareth perceived that Sir Perard began to weary a very great deal in that fight and to bear his defences full low, and therewith he redoubled his blows and smote Sir Perard upon the helm so fiercely that his brains swam like water and his head hung low upon his breast.

Then, perceiving how that Sir Perard fainted, Sir Gareth ran to him and caught him by the helm and dragged him down upon his knees, and he rushed off the helm of Sir Perard, and caught him by the hair and dragged down his neck so that he might have slain him had he chosen to do so.

Then Sir Perard, perceiving how near death was to him, caught Sir Gareth about the knees, and cried out on high, "Messire, spare my life, for so thou hast it at thy mercy." Quoth Sir Gareth, "Sir Knight, I will not spare thy life unless this lady beseech it of me."

Then Lynette cried out: "Fie upon thee, thou saucy varlet! Who art thou that I should ask a favor of thee?"

Lynette asketh the life of the Black Knight.

Then Sir Perard cried out, "Fair Lady, I beseech thee that thou beg my life at the hands of this knight," and thereupon Lynette said: "Fie upon it that it must needs be so. But indeed I cannot suffer so worshipful a knight as thou art, Sir Perard, to be slain by the hand of a kitchen knave. So, Sirrah Beaumains, I bid thee stay thy hand and spare this knight his life."

Upon this speech, Sir Gareth released his hold upon Sir Perard and said, "Arise, Sir Knight, for I will spare thy life upon this lady's behest." And therewith Sir Perard arose and stood upon his feet. And Sir Perard said: "Sir, thou hast conquered me in fair battle and for that reason I have yielded me to thee. Now, I prythee tell me, hast thou any commands that thou wouldst lay upon me?" Quoth Sir Gareth: "Yea, Messire, I have a command to lay upon you and this is that command: It is that you straightway go to the court of King Arthur and pay your duty unto him. And you are to say unto King Arthur that Beaumains, the kitchen knave, hath sent you unto him. And I pray you give him news of me and tell him it fareth well with me." And Sir Perard said, "Messire, it shall be done according to your bidding." And Sir Gareth said, "See that it is so."

Now in all these things that Sir Gareth did and said he ever bore himself with such dignity and haughtiness that a knight of ten years' standing would not have acted with more dignity than he. And after he had settled those affairs in that wise, he turned to Lynette and addressed himself to her, saying, "Lady, if so be thou art now ready to depart I am ready to accompany thee," and with that the damsel took her departure and Sir Gareth and Axatalese followed after her. So they left that place of battle and soon after they had gone Sir Perard departed upon his way to the court of King Arthur as he had been commanded to do by Sir Gareth as aforesaid.

Now after Lynette and Sir Gareth had ridden some while in silence, Lynette turned her face and looked upon Sir Gareth. And she said, "Sir Kitchen Knave, I would I knew who thou really art." To the which Sir Gareth answered very calmly, "Thou hast declared several times who I am and that I am a kitchen knave from King Arthur's court." Then Lynette laughed and she said, "True, I had nigh forgot." And she said, "Ride not so near to me for still, I believe, thou savorest of the kitchen." And thereupon Sir Gareth withdrew to that same distance he had assumed before.

They behold one fleeing from the forest.

Now somewhile toward the approach of eventide, Sir Gareth and Lynette and Axatalese came away from that part of the country and to where the forest began again. And it befell that as they approached the forest they beheld of a sudden one who came spurring out of the woodlands riding

upon a white horse, driving very furiously and at full speed. This rider when he was come nigh suddenly drew rein, and flinging himself from the saddle he ran to Sir Gareth and caught him by the stirrup, crying out: "Sir Knight! Sir Knight! I crave you of your worship that you will lend your aid in a case of woful need!" Then Sir Gareth beheld that this one who had come to him in this wise was an esquire, clad in green and yellow and that he was one of good appearance and of quality. And Sir Gareth said: "Fair Friend, I prythee tell me what service it is that thou wouldst have of me?"

"Sir," cried that esquire, "my master, who is a knight of these marches, is beset within the forest yonder by several thieves and I fear they will slay him unless help cometh to him in short order." Sir Gareth said, "Where is your master?" And the esquire said, "Follow me and I will bring you to him."

Sir Gareth driveth to rescue the wounded knight.

So the esquire mounted his horse again and drave away with all speed and Sir Gareth set spurs to his horse and also drave away at speed, and Lynette and the dwarf followed with speed after Sir Gareth. So anon they entered the forest and coursed therethrough for a little ways and then Sir Gareth perceived where at a short distance there was a knight set with his back against a tree defending himself against six great and brawny villains clad in full armor. And Sir Gareth beheld that there were three other villains who lay dead upon the ground, but that the knight was in a sorry case, bleeding from several wounds and very weary with his battle. Thereupon, beholding this, Sir Gareth drew his sword and cried out in a very loud voice: "Have at ye, villains! Have at ye!" and therewith drave into the midst of that contest. And the thieves were astonished at the violence of his coming so that they knew not what to do, for Sir Gareth drave into their midst without let or pause of any sort. And ere they recovered from their astonishment, Sir Gareth struck one of the villains to the earth at a single blow and then he smote down another. And a third would have defended himself, but Sir Gareth rose up in his stirrups and he smote him so full and terrible a buffet that he clave through his morion and through his head to the very teeth of his head.

Sir Gareth slayeth the thieves.

Then beholding that dreadful terrible blow that Sir Gareth had struck their companion, the other three villains were adread for their lives, and fled shrieking away into the forest. But Sir Gareth would not let them escape but charged after them with great fury. And the three thieves found that they could not escape, and that there was naught else for them to do but to turn and stand at bay and so they did. But Sir Gareth would not be stayed by this, but he drave straightway into their midst and struck upon this side and upon that, so that maugre their defence all three of those villains were presently stretched, all bathed in their blood, upon the ground. Then Sir Gareth rode back again, wiping his sword very calmly ere he put it back into its sheath.

So anon he came to where was that knight whom he had saved and at that time Lynette and Axatalese and the esquire were lending such aid to the wounded man as his case demanded.

But when that knight beheld Sir Gareth returning from his battle, he broke away from the others and came to Sir Gareth and embraced him about the knee and said, "Messire, you have certes saved my life." And he said: "I pray you tell me what great and worshipful knight you are who doeth such wonderful battle as I beheld. Never would I have supposed it possible that any single knight could have overthrown six armed men with such ease as I have beheld you do this day."

Lynette mocketh Sir Gareth.

Now Lynette was standing by at that time and her eyes were wonderfully bright and shining and she looked very strangely upon Sir Gareth. Then hearing what that knight said whom Sir Gareth had rescued she burst out laughing very shrilly and piercingly and she cried out, "Sir Knight, wit you who this is who hath saved your life?" The knight said, "Nay, damsel, I know not." She said: "Wit you then that this is a kitchen knave of King Arthur's court hight Beaumains, so hight because of the whiteness of his hands. He hath followed me hither against my will, and I cannot drive him from me."

Then that knight was very much astonished and he said: "Fair damsel, certes you jest with me, for indeed this is some very noble and well-approved knight of great worship. For no one but such a knight as that could have done such deeds of arms as I beheld this day."

Sir Gareth rebuketh the knight.

Now at that time Sir Gareth was very weary with the battles he had fought during the day, and his body was sore with several wounds that he had suffered, and his spirit was very greatly vexed with the scorn with which Lynette had ever treated him for all this while, wherefore he had but little patience to deal to any man. So straightway he turned him toward that knight and he spake very sternly to him, saying: "Messire, do you intend to gainsay that which this lady sayeth to you concerning me? Wit you that I will not suffer her word to be put in question in any wise. Wherefore, if she is pleased to say that I am a scullion lad, so for her sake you must believe it to be."

At this that knight was more astonished than before, and he wist not what to think. So anon he said: "Messire, certes I meant no offence to you, for how should I mean offence to one who hath done me such service as you have rendered to me this day?"

"Well," quoth Sir Gareth, "in this I am greatly offended that you should gainsay that which this lady is pleased to say. Wit you that for this while I am this lady's champion, and so I will suffer no one to gainsay her." So said Sir Gareth, and when he had ended that saying, Lynette laughed and laughed again with all her might and main. And she cried out, "Well said, thou kitchen knave!" unto the which speech Sir Gareth made no reply.

Then that knight said to Sir Gareth and to Lynette: "Messire, and thou, fair damsel, I know not what all this meaneth but haply you know. But I see, Sir Knight, that thou art wounded in several places, and I doubt not that you are both aweary with your travels, wherefore I pray you that you will come with me to my castle which is not a very great distance away from this, and I beseech you there to lodge and to refresh you for this night."

To this Lynette said: "That which thou sayest pleases me very greatly, Messire, for indeed I am aweary and would fain rest me a little. So let us go forward to your castle. But this Beaumains must ride not so close to us for indeed I cannot abide the odor of the kitchen."

So after that they all departed from that place, and ever Sir Gareth rode at a distance as the damsel had commanded him to do.

They come to the castle of the knight.

Now after they had gone a considerable way they came out of the forest and into a valley wherein stood the castle of that knight. And it was a very fair and noble castle and the valley was exceedingly fertile with many rich fields and meadows and with several plantations of trees, both of fruit trees and otherwise. Through this fruitful valley they came to the castle and they rode into the castle courtyard with a great noise of horses' hoofs upon the cobblestones, and at that coming many of the attendants of the castle came running for to take their horses and to serve them.

Then Lynette gazed about her and she said to the knight of the castle, "Messire, who are these?" He said: "Fair damsel, these are they who would take your horse and the horse of that noble knight your companion, and others are they who would wait upon you and upon him to serve you both." Then Lynette said: "Not so, Sir Knight, my horse they may take and me they may serve, but it is not meet that a kitchen knave such as Beaumains should be waited upon in that wise, wherefore I bid you to suffer him to wait upon himself."

Sir Gareth serveth himself.

Upon this speech Sir Gareth turned him to the knight of the castle and his face was very calm, albeit his eyes shone like sparks of fire and he said, speaking very haughtily: "Messire, whitherward is the stable? I pray you to tell me so that I may house my good horse and wait upon myself as this lady, whom I have undertaken to serve, hath commanded me to do." Then the knight of the castle

was much troubled and knew not what to reply; yet anon he said, "Messire, I know not what to say in this case but an you ask me I must say the stable lieth yonderways."

So spake the knight, and thereupon Sir Gareth turned him without another word and rode away, still very calmly, leaving them alone.

So after that the knight and Lynette entered the castle. But the knight, when he was alone, called to him the steward of the castle and he said to him: "Go you and search out that noble and worthy knight, for assuredly he is some great and famous champion. See you that he is served in all wise that such an one should be served, and spare naught to comfort him and put him at his ease, for this day he hath certes saved my life." So the steward did as he was bidden and that evening Sir Gareth was served in all wise befitting for a knight royal such as he really was.

Now when the next day was come, and when it was time for Lynette and Sir Gareth and Axatalese the dwarf to depart from that place, the knight of the castle came to Sir Gareth where he sat upon his horse. And he laid his hand upon the stirrup of Sir Gareth and he said: "Messire, I pray you tell me, is there any service that I may do you that you would have of me?"

Sir Gareth biddeth the knight to do service.

Then Sir Gareth looked down upon that knight and he said: "Sir, there is a service you could render me an you chose to do so, and this is that service: it is that you should go to the court of King Arthur with all the estate that is befitting for one of your degree. And when you have come to the court I would fain have you tell King Arthur that Beaumains, the kitchen knave, hath sent you to him for to pay your court unto him. And I would have you tell the King and Sir Gawaine how it hath fared with me so far as you are aware of." Thus said Sir Gareth, and to him the knight of the castle made reply: "Sir, it shall be done as you ordain; for all those things I will do exactly as you commanded me."

So after that they three departed upon their way, the damsel Lynette riding ahead and Sir Gareth and the dwarf riding some distance behind.

And now if you would hear what other adventures befell Sir Gareth and Lynette at this time I pray you to read further, for there these several things are told of in due order.

Chapter Fourth

How Sir Gareth met Sir Percevant of Hind, and how he came to Castle Dangerous and had speech with the Lady Layonnesse. Also how the Lady Layonnesse accepted him for her champion.

So the damsel Lynette followed by Sir Gareth and the dwarf travelled for all that morning and a part of the afternoon without let or stay of any sort and without meeting with any adventure whatsoever, and in all that time the damsel said no word to Sir Gareth whether of good or ill, but ever kept her eyes fixed straight before her as though very much occupied with thought.

They behold a fair pavilion in a valley.

So about two hours or three after the prime of the day they came to the top of a very long steep hill, and there beneath them in the valley that lay below the hill, Sir Gareth perceived that a considerable company and one that appeared to be of great estate were foregathered. For at that place there were a number of pavilions of divers colored silk and above each pavilion there flew a silken banner bearing the device of the owner of that pavilion. And in the midst of all those other pavilions there was one that was manifestly the pavilion of the knight-champion or of the overlord of all the others. For that pavilion was of crimson silk embroidered with figures in threads of silver and black, and above the pavilion there flew a banner of very great size, which same was also of crimson silk embroidered in silver and black with the figure of a leopard couchant.

And from where he stood upon the heights, Sir Gareth saw that all these pavilions were spread in a fair level meadow with grass well mown, as smooth as a cloth of green velvet, and all bright with gay and pretty flowers. And this meadow and other meadows beyond it stretched away to a great distance and at the extremity of the distance was a fair tall castle and a goodly town of many towers, all shining very bright in the clear transparent daylight.

All this Sir Gareth beheld very plain, as it were upon the palm of his hand, and he beheld how above all that level, fruitful valley the sky arched like to a roof of crystal – warm and perfectly blue, and filled full of a very great many clouds.

Then Lynette said: "Hah, Beaumains, see you yonder pavilions and see you that pavilion which is in their midst?" And Sir Gareth said, "Yea, damsel, I behold them all."

Lynette telleth Sir Gareth of Sir Percevant.

Quoth Lynette: "Wit you that that central pavilion belongeth to Sir Percevant of Hind, for well do I know the device embroidered upon his banner. And I have to tell you that Sir Percevant is one of the very greatest of the knights champion of this realm and that he hath fought many battles with some of the chiefest Knights of the Round Table and hath come forth with great credit in all those encounters. Now, Beaumains, this is a very different sort of knight from any of those with whom you have hitherto had to do, wherefore be you advised that it is not meet for a kitchen knave to have to do in such an adventure as this. So turn you about and get you gone or else of a surety some great ill will befall you in this affair."

Then Sir Gareth looked very calmly upon Lynette and he said: "Lady, it may well be that a man who assumeth to have credit and honor may fail in an undertaking of this sort, but when have you ever heard that such a man of credit or of honor hath withdrawn him from an adventure because there is great danger in it?"

Then Lynette laughed and she said: "Hah, Beaumains, thou speakest with a very high spirit for one who is but a kitchen knave. Now if harm befalleth thee because of this undertaking, blame thyself therefor." And Sir Gareth said: "So will I do, and rest you well assured, fair damsel, that never shall I blame you for that or for anything else that may befall me." And at that Lynette laughed again.

Then Sir Gareth drew rein and turned downhill to where were those pavilions aforesaid, and so they all three descended from the height into the valley and so came toward that fair meadow wherein the silken tents had been erected.

Now as they drew near to the pavilions, they beheld several esquires who were sitting at a bench playing at dice. These, beholding Sir Gareth coming in that wise with the fair damsel and the dwarf, they all arose, and he that was chief among them said: "Sir, what knight are you, and what is your degree, and why come you hitherward?" Him answered Sir Gareth, saying: "Friend, it matters not who I am saving only that I am of sufficient worth. As for my business, it is to have speech with Sir Percevant of Hind, the lord of this company."

Quoth the esquire: "Sir, you cannot come past this way nor may you have speech with Sir Percevant of Hind without first making known your name and your degree, for otherwise you come upon him at your peril." Then Sir Gareth laughed, and said, "Say you so?" and therewith he drave past all those esquires and Lynette and the dwarf went with him and no one dared to stay him. So they came to the pavilion of Sir Percevant and Sir Percevant was within his pavilion at that time.

Now before the pavilion there was a tall painted post set into the ground, and upon the post there hung a great shield, bearing upon it the device of a leopard couchant in black and white, and so Sir Gareth perceived that this was the shield of Sir Percevant.

Then Sir Gareth drew his sword and he went forward and smote the shield such a blow that it rang like thunder beneath the stroke that he gave it.

Therewith came Sir Percevant of Hind out of his pavilion and his countenance was all aflame with anger and he cried out very fiercely: "Messire, who are you who dare to smite my shield in that wise?"

Sir Gareth challengeth Sir Percevant.

But Sir Gareth sat his horse very calmly, and he said: "Messire, I struck your shield for to call you forth so that I might have speech with you. As for my name, I will not tell you that nor my degree. But if you would know these things, I bid you for to ask them of this lady who is my companion."

Then Sir Percevant turned him to Lynette, and he said, "Damsel, who is this knight?" And Lynette said: "Sir, I know not otherwise than that he is a kitchen knave of King Arthur's court who hath clothed himself in armor. He is called Beaumains, and fain would I have been rid of him several times, but could not; for ever he followeth me, and, maugre my wishes, will ever serve as my champion."

Then Sir Percevant turned unto Sir Gareth with great anger and he said: "Sir, I know not what is this jest that you and your damsel seek to put upon me, but this I do know, that since you have appointed her to speak for you, and since she declareth you to be a kitchen knave, so must I believe you to be. Wherefore, unless you straightway declare your name and your degree to me upon your own account, and unless you prove to me that you are otherwise than this damsel sayeth, I shall straightway have you stripped of your armor and shall have you bound and beaten with cords for this affront that you have put upon my shield."

Then Sir Gareth spake very calmly, saying: "Sir, that would be a pity for you to do, for I have to tell you that, whether I be a kitchen knave or no, nevertheless I have had to do with several good and worthy knights of fair repute. For I have to tell you that one of these knights was Sir Launcelot of the Lake and that he made me knight. And I have to tell you that another one of these was your own brother, Sir Perard, whom I overcame yesterday in battle and whom I would have slain only that this damsel besought his life at my hands. And I have to tell you that Sir Perard is even now upon his way to the court of King Arthur, there to pay his duty to the King upon my demand upon him to that end."

Then Sir Percevant cleared his brow of its anger, and he said: "Sir, I perceive from all that you tell me that you are some knight of very good quality and merit. Wherefore I will withdraw that which I said and will do you battle because you have struck my shield. And it will go hard with me

but I shall serve you in such a way as shall well wipe out that affront in your warm red blood. For I promise you that I shall not let or stay in the battle against you."

So spake Sir Percevant and straightway he withdrew him into his tent and several of the knights who were his companions and several esquires who had gathered about in this while of talk, went into his pavilion with him and there aided him to don his armor and to fit himself for battle.

Of the meadow of battle.

So anon Sir Percevant came forth again in all wise prepared for that battle. And his esquires brought to him a noble horse as white as milk and they assisted him to mount thereon. And Sir Percevant took a great spear into his hand and so turned and led the way toward a fair smooth level lawn of grass whereon two knights might well run atilt against one another. And all they who were of that company followed Sir Percevant and Sir Gareth to that lawn of grass, and the damsel Lynette and the dwarf Axatalese went thither along with the others.

So coming to that place a marshal of the lists was appointed, and thereafter each knight was assigned a certain station by that marshal. Then, everything being duly prepared, the word for the assault was given, and each knight launched forth against the other with all the speed with which he was able to drive. So they met in the midst of the course with a great roar and crashing of wood and metal and in that encounter the spear of each knight was broken into small pieces and the horse of each staggered back from beneath the blow and would have fallen had not the knight rider recovered him with rein and spur and voice.

Sir Gareth doeth battle with Sir Percevant.

Then each knight leaped down from his horse and drew his sword and rushed to the assault afoot with all the fierceness of two wild boars engaged in battle. And thereupon they fell to lashing such blows at one another that even they who looked on from a distance were affrighted at the violence and the uproar of that assault. For the two champions fought very fiercely, and the longer they fought the more fiercely they did battle. And in a little while the armor of each was all stained red, and the ground upon which they fought was all besprinkled with red, yet neither knight had any thought of yielding to the other in any whit or degree, but still each fought on with ever-increasing fury against the other.

Now at this time neither knight had aught of advantage against the other, and no man might have told how that battle would have gone, but at the moment of the greatest doubt, Lynette uplifted her voice aloud, as it were in terror, crying out very shrilly and vehemently: "Good worthy knight Sir Percevant, will you then let a kitchen knave and a scullion stay you thus in your battle?"

Sir Gareth overcometh Sir Percevant.

Then it befell as it had befallen before when Sir Gareth fought with the Black Knight, Sir Percevant's brother, for Sir Gareth heard the words that Lynette cried out, and straightway it was as though the new strength of several men had entered into his body because of his anger at those words. And that anger consumed all else that was before it, whether that other were of prudence or of temper. For straightway Sir Gareth flung aside his shield and seized his sword in both hands and rushed upon Sir Percevant and struck blow upon blow so fiercely and so violently that nor skill nor strength might withstand his assault. Then Sir Percevant fell back before that assault and could not do otherwise, and he bore his shield full low; but ever Sir Gareth followed him and smote him more and more violently so that Sir Percevant could no longer hold up his shield against the assault of his enemy. And Sir Gareth perceived that Sir Percevant waxed feeble in his defence and with that he rushed in and smote Sir Percevant upon the helm so woeful a blow that Sir Percevant could no longer stand upon his feet but sank slowly down upon his knees before Sir Gareth. Then Sir Gareth ran to Sir Percevant and caught him by the helm and rushed the helm off from his head and with that Sir Percevant wist that death overshadowed him. Then Sir Percevant caught Sir Gareth about the thighs and, embracing him, cried out: "Messire, spare my life and do not slay me!" And all those

knights and esquires who were in attendance upon Sir Percevant pressed about Sir Gareth where he stood, and lifted up their voices, also crying out: "Sir Knight, do not slay that good worthy knight our champion, but spare his life to him."

Then Sir Gareth, all wet with the blood and sweat of battle and panting for breath said in a very hoarse voice: "Ask ye not for this knight's life for I will not spare his life to him except upon one condition, and that condition is that the damsel whose champion I am shall ask his life at my hands."

Now at that time Lynette was weeping amain, though whether with dread of that fierce battle or because of something else, who may tell? Yet ever she wept, and ever she laughed and wept again. And she cried out: "Thou saucy knave, Beaumains, who art thou to make such a demand as that?"

But Sir Gareth said: "If I be saucy, let it pass, yet so it is as I have said, and I will not spare this knight his life unless thou ask it of me," and therewith he caught Sir Percevant by the hair and lifted his sword on high as though to separate the head of Sir Percevant from off his body.

Lynette beseecheth Sir Percevant's life.

Then all those knights and esquires crowded around Lynette and besought her that she would ask for the life of Sir Percevant. And Lynette said: "Stay thy hand, Beaumains, and slay him not, for it would be a pity for so good and worthy a knight as Sir Percevant of Hind to lose his life at the hands of a kitchen knave such as thou art."

Then Sir Gareth said: "Arise, Sir Knight, and stand up, for the word of this lady hath saved thy life." And therewith Sir Gareth released his hold of Sir Percevant and Sir Percevant arose and stood up.

Sir Gareth commandeth service of Sir Percevant.

Then Sir Percevant said: "Sir, thou hast beaten me in a very fair and bitter battle and so I yield myself to thee. Now I pray thee tell me what are thy commands upon me?" And Sir Gareth said: "Sir, thou sayest well, and these are my commands: that thou, together with all this thy company of knights and esquires, do take your departure from this field and that ye all go to the court of King Arthur. And it is my desire that when thou hast come to the court of the King thou shalt pay thy duty to him and say to him that Beaumains, the kitchen knave, hath sent thee to pay that duty."

Then Sir Percevant bowed his head before Sir Gareth and said: "Sir, it shall be as you command." And after that he said, "Sir, I pray you that you will do me this favor; I pray you that you will come with me to yonder castle at that town which you see afar off. For that is my castle and my town and I am fain that you should rest you ere you go farther upon your way, and that you should refresh yourself at my castle. I perceive that you are wounded in several places, and I would fain that you should have your wounds searched and dressed and that you should have rest and ease ere you go forward, so that your wounds may be healed and that you may be made hale when you undertake your further adventures."

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