

***THOMAS SIR
MALORY, JAMES
SIR KNOWLES***



***THE LEGENDS
OF KING
ARTHUR AND
HIS KNIGHTS***

Thomas Sir Malory, James Sir Knowles

The Legends of King Arthur and His Knights

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CHAPTER I

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The Prophecies of Merlin, and the Birth of Arthur



ing Vortigern the usurper sat upon his throne in London, when, suddenly, upon a certain day, ran in a breathless messenger, and cried aloud—

“Arise, Lord King, for the enemy is come; even Ambrosius and Uther, upon whose throne thou sittest—and full twenty thousand with them—and they have sworn by a great oath, Lord, to slay thee, ere this year be done; and even now they march towards thee as the north wind of winter for bitterness and haste.”

At those words Vortigern’s face grew white as ashes, and, rising in confusion and disorder, he sent for all the best artificers and craftsmen and mechanics, and commanded them vehemently to go and build him straightway in the furthest west of his lands a great and strong castle, where he might fly for refuge and escape the vengeance of his master’s sons—“and, moreover,” cried he, “let the work be

done within a hundred days from now, or I will surely spare no life amongst you all.”

Then all the host of craftsmen, fearing for their lives, found out a proper site whereon to build the tower, and eagerly began to lay in the foundations. But no sooner were the walls raised up above the ground than all their work was overwhelmed and broken down by night invisibly, no man perceiving how, or by whom, or what. And the same thing happening again, and yet again, all the workmen, full of terror, sought out the king, and threw themselves upon their faces before him, beseeching him to interfere and help them or to deliver them from their dreadful work.

Filled with mixed rage and fear, the king called for the astrologers and wizards, and took counsel with them what these things might be, and how to overcome them. The wizards worked their spells and incantations, and in the end declared that nothing but the blood of a youth born without mortal father, smeared on the foundations of the castle, could avail to make it stand. Messengers were therefore sent forthwith through all the land to find, if it were possible, such a child. And, as some of them went down a certain village street, they saw a band of lads fighting and quarrelling, and heard them shout at one—“Avaunt, thou imp!—avaunt! Son of no mortal man! go, find thy father, and leave us in peace.”

At that the messengers looked steadfastly on the lad, and asked who he was. One said his name was Merlin; another, that his birth and parentage were known by no man; a third, that the foul fiend alone was his father.

Hearing the things, the officers seized Merlin, and carried him before the king by force.

But no sooner was he brought to him than he asked in a loud voice, for what cause he was thus dragged there?

“My magicians,” answered Vortigern, “told me to seek out a man that had no human father, and to sprinkle my castle with his blood, that it may stand.”

“Order those magicians,” said Merlin, “to come before me, and I will convict them of a lie.”

The king was astonished at his words, but commanded the magicians to come and sit down before Merlin, who cried to them—

“Because ye know not what it is that hinders the foundation of the castle, ye have advised my blood for a cement to it, as if that would avail; but tell me now rather what there is below that ground, for something there is surely underneath that will not suffer the tower to stand?”

The wizards at these words began to fear, and made no answer. Then said Merlin to the king—

“I pray, Lord, that workmen may be ordered to dig deep down into the ground till they shall come to a great pool of water.”

This then was done, and the pool discovered far beneath the surface of the ground.

Then, turning again to the magicians, Merlin said, “Tell me now, false sycophants, what there is underneath that pool?”—but they were silent. Then said he to the king, “Command this pool to be drained, and at the bottom shall be found two dragons, great and huge, which now are sleeping, but which at night awake and fight and tear each

other. At their great struggle all the ground shakes and trembles, and so casts down thy towers, which, therefore, never yet could find secure foundations.”

The king was amazed at these words, but commanded the pool to be forthwith drained; and surely at the bottom of it did they presently discover the two dragons, fast asleep, as Merlin had declared.

But Vortigern sat upon the brink of the pool till night to see what else would happen.

Then those two dragons, one of which was white, the other red, rose up and came near one another, and began a sore fight, and cast forth fire with their breath. But the white dragon had the advantage, and chased the other to the end of the lake. And he, for grief at his flight, turned back upon his foe, and renewed the combat, and forced him to retire in turn. But in the end the red dragon was worsted, and the white dragon disappeared no man knew where.

When their battle was done, the king desired Merlin to tell him what it meant. Whereat he, bursting into tears, cried out this prophecy, which first foretold the coming of King Arthur.

“Woe to the red dragon, which figureth the British nation, for his banishment cometh quickly; his lurkingholes shall be seized by the white dragon—the Saxon whom thou, O king, hast called to the land. The mountains shall be levelled as the valleys, and the rivers of the valleys shall run blood; cities shall be burned, and churches laid in ruins; till at length the oppressed shall turn for a season and prevail against the strangers. For a Boar of Cornwall shall arise and rend them, and trample their necks beneath his feet. The

island shall be subject to his power, and he shall take the forests of Gaul. The house of Romulus shall dread him—all the world shall fear him—and his end shall no man know; he shall be immortal in the mouths of the people, and his works shall be food to those that tell them.

“But as for thee, O Vortigern, flee thou the sons of Constantine, for they shall burn thee in thy tower. For thine own ruin wast thou traitor to their father, and didst bring the Saxon heathens to the land. Aurelius and Uther are even now upon thee to revenge their father’s murder; and the brood of the white dragon shall waste thy country, and shall lick thy blood. Find out some refuge, if thou wilt! but who may escape the doom of God?”

The king heard all this, trembling greatly; and, convicted of his sins, said nothing in reply. Only he hastened the builders of his tower by day and night, and rested not till he had fled thereto.

In the meantime, Aurelius, the rightful king, was hailed with joy by the Britons, who flocked to his standard, and prayed to be led against the Saxons. But he, till he had first killed Vortigern, would begin no other war. He marched therefore to Cambria, and came before the tower which the usurper had built. Then, crying out to all his knights, “Avenge ye on him who hath ruined Britain and slain my father and your king!” he rushed with many thousands at the castle walls. But, being driven back again and yet again, at length he thought of fire, and ordered blazing brands to be cast into the building from all sides. These finding soon a proper fuel, ceased not to rage, till spreading to a mighty

conflagration, they burned down the tower and Vortigern within it.

Then did Aurelius turn his strength against Hengist and the Saxons, and, defeating them in many places, weakened their power for a long season, so that the land had peace.

Anon the king, making many journeys to and fro, restoring ruined churches and, creating order, came to the monastery near Salisbury, where all those British knights lay buried who had been slain there by the treachery of Hengist. For when in former times Hengist had made a solemn truce with Vortigern, to meet in peace and settle terms, whereby himself and all his Saxons should depart from Britain, the Saxon soldiers carried every one of them beneath his garment a long dagger, and, at a given signal, fell upon the Britons, and slew them, to the number of nearly five hundred.

The sight of the place where the dead lay moved Aurelius to great sorrow, and he cast about in his mind how to make a worthy tomb over so many noble martyrs, who had died there for their country.

When he had in vain consulted many craftsmen and builders, he sent, by the advice of the archbishop, for Merlin, and asked him what to do. "If you would honour the burying-place of these men," said Merlin, "with an everlasting monument, send for the Giants' Dance which is in Killaraus, a mountain in Ireland; for there is a structure of stone there which none of this age could raise without a perfect knowledge of the arts. They are stones of a vast size and wondrous nature, and if they can be placed here as

they are there, round this spot of ground, they will stand for ever.”

At these words of Merlin, Aurelius burst into laughter, and said, “How is it possible to remove such vast stones from so great a distance, as if Britain, also, had no stones fit for the work?”

“I pray the king,” said Merlin, “to forbear vain laughter; what I have said is true, for those stones are mystical and have healing virtues. The giants of old brought them from the furthest coast of Africa, and placed them in Ireland while they lived in that country: and their design was to make baths in them, for use in time of grievous illness. For if they washed the stones and put the sick into the water, it certainly healed them, as also it did them that were wounded in battle; and there is no stone among them but hath the same virtue still.”

When the Britons heard this, they resolved to send for the stones, and to make war upon the people of Ireland if they offered to withhold them. So, when they had chosen Uther the king’s brother for their chief, they set sail, to the number of 15,000 men, and came to Ireland. There Gillomanius, the king, withstood them fiercely, and not till after a great battle could they approach the Giants’ Dance, the sight of which filled them with joy and admiration. But when they sought to move the stones, the strength of all the army was in vain, until Merlin, laughing at their failures, contrived machines of wondrous cunning, which took them down with ease, and placed them in the ships.

When they had brought the whole to Salisbury, Aurelius, with the crown upon his head, kept for four days the feast of

Pentecost with royal pomp; and in the midst of all the clergy and the people, Merlin raised up the stones, and set them round the sepulchre of the knights and barons, as they stood in the mountains of Ireland.

Then was the monument called "Stonehenge," which stands, as all men know, upon the plain of Salisbury to this very day.

Soon thereafter it befell that Aurelius was slain by poison at Winchester, and was himself buried within the Giants' Dance.

At the same time came forth a comet of amazing size and brightness, darting out a beam, at the end whereof was a cloud of fire shaped like a dragon, from whose mouth went out two rays, one stretching over Gaul, the other ending in seven lesser rays over the Irish sea.

At the appearance of this star a great dread fell upon the people, and Uther, marching into Cambria against the son of Vortigern, himself was very troubled to learn what it might mean. Then Merlin, being called before him, cried with a loud voice: "O mighty loss! O stricken Britain! Alas! the great prince is gone from us. Aurelius Ambrosius is dead, whose death will be ours also, unless God help us. Haste, therefore, noble Uther, to destroy the enemy; the victory shall be thine, and thou shalt be king of all Britain. For the star with the fiery dragon signifies thyself; and the ray over Gaul portends that thou shalt have a son, most mighty, whom all those kingdoms shall obey which the ray covers."

Thus, for the second time, did Merlin foretell the coming of King Arthur. And Uther, when he was made king, remembered Merlin's words, and caused two dragons to be

made in gold, in likeness of the dragon he had seen in the star. One of these he gave to Winchester Cathedral, and had the other carried into all his wars before him, whence he was ever after called Uther Pendragon, or the dragon's head.

Now, when Uther Pendragon had passed through all the land, and settled it—and even voyaged into all the countries of the Scots, and tamed the fierceness of that rebel people—he came to London, and ministered justice there. And it befell at a certain great banquet and high feast which the king made at Easter-tide, there came, with many other earls and barons, Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall, and his wife Igerna, who was the most famous beauty in all Britain. And soon thereafter, Gorlois being slain in battle, Uther determined to make Igerna his own wife. But in order to do this, and enable him to come to her—for she was shut up in the high castle of Tintagil, on the furthest coast of Cornwall—the king sent for Merlin, to take counsel with him and to pray his help. This, therefore, Merlin promised him on one condition—namely, that the king should give him up the first son born of the marriage. For Merlin by his arts foreknew that this firstborn should be the long-wished prince, King Arthur.

When Uther, therefore, was at length happily wedded, Merlin came to the castle on a certain day, and said, “Sir, thou must now provide thee for the nourishing of thy child.”

And the king, nothing doubting, said, “Be it as thou wilt.”

“I know a lord of thine in this land,” said Merlin, “who is a man both true and faithful; let him have the nourishing of the child. His name is Sir Ector, and he hath fair possessions both in England and in Wales. When, therefore, the child is

born, let him be delivered unto me, unchristened, at yonder postern-gate, and I will bestow him in the care of this good knight.”

So when the child was born, the king bid two knights and two ladies to take it, bound in rich cloth of gold, and deliver it to a poor man whom they should discover at the postern-gate. And the child being delivered thus to Merlin, who himself took the guise of a poor man, was carried by him to a holy priest and christened by the name of Arthur, and then was taken to Sir Ector’s house, and nourished at Sir Ector’s wife’s own breasts. And in the same house he remained privily for many years, no man soever knowing where he was, save Merlin and the king.

Anon it befell that the king was seized by a lingering distemper, and the Saxon heathens, taking their occasion, came back from over sea, and swarmed upon the land, wasting it with fire and sword. When Uther heard thereof, he fell into a greater rage than his weakness could bear, and commanded all his nobles to come before him, that he might upbraid them for their cowardice. And when he had sharply and hotly rebuked them, he swore that he himself, nigh unto death although he lay, would lead them forth against the enemy. Then causing a horse-litter to be made, in which he might be carried—for he was too faint and weak to ride—he went up with all his army swiftly against the Saxons.

But they, when they heard that Uther was coming in a litter, disdained to fight with him, saying it would be shame for brave men to fight with one half dead. So they retired into their city; and, as it were in scorn of danger, left the

gates wide open. But Uther straightway commanding his men to assault the town, they did so without loss of time, and had already reached the gates, when the Saxons, repenting too late of their haughty pride, rushed forth to the defence. The battle raged till night, and was begun again next day; but at last, their leaders, Octa and Eosa, being slain, the Saxons turned their backs and fled, leaving the Britons a full triumph.

The king at this felt so great joy, that, whereas before he could scarce raise himself without help, he now sat upright in his litter by himself, and said, with a laughing and merry face, "They called me the half-dead king, and so indeed I was; but victory to me half dead is better than defeat and the best health. For to die with honour is far better than to live disgraced."

But the Saxons, although thus defeated, were ready still for war. Uther would have pursued them; but his illness had by now so grown, that his knights and barons kept him from the adventure. Whereat the enemy took courage, and left nothing undone to destroy the land; until, descending to the vilest treachery, they resolved to kill the king by poison.

To this end, as he lay sick at Verulam, they sent and poisoned stealthily a spring of clear water, whence he was wont to drink daily; and so, on the very next day, he was taken with the pains of death, as were also a hundred others after him, before the villainy was discovered, and heaps of earth thrown over the well.

The knights and barons, full of sorrow, now took counsel together, and came to Merlin for his help to learn the king's will before he died, for he was by this time speechless. "Sirs,

there is no remedy," said Merlin, "and God's will must be done; but be ye all to-morrow before him, for God will make him speak before he die."

So on the morrow all the barons, with Merlin, stood round the bedside of the king; and Merlin said aloud to Uther, "Lord, shall thy son Arthur be the king of all this realm after thy days?"

Then Uther Pendragon turned him about, and said, in the hearing of them all, "God's blessing and mine be upon him. I bid him pray for my soul, and also that he claim my crown, or forfeit all my blessing;" and with those words he died.

Then came together all the bishops and the clergy, and great multitudes of people, and bewailed the king; and carrying his body to the convent of Ambrius, they buried it close by his brother's grave, within the "Giants' Dance."

CHAPTER II

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The Miracle of the Sword and Stone, and the Coronation of King Arthur—The Sword Excalilur—The War with the Eleven Kings



Now Arthur the prince had all this time been nourished in Sir Ector's house as his own son, and was fair and tall and comely, being of the age of fifteen years, great in strength, gentle in manner, and accomplished in all exercises proper for the training of a knight.

But as yet he knew not of his father; for Merlin had so dealt, that none save Uther and himself knew aught about him. Wherefore it befell, that many of the knights and barons who heard King Uther speak before his death, and call his son Arthur his successor, were in great amazement; and some doubted, and others were displeased.

Anon the chief lords and princes set forth each to his own land, and, raising armed men and multitudes of followers, determined every one to gain the crown for himself; for they

said in their hearts, "If there be any such a son at all as he of whom this wizard forced the king to speak, who are we that a beardless boy should have rule over us?"

So the land stood long in great peril, for every lord and baron sought but his own advantage; and the Saxons, growing ever more adventurous, wasted and overran the towns and villages in every part.

Then Merlin went to Brice, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and advised him to require all the earls and barons of the realm and all knights and gentlemen-at-arms to come to him at London, before Christmas, under pain of cursing, that they might learn the will of Heaven who should be king. This, therefore, the archbishop did, and upon Christmas Eve were met together in London all the greatest princes, lords, and barons; and long before day they prayed in St. Paul's Church, and the archbishop besought Heaven for a sign who should be lawful king of all the realm.

And as they prayed, there was seen in the churchyard, set straight before the doorways of the church, a huge square stone having a naked sword stuck in the midst of it. And on the sword was written in letters of gold, "Whoso pulleth out the sword from this stone is born the rightful King of Britain."

At this all the people wondered greatly; and, when Mass was over, the nobles, knights, and princes ran out eagerly from the church to see the stone and sword; and a law was forthwith made that whoso should pull out the sword should be acknowledged straightway King of Britain.

Then many knights and barons pulled at the sword with all their might, and some of them tried many times, but

none could stir or move it.

When all had tried in vain, the archbishop declared the man whom Heaven had chosen was not yet there. "But God," said he, "will doubtless make him known ere many days."

So ten knights were chosen, being men of high renown, to watch and keep the sword; and there was proclamation made through all the land that whosoever would, had leave and liberty to try and pull it from the stone. But though great multitudes of people came, both gentle and simple, for many days, no man could ever move the sword a hair's breadth from its place.

Now, at the New Year's Eve a great tournament was to be held in London, which the archbishop had devised to keep together lords and commons, lest they should grow estranged in the troublous and unsettled times. To the which tournament there came, with many other knights, Sir Ector, Arthur's foster-father, who had great possessions near to London; and with him came his son, Sir Key, but recently made knight, to take his part in the jousting, and young Arthur also to witness all the sports and fighting.

But as they rode towards the jousts, Sir Key found suddenly he had no sword, for he had left it at his father's house; and turning to young Arthur, he prayed him to ride back and fetch it for him. "I will with a good will," said Arthur; and rode fast back after the sword.

But when he came to the house he found it locked and empty, for all were gone forth to see the tournament. Whereat, being angry and impatient, he said within himself, "I will ride to the churchyard and take with me the sword

that sticketh in the stone, for my brother shall not go without a sword this day.”

So he rode and came to the churchyard, and alighting from his horse he tied him to the gate, and went to the pavilion, which was pitched near the stone, wherein abode the ten knights who watched and kept it; but he found no knights there, for all were gone to see the jousting.

Then he took the sword by its handle, and lightly and fiercely he pulled it out of the stone, and took his horse and rode until he came to Sir Key and delivered him the sword. But as soon as Sir Key saw it he knew well it was the sword of the stone, and, riding swiftly to his father, he cried out, “Lo! here, sir, is the sword of the stone, wherefore it is I who must be king of all this land.”

When Sir Ector saw the sword, he turned back straight with Arthur and Sir Key and came to the churchyard, and there alighting, they went all three into the church, and Sir Key was sworn to tell truly how he came by the sword. Then he confessed it was his brother Arthur who had brought it to him.

Whereat Sir Ector, turning to young Arthur, asked him —“How gottest thou the sword?”

“Sir,” said he, “I will tell you. When I went home to fetch my brother’s sword, I found nobody to deliver it to me, for all were abroad to the jousts. Yet was I loath to leave my brother swordless, and, bethinking me of this one, I came hither eagerly to fetch it for him, and pulled it out of the stone without any pain.”

Then said Sir Ector, much amazed and looking steadfastly on Arthur, “If this indeed be thus, ’tis thou who

shalt be king of all this land—and God will have it so—for none but he who should be rightful Lord of Britain might ever draw this sword forth from that stone. But let me now with mine own eyes see thee put back the sword into its place and draw it forth again.”

“That is no mystery,” said Arthur; and straightway set it in the stone. And then Sir Ector pulled at it himself, and after him Sir Key, with all his might, but both of them in vain: then Arthur reaching forth his hand and grasping at the pommel, pulled it out easily, and at once.



Then fell Sir Ector down upon his knees upon the ground before young Arthur, and Sir Key also with him, and straightway did him homage as their sovereign lord.

But Arthur cried aloud, "Alas! mine own dear father and my brother, why kneel ye thus to me?"

"Nay, my Lord Arthur," answered then Sir Ector, "we are of no blood-kinship with thee, and little though I thought how high thy kin might be, yet wast thou never more than foster-child of mine." And then he told him all he knew about his infancy, and how a stranger had delivered him, with a great sum of gold, into his hands to be brought up and nourished as his own born child, and then had disappeared.

But when young Arthur heard of it, he fell upon Sir Ector's neck, and wept, and made great lamentation, "For now," said he, "I have in one day lost my father and my mother and my brother."

"Sir," said Sir Ector presently, "when thou shalt be made king be good and gracious unto me and mine."

"If not," said Arthur, "I were no true man's son at all, for thou art he in all the world to whom I owe the most; and my good lady and mother, thy wife, hath ever kept and fostered me as though I were her own; so if it be God's will that I be king hereafter as thou sayest, desire of me whatever thing thou wilt and I will do it; and God forbid that I should fail thee in it."

"I will but pray," replied Sir Ector, "that thou wilt make my son Sir Key, thy foster-brother, seneschal of all the lands."

"That shall he be," said Arthur; "and never shall another hold that office, save thy son, while he and I do live."

Anon, they left the church and went to the archbishop to tell him that the sword had been achieved. And when he

saw the sword in Arthur's hand he set a day and summoned all the princes, knights, and barons to meet again at St. Paul's Church and see the will of Heaven signified. So when they came together, the sword was put back in the stone, and all tried, from the greatest to the least, to move it; but there before them all not one could take it out save Arthur only.

But then befell a great confusion and dispute, for some cried out it was the will of Heaven, and, "Long live King Arthur," but many more were full of wrath and said, "What! would ye give the ancient sceptre of this land unto a boy born none know how?" And the contention growing greatly, till nothing could be done to pacify their rage, the meeting was at length broken up by the archbishop and adjourned till Candlemas, when all should meet again.

But when Candlemas was come, Arthur alone again pulled forth the sword, though more than ever came to win it; and the barons, sorely vexed and angry, put it in delay till Easter. But as he had sped before so he did at Easter, and the barons yet once more contrived delays till Pentecost.

But now the archbishop, fully seeing God's will, called together, by Merlin's counsel, a band of knights and gentlemen-at-arms, and set them about Arthur to keep him safely till the feast of Pentecost. And when at the feast Arthur still again alone prevailed to move the sword, the people all with one accord cried out, "Long live King Arthur! we will have no more delay, nor any other king, for so it is God's will; and we will slay whoso resisteth Him and Arthur;" and wherewithal they kneeled down all at once, and cried for Arthur's grace and pardon that they had so long delayed

him from his crown. Then he full sweetly and majestically pardoned them; and taking in his hand the sword, he offered it upon the high altar of the church.

Anon was he solemnly knighted with great pomp by the most famous knight there present, and the crown was placed upon his head; and, having taken oath to all the people, lords and commons, to be true king and deal in justice only unto his life's end, he received homage and service from all the barons who held lands and castles from the crown. Then he made Sir Key, High Steward of England, and Sir Badewaine of Britain, Constable, and Sir Ulfius, Chamberlain: and after this, with all his court and a great retinue of knights and armed men, he journeyed into Wales, and was crowned again in the old city of Caerleon-upon-Usk.

Meanwhile those knights and barons who had so long delayed him from the crown, met together and went up to the coronation feast at Caerleon, as if to do him homage; and there they ate and drank such things as were set before them at the royal banquet, sitting with the others in the great hall.

But when after the banquet Arthur began, according to the ancient royal custom, to bestow great boons and fiefs on whom he would, they all with one accord rose up, and scornfully refused his gifts, crying that they would take nothing from a beardless boy come of low or unknown birth, but would instead give him good gifts of hard sword-strokes between neck and shoulders.

Whereat arose a deadly tumult in the hall, and every man there made him ready to fight. But Arthur leaped up as a flame of fire against them, and all his knights and barons

drawing their swords, rushed after him upon them and began a full sore battle; and presently the king's party prevailed, and drove the rebels from the hall and from the city, closing the gates behind them; and King Arthur brake his sword upon them in his eagerness and rage.

But amongst them were six kings of great renown and might, who more than all raged against Arthur and determined to destroy him, namely, King Lot, King Nanter, King Urien, King Carados, King Yder, and King Anguisant. These six, therefore, joining their armies together, laid close siege to the city of Caerleon, wherefrom King Arthur had so shamefully driven them.

And after fifteen days Merlin came suddenly into their camp and asked them what this treason meant. Then he declared to them that Arthur was no base adventurer, but King Uther's son, whom they were bound to serve and honour even though Heaven had not vouchsafed the wondrous miracle of the sword. Some of the kings, when they heard Merlin speak thus, marvelled and believed him; but others, as King Lot, laughed him and his words to scorn, and mocked him for a conjurer and wizard. But it was agreed with Merlin that Arthur should come forth and speak with the kings.

So he went forth to them to the city gate, and with him the archbishop and Merlin, and Sir Key, Sir Brastias, and a great company of others. And he spared them not in his speech, but spoke to them as king and chieftain telling them plainly he would make them all bow to him if he lived, unless they choose to do him homage there and then; and so they parted in great wrath, and each side armed in haste.

“What will ye do?” said Merlin to the kings; “ye had best hold your hands, for were ye ten times as many ye should not prevail.”

“Shall we be afraid of a dream-reader?” quoth King Lot in scorn.

With that Merlin vanished away and came to King Arthur.

Then Arthur said to Merlin, “I have need now of a sword that shall chastise these rebels terribly.”

“Come then with me,” said Merlin, “for hard by there is a sword that I can gain for thee.”

So they rode out that night till they came to a fair and broad lake, and in the midst of it King Arthur saw an arm thrust up, clothed in white samite, and holding a great sword in the hand.

“Lo! yonder is the sword I spoke of,” said Merlin.

Then saw they a damsel floating on the lake in the Moonlight. “What damsel is that?” said the king.



“The lady of the lake,” said Merlin; “for upon this lake there is a rock, and on the rock a noble palace, where she abideth, and she will come towards thee presently, thou shalt ask her courteously for the sword.”

Therewith the damsel came to King Arthur, and saluted him, and he saluted her, and said, “Lady, what sword is that the arm holdeth above the water? I would that it were mine, for I have no sword.”

“Sir King,” said the lady of the lake, “that sword is mine, and if thou wilt give me in return a gift whenever I shall ask it of thee, thou shalt have it.”

“By my faith,” said he, “I will give thee any gift that thou shalt ask.”

“Well,” said the damsel, “go into yonder barge, and row thyself unto the sword, and take it and the scabbard with thee, and I will ask my gift of thee when I see my time.”

So King Arthur and Merlin alighted, and tied their horses to two trees, and went into the barge; and when they came to the sword that the hand held, King Arthur took it by the handle and bore it with him, and the arm and hand went down under the water; and so they came back to land, and rode again to Caerleon.

On the morrow Merlin bade King Arthur to set fiercely on the enemy; and in the meanwhile three hundred good knights went over to King Arthur from the rebels' side. Then at the spring of day, when they had scarce left their tents, he fell on them with might and main, and Sir Badewaine, Sir Key, and Sir Brastias slew on the right hand and on the left marvellously; and ever in the thickest of the fight King Arthur raged like a young lion, and laid on with his sword, and did wondrous deeds of arms, to the joy and admiration of the knights and barons who beheld him.

Then King Lot, King Carados, and the King of the Hundred Knights—who also rode with them—going round to the rear, set on King Arthur fiercely from behind; but Arthur, turning to his knights, fought ever in the foremost press until his horse was slain beneath him. At that, King Lot rode furiously at him, and smote him down; but rising straightway, and being set again on horseback, he drew his sword Excalibur that he had gained by Merlin from the lady of the lake, which, shining brightly as the light of thirty torches, dazzled the eyes of his enemies. And therewith falling on them afresh with all his knights, he drove them back and slew

them in great numbers, and Merlin by his arts scattered among them fire and pitchy smoke, so that they broke and fled. Then all the common people of Caerleon, seeing them give way, rose up with one accord, and rushed at them with clubs and staves, and chased them far and wide, and slew many great knights and lords, and the remainder of them fled and were seen no more. Thus won King Arthur his first battle and put his enemies to shame.

But the six kings, though sorely routed, prepared for a new war, and joining to themselves five others swore together that, whether for weal or woe, they would keep steadfast alliance till they had destroyed King Arthur. Then, with a host of 50,000 men-at-arms on horseback, and 10,000 foot, they were soon ready, and sent forth their fore-riders, and drew from the northern country towards King Arthur, to the castle of Bedgraine.

But he by Merlin's counsel had sent over sea to King Ban of Benwick and King Bors of Gaul, praying them to come and help him in his wars, and promising to help in return against King Claudas, their foe. To which those kings made answer that they would joyfully fulfil his wish, and shortly after came to London with 300 knights, well arrayed for both peace and war, leaving behind them a great army on the other side of the sea till they had consulted with King Arthur and his ministers how they might best dispose of it.

And Merlin being asked for his advice and help, agreed to go himself and fetch it over sea to England, which in one night he did; and brought with him 10,000 horsemen and led them northward privately to the forest of Bedgraine, and there lodged them in a valley secretly.

Then, by the counsel of Merlin, when they knew which way the eleven kings would ride and sleep, King Arthur with Kings Ban and Bors made themselves ready with their army for the fight, having yet but 30,000 men, counting the 10,000 who had come from Gaul.

“Now shall ye do my advice,” said Merlin; “I would that King Ban and King Bors, with all their fellowship of 10,000 men, were led to ambush in this wood ere daylight, and stir not therefrom until the battle hath been long waged. And thou, Lord Arthur, at the spring of day draw forth thine army before the enemy, and dress the battle so that they may at once see all thy host, for they will be the more rash and hardy when they see you have but 20,000 men.”

To this the three knights and the barons heartily consented, and it was done as Merlin had devised. So on the morrow when the hosts beheld each other, the host of the north was greatly cheered to find so few led out against them.

Then gave King Arthur the command to Sir Ulfius and Sir Brastias to take 3000 men-at-arms, and to open battle. They therefore setting fiercely on the enemy slew them on the right hand and the left till it was wonderful to see their slaughter.

When the eleven kings beheld so small a band doing such mighty deeds of arms they were ashamed, and charged them fiercely in return. Then was Sir Ulfius' horse slain under him; but he fought well and marvellously on foot against Duke Eustace and King Clarience, who set upon him grievously, till Sir Brastias, seeing his great peril, pricked towards them swiftly, and so smote the duke through with

his spear that horse and man fell down and rolled over. Whereat King Clarience turned upon Sir Brastias, and rushing furiously together they each unhorsed the other and fell both to the ground, and there lay a long time stunned, their horses' knees being cut to the bone. Then came Sir Key the seneschal with six companions, and did wondrous well, till the eleven kings went out against them and overthrew Sir Griflet and Sir Lucas the butler. And when Sir Key saw Sir Griflet unhorsed and on foot, he rode against King Nanter's hotly and smote him down, and led his horse to Griflet and horsed him again; with the same spear did Sir Key smite down King Lot and wounded him full sore.

But seeing that, the King of the Hundred Knights rushed at Sir Key and overthrew him in return, and took his horse and gave it to King Lot. And when Sir Griflet saw Sir Key's mischance, he set his spear in rest, and riding at a mighty man-at-arms, he cast him down headlong and caught his horse and led it straightway to Sir Key.

By now the battle was growing perilous and hard, and both sides fought with rage and fury. And Sir Ulfius and Sir Brastias were both afoot and in great danger of their death, and foully stained and trampled under horses' feet. Then King Arthur, putting spurs to his horse, rushed forward like a lion into the midst of all the *mêlée*, and singling out King Cradlemont of North Wales, smote him through the left side and overthrew him, and taking his horse by the rein he brought it to Sir Ulfius in haste and said, "Take this horse, mine old friend, for thou hast great need of one, and charge by side of me." And even as he spoke he saw Sir Ector, Sir