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**King Arthur's Knights The Tales  
Re-told for Boys & Girls**

Henry Gilbert

# Imprint

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In tholdè dayès of the King Arthour,  
Of which that Britons speken great honour,  
All was this land fulfilled of faery.

*The Canterbury Tales.*



## PREFACE

This book is an attempt to tell some of the stories of King Arthur and his Knights in a way which will be interesting to every boy and girl who loves adventures.

Although tales of these old British heroes have been published before in a form intended for young people, it is believed that they have never been related quite in the same spirit nor from the same point of view; and it is hoped that the book will fill a place hitherto vacant in the hearts of all boys and girls.

No doubt many of you, my young readers, have at some time or another taken down the *Morte D'Arthur* from your father's bookshelves and read a few pages of it here and there. But I doubt if any of you have ever gone very far in the volume. You found generally, I think, that it was written in a puzzling, old-fashioned language, that though it spoke of many interesting things, and seemed that it ought to be well worth reading, yet somehow it was tedious and dry.

In the tales as I have retold them for you, I hope you will not find any of these faults. Besides writing them in simple language, I have chosen only those episodes which I know would appeal to you. I have added or altered here and there, for in places it struck me that there was just wanting a word or two to make you feel the magic that was everywhere abroad in those days. It seemed to me that some mysterious adventure might easily be waiting in the ruined and deserted Roman town on the desolate moor, or even just round the mossy trunk of the next oak in the forest-drive, through which the knight was riding; or that any fair lady or questing dog which he might meet could turn out to be a wizard seeking to work woe upon him. Nevertheless, I was always sure that in those bright days when the world was young, whatever evil power might get the mastery for a little while, the knight's courage, humility, and faith would win through every peril at the end.

In this book, besides reading of wonderful adventures and brave fighting, you will learn just what sort of man a perfect knight was required to be in the chivalrous times when men wore armour and rode on errantry. The duties of a 'good and faithful knight' were

quite simple, but they were often very hard to perform. They were—to protect the distressed, to speak the truth, to keep his word to all, to be courteous and gentle to women, to defend right against might, and to do or say nothing that should sully the fair name of Christian knighthood.

Although, therefore, these stories of King Arthur and his men treat of knights and their ladies, of magical trolls and wonder-working wizards, and it might seem for that reason that they can have little or nothing in common with life of the present day, it will be seen that the spirit in which they are told conveys something which every boy can learn.

Indeed, the great and simple lesson of chivalry which the tales of King Arthur teach is, in a few words, to merit 'the fine old name of gentleman.'

The history of King Arthur and his Knights is contained in two books, one being the *Morte D'Arthur*, written by Sir Thomas Malory, the other being the *Mabinogion*, a collection of old Welsh stories, first translated by Lady Charlotte Guest in 1838. I have selected thirteen tales from the number which these two books contain; but there are many more, equally as interesting, which remain.

Little is known about Sir Thomas Malory, who lived in the fifteenth century. We only learn that he was a Welshman, a man of heroic mind who, as an old writer relates, 'from his youth, greatly shone in the gifts of mind and body.' Though much busied with cares of state, his favourite recreation was said to be the reading of history, and in this pursuit 'he made selections from various authors concerning the valour and the victories of the most renowned King Arthur of the Britons.' We know, further, that these selections or tales were translated mostly from poems about Arthur written by old French poets in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and that Sir Thomas Malory finished his translation in the ninth year of King Edward the Fourth (1469). This, of course, was before printing was introduced into England, but no doubt many written copies were made of the book, so as to enable the stories to be read to the lords and ladies and other rich people who would desire to hear about the flower of kings and chivalry, the great King Arthur. When, in

1477, Caxton set up his printing press at Westminster, the *Morte D'Arthur* was one of the books which then saw the light of day.

The *Mabinogion*, which contains other tales about King Arthur, is a collection of old Welsh romances. Though our earliest collection of them is to be found in a manuscript written in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, some of them are probably as old as the time when Welshmen clothed themselves in the skins of the beaver and the bear, and used stone for their tools and weapons.

It may be that, when you get older, you will go back to the two books I have mentioned, and you will find them so fascinating that you will be impatient of any other book which pretends to tell you the same tales. But until that time arrives, I hope you will find the stories as I have told them quite interesting and exciting.

HENRY GILBERT.

*June 1911.*



## CONTENTS

### CHAP.

- I. HOW ARTHUR WAS MADE KING AND WON HIS KINGDOM
- II. SIR BALIN AND THE STROKE DOLOROUS
- III. HOW LANCELOT WAS MADE A KNIGHT. THE FOUR WITCH QUEENS, AND THE ADVENTURES AT THE CHAPEL PERILOUS
- IV. THE KNIGHT OF THE KITCHEN
- V. HOW SIR TRISTRAM KEPT HIS WORD
- VI. THE DEEDS OF SIR GERAINT
- VII. HOW SIR PERCEVAL WAS TAUGHT CHIVALRY, AND ENDED THE EVIL WROUGHT BY SIR BALIN'S DOLOROUS STROKE
- VIII. HOW SIR OWEN WON THE EARLDOM OF THE FOUNTAIN
- IX. OF SIR LANCELOT AND THE FAIR MAID OF ASTOLAT
- X. HOW THE THREE GOOD KNIGHTS ACHIEVED THE HOLY GRAAL
- XI. OF THE PLOTS OF SIR MORDRED; AND HOW SIR LANCELOT SAVED THE QUEEN
- XII. OF SIR GAWAINE'S HATRED, AND THE WAR WITH SIR LANCELOT
- XIII. OF THE REBELLION OF MORDRED AND THE DEATH OF KING ARTHUR



## KING ARTHUR'S KNIGHTS



## I

### HOW ARTHUR WAS MADE KING AND WON HIS KINGDOM

In the hall of his Roman palace at London, King Uther, Pendragon of the Island of Britain, lay dying. He had been long sick with a wasting disease, and forced to lie in his bed, gnawing his beard with wrath at his weakness, while the pagan Saxons ravened up and down the fair broad lands, leaving in their tracks the smoking ruin of broken towns and desolated villages, where mothers lay dead beside their children on the hearths, fair churches stood pillaged and desecrated, and priests and nuns wandered in the wilds.

At length, when the pagans, bold and insolent, had ventured near London, the king had been able to bear his shame and anguish no longer. He had put himself, in a litter, at the head of his army, and meeting the fierce, brave pagans at Verulam (now called St. Albans) he had, in a battle day-long and stubborn, forced them at length to fly with heavy slaughter.

That was three days ago, and since then he had lain in his bed as still as if he were dead; and beside him sat the wise wizard Merlin, white with great age, and in his eyes the calmness of deep learning.

It was the third night when the king suddenly awoke from his stupor and clutched the hand of Merlin.

'I have dreamed!' he said in a low shaken voice. 'I have seen two dragons fighting—one white, the other red. First the white dragon got the mastery, and clawed with iron talons the red one's crest, and drove him hither and thither into holes and crannies of the rocks. And then the red one took heart, and with a fury that was marvellous to see, he drove and tore the white dragon full terribly, and anon the white one crawled away sore wounded. And the red dragon walked up and down in the place of his triumph, and grew proud, and fought smaller red dragons and conquered. Thus for a long time he stayed, and was secure and boastful. Then I saw the white dragon return with a rage that was very terrible, and the red dragon fought with him; but his pride had softened him, so he drew off. Then other red dragons came upon him in his wounds and beat him sore, which seeing, the white dragon dashed upon them all—

and I awoke. Merlin, tell me what this may mean, for my mind is sore distraught with the vision.'

Then Merlin looked at the trembling king, wasted with disease, and in his wise heart was great pity.

'It means, lord,' he said in slow grave tones, 'that thy people shall conquer—that a red dragon shall rise from thy kin, who shall drive out the loathsome pagan and shall conquer far and wide, and his fame shall go into all lands and for all time.'

'I thank thee, Merlin, for thy comfort,' sighed the wearied king. 'I have feared me these last years that the pagan will at the last drive my people into the western sea, and that the name of Christ shall die out of this fair land, and the foul pagan possess it. But thy words give me great heart.'

'Nay, sir,' said Merlin, 'take comfort. Great power will come to this people in a near time, and they shall conquer all their enemies.'

Anon the king slept, and lay thus for three further days, neither speaking nor moving. Many great lords and barons came craving to speak with Merlin, asking if the king were not better. But, looking into their crafty eyes, and seeing there the pride and ambitions of their hearts, Merlin knew that they wished the king were already dead; for all thought that King Uther had no son to take the kingdom after him, and each great baron, strong in men, plotted to win the overlordship when the king should be gone.

'If he dieth and sayeth not which he shall name to succeed him,' some asked, 'say, Merlin, what's to be done?'

'I shall tell you,' said Merlin. 'Come ye all into this chamber tomorrow's morn, and, if God so wills, I will make the king speak.'

Next morn, therefore, came all the great barons and lords into the high hall of the palace, and many were the proud and haughty glances passing among them. There was King Lot of Orkney, small and slim, with his dark narrow face and crafty eyes under pent eyebrows; King Uriens of Reged, tall and well-seeming, with grim eyes war-wise, fresh from the long harrying of the fleeing pagans; King Mark of Tintagel, burly of form, crafty and mean of look; King Nentres of Garlot, ruddy of face, blustering of manner, who tried to

hide cunning under a guise of honesty; and many others, as Duke Cambenet of Loidis, King Brandegoris of Stranggore, King Morkant of Strathclyde, King Clariance of Northumberland, King Kador of Cornwall, and King Idres of Silura.

Now, when all these were assembled about the bed of Uther, Merlin went to the side of the sleeping king, and looked long and earnestly upon his closed eyes. Anon he passed his hands above the face of the king, and Uther instantly awoke, and looked about him as if startled.

'Lord,' said Merlin, 'God's hand is drawing you to Him, and these your lords desire you to name your successor ere you pass from life. Is it not your desire that your son Arthur shall take the kingdom after you, with your blessing?'

Those who craned towards the bed started and looked darkly at Merlin and then at each other; for none had heard of the son whom the wizard named Arthur. Then in the deep silence the dying king raised his hand in the sign of blessing, and in a hollow whisper said:

'Such is my desire. With God's blessing I wish my son Arthur to take this kingdom after me, and all that love me must follow him.'

His eyes closed, a shiver passed down the tall frame as it lay beneath the clothes, and with a sigh the soul of Uther sped.

In a few days the king was buried in all solemnity with the dead of his kindred in the Roman temple that had been made a church, where now stands St. Paul's. Thereafter men waited and wondered, for the land was without a king, and none knew who was rightfully heir to the throne.

As the days went by, men gathered in groups in the market-place of London, whispering the rumours that mysteriously began to fly from mouth to mouth,—how King Lot of Orkney and Lothian was gathering his knights and men-at-arms; and King Uriens and Duke Cambenet of Loidis had got together a great host, although the remnant of the pagans had fled the country. The faces of the citizens went gloomy as they thought of the griefs of civil war, of the terrors of the sack of cities, the ruin of homes, the death of dear ones, and the loss of riches. Nevertheless, some were already wagering which

of the great lords would conquer the others, and take to himself the crown of Britain and the title of Pendragon.

As it neared the feast of Christmas, men heard that the Archbishop of London, who was then chief ruler of the Church, had sent his letters to each and all the great nobles, bidding them come to a great council to be holden at the church of St. Paul at Christmas.

When men heard that this was done by the advice of Merlin, faces lightened and looked more joyful.

'Now shall things go right,' said they, 'for the old, old Merlin hath the deepest wisdom of all the earth.'

On Christmas Eve the city throbbled with the clank of arms and the tramp of the great retinues of princes, kings and powerful lords who had come at the archbishop's summons, and by day and night the narrow ways were crowded with armed men. Long ere the dawn of Christmas Day, the lords and the common people betook themselves along the wide road which led across to the church, which then stood in a wide space amid fields, and all knelt therein to mass.

While it was yet dark a great strange cry rang out in the churchyard. Some ran forth, and there by the wall behind the high altar they saw a vast stone, four-square, that had not been there before, and in the middle thereof was stuck a great wedge of steel, and sticking therefrom by the point was a rich sword. On the blade were written words in Latin, which a clerk read forth, which said, 'Whoso pulleth this sword out of this stone and wedge of steel is rightwise born King of all Britain.'

The clerk ran into the church and told the archbishop, and men were all amazed and would have gone instantly to see this marvel, but the archbishop bade them stay.

'Finish your prayers to God,' he said, 'for no man may touch this strange thing till high mass be done.'

When mass was finished, all poured forth from the church and thronged about the stone, and marvelled at the words on the sword. First King Lot, with a light laugh, took hold of the handle and essayed to pull out the point of the sword, but he could not, and his

face went hot and angry. Then King Nentres of Garlot took his place with a jest, but though he heaved at the sword with all his burly strength, till it seemed like to snap, he could not move it, and so let go at last with an angry oath. All the others essayed in like manner, but by none was it moved a jot, and all stood about discomfited, looking with black looks at one another and the stone.

'He that is rightwise born ruler of Britain is not here,' said the archbishop at length, 'but doubt not he shall come in God's good time. Meanwhile, let a tent be raised over the stone, and do ye lords appoint ten of your number to watch over it, and we will essay the sword again after New Year's Day.'

So that the kings and lords should be kept together, the archbishop appointed a great tournament to be held on New Year's Day on the waste land north of the city, which men now call Smithfield.

Now when the day was come, a certain lord, Sir Ector de Morven, who had great lands about the isle of Thorney, rode towards the jousts with his son, Sir Kay, and young Arthur, who was Sir Kay's foster-brother. When they had got nearly to the place, suddenly Sir Kay bethought him that he had left his sword at home.

'Do you ride back, young Arthur,' he said, 'and fetch me my sword, for if I do not have it I may not fight.'

Willingly Arthur turned his horse and rode back swiftly. But when he had arrived at the house, he found it shut up and none was within, for all had gone to the jousts. Then was he a little wroth, and rode back wondering how he should obtain a sword for his foster-brother.

Suddenly, as he saw the tower of St. Paul's church through the trees, he bethought him of the sword in the stone, about which many men had spoken in his hearing.

'I will ride thither,' said he, 'and see if I may get that sword for my brother, for he shall not be without a sword this day.'

When he came to the churchyard, he tied his horse to the stile, and went through the grave-mounds to the tent wherein was the sword. He found the place unwatched, and the flashing sword was sticking by the point in the stone.

Lightly he grasped the handle of the sword with one hand, and it came forth straightway!

Then, glad that his brother should not be without a sword, he swiftly gat upon his horse and rode on, and delivered the sword to Sir Kay, and thought no more of aught but the splendid knights and richly garbed lords that were at the jousts.

But Sir Kay looked at the sword, and the writing, and knew it was the sword of the stone, and marvelled how young Arthur had possessed himself thereof; and being of a covetous and sour mind he thought how he might make advantage for himself. He went to his father, Sir Ector, and said:

'Lo, father, this is the sword of the stone, and surely am I rightful king.'

Sir Ector knew the sword and marvelled, but his look was stern as he gazed into the crafty eyes of his son.

'Come ye with me,' he said, and all three rode to the church, and alit from their horses and went in.

Sir Ector strode up the aisle to the altar, and turning to his son, said sternly:

'Now, swear on God's book and the holy relics how thou didst get this sword.'

Sir Kay's heart went weak, and he stammered out the truth.

'How gat you this sword?' asked Sir Ector of Arthur.

'Sir, I will tell you,' said Arthur, and so told him all as it had happened.

Sir Ector marvelled what this should mean; for Arthur had been given to him to nourish and rear as a week-old child by Merlin, but the wizard had only told him that the babe was a son of a dead lady, whose lord had been slain by the pagans.

Then Sir Ector went to the stone and bade Arthur put back the sword into the wedge of steel, which the young man did easily.