

A photograph of two knights in full plate armor on a boat. The knight in the foreground is wearing a helmet with a visor and a red surcoat. The knight behind him is also in armor. They are on a body of water with a forested bank in the background.

***HENRY  
GILBERT***

***KING  
ARTHUR'S  
KNIGHTS***

**Henry Gilbert**

# **King Arthur's Knights**

**The Tales Re-told for Boys & Girls**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## KING ARTHUR'S KNIGHTS

I

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

VIII

IX

X

XI

XII

XIII

# KING ARTHUR'S KNIGHTS

[Table of Contents](#)

## [Table of Contents](#)

### 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 to-morrow'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 throbbed 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.

Thereupon Sir Ector strove with all his strength to draw the sword forth again, but though he pulled till he sweated, he could not stir the sword.

'Now you essay it,' he said to his son. But naught that Sir Kay could do availed.

'Now do you try,' he bade Arthur.

Arthur lightly grasped the handle with one hand, and the sword came out without hindrance.

Therewith Sir Ector sank to his knees, and Sir Kay also. And they bared their heads.

'Alas,' said Arthur, 'my own dear father and brother, why kneel ye so to me?'

'Nay, nay, my lord Arthur, it is not so,' said Sir Ector, 'for I was never your father. I wot well ye are of higher blood than I weened. For Merlin delivered you to me while yet ye were a babe.'

The tears came into Arthur's eyes when he knew that Sir Ector was not his father, for the young man had loved him as if he were of his own blood.

'Sir,' said Ector unto Arthur, 'will ye be my good and kind lord when ye are king?'

'Ah, if this be true as ye say,' cried Arthur, 'ye shall desire of me whatsoever ye may, and I shall give it you. For both you and my good lady and dear mother your wife have kept and loved me as your own.'

'Sir,' said Sir Ector, 'I crave a boon of you, that while you live, your foster-brother, Sir Kay, shall be high seneschal of all your lands.'

'That shall be done, and never man shall have that office but him, while he and I live,' replied Arthur.

Then hastily Sir Ector rode to the archbishop, and told him how and by whom the sword had been achieved from the stone. Thereupon the archbishop let call a great meeting on Twelfth Day of all the kings and barons.

So on the day appointed, all men gathered in the churchyard of St. Paul's, and the tent was removed from about the stone. From day dawn to the evening the kings and princes and lords strove each in his turn to draw the sword from the stone. But none of them availed to move it.

While they stood about, dark of look, gnawing their lips with rage and disappointment, the archbishop turned privily to Sir Ector and bade him bring Arthur.

The young man came, quietly clad in a tunic of brown samite, of medium height, with curly hair above a fair face of noble, though mild mien. As he came among the richly clad nobles, they looked haughtily at him, and wondered who he was and why he came, for as yet none had been told that the sword had been drawn by him.

The archbishop, tall, white-haired and reverend, called Arthur to him and said in grave tones:

'My son, I have heard a strange tale of thee, and whether it be true or false, God shall decide. Now, therefore, do ye take hold upon this sword and essay to draw it from the stone.'

The proud barons, some with looks amazed and others with sneering laughter, pressed about the young man as he stepped towards the stone. Arthur took the handle of the sword with his right hand, and the sword seemed to fall into his grasp.

Thereat arose great cries of rage, and angry looks flashed forth, and many a hand went to dagger haft.

'Ho, archbishop!' cried King Lot, fiercely striding towards the tall ecclesiastic, 'what wizard's brat are you foisting upon us here to draw the sword by magic?'

'Tis a trick!' cried Nentres of Garlot, his bluff manner falling from him, and all the savage anger gleaming from his eyes. 'A trick that shall not blind men such as we!'

'Who is this beggar's boy that is put forth to shame us kings and nobles?' said King Mark, and his hand sought his dagger as he disappeared among the crowd and wormed his way towards where stood young Arthur. But Sir Ector and Sir Kay, seeing the threatening looks of all, had quickly ranged themselves beside young Arthur, and with them went Sir Bedevere, Sir Baudwin and Sir Ulfius, three noble lords who had loved King Uther well.

'Peace, lords!' said the old archbishop, calmly meeting the raging looks about him. 'Ye know what words are about the sword, and this youth hath drawn the sword. I know naught of tricks or wizardry, but I think high Heaven hath chosen this way of showing who shall be lord of this land, and I think this young man is rightful King of us all.'

'Tis some base-born churl's son that the wizard Merlin would foist upon us!' cried the barons. 'We will have none of him!'

'A shame and dishonour it is, so to try to overrule us, kings and lords of high lineage, with an unknown youth,' cried others.

'We will have the sword put back and set a watch over it,' cried King Uriens, 'and we will meet here again at

Candlemas, and essay the sword. And at that time, my lord archbishop, thou shalt do the proper rites to exorcise all evil powers, and then we will try the sword once more.'

So was it agreed by all, and ten knights watched day and night about the stone and the sword.

But it befell at Candlemas as it had befallen at Twelfth Day, that for all their strength and might, none of the kings or barons could draw forth the sword; but into the hand of the unknown Arthur the weapon seemed to fall.

Whereat they were all sore aggrieved and rageful, and resolved that they would have yet another trial at Easter. It befell at the feast of Easter as it had befallen before, and this time the kings and lords for angry spite would have fallen upon Arthur and slain him, but the archbishop threatened them with the most dreadful ban of Holy Church. They forbore, therefore, and went aside, and declared that it was their will to essay the sword again at the high feast of Pentecost.

By Merlin's advice the young Arthur went never about, unless the five friends of Uther were with him, that is to say, Sir Ector and his son Sir Kay, Sir Bedevere, Sir Baudwin and Sir Ulfius. And though at divers times men were found skulking or hiding in the horse-stall, the dark wood by the hall, or the bend in the lane, in places where Arthur might pass, no harm came to him by reason of the loving watch of those noble knights.

Again at the feast of Pentecost men gathered in the churchyard of St. Paul's, and the press of people was such that no man had ever seen the like. Once more the kings and princes and great barons, to the number of forty-nine,



came forward, and each in turn pulled and drew at the sword in the stone until the sweat stood on their brows. Nevertheless, though the sword point was but the width of a palm in the stone, not the mightiest of them could move it by the breadth of a hair.

King Mark of Tintagel was the last of them who had to stand back at length, baffled and raging inwardly. Many were the evil looks that would have slain Arthur as he stood among his friends.

Then a cry came from among the common people, and so strong was it that the nobles looked as if they hated to hear it.

'Let Arthur draw the sword!' was the call from a thousand throats.

The venerable archbishop came and took Arthur by the hand, and led him towards the sword. Again the young man held the rich pommel with his single hand, and that which none of the forty-nine great men could do, he did as easily as if he but plucked a flower.

A fierce cry leaped from among the thousands of the common people.

'Arthur shall be our King!' they cried. 'Arthur is our King! We will no longer deny him!'

Many of the princes and barons cried out with the commons that this was their will also; but eleven of the most powerful and ambitious showed by their arrogant and angry gestures that they refused to own Arthur as their lord.

For a long time the uproar raged, the cries of the common folk becoming fiercer and more menacing against the counter cries of the eleven kings and their adherents.

At length from among the people there came the governor of London, who, in his rich robes of office, leaped upon the stone where but lately the sword had been.

'My lords, I speak the will of the commons,' he cried, and at his voice all were silent. 'We have taken counsel together, and we will have Arthur for our King. We will put him no more in delay, for we all see that it is God's will that he shall be our King, and who that holdeth against him, we will slay.'

With that he got down from the stone, kneeled before Arthur, put the keys of the city in his hands, and rendered homage unto him. The great multitude kneeled likewise, bowing their bare heads, and cried him mercy because they had denied him so long.

Because they feared the great multitude, the eleven kings kneeled with them, but in their hearts was rage and rebellion.

Then Arthur took the sword between his hands and, going into the church, he laid it on the high altar, and the archbishop blessed him. Then, since Arthur was as yet unknighthed, King Kador of Cornwall, who was brother of King Uther, made him a knight.

Standing up in the sight of all the people, lords and commons, Arthur laid his left hand upon the holy relics; then, lifting up his right hand, he swore that he would be a true king, to stand forth as their ruler in justice and mercy, to keep them from oppression, to redress their wrongs, and to establish right throughout the length and breadth of his dominions.

Men went forth from the church in great joy, for now they had a king they loved, and they felt that the land was safe

from civil strife and the griefs of war.

When Arthur in his palace at London had received the homage of all the lords and princes from the lands south of Humber, he appointed his officers. Sir Kay he made seneschal or steward, and Sir Baudwin was made constable, and Sir Ulfius he named chamberlain of his court. By the counsel of Merlin he made Sir Bedevere Warden of the Northern Marches, for the lands of the eleven kings lay mostly in the country north of Trent, and though those princes had yielded lip service to Arthur, Merlin knew that in their hearts they nurtured the seeds of conspiracy.

King Arthur made a progress through all his territories, staying at the halls of those who did service for the lands they held of him, and he commanded all those who had suffered evil or wrong to come to him, and many came. The king's wrath when he heard a tale of women and orphans wronged or robbed or evilly treated by proud or powerful lords and knights, was terrible to see. Many were the pale captives he released from their deep dungeons, many were the tears he wiped away, and hard and heavy was his punishment of evil lords who thought their power would for ever shield them from penalty for their cruelties and oppression.

When this was done, he caused a proclamation to be uttered, that he would hold his coronation at the city of Caerleon-upon-Usk, at the feast of Hallow-mass then following; and he commanded all his loyal subjects to attend. When the time came, all the countryside on the marches of Wales was filled with the trains of noblemen and their knights and servants gathering towards the city.

As Arthur looked from the window of the palace which the Romans had builded, and which looked far and wide over the crowded roads, word was brought to him that six of the kings who had resented his kingship had come to the city. At this Arthur was glad, for he was full gentle and kindly, and would liefer be friendly with a man than his enemy.

Thinking that these kings and knights had come for love of him, and to do him worship at his feast, King Arthur sent them many and rich presents. But his messengers returned, saying that the kings and knights had received them with insults, and had refused to take the gifts of a beardless boy who had come, they said, of low blood.

Whereat the king's eyes flashed grimly, but at that time he said no word.

In the joustings and knightly games that were part of the festival of the coronation, the six kings ever ranged themselves against King Arthur and his knights, and did him all the despite they could achieve. At that time they deemed themselves not strong enough to hurt the king, and therefore did no open act of revolt.

Now it happened, when the feasting was over and many of the kings and lords had departed home again, that Arthur stood in the door of his hall that looked into the street, and with his three best nobles, Sir Kay, Sir Bedevere and Sir Baudwin, he watched the rich cavalcades of his lords pass out of the town. Suddenly, as he stood there, a little page-boy, fair of face but for the pitiful sorrow and gauntness upon it, dashed from the throng of a lord's retinue which

was passing and threw himself along the ground, his hands clutching the feet of the king.

'O King Arthur, save me!' the lad cried, spent of breath, 'or this evil lord will slay me as he hath slain my mother and my brothers.'

From the throng a tall black knight, leaping from his horse, strode towards the boy, and would have torn his hands from their hold upon the king's feet.

'Back, sir knight!' said the king. 'I will hear more of this. Who are you?'

The knight laughed insolently.

'I? Oh, I am one that the last king knew well to his sorrow. I am Turquine, brother to Sir Caradoc of the Dolorous Tower.'

'What is this boy to you?'

'He is Owen, the caitiff son of a brave father, who gave him to my care to train in knightly ways. But 'tis a puling fool, more fitting for the bowers of ladies.'

'Nay, king, he lies!' said the lad who kneeled before the king. 'I am his nephew. His hand slew my dear father treacherously, and he hath starved my mother to her death. For our lands are rich while his are poor, and my father warned me of him ere he died. This man hath kept me prisoner, used me evilly, starving me and wealing me with cruel blows daily. I think he hath my death in his heart.'

'I can speak of this thing,' said a knight, who came forth from the throng. 'I am Sir Miles of Bandon. I know this lad speaks truth, for his father was mine own dear cousin. This Sir Turquine is a felon knight.'

The brow of the king went dark. He looked from the cruel insolent face of the black knight to the wan beseeching face

of the lad.

'Hark ye!' said Arthur to Turquine, and his voice was terrible, for all that it was very quiet, 'ye shall answer to me and my justice for any evil you have done this young boy or his people. When I send for thee, come at once, or it will be worse for thee. The boy stays with me. Now begone!'

The big knight looked with hatred and surprise in his eyes, and for a while said naught. Then, with an insolent laugh, he turned and vaulted on his horse.

'I may come when thou dost not expect me, sir king!' he said, mocking, and shot an evil look at the young page.

Thenceforward the young page Owen stayed in the court, doing his services deftly and quietly, with an eye ever on the king to do his bidding. One night, when a storm raged and the town lay dark and quiet, King Arthur sat in his hall. Sir Kay and Sir Bedevere told tales, or the king's bard sang songs to amuse him, while about them moved young Owen, noiseless of step, quick of eye, and as restless as an unquiet spirit.

Anon the lad would pass through the arras, creep to the great outer door, and look at the porter in his room beside it. Then he would stand at the wicket and listen to the rare footsteps pass down the road, and when the rising wind keened and shrilled through the crannies, he would glance about him with quick looks as if in fear of an enemy.

Once he went to Falk, the king's porter, and said:

'Tis a stormy night, Sir Falk. I doubt few are about the streets of Caerleon on such a night.'

'Few indeed,' said Falk.

'Yet methought but now I heard the rattle of a bridle in the distance, as if a steed stood in armour.'

'I heard naught,' said Falk. 'Twould be but the grinding of a chain beside a horseblock.'

Young Owen went away, and sat where the king and his knights listened to the marvellous tales of the wise Gildas, who told of most terrible witches and warlocks in the wizard woods of Brittany.

Again the lad approached the door and listened; then going to the porter he said:

'This drenching storm will tear the last poor leaves from the forest trees, I ween, Sir Falk.'

'Of a truth,' said the porter, "'tis overlate for leaves. They be stuck in the mire of the rides long ere this.'

'They could not be blown so far in this gushing storm,' said the page, 'and therefore I have deceived myself. But I thought I heard the rustle of leaves on the stones before the door but now.'

'It could not be,' said the porter; 'it was doubtless the gouts of water from the roof of the hall thou didst hear.'

Owen went away, but in a little while returned, and softly opened the wicket panel in the door a little way, and looked forth into the roaring darkness of rain and wind.

'Think you, Sir Falk,' he said, going to the porter, 'that the witches from the woods of Denn do send their baleful fires on such a night as this to lead poor houseless wretches into the marsh below the wall?'

The porter laughed.

'Thou'rt over-full of fancies to-night, young sir,' he said. 'Have no fear of witches. We're all safe and sound here till

the blessed daylight comes, and none need stir out till then.'

'Methought I saw a flash in the dark but now,' said Owen, 'as if 'twas the gleam of a sword or a wandering marsh fire.'

'Not a doubt 'twas but a lightning flash,' returned the porter. 'Now go ye, for I hear the king moving towards bed. Sleep soundly, lad; no need to fear this night.'

In a little while the palace was sunk in darkness, and in silence save for the smothered cries of sleepers in their dreams. Outside, the rain still sobbed at the eaves, and the wind beat at the narrow casements. Time passed, and for all his weariness young Owen could not sleep.

His spirit had been heavy all the day, and vague and dreadful fears had haunted him. Something told him that the life of the beloved king, who had taken him from the foul and cruel power of Sir Turquine, was threatened. He rose in the dark from his pallet of straw in the hall where lay the other pages, and stole softly out. He would make his way to the king's door, and, wrapped in his cloak, would lie before it.

He felt his way softly along the corridor in the deep darkness. Suddenly he stopped. Something alive was near him in the dark. Even as he turned, a hand seized him by the throat, and a hateful voice which he knew growled in his ear:

'Lead us to the king's room, or this shall sink in thy heart!'

He knew at once that all his fears of the day and the night had been true. He had indeed heard the stealthy footsteps before the door of the hall, and had seen the dull



gleam of a sword in the hand of one of those who lay in wait to murder the king.

'Speak!' said the voice again. 'Is the king's room backward or forward?'

'I will not tell thee!' he gasped, and heard a low mocking laugh.

'Tis thee, my caitiff boy!' sneered Sir Turquine, for he it was. 'Then this for thee!'

With the words he thrust his dagger into the body of the struggling boy, who swooned and dropped to the floor.

In a few moments Owen stirred, for his struggles had caused his enemy's dagger to swerve, and though weak from loss of blood, the young page knew that he must act at once to save his hero from the murderous knives.

He heard the stealthy footsteps of the murderers going backwards to the hall, and, filled with joy, he pressed forward. His head was dizzy, he felt as if every moment he must sink in a swoon; but at length he reached the door, turned the handle and fell in.

'The king!' he cried. 'Save the king! Turquine has broken in and seeks his life.'

At his shrill cry there was the rush of men and torches along the corridors and into the room. Sir Bedevere was at the head of them, and in a moment he, with twenty half-dressed knights behind him, was scattering through the palace seeking the murderers, while the king ordered his leech or doctor to attend instantly to Owen's wound.

This was soon found not to be severe, and the lad was laid at the foot of the king's bed, glad and proud to hear the king's words of praise.

Then Sir Bedevere entered, saying that the murderers had fled as soon as they found they were discovered.

'But, my lord king,' he said, 'this is no murderous attempt by one insolent lord. It means, my king, that thou wilt have to fight for thy kingdom. It is civil war!'

'What mean you, Sir Bedevere?'

'Sir Turquine is but one of them, my king,' replied Bedevere. 'He is but the tool of the six kings who have put such great despite upon you. For with them also in this midnight murder-raid I saw King Nentres of Garlot and Duke Cambenet.'

Suddenly, as he spoke, the tall grey form of Merlin took shape before them, for so great and marvellous was the power of this wizard, that he could come and go unseen, except when he willed that men should see him.

'Sir,' said Merlin, 'ye owe your life to this brave lad here, and he shall be a passing good man when he shall have attained his full strength, and he doth deserve your high and gracious favour.'

'That shall he have,' said the king, and smiled at young Owen, and the smile made the lad forget all the burning of his wound for very pride and gladness.

'And now,' said Merlin, 'if ye will gather your men I will lead you to the hold of those murderous kings by a secret way, and ye should give them such a sudden blow as will discomfit them.'

In a little while all was ready, and then, silently, with muffled arms, the men of Arthur were marching forth down the narrow dark lanes of the town to where the place was

ruinous with old houses left forsaken by their Roman masters when they had gone from Britain fifty years before.

Merlin led them to a great squat tower which stood beside the wall, wherein a single light gleamed at a high window. Causing some to surround this place, Merlin led others to a broken door, and there they entered in. Then was there a sudden uproar and fierce fighting in the rooms and up the narrow stairs.

In the darkness King Lot, with a hundred knights, burst out through a rear door, and thought to escape; but King Arthur with his knights waylaid them, and slew on the right and on the left, doing such deeds that all took pride in his bravery and might of arms. Fiercely did King Lot press forward, and to his aid came Sir Caradoc, who set upon King Arthur in the rear.

Arthur drew from his side the sword he had so marvellously taken from the stone, and in the darkness it flashed as if it were thirty torches, and it dazzled his enemies' eyes, so that they gave way.

By this time the common people of Caerleon had heard the great outcry and the clang of swords on armour. Learning of the jeopardy of their beloved king from midnight murderers, they ran to the tower, and with clubs and staves and bills they slew many of the men of the evil kings, putting the rest to flight. But the six kings were still unharmed, and with the remnant of their knights fled and departed in the darkness.

A few days later King Arthur journeyed back to London, and on an evening when, in the twilight, he stood upon the roof of the palace overlooking the broad Thames, he was

aware of a shadow beside him where no shadow had been before. Before he could cross himself against the evil powers of wizardry and glamour, the steel-blue eyes of Merlin looked out from the cloud, and the magician's voice spoke to him as if from a great distance.

'I stand beneath the shaggy brows of the Hill of Tanyshane,' said the voice, 'and I look down into the courtyard of the castle of King Lot. There I see the gathering of men, the flash of torches on their hauberks, the glitter of helms, and the blue gleams of swords. I have passed through these northern lands, from the windswept ways of Alclwyd to the quaking marshes of the Humber. Eleven castles have I seen, and each is filled with the clang of beating iron, the glow of smiths' fires and the hissing of new-tempered steel. Call thy council, and abide my return, for now you must fight for your kingdom, O king, and for your very life.'

The voice ceased, and the shadow and the vivid eyes it half concealed died away with it.

Into the council-chamber three days later, while men waited for they knew not what, Merlin entered.

'What news do you bring, Merlin?' they cried.

'Of civil war!' he said. 'I warn you all that the six kings ye gave a check to at Caerleon have taken to themselves four others and a mighty duke. They will to thrust Arthur, whom they call base-born, out of his life. Mark you, they are passing strong and as good fighting men as any alive—pity it is that great Uriens is with them, the wisest and noblest fighter of them all!—and unless Arthur have more men of

arms and chivalry with him than he can get within this realm, he will be overcome!'

'Oh, but we be big enough!' cried some.

'That ye are not!' said Merlin. 'Which of ye have single-handed beaten back the pagan hordes from your lands? Which of ye can match King Lot for subtlety and craft, or the great Uriens of Reged for wisdom in war?'

'What is to do, then? Tell us your counsel,' said they all.

'This is my advice,' replied the wizard. 'Ye must send an embassy to King Ban of Brittany and King Bors of Gaul, promising to aid them when King Claudas, their common enemy, shall fight them again, if they will come and aid our king in this his fight for life and kingdom.'

In a few weeks this was done. King Ban of Brittany and his brother, King Bors, crossed into Britain with five thousand good knights, sworn to aid Arthur in this great conflict.

With King Ban came his son, young Lancelot, who was later to make more fame and more dole than any knight of Arthur's court.

On a day in early spring, the hosts of Arthur and his two allies were encamped in Sherwood Forest, and the fore-riders or scouts, which Merlin had sent out, came hastening in to say that the host of the eleven kings was but a few miles to the north of Trent water. By secret ways, throughout that night, Merlin led the army of Arthur until they came near where the enemy lay. Then did he order an ambush to be made by some part of their men, with King Ban and King Bors, by hiding in a hollow filled with trees.

In the morning, when either host saw the other, the northern host was well comforted, for they thought King Arthur's force was but small.

With the pealing of trumpets and the shouts of the knights, King Arthur ordered his men to advance, and in their midst was the great silken banner with the fierce red dragon ramping in its folds. This had been blessed by the Archbishop of London at a solemn service held before the host left London.

All day the battle raged. Knight hurled and hurtled against knight, bowmen shot their short Welsh arrows, and men-at-arms thrust and maimed and slashed with the great billhooks and spears.

King Arthur, with his bodyguard of four—Sir Kay, Sir Baudwin, Sir Ulfius, and Sir Bedevere—did feats of arms that it was marvel to see. Often the eleven kings did essay to give deadly strokes upon the king, but the press of fighting kept some of them from him, and others withdrew sore wounded from the attack upon him and his faithful four.

Once the five held strong medley against six of the rebel kings, and these were King Lot, King Nentres, King Brandegoris, King Idres, King Uriens, and King Agwisance; and so fiercely did they attack them that three drew off sore wounded, whilst King Lot, King Uriens and King Nentres were unhorsed, and all but slain by the men-at-arms.

At length it appeared to Arthur that his host was yielding before the weight of numbers of the enemy, and then he bethought him of a strategy. He took counsel of his nobles, and they approved; he sent a trusty messenger to the Kings