





Robert Hope - Moncureff,
1846 - 1927

Suron Rock,
from
Mother
Christmas 1881



“With a bound and a roar the lion sprang upon the giant. In vain he strove to use his club.”—p. 18. *The Knight of the Lion.*



THE OLD TALES OF CHIVALRY.

Re-told by
ASCOTT R. HOPE,

AUTHOR OF

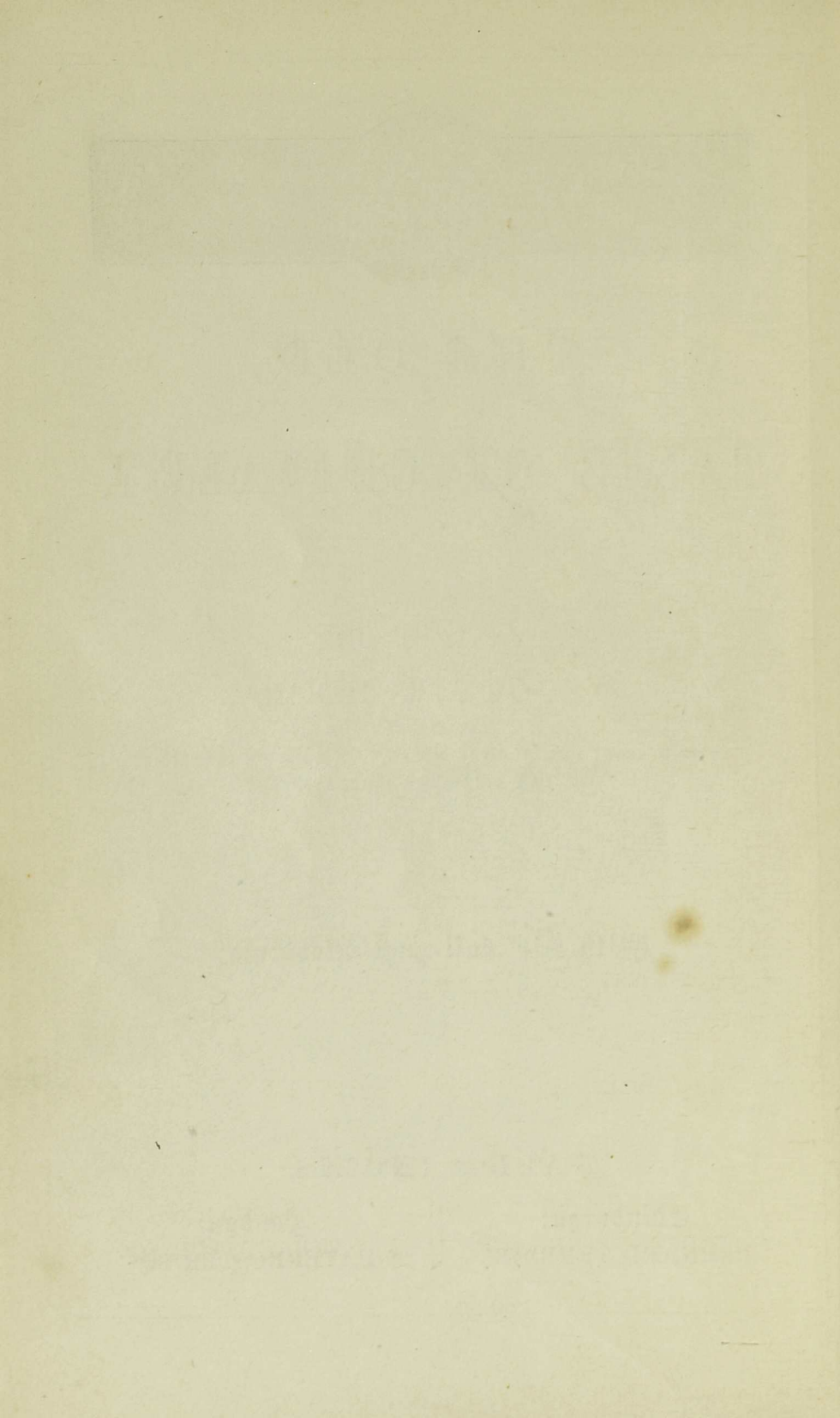
"ROUND ABOUT THE MINSTER GREEN," "A PECK OF TROUBLES,"
"THE DAY AFTER THE HOLIDAYS," &c.

With Six Full-page Woodcuts.

GALL & INGLIS.

Edinburgh:
BERNARD TERRACE.

London:
25 PATERNOSTER SQ^R.



CONTENTS.



	PAGE
INTRODUCTION,	v
THE KNIGHT OF THE LION,	1
HUON'S TASK,	34
THE DRAGON OF RHODES,	77
THE RESCUE OF THE QUEEN,	89
ROLAND AND OLIVER,	132
FLORICE AND BLANCHEFLOWER,	143
THE RANSOM,	177
THE SON OF AMADIS,	184
THE KNIGHT AND THE ABBOT,	215
STEEL-HEART,	240
THE DEMON KNIGHT,	258
THE CHALLENGE,	268

CONTENTS

1	Introduction
2	The History of the Book
3	Notes
4	The History of the Book
5	The History of the Book
6	The History of the Book
7	The History of the Book
8	The History of the Book
9	The History of the Book
10	The History of the Book
11	The History of the Book
12	The History of the Book
13	The History of the Book
14	The History of the Book
15	The History of the Book
16	The History of the Book
17	The History of the Book
18	The History of the Book
19	The History of the Book
20	The History of the Book
21	The History of the Book
22	The History of the Book
23	The History of the Book
24	The History of the Book
25	The History of the Book
26	The History of the Book
27	The History of the Book
28	The History of the Book
29	The History of the Book
30	The History of the Book
31	The History of the Book
32	The History of the Book
33	The History of the Book
34	The History of the Book
35	The History of the Book
36	The History of the Book
37	The History of the Book
38	The History of the Book
39	The History of the Book
40	The History of the Book
41	The History of the Book
42	The History of the Book
43	The History of the Book
44	The History of the Book
45	The History of the Book
46	The History of the Book
47	The History of the Book
48	The History of the Book
49	The History of the Book
50	The History of the Book
51	The History of the Book
52	The History of the Book
53	The History of the Book
54	The History of the Book
55	The History of the Book
56	The History of the Book
57	The History of the Book
58	The History of the Book
59	The History of the Book
60	The History of the Book
61	The History of the Book
62	The History of the Book
63	The History of the Book
64	The History of the Book
65	The History of the Book
66	The History of the Book
67	The History of the Book
68	The History of the Book
69	The History of the Book
70	The History of the Book
71	The History of the Book
72	The History of the Book
73	The History of the Book
74	The History of the Book
75	The History of the Book
76	The History of the Book
77	The History of the Book
78	The History of the Book
79	The History of the Book
80	The History of the Book
81	The History of the Book
82	The History of the Book
83	The History of the Book
84	The History of the Book
85	The History of the Book
86	The History of the Book
87	The History of the Book
88	The History of the Book
89	The History of the Book
90	The History of the Book
91	The History of the Book
92	The History of the Book
93	The History of the Book
94	The History of the Book
95	The History of the Book
96	The History of the Book
97	The History of the Book
98	The History of the Book
99	The History of the Book
100	The History of the Book



INTRODUCTION.

THE Old Tales of Chivalry, so universally popular throughout the Middle Ages, have now for many generations fallen into discredit. Few but grave students of the past know even the names, once familiar as household words to young and old, of those

“ British and Armoric knights,
And all who since, baptized or infidel,
Jousted in Aspramont or Montalban,
Damasco, or Morocco, or Trebizond.”

The scenes and characters which for our ancestors were lit by the brightest light of imagination, are now hidden beneath centuries of dust, except where the genius of an Ariosto, a Wieland, or a Tennyson has transmuted them into more refined forms. For this neglect of the old romances in their original shape there are good reasons. Their want of unity of plot and variety of incident; their tediousness of detail; their promiscuous and often ludicrous introduction of supernatural agencies; their utter disregard of probability; the gusto with which they dwell on slaughtering as the main end of life—do not recommend them to the more fastidious taste of

modern times. Above all, the morality of most of these tales is not our morality, though it fairly represented some of the best as well as some of the worst features of a coarser age.

The romances of chivalry, then, are not likely to be read with pleasure or profit in the state in which they have been left to us; but, now that so much interest is shown in our old literature, I have thought that some of these old stories might be reproduced in a form which should render them unobjectionable and at least as attractive as the great mass of our juvenile fiction. It must be remembered that even in the days of their popularity, these stories were freely handled by successive authors, who did not scruple to alter and improve them with an eye to the taste and conscience of their own contemporaries. Mallory's *Mort d'Arthur*, almost the only book of the kind which is now in the hands of young readers, is itself a compilation of several old books adapted in this way. There is no reason, except the jealousy of antiquarians, why similar materials should not be again used with the same freedom. The original authors are mostly unknown, and respect for them need not prevent us from dealing with their works as they probably dealt with stories that had been handed down to them in a ruder form.

I have therefore selected from the enormous mass of this kind of literature still extant, twelve stories which may serve as examples of the style and subjects of the romances of chivalry. While preserving the main interest of these stories, and even giving some hint of their absurdities, I have made bold to deal with them in the spirit above

indicated, and have especially suppressed or given a new colour to many features of their morality. This plan has forbidden the use of any story well known, except by name, to the readers I have in view, or any which exists in only one authoritative version; those stories have also been preferred which would best bear abridgment, and required the smallest degree of alteration. As the romances of chivalry generally came to us from France, and were most and longest popular in that country, I have given a number of French tales which may seem disproportionate to those who forget that Arthur flourished in Brittany as well as in Wales. I have indeed treated most of the stories after French models, and in some parts have followed closely M. de Tressan and the other authors who in the latter part of last century attempted, by their free versions and abridgments of the original manuscripts and early printed books, to revive a knowledge of this kind of fiction. In some respects, indeed, their attempts are not likely to please English readers. But I have compared various versions, used my own judgment, and, in short, done my best to make this little book as readable as possible for young folks who live in the nineteenth century, and are as fond of wonders and adventures as all people were in the Middle Ages, but who have learned that life cannot be all wonders and adventures, and through study of so many scientific manuals have become somewhat fastidious in their taste for the marvellous.

We need not enter into the disputes which have vexed learned minds as to the origin of the stories appearing again and again in different forms throughout this class of fiction. These

stories probably had their source in myths common to many races. The science of comparative mythology has shown matter for very important consideration in the resemblances, too many and too close to be accidental, which may be found in all popular tales. The latest authorities are inclined to think that such tales may often be traced back to imaginative descriptions of the phenomena of nature. Thus, the four and twenty blackbirds who were baked in a pie would, by an enthusiast for this theory, be taken for the four and twenty hours of the day; the clothes which were hung out are the clouds; the king is the sun; the queen is, of course, the moon. From such germs might well spring the legends which developed into the popular tales of an unlettered age, taking ever new shape and colour from the changing circumstances of time and place. Jack the Giant-killer, the homely hero of the peasantry, becomes a mailed knight when he is introduced among Norman nobles. This is not the only character to appear in the following pages, whom the most youthful critics may recognise as an old friend with a new dress.

The fictions thus cast into the mould of chivalry, so to speak, are usually considered as belonging to three main groups or cycles.

1. The stories of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

2. The stories relating mainly to Charlemagne and his twelve peers.

3. The stories belonging to Spain and Portugal, in which Amadis de Gaul and his descendants are the chief characters.

To these must be added a group of tales which

present the old classical heroes in the guise of knights, and another dealing with the exploits of Crusaders. But as these groups cannot be considered as national, it will be better to take a division which presents stories of this class in three stages of development.

In the first they are unadorned and often darkly ferocious tales, celebrating the deeds of historical or half-historical heroes. Their history is of the most vague kind. Charlemagne is confused with Charles Martel, and becomes a shadow, to which the most inconsistent characters are ascribed by various romancers. We can connect Arthur with nothing certain in the world of fact. One writer, who affects dates, fixes Charlemagne in A.D. 103, and puts Arthur long before. Again, we hear of our legendary hero exhibiting a strong foreign policy by crossing the sea and defeating Lucius, Emperor of Rome, who has in his army the kings of Ethiopia and Egypt. We find Scotland, in his days, under the government of the Saracens; this name was given freely to all barbarous and heathen people. Biblical and classical personages are gravely invested with arms and customs of chivalry which were not introduced till the Middle Ages. Nothing is clear here but that the bards of the day were doing their best to compliment their patrons, by throwing a halo of imaginary glory round the deeds of their real or supposed ancestors.

In the second stage it is evident that the sombre Gothic spirit has come in contact with the warm imagination of the East. The Crusades, or the settlement of the Moors in Spain, have introduced brighter and more varied features into these records of adventure. The knights no

longer content themselves by slaughtering each other in their native forests, but travel far and wide and see great wonders. Now it is the geography of the romances that most amazes us. We find Constantinople lying on the way between Ireland and England. Denmark is in the neighbourhood of Lombardy. Sir Bevis of Southampton sails from the Greek Sea, and lands at the port of Cologne. The magic machinery of Eastern fairy tales begins to appear, and by its glowing marvels throws into the shade all the wisdom of such an old-fashioned enchanter as Merlin. The scene is sometimes filled by the pomp of Oriental monarchs; sometimes by real beasts, as fierce as the legendary dragons; danger has to be encountered in strange and exciting forms. But, of course, the Saracen hosts are invariably cut to pieces by a single knight who wears the cross.

Tradition thus gave way to invention, and at last this kind of fiction reached a point where its writers are seen to be trying to make-believe very much, as children say, straining after extravagances, piling wonders upon wonders, dragging their heroes through a bewildering succession of griffins, hobgoblins, amazons, winged horses, sea-monsters, empresses, pirates, fiery towers, magic ships, and the like; natural science, as well as history and geography, is more and more freely sacrificed to these vivid imaginations. It was machinery of this kind which played the greatest part in turning poor Don Quixote's head.

"Do but see what he wonders at," quoth the innkeeper—"the stopping of a mill-wheel! Your worship should read what I have read concerning

Felixmarte of Hyrcania, who, with one back-stroke, cut asunder five giants through the middle as if they had been so many bean-cods. At another time he encountered a great and powerful army, consisting of about a million, six hundred thousand soldiers, all armed from head to foot, and routed them as if they had been a flock of sheep. But what will you say of the good Don Cirongilio of Thrace? who was so stout and valiant, as you may there read in the book, that once as he was sailing on a river, seeing a fiery serpent rise to the surface of the water, he immediately threw himself upon it, and getting astride its scaly shoulders, squeezed its throat with both his hands with so much force that the serpent, finding itself in danger of being choked, had no other remedy than to plunge to the bottom of the river, carrying with him the knight, who would not quit his hold; and when they reached the bottom, he found himself in such a fine palace and beautiful gardens that it was wonderful, and presently the serpent turned into an old man, who said so many things to him that the like was never heard."

This sort of thing reminds us of another celebrated adventurer, whose name was Munchausen. We know that both writers and readers must soon grow tired of such a surfeit of impossibilities. Here we find a sly minstrel poking fun at the whole affair, and there a monk solemnly drawing his moral from these idle tales. And they are now written for women as well as warriors.

"These blows and slashes," says the innkeeper's daughter, "which please my father so much, are not to my mind. I like the complaints which the knights make when they are absent from their

mistresses; and really sometimes they make me weep for pity."

At this stage the romantic fiction is kept alive chiefly by the sentiment of chivalrous devotion towards ladies, which played small part in the sanguinary scenes of an earlier period, but is now spun into the most fine-drawn and absurd conceits of gallantry, seriously admired by sighing squires and blushing dames of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but soon to be turned into inextinguishable ridicule by the world-famed satire of Cervantes.

Though many of these romances have perished, more than enough of them have been handed down to show that, for the most part, we should find them very dull and long-winded reading. The task of selecting among the abundant materials has been a harder one than may be supposed. Setting aside stories of such a kind as seem capable only of burlesque treatment, I have tried to give characteristic samples of the various elements of chivalric fiction, and I hope I may be successful in helping young folks not wholly to forget such good old friends of their forefathers.

A. R. H.



THE OLD TALES OF CHIVALRY.

The Knight of the Lion.

I.

THE brave Sir Ewayne had wed a fair lady, the mistress of goodly castles and wide lands. To the marriage came Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, and from far and near the people came to look upon their great king; so for a week all was feasting and jollity in the lady's castle, where the time was spent in sports, and hunting, and banquets, such as beseemed these noble guests.

But when a week had passed, the king must ride forth with his knights against the heathen who were laying waste a distant part of his realm. Then, as all the castle rang with the clash of

armour and the trampling of steeds, Sir Ewayne drew his new-made wife aside, and took her by the hand, and spoke gently thus—

“Sweet lady, my life and joy, there is a thing I would pray thee, for my honour and thine also.”

“Truly, sir, fear not but I will do all your wish,” said the lady, smiling; but her countenance changed when her husband told her that she must give him leave to follow the king.

“Well thou knowest how sad I am to part from thee, my wife, but think how men will blame me if I leave all my knighthood, and dwell idly at home. Nay, what good wife would love her husband better if he cared only to lie in her arms? Give me leave, then, to ride forth for a twelve-month, and win worship in deeds of arms.”

“Loth should I be to grieve thee!” she cried, though she was sore unwilling to let him go. “I give my leave; but, Sir Ewayne, promise, by the love you owe me, to come again ere a twelvemonth be gone. This is the eve of St. John; look that you come by this day twelvemonth, for if you come not by that day, you shall lose my love for ever.”

“Lady,” said he, kissing her, “if I might have my will, I would never leave thee, and now nought

shall hinder me from keeping the day thou hast set me. Fear not for my life. The love of thee will be a charm to strengthen thy true knight against every foe."

Gladly, then, Sir Ewayne let his squire do on his armour, dented in many a fray. Lightly he leaped upon his horse among that band of goodly knights, while his lady held the king's stirrup and bade him good speed. But the tears trickled down her cheeks, so that all the knights pitied her as they took farewell; and when her husband lingered behind to give her one more kiss, she whispered in his ear, beseeching him again not to fail to keep his day.



II.

Far rode King Arthur and his knights, and fiercely warred they with the heathen foe. Sir Ewayne, as of old, was first in every fight, yet escaped from all unhurt. When the war was over, he did not go homewards, for the love of knight-hood was too strong on him, and too lightly he forgot the love of his lady; but he rode with his brothers in arms to jousts and tournaments which, all over the land, were held in honour of Arthur's

knights. There many doughty deeds were done, and Sir Ewayne still bore himself among the best, and won prizes in all the lists, so that his fame went forth far and wide.

Thus the twelvemonth passed away, and so greedy of renown was the knight, that still he stayed from his lady, and thought not of his word pledged to her. But, one day, as he feasted at the king's table, and the queen spoke to him of his newly wed wife, he suddenly bethought him of her last words, and how he had promised to be with her by a day which was now some time past. Sorrowful and ashamed, he rose from the table, and would have saddled his horse to ride home that hour, so that even yet he might mend his fault; but before he could take leave of the king and queen, there came hastily into the hall a damsel, who knelt before Arthur, and said—

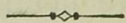
“Sir king, Heaven save thee! My lady greets thee by me, and the good Sir Lancelot, and the courteous Sir Gawayne, and all thy knights, save only one. Sir Ewayne has deceived my lady, and it were shame to call so false a man a knight. She weened she had his heart, and truly he made great boast of his love, but all was treason and treachery, for now he has broken the term that

was set between them, and thought nothing of her grief. He cannot be come of noble blood that so soon forgets his wife who loved him better than herself! Therefore, unkind and untrue man, she will see thee no more. Deliver me my lady's ring!" With this, she stepped up to Sir Ewayne, and, as he stood astonished, tore from his hand the ring which his wife had given him as a token of her love, hurried from the hall, leaped upon her palfrey, and went her way without another word. Neither squire nor groom rode with her, and no man knew where she had gone.

Sir Ewayne stood still awhile, as overwhelmed by the news of his lady's anger, then rushed after the damsel, and would have followed her on foot. But nowhere could he see her, for she had ridden into a great forest. Yet he ceased not to seek her, wandering through the forest, wild with grief, and crying out angrily against his own folly and forgetfulness.

"Alas for the day I was born! Have I thus lost my lady? Would, then, that I might die!" he cried loud and often, and in his despair tore up the trees, and broke his sword against the rocks, till, breathless and exhausted, he fell on the grass. He rose again, and again fury took him, and now he threw away his armour, helmet and shield and

mail of proof, rent his vest and shirt to shreds, flung them to the winds, running naked like a wild beast through the deepest thickets. His men sought him far and near, but found only his armour, which they brought back to the king, and took their master for dead. The news went abroad, and all men mourned for the brave Sir Ewayne, and his lady most of all, for she repented of her anger when she knew that he had lost his wits for sorrow and love of her.



III.

But Ewayne was alive in the forest, sleeping on the bare ground, and living on roots and berries. His madness waxed greater from day to day. Once he came upon a savage hunting in the woods; he wrested his bow and arrows from him, and was gone before the savage could raise his club. Henceforth he was able to kill wild beasts, and have raw flesh for his daily food, and drink warm blood. Still he fled the sight of all men; his hair and nails grew; he was frightful to behold, as he wandered about, murmuring to himself the name of his wife, and from time to time taken by a fit of fury, in which he would tear up all around

him, and try to dash himself to pieces upon the rocks. To such a plight had this good knight come, who was once in so great honour and renown.

Save himself, the only dweller in this forest was a hermit, who had built a little cell in the midst of a bushy glade. When the hermit saw this naked man armed with a bow and arrows, he fled hastily into his cell. But soon he knew Ewayne for a madman, and took pity on him, and set barley bread and water out at the window of his hermitage for him. Ewayne's wits were not so far gone but that he knew the hermit meant kindly by him, and every day he would steal up to take the food thus provided, though he never saw or spoke with the holy man. Every day, too, he would leave in return at the door of the cell the carcass of a deer or some other beast which he had killed; and when he was gone, the hermit would bring it in, and cook the venison, and set out part of that also for the hunter. Thus both of them fared better for this friendship, yet neither of them knew so much as the other's name. But from Ewayne's looks and bearing, and from the scars of his wounds, the hermit believed him to be a gentle knight, from whom some great sorrow had

taken away his wits for a time. Then he carried the skins of the slain beasts to the nearest town, and sold them, and with the money bought clothes and arms, such as beseemed a knight, and medicines, for this hermit was skilled in healing, and hoped yet to cure the wild man of his madness.

So a year went by, and Ewayne still dwelt in the forest, and but for the old man's kindness, would have led the life of the beasts. But now his fury was passed away; he began to bethink him who he was, and to remember what had gone before. Now he lay for hours on the ground sighing and weeping. His sorrow became so great that he cared not to eat, and he could no longer hunt for food. His strength left him; often he swooned away; he desired nothing but to die. The hermit always left out bread and water for him, but the poor man seldom came for them now. At last, when seven days had passed, and the food was untouched, the good hermit began to fear that he was dead, and set out one morning through the forest in search of him.

Before long, he came upon Ewayne lying under a tree, all pale and worn and senseless. But his heart still beat, and the good old man made haste

to help him. He ran to his hermitage, and quickly brought back the clothes and arms which he had provided. These he laid by the side of the sleeping knight, then anointed his body above the heart with a precious ointment, of which the virtues were known to him alone. This done, he stole away and left Ewayne still sleeping.

When the sun came to noon, and its beams fell on his face, he awoke, and rose, and was astonished ; for lo ! his sickness and his madness had left him, and he stood up a whole man, in mind and body, though how he came by this cure he knew not. And there lay at his side clothes, and armour, and a good sword, such as he had cast away from him in his frenzy a year ago. That year now seemed nothing but a frightful dream ; and yet, as Ewayne beheld himself in a clear fountain hard by, he knew that he had, indeed, been living like a savage man, and feared that all would fly from the sight of him. He bathed himself in the fountain, and though at first he was too weak to stand upright, he was soon able to put on the clothes and the armour, and found that he could still draw a sword. Then he knelt and thanked Heaven for this deliverance, and vowed never to use this sword save to succour the helpless and the oppressed.

IV.

Slowly he now took his way through the forest, stiff of limb and heavy of heart; and though his madness had passed away, thought ever with sorrow on the lady whose love he had lost. Thus many an hour and many a mile he wandered, but met no living thing. But towards evening he heard a dreadful noise in a thicket close at hand, and when he hastened thither by the nearest way, he saw a fearsome sight. A lion and a dragon were struggling together with all the fury of their kind. The dragon, breathing out fire from its nostrils, twining round the body of its enemy, and driving its fangs deep into the flesh, had almost slain the lion, when Sir Ewayne, moved by his knighthood to take the part of the weaker, ran up to the rescue. He held his shield before his face to keep off the monster's fiery breath; he raised his sword; for a moment the old might came back to his arm; and with one stroke he clave the dragon's body in two. The lion, thus set free, rose to its feet, and shook its bloody mane, and roared so that all the forest echoed back the sound. Quickly Ewayne stood upon his guard, for he thought he must now have to do with this other

fierce beast. But the lion had no mind to assail its preserver; it crept up to him, crouching on the ground, fawning upon him, and licking his feet, and in all ways tried to let the knight know its gratitude. Ewayne spoke kindly to the beast, and dressed its wounds as best he could. Then, when he went on his way, the lion would not leave him, but followed or strode by his side. Soon it came to understand his commands, and obey his voice like a dog. Never knight had such a faithful friend as this savage creature.

At nightfall, when they halted, Ewayne broke down boughs, and made a rude lodge in which to pass the night. Meanwhile the lion went a little way off and killed a deer, the carcass of which it brought to its master, who with flint and steel lit a fire of moss and dry branches, and on a spit roasted the flesh for supper. But not a morsel would the lion touch till the knight had eaten; and when, after this simple meal, he lay down to sleep with his head upon his shield, the grateful beast prowled round, and spent the night in watching over its preserver.

Next morning, Ewayne rose betimes and set forward, knowing not nor heeding where he went, till at evening, as before, the lion brought him his

prey, and they supped together and spent the night. Many days thus he journeyed on, with the lion by his side, through this great forest, and at last came upon a wide plain of rich meadows, in the midst of which stood a many-towered castle. Towards this the knight took his way, and reached the gate at sunset.

Men came out and let down the drawbridge, but suddenly they fled at the sight of the strange squire which Ewayne had with him. And the porter said—

“Sir, it behoves thee to leave that beast without.”

“Nay,” replied Ewayne, “my lion and I are not to be parted, we must either come in together, or else will go hence.”

The porter still grumbled, but then came up the lord of the castle, who bade that Ewayne and his lion should be both admitted, and hastened to meet and welcome his guest.

The knight was now courteously led into a chamber, where the ladies of the castle unarmed him, and brought him clothes of rich silk, and showed him all kindness. But to Sir Ewayne it seemed that they were sad at heart, though they tried to look glad of his coming. When he came

into the hall and supper was served, he still might see that some affliction had fallen upon all the inhabitants of the castle. His host made a fair show for his sake, but he could scarcely speak for sorrow, and the ladies would ever and again break out weeping and sighing as they waited on him, and none eat a morsel from the plenteous board. The knight wondered greatly, and when supper was done, he asked the lord of the castle the cause of their trouble.

"Sir, if it is your will, I would fain know why you make such ill cheer."

"Alas!" was the answer, "we would make joy, as becomes us, since we have you as our guest; but we cannot but grieve when we think of what shall be done to-morrow. Know that in this country dwells a proud and cruel giant, by name Harpins of the Mountain, who is the terror of our lives, for no man here living can say him nay. And oh, sir! I had four goodly sons that he has taken prisoner, as they strove to rid the land of such a pest. Two of them he has slain before my eyes, and each day another is to be put to death, unless I deliver him my daughter. Because she would not be his wife, he has sworn to marry her to the meanest of his servants, so morning by morning

he comes before my castle demanding her, and I must see all my children undone, unless I can find a champion to fight this monster. What wonder, then, if we be full of woe !”

“Methinks it strange,” said Ewayne, when he had listened to this tale, “that you have not ere this sought help and counsel from the king. For in all this wide world there is no man of so great might, but King Arthur has knights at his Round Table who would be full glad and willing to meet with such a man, and try their strength against him.”

“Sir, I have indeed sent to the king’s court, but there are no knights there, save the best, who can stand against this giant. And Sir Lancelot and all the best knights have gone to rescue the queen, who has been stolen away, they say, by a certain felon knight. Till they come back and bring the queen safe again, I can have no help.”

“Help you shall have !” cried Ewayne. “I know Sir Lancelot well, and for his sake and the maiden’s, I will undertake this battle and fight with the giant, let him come as soon as he will.”

“Heaven reward thee !” prayed the knight, and the lady of the castle and her daughter came and knelt before Ewayne, and thanked him with tears

and many words. But he declared that no lady should kneel to him, and raised them up, and spoke kindly to them, and prayed them to be of good cheer, for he would avenge them on their oppressor. Then they and all in the castle took courage, thinking that he must be a knight of strength and renown who had a lion thus at his bidding, and so blithely promised to meet this great giant.



V.

That night Sir Ewayne slept once more upon a bed, and the lion lay beside, so that no man durst come near his chamber. In the morning he rose early, and before he did any other thing, was going to the chapel of the castle to hear the service, when a servant came running to say that the giant was at hand. All in the castle hurried to the walls, and now Sir Ewayne saw a piteous sight. With huge strides the giant came on, a shaggy monster, whose hair hung to his waist, dressed in bull-skins, and bearing no weapon but a great club of iron; in his other hand he had a cruel scourge of ten cords, with which he furiously beat his two captives, as he drove them before him almost naked, half starved with

cold and hunger, and having their hands bound behind their backs. At every blow the blood ran down their defenceless bodies, and their cries were heard throughout the castle, so that all rued the fate of these gentle youths, and their father and mother wept to behold them. Pale and trembling stood their sister as the giant came beneath the walls and cried out in the ears of them all—

“If thou wilt have thy sons alive, deliver me that damsel, that I may give her to the foulest knave that eats my bread.”

“Fear not,” said Sir Ewayne, as the weeping ladies did on his armour. “This giant is full fierce and cruel of his words, but either he shall kill me, or I will deliver this maiden from the dread of him; for, certes, it were pity that such a foul hap should ever befall such a fair lady.”

“Oh, sir!” said the father, “do as you say, and I will give you this castle and half my land.”

“Nay, Heaven forbid that a true knight should take reward for succouring a damsel!” said Sir Ewayne, and bid them let down the drawbridge.

Forth he rushed, with his lion at his heels, while all the people in the castle fell on their knees to pray for this gallant knight. When the giant saw him he gave over lashing his captives, and turned

upon their champion with mocking and boastful words—

“What fiend made thee so bold to come out against a man like me? Whoever sent thee here loved thee full little, and shall soon be rid of thee!”

“Do thy best!” cried Sir Ewayne, and without more ado hurled his spear so straight and strong, that it pierced the bull-hide, and sank deep into the giant’s hairy breast. As the blood gushed out, the hideous creature gave a roar, and, brandishing his iron club, rushed upon the knight, as if he would crush him to the earth. But he deftly caught the blow upon his shield, and with his keen sword rained strokes upon the bull-hide, that could not turn its edge. Cries of surprise, fear, and pity rose all around. Again and again the knight seemed to be already a dead man, but ever he escaped the iron club, and gave back blow for blow, till all wondered, and said that this could be no other than Sir Lancelot or Sir Gawayne, who fought thus against such a foe. But ah! his strength began to fail him; he struck wildly in the air; he stumbled; his shield fell from his hands. The white maiden on the walls clasped her hands, and would have cried out, but she could not move

her lips for terror. The giant gave a shout that went to every heart, he raised his club, one moment more and the knight was lost. Then suddenly the lion raised its head as it saw its master in such a strait. With a bound and a roar it sprang upon the giant, and tore his flesh so that the bones could be seen beneath. In vain he strove to use his club; the beast leaped aside at every stroke, and before, behind, on either side, it flew upon him and mangled him, till he bellowed for pain, and at last, blinded by the blood which flowed into his eyes, overreached himself, and fell on the ground like a heavy tree. Now Sir Ewayne had recovered himself; he ran up to the fallen monster, and with one mighty stroke cut off his right arm. Next moment he drove his good blade into the wicked heart. The trembling captives wept for joy. Their sister swooned away upon the walls. The castle gates were flung open, and all within ran forth to hail the victor.

Who can tell their joy when they saw their fell oppressor lie lifeless on the ground! The lord and lady of the castle fell on the neck of their champion, and prayed him earnestly to stay with them and take all that they had for his.

"Nay," said Sir Ewayne, "I will have nought

of ye but it were a horse, on which to go my way as becomes a knight."

"Sir," said his host, "the best steed in my stalls is yours freely, but I would give you back what is dearest of all to me, my daughter, that you have given to me this day. Well are ye worthy to wed her, and she is not worthy to be despised by any in the land."

"Take it for no despite if I may not wed her or any other maiden," answered Ewayne. "She is indeed fair and gentle, and in all the world there is no king or emperor or man of so great honour that he might not gladly have so sweet a lady for his wife. But I have a wife, and alas! I have none. Courteous sir, entreat me no further, but let me go hence."

"And if any ask us what knight has done so doughty a deed, how shall we name thee?"

"Call me the Knight of the Lion," said Ewayne, and would tell them no more.

Long they pressed him to stay with them, but when they saw that his will might not be moved, they said farewell, and sent him forth upon a gallant steed, fit for such a good knight.

Sir Ewayne gave his horse the rein, and rode on wherever it bore him, with the faithful lion

at his side. Well pleased he was to know that his sword had not forgotten its ancient sharpness; yet grief ever seized him as he thought of the lady to whom it should have been devoted. Was she dead? Was she married again, believing him dead? He cared not to know, since she loved him no more. He could do nothing for her but to obey her request, and never to seek to see her face, or let her hear his name.



VI.

Before many months had passed, the land began to ring with the fame of this fearless champion, who was known only as the Knight of the Lion. Foul caitiff and cruel tyrant shook at that name, for well they knew that the oppressed and helpless had no surer friend. All who were in misfortune had but to repair to him, and might then bless the day on which he was born, for they were not more ready to beseech than he was to succour, and he fought for no cause in which he did not conquer. Wherever he went the people came forth from the towns to greet him, and when he departed conveyed him out of the gates with prayers that no harm might befall him.

These prayers were as a magic armour, against which the strongest weapons could not prevail, and for years this knight passed through all perils unhurt, and achieved adventures in which all others had fallen.

“Never have men seen such a knight since the brave Sir Ewayne was alive,” said King Arthur among his knights at Camelot, as the news came thither of fresh exploits done by this stranger. “Methinks he were well worthy to sit at our Round Table. Is there none of my knights who will go forth and find him, and bring him hither, by force or by his own goodwill?”

The king's knights were nowise loth to do his will, for they were jealous of the fame of the Knight of the Lion, and eagerly desired to try their might against him. Sir Lancelot, Sir Gawayne, and Sir Kay the boaster, all sought this quest, and Arthur sent forth these three, bidding them not return without the unknown knight as courteous friend or vanquished foe.

So these three took divers ways, and rode far and wide, asking all they met for news of a knight who led a lion with him wherever he went. All had heard of this knight; all bore witness that he helped in word and deed whoever had

need of him, but no man could say where he might be found. The three knights rode on by hill and dale, by castle and town, but still could hear no tidings of the Knight of the Lion. Yet Lancelot and Gawayne ceased not to seek him. Only Sir Kay left the quest, and rode back to tell the king that this knight must be dead or held fast in some dungeon.

But now as he rode, it chanced he met with him, and perceived by the lion that this was the knight he sought. Because his vizor was down, he knew not it was Sir Ewayne, but Ewayne knew him well for Sir Kay, the steward of the king, who ever railed at his fellows and boasted himself, but whose words were greater than his deeds.

"Hold, Sir Knight of the Lion!" he cried loudly. "I have sworn to bring thee to King Arthur as friend or foe."

"Sir Steward," answered Ewayne sadly, "I have no friends, and I am foe to no good man. Have it as thou wilt."

"Then sit firm in thy saddle," said the boasting knight. "But first send thy lion away, or bind him, if thou wilt not yield thee. Thyself shall fight with me alone."

"Let the lion not make thee aghast. It is

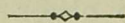
neither right nor custom to have aid against a single knight," and with that Sir Ewayne bade his lion lie down, and the faithful beast obeyed him, nor would it ever move till it saw its master in danger.

Scant courtesy passed between these knights. Without more ado, they ran together with their sharp lances, and at the first onset Sir Ewayne hurled Sir Kay out of his saddle, and cast him on the ground a spear's length behind his horse, and with such force that his helm smote a foot deep into the ground. No other harm would he do him, because he knew him of old, but he left the steward discomfited on the ground, and thus took farewell of him—

"Go back to the king and tell him that the Knight of the Lion is not worthy to be his friend, and that knights such as thou, whose boasting is their chief dishonour, are unworthy to be my foes."

He turned his rein and rode away with heavy heart, leading beside him the horse of the fallen knight. It was not in him to be proud of such a victory, and the sight of Sir Kay had set him thinking of the days gone by, when he fought and feasted among the princes of Arthur's court, and

knew not of the sorrow that should come upon him. Then all his life was full of pride and joy; now his only hope was in death, and death came not to him who was sick of life. At times it seemed that his madness was about to return upon him; the best he could look for would be to die like a wild beast, unknown and unpitied, bereft of himself as he had been of his wife and his friends. Then the lion came and licked his hand, and with tears in his eyes he raised his head.



VII.

And lo! now, as he looked around, he knew well the place in which he was. There was a great leafless thorn tree above a trickling well, and hard by, a little chapel built upon a rock. It was under this thorn that first he met his lady many years ago, it was in this chapel that they had plighted their troth. At the sight that dauntless knight grew white and trembled like a woman, and overcome with sudden weakness, fell from his horse.

He rose to his feet, and wild thoughts rushed into his mind. In the fall his sword had escaped

from the sheath. He seized it, he thrust the hilt into the ground, he placed the point against his throat, he would have slain himself on the spot, when a voice of distress reached his ear. In the chapel there was one weeping and complaining. Sir Ewayne paused and cried—

“Who art thou that mournest there?”

“Ah! well-away!” answered the voice, “I am the sorriest wight that ever lived, and as yet I have lived but seven years.”

“Nay,” said the knight, “by all the saints, there is no sorrow like mine for seven years past, nor any wight alive that might make such dole. I was a man and now am none, nor worthy to be seen of men. Once I was a noble knight and a lord of might and renown; I had knights and squires in my train, and riches and lands in plenty, and all I lost through my folly. But the greatest sorrow is yet to tell: I lost my lady that was full dear to me, and that loved me better than her life. I have nought to do but to slay myself by whom I was undone.”

“Alas! mine is a more sorrowful case. I am but a little maiden seven years old, my father, they say, died before I was born, and left my mother in grief and fear. Many strong lords

have sought her to wife, yet, though she lived alone with none to protect her, she ever sent them away and wept for her own good knight who is dead these seven years. Ah, sir! there is a felon knight called Sir Salados who dwells near at hand, and of whom all this country is in dread. He has sore vexed my mother, and has robbed her of all her lands when she would not give them with her good will. And to-day this wicked knight came at the hour of prime, and has taken her captive in her own castle, and there, for she will not marry him, she must starve in a dungeon, if I bring not some champion to her succour. Fain am I to seek the Knight of the Lion, who, as men say, slew the giant Harpins, and never fails ladies that are in need; for certain he would fight this cruel man. But none know where he may be found, and I am weak and tender of age, and alas! alas! my mother must die."

"Nay, dear maiden, she shall not die while I live!" cried Ewayne, forgetting his own grief at this pitiful tale, "thank Heaven that has brought to thee him thou seekest. I am he whom men call Knight of the Lion, and I will fight this felon knight while breath is in me. Come forth and lead me to where he is, and be of good cheer."

Forth ran the little maiden with a cry of joy. But on the threshold of the chapel she paused and shook for fear, and pointed with her hand.

“Ah, see! There he comes riding on a black horse, and here in this meadow he is wont to defy all that fear not to try his might!”

Sir Ewayne looked, and saw, riding furiously towards him on a coal-black steed, a tall knight in black armour from head to foot, with a black shield and a black pennon on his lance, and the trappings of his horse were of black velvet.

“’Tis well,” he said, and placed the child upon Sir Kay’s horse, and bade her not be afraid of the lion, for it would do no maiden harm, and bade it watch by her while he dealt with this black knight. Then he drew tight his girths, took his spear in hand, leaped into the saddle, and flew forth like an arrow, crying—

“Ho! Sir Salados, false knight and robber of ladies, the time is come when thou shalt be well paid for all thy villainy.”

VIII.

The black knight spoke not a word, but, with a scornful laugh, put his lance in rest and spurred

upon Ewayne. And now, as they rushed together, a loud peal of thunder burst above their heads, and a heavy storm of rain and hail poured down around them, so that the knights were almost hid from sight. With a mighty shock they met midway. Both lances splintered to the handle, but neither was shaken in his seat. Out flew their bright swords, and deadly were the strokes dealt between them. It was no Sir Kay with whom the Knight of the Lion had now to do. Sparks flew from helmet and hauberk; the armour crashed and gaped beneath the blows; the blood poured down upon the field. Still each sat stiffly upon his horse, and neither would yield a foot; it was a battle for life or death. At last the black knight's strokes seemed to wax faint, and Sir Ewayne gathered all his strength, and smote a blow which cleft helm and brainpan, and made Sir Salados reel and give back as if he would have fallen. For a moment Ewayne held his hand, deeming that his foe would beg for mercy; then, of a sudden, the black knight turned and fled for his life.

With all his main he sped away, and the Knight of the Lion rode hard behind him, sword in hand. Like the wind they rode, for now the beaten knight could see his castle walls, and Ewayne

would kill his horse but he would take him dead or alive. The storm raged around them, and the hail blinded their eyes, but with loosened bridle and blood-stained spurs they urged their panting steeds, and swiftly neared the castle gate. And now the flying craven gains the moat; three strides and he has crossed the drawbridge; he is hidden within the walls. Fast follows Ewayne, heedless of a warning cry. His good steed bounds forward, and already he is within the gateway, when with a clang the portcullis falls from above, smiting through saddle and horse, shearing the spurs from the heels of the knight, and by a hair-breadth leaving him unhurt, but amazed, dismounted, and alone in the house of his enemy, which was no other than the house that had once been his.

In all haste he gained his feet and stood on guard with his back to the gate. But the sword had almost dropped from his hand when he saw no one in the courtyard save a lady weeping and wringing her hands. That lady was his wife, who seven long years ago had bid him see her no more.

"Alas! alas!" she cried, "what do you here? This is a den of robbers and murderers into which you have come, and I am an unhappy lady who must here lose my life."

"Then I shall lose my own first, for my life is not so dear to me as thine."

The voice went to her heart. She looked earnestly upon the closed vizor of the knight, and was about to speak, when Sir Salados, all covered with blood and brandishing a huge axe, burst forth through a door in the wall, with a band of armed men at his heels.

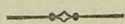
Now Sir Ewayne was lost, unless some enchanter should come to his aid, or he might have wings to fly. Yet the good knight did not quail. He drew the lady to him and stood before her with his sword. On rushed the black knight and his treacherous rabble. But ere the sharp steel clashed, a sound was heard that made them hold and look round in dread.

It was the roar of the lion that now came raging without the gate, and as it saw its master's peril, dashed against the steel bars and tore up the earth beneath, and with all its might strove to win to his side. Small wonder that these caitiffs shook at the sight, and drew back a space.

"Would ye fear a caged beast?" cried their felon lord, and led them once more against Sir Ewayne.

Alas! what could his single arm do against so

many. They closed upon him ; the lady shrieked and fell ; his sword gleamed like light, and it was wondrous to see how he stood firm among such mighty blows. Then, as they bore him down, and the black knight's axe was raised above his head, the crowd gave a cry, and a crash was heard above the din, for the lion had burst through the bars, and was among them with bristling mane and open jaws. The heavy blow fell upon its head ; but never struck Sir Salados another stroke. Hurling to the ground, he lay with his neck broken, and his craven crew turned and fled on every side, melted like snow before the hot breath of the lion, which chased them fiercely into the inner courts of the castle.



IX.

Breathless but unwounded, Sir Ewayne sprang to his feet and looked around. He was alone with the lady, who knelt before him and thanked him full humbly. He would have spoken, but his tongue clove to his mouth. Then was heard the trampling of hoofs without, and two knights rode up, and the little maiden by their side on Sir Kay's horse. Ewayne made clear the entry to

let them pass, and forthwith he knew them for Sir Lancelot and Sir Gawayne.

Much they marvelled to see him safe from such a fray, and fain were they, when the lady had told the tale, to learn the name of her deliverer.

"Surely," said Sir Lancelot, "there is no knight save him of the Lion who could thus succour a lady; and this knight we have sought these many days."

"Ah me!" cried the lady, "there was once such a knight who took me for his wife. By my own sinful pride I drove him from me, or else I had never wanted succour against robbers and traitors. But all that I have and hope would I give to see him again for a moment's space, that I might pray him to pardon me, and die in peace."

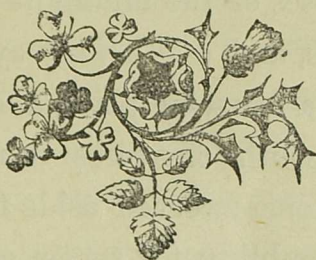
"Fair lady," said Sir Gawayne the courteous, "that may not be. Thou wert wedded to our fellow Sir Ewayne, and he is dead these seven years. Would, indeed, that he were alive!"

"He is alive!" spoke a voice that all knew well of old. "Sirs, I am he that you seek. Lady, I am he that you loved."

He raised his vizor, and, amazed, they saw Ewayne stand before them. The two knights made the sign of the cross; the lady gave a cry.

“Oh, my wife, it is your forgiveness that I should pray for on my knees!”

He could speak no more, and she could not hear for joy. Each of them would fain be the first to forgive. They fell upon one another's necks, and in one kiss forgot all the sorrows of these seven years.





Huon's Task.

I.



KNIGHT was traversing the dark glades of a Syrian forest, guided only by weird glimpses of the midnight moon. Sword in hand he rode, and cast a wary eye from side to side, for it was a fearsome place, and he knew not with what uncouth creatures it might abound. Suddenly his horse swerved aside from the path, rearing and trembling for terror, as there glided forth a strange figure and stood with uplifted hand on the moonlit sword. Its stature was no higher than that of a newly weaned child, but the grey beard and wrinkled brow were those of a man of fourscore. At the sight of it the traveller grasped tight his sword and made the sign of the cross.

“The saints defend us! ’Tis Oberon, the prince

of fairyland, against whom and his magic arts no steel forged of man can avail."

"Nay, Sir Huon of Bordeaux, fear me not," spoke the dwarf in mild and benevolent tones, as if he read his thoughts.

"Thou knowest me, then?"

"And wish thee well. I have always been the friend of thy race, and, though unknown to thee, have watched over thy welfare from the cradle. Now, I am here to aid thee in the perilous enterprise on which thou art bound. Trust me; dismount; and my goodwill shall be proved."

For a moment the knight hesitated; then he leaped from his steed. The enchanter waved his wand. Instantly the darkness gave place to a flood of dazzling light, and with the sound of entrancing music there sprang up around them, like vapour, a magnificent palace, such as no king in Christendom could boast. One moment Sir Huon stood on the ground damp with dew, and the cold night wind sighed above his head among bare branches; the next he found himself in a lofty hall, where the walls were of glittering crystal and the pillars of gold, and the roof was starred with gems of every hue, that lit up the scene with more than noonday brilliance. The floor was one carpet

of blooming flowers, and upon it stood a table loaded with sumptuous dishes, at the head of which Oberon sat on a golden throne. The knight's horse was led away, as if by spirits of the air; unseen hands held before him a jewelled basin of perfumed water; the same invisible attendants relieved him of his armour, and threw round him a robe of embroidered silk. Then, before he had fully recovered from his amazement, the enchanter motioned him to a seat by his side, and the invisible hands served them with meat and drink. The guest at that banquet had only to form a wish, and it seemed that a spirit stood beside him who knew and obeyed his slightest thought. Oberon did not eat, but while Huon satisfied his appetite, he pledged him in a cup of wine, and spoke thus:—

“I have vowed friendship and protection to thy house; nothing that concerns them is hid from me. I know the purpose of this journey and the charge laid upon thee. It is now three months since, in a chance fray, a good knight slew Charlot, the king's envious and boastful son. The angry king would have doomed the knight to suffer death on the spot, but, at the entreaty of the twelve peers of France, he consented to pardon him on

condition that he performed penance after a strange fashion. He must ride alone to the palace of Gaudisse, the Emir of Babylon, and present himself in the hall while that relentless miscreant should be sitting at meat among his vassals and friends. Before speaking a word, he must cut off the head of whomever he found sitting at the Emir's right hand, must then kiss his fair daughter Esclarmonde thrice, and must take from Gaudisse a handful of his beard and four of his great teeth. Having further made the Emir swear to be tributary to the crown of France, he is to return with these trophies, or expect no welcome but a shameful death. Say I not truly, and art thou not this luckless knight?"

"Marvellous enchanter, it is even as thou hast said!" replied Huon. "All this am I bound to do, and it is better to die by the swords of the infidels, than on the gallows!"

"Fear not, Huon, thou shalt not die. The enterprise has perils that might make a less brave man turn back, but thou shalt come through all in triumph, if thou art a worthy son of my friend thy father, and wilt but accept my aid and obey my directions."

"Noble Oberon, I will obey thee in all things,"

vowed Huon, and the enchanter smiled benignantly, and bringing forth a crystal goblet and an ivory horn, placed them in his hands.

“Take these gifts, and learn their value. The goblet will at the wish of any good man fill with meat or drink; while in the hands of the treacherous and base it remains for ever empty. A barren desert lies before thee, and without this goblet thou art like to starve by the way. When assailed by numbers, let this horn be thy defence. Sound it softly if the danger be slight, and watch what befalls; but in utmost need blow loudly, and I myself will appear with all the host of fairyland. Yet remember, these charms serve only him whose heart is true and his honour pure; no summons from the coward or the liar will reach my ear.”

“May I never prove unworthy of thy protection!”

“Beware, also, of rashness. I foresee too surely that the hot blood of youth will carry thee into perils where my aid may be of no avail. Above all, take heed to shun the tower of Angoulafre, that ruthless giant of whom all these countries are in dread. In that tower he maintains himself by enchantments even stronger than mine, and he

can only be slain by him who wears a coat of magic mail that he stole from me years ago. It would be courage thrown away to attack him; do not attempt it; success is well-nigh impossible."

"Show me the way to this tower!" was Huon's eager reply.

"Said I not well? Thy imprudence is too strong for my counsels."

"Nay, friendly enchanter, the imprudence is thine, to let me know this danger that may be sought and overcome. If I am destined to leave my bones in the tower of Angoulafre, so be it; but it shall never be said that Huon heard of a perilous achievement and passed it by."

"Thy task is already a full hard one," said Oberon, and sighed to think of the misfortunes that might yet lie before this gallant knight.

But now the morning began to break, and at the first beam of the rising sun the enchanted palace vanished away like a dream, and Huon found himself again in the heart of the forest. The fairy prince conducted him to the verge of it, and gave directions as to the way he must now take. Then, earnestly repeating his injunctions, he took leave of him with all good wishes.

II.

For several days the road of the adventurous knight lay across a barren and uninhabited desert, where he had good cause to know the value of Oberon's gifts, for the enchanted goblet never failed to fill in his hands, and furnished him with whatever meat and drink he desired.

At last he reached a richer tract of country, and at evening entered the gates of a large city. There, as he was looking about for a caravansery in which to spend the night, a man, who appeared to be one of the principal inhabitants of the city, came forth from his house, and invited the stranger to lodge with him.

Houn gladly accepted this hospitality, and was richly entertained by his new friend according to the customs of the East. He did not know the name of his host, nor why a Saracen should show him such kindness. But when supper was removed and the attendants had withdrawn, the master of the house rose, locked the door, plucked off his turban and fell on his knees, crying out in good French—

“Huon, son of my old lord and master, say that these well-known features have not deceived me!”

"Who are you?" exclaimed Huon, astonished to hear not only his own language, but the accent of his native province. "Stay!" he added, remembering the warnings of Oberon and minding to try the sincerity of this man. "Take this goblet and pledge me in a cup of wine."

"But it is empty," said the host, handling the talisman with a perplexed look. "I would indeed that it were full!"

Instantly the cup filled to the brim with ruby wine, and his astonishment was increased.

"Drink without fear, my countryman," said Huon, smiling. "Now I know you for an honest man."

The pretended Saracen drained the goblet to the last drop, and when they had embraced each other, as became good countrymen, he proceeded to satisfy the curiosity of his guest.

"Know that my name is Gerasmes, and that my father, the Mayor of Bordeaux, was one of the most faithful of the retainers of your father's house."

"Ha! good Gerasmes, is it thou? Often I have heard my father speak of you and your family. But how come you in this city, the name of which is unknown to me?"

"This is the Saracen city of Tourmont, and you

will learn with as much surprise as sorrow that the Sultan who rules over it is no other than your father's brother."

"My uncle! Is it possible?"

"Even so—your own uncle. You have doubtless heard tell in your youth that a young brother of my lord your father was carried away by pirates on the sea-shore, along with all his attendants. I was then his page, and I was brought with him to the shores of the Red Sea, where we were sold as slaves to Gaudisse, the Emir of Babylon. This Emir hated the Christians with all his heart, and, learning your uncle's high birth, used every effort to pervert him from his faith. He succeeded only too well. Your uncle, threatened and tempted, denied his baptism, and became a follower of the Prophet. From that moment Gaudisse loaded him with honours and riches, married him to his own niece, and appointed him the tributary ruler of this country."

"Ah!" cried Huon, "I am indeed amazed and ashamed! Lead me forthwith to this renegade uncle. In the presence of a knight of his own blood, he cannot but blush for the infamous cowardice that let him abandon the faith of his fathers."

"Alas!" replied Gerasmes, "I fear that your reproaches will not move him. Given up to pleasures, jealous of a power which he exercises with unrestrained cruelty, hardened in heart by a long course of debauchery, he will forget that you are the son of his brother, and will reply to your exhortations only by ordering you to be put to death."

"No matter! I insist on it that you announce my arrival to the Sultan, and procure me an interview with him to-morrow morning."

Gerasmes still endeavoured to shake his resolution, but it was not to be changed, and the knight refused to retire to rest till his new friend promised to do as he desired. At last Gerasmes agreed, upon one condition.

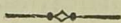
"Give me leave to follow you wherever you go, and serve you as your squire, as my father served your father."

"Willingly; but first you must know the dangers that you will share," said Huon, and related to him the perilous enterprise on which he was bound.

"Twice as much should not daunt me!" exclaimed Gerasmes. "I can no longer bear to live among these infidels; already my life is not safe

here ; and I fear no danger while in the service of such a knight."

After spending some time in recounting to each other their several adventures, they retired to rest, joyful thus to have met, and hoping not soon to part.



III.

So next morning Gerasmes sought the Sultan, and informed him of the arrival of his nephew, Huon of Bordeaux, and of his wish to present himself at the court.

The Sultan was no less surprised than displeased at this news. For some moments he hesitated how to answer ; but the baseness of his soul prompted him to a dissimulation, under cover of which he might prepare means to rid himself of this unwelcome kinsman. He knew that Gerasmes loved too well the Christians and the house of Bordeaux to aid him in such treachery ; so he feigned great joy at the prospect of being able to receive the heir of his family, and desired that Huon might be brought to him at once. While Gerasmes was absent on this errand, he sent to assemble his guards, and after giving some secret orders, went himself to meet his

nephew and present him to the nobles of the court.

Huon burned with indignation and shame to see upon his uncle's brow a rich green turban, crowned with a crescent of gems. His candid nature would scarcely suffer him to submit to the hypocritical embraces which the Sultan lavished upon him.

"Ah, my father!" he murmured to himself, "what wouldst thou say if thou could behold a prince of thy race under this hateful disguise?"

In the hope, however, of finding a favourable moment to reproach his uncle with his apostasy, he tried to accept without open disgust the salutations with which all the court pressed to receive him. But the Sultan, as if he had divined the intentions of his nephew, skilfully avoided all opportunity of private speech. The whole morning they spent with all the train of courtiers and attendants in examining the palace and its gardens; till the hour of dinner sounded, and the Sultan gave Huon his hand to lead him to the hall. Now the young man could no longer restrain his impatience.

"Oh, my uncle!" he whispered in his ear. "Oh, prince, brother of my father, in what a state have I the grief and shame to find thee!"

The Sultan secretly gnashed his teeth ; but he pretended to be moved by this reproach ; he gently pressed his kinsman's hand, and replied in the same tone—

“Silence for the present, dear nephew ! To-morrow morning I will explain all. You do not know the whole truth.”

Huon, deceived by his uncle's air, calmed himself and sat down by his side with a lighter heart. The muftis, the cadis, and the other officers of the court took their places ; there were also some dervishes present, upon whom, like a good Catholic, our knight looked with the greatest contempt and abhorrence. As for Gerasmes, he remained without, and kept a watchful eye on what was doing in the other parts of the palace. He began to suspect treachery, and his suspicions were increased when he saw armed men mustering in the apartments near the hall. But before he could warn his new master, what he dreaded had already come about.

At first Huon addressed himself to do honour to the feast, and eat with the appetite of youth and a good conscience. All kinds of rich meats were served to him, but, according to the law of the Prophet, no wine appeared on the table. So, after

a time, Huon drew from his bosom the magic goblet, which, at his wish, was at once filled with red and sparkling wine. At this sight the Saracens frowned and stroked their beards, but feigning not to observe these signs of displeasure, he courteously handed the cup to the Sultan, saying—

“Dear uncle, pledge me in this goblet. It is excellent wine of your own native province, and will remind you of your mother’s milk. Take and drain it!”

The Sultan often drank wine in secret, though before others he made pretence of conforming to the precepts of his adopted religion. It was long since he had tasted the good wine for which his birthplace was famed; the very name of it made his mouth water; surely for once he might transgress the law: and, in public as it was, he stretched out his hand towards the crystal goblet in which the generous liquor glowed like a heap of rubies.

“Besides,” he thought, to excuse himself, “I must dissemble; I must lull his suspicions; this will give time for my guards to arrive and be ready.”

He received the cup, put it to his lips, and felt a thrill of delight as he already thought to taste the delicious flavour, when, lo! it was empty in his hands, the contents disappearing as if by enchant-

ment. Huon could not restrain a laugh at the Sultan's confusion and disappointment, yet he drew back from this uncle whose falsity was thus revealed.

"Insolent!" cried the Sultan, as soon as surprise allowed him to speak. "Do you dare to mock me in the midst of my court? But I will teach you whether you can defy me with impunity. Ho! without there!"

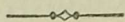
And he hurled the goblet at Huon's head, who, catching it in his hand, replied by tearing the Sultan's jewelled turban from his head, and trampling it on the floor. The cadis, agas, dervishes, and muftis rose from the table, uttering cries of horror at this insult to their faith. At the same moment, the doors of the hall were flung open on every side, and a crowd of soldiers and eunuchs, armed to the teeth, rushed in, and ran upon the young knight in such haste, that the foremost of them tripped and fell in a struggling heap before him.

This gave Huon a moment's respite. He stepped back while his assailants were picking themselves up, and did not even take the trouble to draw his sword, but brought out the ivory horn of Oberon, on which he began to blow gently, not

thinking the danger great enough for a louder summons. Immediately the effects were seen. At the first soft and melodious notes, every Saracen stood upright, then fell a-trembling in all his limbs, and as the sound continued, began, willy-nilly, to break into a dance. The music of the horn was heard over all the palace, and every note thrilled through every limb. The dervishes whirled themselves into the middle of the hall; the eunuchs gambolled like kids; their weapons dropped from the hands of the soldiers, and they staggered as if they were drunk; the grave muftis and cadis flung their turbans on the floor, and spun round among the crowd; even the Sultan himself, after stamping and wriggling in a vain effort to maintain his dignity, was forced to caper with the rest; and soon all the assembly was one wild reel. Huon, standing at the head of the hall, blew faster and faster, and the dancers were hurried round and round with more and more vehemence. Howling, leaping, tumbling, tottering, skipping, tripping over their long garments, panting, perspiring, frantically clinging to the chairs and tables, and even to each other's beards, dashing their heads against the walls, kicking their slippers up to the ceiling, raging,

crying, entreating, struggling, they whirled on, and kept up the dance till they could neither stand nor speak, but still their limbs must jerk like a child's toy, of which the enchanter did not cease to pull the string. At last Huon took pity on this wretched rout. He suddenly took the horn from his lips, and in one moment, every Saracen fell flat on the ground, breathless and exhausted.

Seeing that they were no longer able to do him harm, the knight made his way through the piles of helpless bodies, and leaving the palace at his ease, sought out the house of Gerasmes, where that prudent squire had already preceded him, and was saddling their horses for immediate departure.



IV.

Before one of the Saracens had recovered strength to move hand or foot, Huon and Gerasmes left the city and took the road to Babylon. For several days they journeyed on without meeting any hindrance, and at last arrived upon a plain in the midst of which a huge tower reared itself, losing its battlements in the clouds.

"It is the tower of Angoulafre!" cried Huon.

"Do not approach it!" begged Gerasmes, who, though brave, was not so eager for adventures as his master. "Call to mind the warnings of Oberon. Back, if you love your life!"

But the knight feigned not to hear his squire's advice. He was determined to visit this tower, the appearance of which was indeed appalling and mysterious. As they drew nearer, they perceived that the wall was pierced here and there with deep windows that resembled human eyes, but through which no human being could be seen. All without and within was dark, silent, and threatening. The whole pile was surrounded by a wide, deep ditch, crossed by a drawbridge three feet wide, beyond which was a gate even narrower than the bridge. The gate was defended by two tall brazen statues, that whirled round long flails of the same metal, like the arms of a windmill; so broad were these flails and so rapid was their motion, that not even a bird could pass between them without being crushed to pieces.

The more he saw of this fearsome place, the more Gerasmes urged his master to hold back from it. But Huon was only tempted on by these desperate obstacles. At a little distance from the

tower, he dismounted, bade his companion remain with the horses, and advanced alone and on foot towards the entrance, where hung a great basin of brass, as large as a shield. He struck it with the hilt of his sword, and the brass gave forth a deep, dreadful clang that was echoed throughout the tower.

“Now we shall see who lives here,” said Huon to himself; and a sorrowful cry made him turn his eyes upwards to the loophole above the gate, through which he caught a glimpse of the face of a young and beautiful lady. Before a minute had passed, the whirling arms of the statues suddenly ceased their motion, and the lady appeared at the wicket.

“Rash man, what do you here?” she cried, all pale and shuddering, as Huon ran lightly across the drawbridge. “You are but hastening upon your death.”

“Nay; what harm can await me in the abode of such a fair one,” said Huon gallantly.

“Alas!” replied she, casting looks of compassion upon him, “it is not me whom ye have to fear, but the cruel tyrant who holds me here as his prisoner.”

“The giant Angoulafre?”

"No other. At this moment, happily for you, he sleeps. If he had awakened, you were surely lost! When I heard the noise you made, I gave you up for lost; then, perceiving the cross which adorns your shield, I judged that you must be a Christian knight, and resolved to save your life if I could. Now you are warned; oh, fly while there is yet time!"

"Noble and beautiful damsel, I have not come here to fly. And now that I have seen you and know you to be the captive of this monster, I am more than ever eager to combat him and deliver you. But tell me, lady, before I seek the giant, who are you, and how came you into his power."

"Ah! the tale of my misfortunes is soon told. My name is Sibille. I came with my noble father, Guerin of Guienne, on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and returning thence, would have sailed to France, where a good knight, nephew of Ogier the Dane, waited to make me his wife. But a furious tempest threw us upon this hateful coast; Angoulafre discovered and attacked us; my father and all his knights were slain, and I became his prisoner. For three years have I pined in this house of horror, and now for the first time I hear

my native tongue and see the face of a countryman."

"Nay, fair Sibille, of a kinsman! Know that I am Huon of Bordeaux, the eldest son of your father's brother, and therefore your cousin, and doubly bound to deliver you from this wicked giant. Lead me to him forthwith, and let me deal with this robber of ladies!"

"But ah! he is strong and fierce and——"

"Say no more. Am I not one of the peers of France?"

Sibille, scarcely able to suppress her exclamations of joy, no longer delayed to admit this welcome kinsman; and, walking on tiptoe, led the way to the chamber from which the monster's snoring could be heard all over the tower.

There he lay on his back, a hideous form, seventeen feet long, with a countenance the ferocity of which even in sleep would have made most men shudder. Huon stood over him and raised his sword; his first impulse was to bury it to the hilt in the giant's throat. But he bethought him that he was a knight, and must in no case attack an enemy who could not defend himself. Besides, he fortunately remembered that this monster could not be slain except by the

man who wore the enchanted coat of mail of which Oberon had spoken; and, while Angoulafre still slept heavily, the knight and his cousin searched for this throughout the tower. It was soon discovered in a cedar coffer that stood in one of the next apartments. Huon seized it, put it on, and was rejoiced to find that it fitted him marvellously well.

“Now, fair cousin,” he said gaily, “excuse me if I leave you here for a little. I am going to awake Angoulafre, and put him to death.”

But it was no easy task to rouse the giant from his nap. Not till Huon had shaken him, and struck him, and shouted in his ear, and pulled his beard, and tweaked his nose, did he begin to move, and slowly raised his head, gaping and rubbing his blood-shot eyes. Then, as he caught sight of this unexpected visitor, he stared wildly, and bellowed in a voice that shook all the walls, and sent Sibille, anxiously watching without, to her knees.

“Puny creature, what madness has brought you here to your death? Miserable wretch, tell me your name before I crush you with one blow, and you be never more heard of on earth!”

“Odious monster, my name is Huon of Bor-

deaux, and I am come to punish you for all your evil deeds. Arm, and prepare for the combat."

Angoulafre might well be astonished at this bold language. He regarded the knight with attention, and was still more astonished to see him encased in the magic coat of mail.

"By Mahomet," he said, "it was generous of you not to have slain me in my sleep, as you might well have done. Come: I pardon you; it would cost me too much trouble to take your life. Only give me up that armour, and on this condition I will let you go free and unharmed."

"Nay, give you up this tower, and the princess whom you hold captive in it; and moreover, consent to renounce Mahomet, and to follow me to the court of the Emir of Babylon, where I have a certain errand to do; on these conditions will I spare your life."

The giant laughed loudly, and made a gesture of scorn.

"Fool, if I let you go, you could not come at the Emir of Babylon without my aid. He is my vassal, and this golden ring betokens the respect due to me by him and all his. Four gates guard his palace, each of which will fly open at the sight of my ring. Without it you cannot hope to

pass. At the first gate, they would cut off your right hand, at the second your left, at the third one of your feet, at the fourth another, and when thus you reached the hall, it would be but a moment before your head would be shorn from your shoulders. Be wise, then, take this ring, and return my armour."

"Ring, and armour, and all that you have is already mine," quoth the bold Huon. "We but waste our time; arm, and let me slay thee without more to-do."

Seeing that he could by no persuasion win back from Huon the enchanted mail, Angoulafre withdrew to prepare for the combat. In a short time he returned, covered from head to foot with massive armour, and wielding a huge scythe in both his brawny hands.

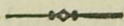
"I am ready to fight, if you are ready to die!" he roared, brandishing this terrific weapon over Huon's head.

"Look to thyself, pagan," replied Huon, deftly escaping the blow.

The scythe, swung with all the giant's strength, struck against a pillar, and sank into it to the depth of three feet. Angoulafre made desperate efforts to draw it out, but before he could succeed,

Huon rushed forward, and cut off both his hands at the wrists. The giant, uttering a hideous howl of pain, turned to fly. He hurled himself into the chamber where the pale Sibille was trembling for the result of this struggle, but, missing his footing, fell headlong, and his huge bulk rolled at her feet. She screamed out; Huon was close at his heels; one good blow of the keen sword ended the cruel monster's life, and the cousins threw themselves into each other's arms.

When Huon had drawn the giant's ring from his finger, they hastened to leave this gloomy abode, and Gerasmes rejoiced to see his master come back safe. To him the knight confided the care of Sibille, directing him to take her to the nearest seaport and put her on board a ship bound for France, while he himself was achieving his enterprise. So they parted with all good wishes, and Huon pursued his journey alone with the ring of Angoulafre, the enchanted coat of mail, the wonderful goblet and horn, and his own good sword to be his guide.



V.

A few days more brought Huon in sight of the rich and beautiful city of Babylon, where upon a high hill rose the marble palace of Gaudisse, the Emir, or, as he was then called, the Admiral of that country. Huon was glad to arrive at the end of this long journey; and when, leaving his horse at the foot of the hill, he was climbing impatiently up its steep side, he wondered whether Gaudisse would easily comply with the requests he had to make, and if his daughter Esclarmonde were indeed of such surpassing beauty as fame reported her.

As a loud flourish of trumpets announced that the Emir and his guests were sitting down to dinner, Huon presented himself at the outermost gate of the palace, and demanded admission. That same hour Oberon was dining in fairyland, when suddenly he rose and uttered a cry of pain.

"Alas!" cried the enchanter, "the brave knight whom I loved so well is at this moment perjuring himself basely, and thus deprives me of both the power and the will to succour him."

It was too true. Huon had just been asked by the guard whether he belonged to their religion,

this day being a high festival among the Saracens, in which none might take part who were not faithful followers of the Prophet. The knight had thoughtlessly answered "Yes," and was at once allowed to enter without further question. But he no sooner found himself within the precincts of the palace, than his conscience began to smite him for having thus spoken a falsehood and denied his faith. He would have given much to be able to recall the words, but it was now too late. He could only determine not again to be guilty of the like weakness. And when he had advanced as far as the second gate, which was closed and guarded like the first, he drew his sword and called out at the height of his voice—

"Infidel dogs! I command ye to open to a Christian knight!"

The guards sprang to their arms. The barrier bristled with spears and sword-points, and in another moment a cloud of darts would have been hurled upon this rash intruder. But the captain of the guard caught sight of the giant's ring upon the stranger's hand, and called out—

"Forbear! know ye not the ring of Angoulafre, to whom our lord owes tribute and homage?"

Instantly the weapons were lowered, the gate

was flung open, and as the knight passed through, looking sternly around him, the guards fell upon their knees, and the captain, bowing low, conducted him across a court-yard to the third barrier that must be passed.

Here Huon bethought him of again trying the effect of the giant's ring.

"Behold," he cried, "the sign before which you must tremble and fall at my feet!"

Again the effect was magical. At this gate, as also at the fourth, he was received with every mark of profound respect. Then crossing the last court, Huon made his way into the great hall where the banquet was being served, and found himself face to face with the personages upon whom he was to perform his strange mission.

At the head of the board sat the turbaned Emir in all his pomp. On his right was the King of Hircania, a cruel and powerful ruler, of whom all the neighbouring lands stood in dread. On the left of Gaudisse was his daughter Esclarmonde, the most beautiful princess of the East, whose fair face was pale and her bright eyes red with weeping. Sore against her will, she had just been betrothed to this hateful king, and in honour of the betrothal was gathered this brilliant assembly

of the warriors and chiefs both of Babylon and Hircania, who filled the hall, placed according to their rank. The King of Hircania was rising to kiss his destined bride at the moment when Huon entered, and every eye was turned upon the knight who, with raised vizor and naked sword, marched up the hall, and suddenly all were silent, so that no sound could be heard but the trampling of his mailed feet, and the clattering of his scabbard.

The attendants shrank right and left out of his way, and thus unopposed, Huon reached the Emir's seat. Then, before a word was spoken, he raised his sword, and with one mighty blow cut off the head of the King of Hircania, and it rolled at the Emir's feet. Esclarmonde uttered a cry. The feasters sprang up in confusion. Gaudisse, all bespattered by the blood of his guest, and speechless from surprise, gazed open-mouthed upon the audacious stranger. What was his amazement to see him calmly walk up to the princess, who, half terrified, half rejoiced at the fate of her unwelcome suitor, stood as if spell-bound and did not shrink while the handsome knight stooped and saluted her coral lips once, twice, thrice before all the bewildered beholders !

With the last kiss her father found words to express his feelings.

"Madman! who are you, and in the name of the Prophet, what would you here?"

Huon did not concern himself to reply till he had courteously bowed to the blushing lady, and handed her to her seat. Then he turned to the Emir and said in a clear voice, that could be heard in the farthest corner of the hall—

"My name is Huon of Bordeaux, and I am sent hither by Charles the great king to do as I have done; and furthermore, to have from thee a handful of that grizzled beard and four of thy strongest grinders. Be pleased to do me this favour without delay."

"This to my face!" bellowed Gaudisse, stamping, and choking, and glowing like a live coal. "My friend! My beard! My daughter! My grinders! Am I alive to hear such things! Impossible! Outrageous! Irreverence! Audacity! Madness! Never! Ho! my guards, my slaves, my vassals—"

Suddenly the Emir checked himself as Huon raised his hand, and displayed the ring of Angoulafre.

"The ring of my sovereign lord, to whom I owe

homage and tribute! Stranger, I am bound to hear the man that bears this token. But speak the truth. How came you by it, and where last saw you the mighty Angoulafre?"

The knight had too well repented of one falsehood to tell another.

"Pagan, thy sovereign lord is no longer to be feared even by such as thou! This arm has ended his wicked life. Think no more of him, but prepare to obey the commands of my king."

Angoulafre dead!" exclaimed the Emir, and now cared not to restrain his wrath. "Then, robber and murderer and insolent fool, prepare to meet thy death. My beard and grinders, forsooth! What next? Cowards, how long will ye suffer him to insult your prince. Seize him! Bind him! Off with his head! Tear him in pieces!"

At the first word, out leaped the scimitars of the Saracens, and a score of warriors rushed furiously upon the dauntless knight. He stepped back quickly and blew his horn, looking round in confident expectation. But alas! the charm was broken. The offended enchanter did not regard the summons, and the knight must defend himself with his own good sword. The hall rang with the clash of weapons, and above all rose the furious

voice of Gaudisse, bidding his men take the intruder dead or alive. The fair Esclarmonde clasped her hands and wept to see the fray. The indignation she should have felt against her father's enemy was lost in regard for this daring youth; and despite of filial duty, she could not but wish for his escape.

But wishes were in vain, when one stood against so many. Huon's shield was covered with darts; his sword was forced from his hand; the Saracens rushed in and threw themselves upon him. He was seized, dragged away, loaded with chains, and hurled into the Emir's darkest and deepest dungeon, with the assurance that he might expect no better fate than to be flayed alive.

Exhausted from loss of blood, he lay insensible on the cold stones; and when at last he came to himself, his condition was most pitiable. He could scarcely move for pain; the Emir's dreadful threats rang in his ears; in all that country he had no friend to speak a word or shed a tear for him; and worst of all, it was by his own fault that he had come into such misfortune. Bitterly he reproached himself for the falsehood by which he had forfeited the favour of Oberon, and but for which he might now have been reigning a victor

where he pined as a captive, and might have sought the hand of that beautiful princess whose charms had at first sight made such an impression on his heart.

All night long he was tormented by these miserable reflections, and the day brought no ray of light to his gloomy prison. He began to feel the want of food; his magic goblet as well as his horn had been torn from him in the struggle, and no one had come near him since he entered the dungeon. Was it the intention of his enemies to reduce his strength by starvation before bringing him to the torture, that they might have the satisfaction of seeing a Christian knight die with unmanly weakness? A burning thirst also distressed him. Thus he passed that day in anguish of mind and body, thinking sorrowfully of fair France, and the gallant comrades in arms that he should never see more. The death of Charlot was indeed avenged, and his unjust king might well be satisfied.

At last, towards evening, he heard footsteps without. The bolts were drawn back; the key grated in the door of the dungeon. The knight summoned all his fortitude, and prepared to meet his executioners. The door opened, and there

appeared a veiled figure bearing in one hand a lamp, and in the other a basket. Huon strove to rise, but could not for the weight of his fetters. The figure advanced slowly towards him; the veil was drawn back, the lamp raised, and he saw the pitiful face of Esclarmonde.

VI.

When some weeks had gone by, a stranger arrived at the court of Babylon, who spoke the language of the country well, and made believe to be the heir of one of the great Sultans of the East. Such a guest the Emir received with open arms, hoping to find in him a husband for his daughter to take the place of the King of Hircania. A great feast was held in his honour; and, as they sat at dinner, the stranger spoke of the death of Angoulafre, with which all the country rang, and asked for news of the Christian knight who had slain him.

"That knight will do no more murders," said Gaudisse grimly. "Long ere this he has starved in my dungeons."

"Dead!" exclaimed the stranger in such tones that Esclarmonde eagerly fixed her eyes upon

him, and caught a meaning in his words that her father perceived not.

“Ay, dead, and too soon to get all his deserts,” said the Emir. “Know you not how that madman came here and how he fared?”

The stranger was not unaware of Esclarmonde’s glances, and as her father told his tale at full length, he, as if thoughtlessly, drew aside his robe, and let her see a rosary that hung beneath this disguise. At the sight of it, she started and blushed, and he knew he had not been deceived.

When the Emir had ended his story, and gone to sleep, the stranger sought private speech of the princess, and, as soon as they were alone, he fell on his knees, crying—“Lady, tell me the truth, for you can and will. I am come to seek out my dear master, Sir Huon of Bordeaux.”

“You are his faithful squire, Gerasmes, of whom he has so often spoken to me?”

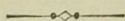
“I am no other. But say, does he live? Is he in health? Where may I see him?”

“Follow me,” replied the princess, and led the way to a dungeon in an unfrequented part of the palace. She drew back the bolts, and in another moment, the knight and his squire were embracing each other with mutual joy.

Soon now Huon's tale was told, while Esclarmonde stood by, and in the obscurity it could not be seen how her cheeks glowed as she heard him speak of her part in his deliverance. His courage, as well as his misfortunes, had so moved her heart that she could not rest for thinking of his unhappy lot. Overcoming all scruples, she persuaded his gaoler to let her visit the prisoner and supply him with food. The more she saw of this knight, the more she was grateful to have been delivered from the hateful King of Hircania. Deserted by the enchanter, Huon now found himself succoured by the powerful magic of love. She secretly restored to him his goblet and ivory horn; and when her father ordered the captive to be led forth to the most cruel death that could be devised, she bribed the gaoler to say that he had already expired of hunger, and in proof to exhibit the emaciated body of a prisoner who had really died that very day. The Emir, wrathful to see his vengeance thus escape him, had the gaoler executed on the spot, and tried to gratify his hatred by inflicting all imaginable tortures on the senseless corpse, which he believed to be that of his enemy. Esclarmonde shuddered at the horrors from which she had preserved Huon;

he now became dearer to her day by day. She was easily persuaded of the errors of her faith; she consented to be baptised as soon as possible, and asked nothing better than to be allowed to fly with her lover to his native land, abandoning gladly for his sake her friends, her rank, and her religion.

With the aid of Gerasmes, they now began to concert measures for escape. It soon seemed that there was need of haste, for the approach was announced of the giant Agrapard, the King of Nubia and brother of Angoulafre, who, the Emir had no doubt, was coming to seek his daughter's hand. Esclarmonde grew pale at the thought, but Gaudisse exulted in the prospect of such a match, and forthwith began to look coldly on Gerasmes. He, without exciting suspicion, took his leave, and hurried to the sea-coast, where it was agreed that he should have a vessel in readiness, while Huon and Esclarmonde watched for the first favourable moment of escape. But now events took an unexpected turn, which altered all their plans.



VII.

As Agrapard drew nearer the city, it appeared that he had come intent on far other thoughts

than those of love. He sent a herald before him to reproach Gaudisse with having lost a single day in avenging his brother's death, and to defy him to mortal combat, or to demand a tribute which would exhaust his revenues.

The Emir was in despair; vainly through all his host he sought a warrior bold enough to accept the challenge of this terrible giant; and when there seemed to be no hope for him but in submission, he cursed his gods and shed tears of rage before his daughter, who seized the moment to make him regret the loss of the vanquisher of Angoulafre.

"Ah!" cried the Emir, "I let him starve to death, and now it repents me to have lost such a champion. He alone could save me from this monster. Willingly would I give half my state to bring him to life!"

"Learn," said Esclarmonde joyfully, "that he of whom you speak is not dead."

"Not dead? But no—I saw his corpse! Do you mock me, child?"

"It was the corpse of another. The brave knight, Huon, is still alive, and, if you are willing, will maintain your cause against the giant."

Gaudisse was astonished, but this was not a

time to ask questions. He desired that Huon should be sent for, and was surprised to find him almost as stout and vigorous as the day on which he was thrown into chains. This must be explained when the present danger was overpast; in the meanwhile, he welcomed the knight, and declared what was required of him.

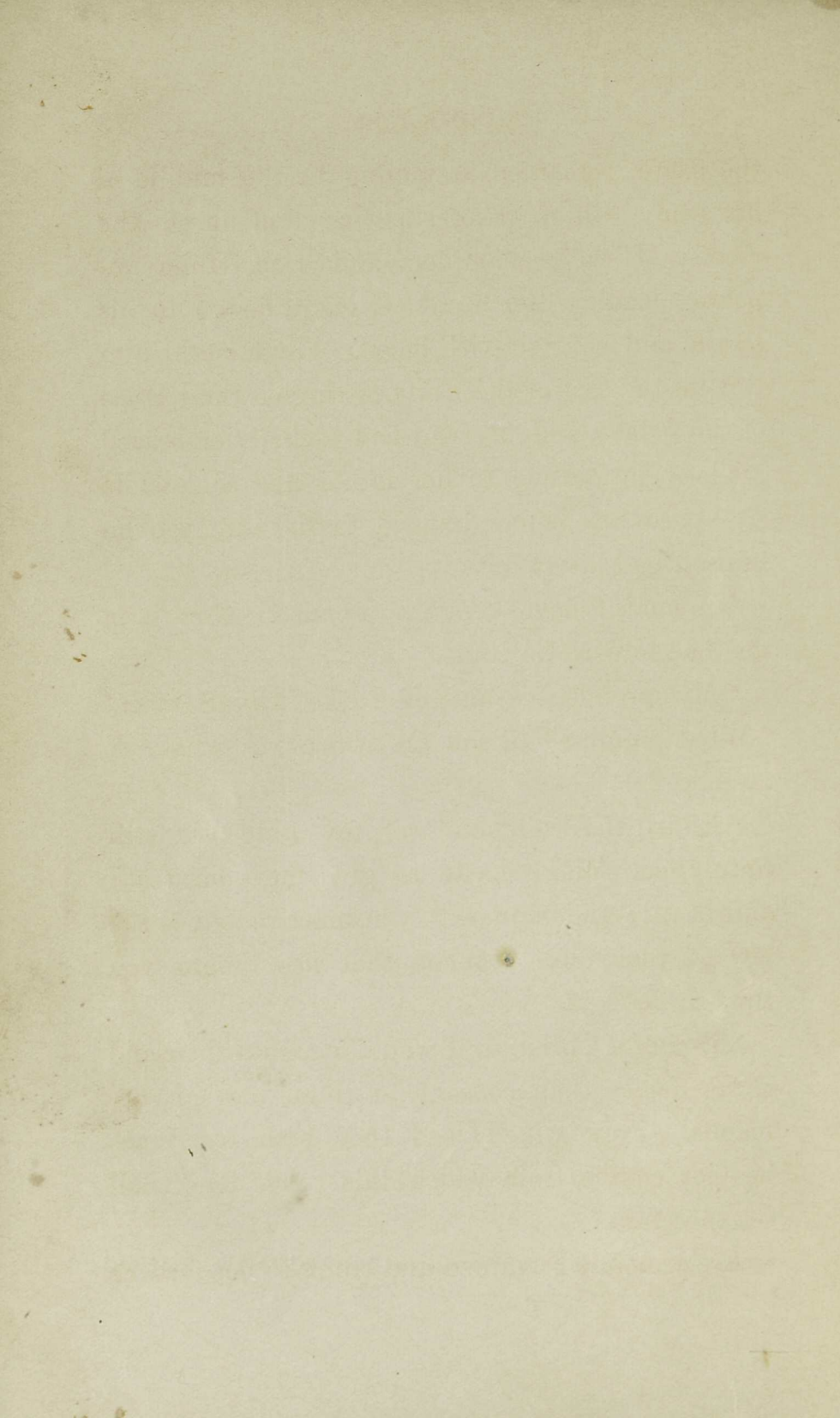
“The brother of the giant whom you slew so gloriously is under our walls, full of threats and fury. As you conquered Angoulafre, so must you conquer Agrapard. Go forth, brave youth, and if you rid me of this foe, I promise to give you my daughter, and to obey the wishes of your king.”

Huon replied by demanding his armour. It was brought forth to him all rusty and battered, and his sword notched with many a blow. Right glad was Huon to find himself again harnessed like a warrior. They brought him the best horse in the Emir's stables, and after taking a tender leave of Esclarmonde, and assuring her father that there need now be no fear of the giant, he mounted and rode forth to defy Agrapard without the walls.

The combat was long and desperate. For hours Esclarmonde's heart was torn with anxiety, and



“Huon appeared, leading the humbled giant bound to his saddle. He brought him to the feet of the Emir.”—p. 73. *Huon's Task*.



the Emir remained trembling in the middle of his army, till a great shouting announced the victory of their champion, and soon Huon appeared leading the humbled giant, bound to his saddle and covered with blood. He brought him thus to the feet of the Emir, sitting on the terrace of the palace, and after he had lovingly embraced his lady, he turned to her father and said, while Agrapard was being dragged to the dungeon he himself had lately left—

“Behold, I have kept my promise. Now it is for thee to perform thine.”

“My promise?” answered the wily Saracen. “What promise? Thou art still alive: what ask ye more?”

“Emir, the commands of my king are still unfulfilled. Make haste to give me your teeth and beard; and moreover, you must renounce the law of your false prophet, that has taught you thus to lie.”

“Dog of a Christian, I would perish a thousand times rather than consent to these insolent demands. Now will I load thee with ten times heavier chains, from which this time none shall set thee free.”

Esclarmonde screamed and clung to her father's

knees, crying for mercy, till she swooned away from terror. Huon ran to support her, and cried—

“Ungrateful miscreant, as well threaten the winds! I grant you one moment to obey me, or else fear my wrath. Say, must I make you feel my power?”

“Seize him! Slay him! Back with them both to the dungeon!” replied Gaudisse, waving his scimitar and shouting to his men; but he held back, not caring to measure himself with the knight who had come from proving his strength upon Agrapard.

The guards rushed forward. Huon smiled and drew forth his horn. Rightly he judged that now the enchanter must be appeased by his repentance and his sufferings. He gave one blast so loud that all the walls of the palace quivered, and lo! in a moment Oberon was by his side, and the ground shook with the trampling of invisible horses and the tread of marching men.

The Emir’s soldiers could not stand against such a foe. As they paused and looked round to ask each other whence came these martial sounds with which the air was filled, the forces of fairy-land were upon them. The dwarf waved his enchanting wand and their arms were struck from

their hands; their leaders were seized and dragged away before their eyes; horses and men rolled in the dust; the blood flowed from the wounds of phantom steel; whole troops were laid low, as trees by a hurricane; destruction swept through the ranks like a thunderbolt, and the terror-stricken host turned to fly in wild confusion, without being able to see a single one of their assailants.

Gaudisse beheld this rout of his army with dismay, but what were his feelings when he found himself in the grasp of invisible hands, and loaded with the very chains that he had destined for Huon! Before he could beg for mercy, the irresistible hands had plucked the beard from his chin; he opened his mouth to roar in agony, and four of his largest teeth were torn from his jaws.

“Be this the fate of all cruel and unbelieving princes!” said Oberon, and gave the beard and the teeth to Huon. “Take now these tokens; return to the King of France; salute him from me, and say that, through my aid and thy own stout heart, thou hast performed the task, and mayst well be forgiven. Take, too, this fair lady to be thy bride, and so long as ye are loving and true, Oberon the Enchanter will be your friend.”

VII.

Huon now found himself master of Babylon, and resolved to bestow it as a reward upon his faithful squire. Gaudisse and Agrapard, he sent to be kept in prison in the tower of Angoulafre. He loaded the Emir's treasures upon camels, and set forth homewards, not forgetting to take with him the most precious treasure of all, the fair Esclarmonde. Arriving at the sea-coast, they embarked in the ship which Gerasmes had provided, and after many more perilous adventures, reached the city of Rome. There Esclarmonde was christened by the Pope and married to Huon; after which they repaired to France, and the knight, presenting the tokens of his success, was in due time restored to the king's favour.

Thus ends the ancient, honourable, famous, and delightful history of Huon of Bordeaux.





The Dragon of Rhodes.

IN the old days when the island of Rhodes was held by the celebrated brotherhood of the Knights of St. John, a certain part of it suffered grievously from the depredations of a dragon, or, as some say, a gigantic serpent. The haunt of this monster was a rocky mountain overhanging a dismal marsh, and crowned by a chapel to which pilgrims came from far and near. Issuing forth every morning and evening out of a dark cave in the side of the mountain, it not only made daily havoc among the cattle and horses that fed round the marsh, but frequently devoured the luckless country people and pilgrims on their way to the shrine, who were unable to fly from terror at the very sight of its dreadful fangs, or fell senseless to the ground, overpowered by the

venom of its fiery breath. In their distress, the inhabitants of the neighbourhood sought the succour of the knights, and one after another, the bravest and most famous members of the order went forth against the dragon, and were never more seen by mortal man. The swords and spears which had so often scattered the Saracen hosts were powerless upon the impenetrable scales of this creature. And when six of his best knights had thus been lost, the Grand Master gave command that no other should undertake such a fatal enterprise.

But in spite of this prohibition, many still hoped that the slaughter of the dragon might be achieved, and none more earnestly than Theodore, a knight of Provence, youngest of the order, who was as yet untried in arms, but burned to do some deed of prowess that might emulate the old glories of his brotherhood. Many a time this youth watched the dragon from afar, and chafed against the command which forbade him to try his maiden sword upon its grisly scales. His mind was constantly filled with one thought; by night he dreamed of the combat, and by day he found no pleasure in life so long as this monster still ravaged the land. By dint of

watching it and considering how it could be overcome, he conceived a plan by which he believed that he might be more successful than his unfortunate companions in arms; and this plan he long revolved in his breast, communicating it to no one, lest some better-trying knight should be chosen to put it in execution. At last he could no longer restrain his impatient ardour; he resolved to kill the dragon, or die in the attempt, disregarding the orders of the Grand Master and his own oath of obedience. He at once sought leave to return to his native country, and obtaining it, embarked for France, where he retired to his castle and spent three months in secretly preparing to carry out his plan, which should bring skill to the aid of courage.

He found out a cunning artificer, and employed him to make a wooden figure which should exactly resemble the dragon in size, colour, and shape. This done, he procured two bull-dogs of the best breed, and carefully trained them to throw themselves upon this figure and hold it fast with their obstinate fangs, while he exercised his horse in riding boldly up to it, and when, by a mechanical contrivance, it was made to rear in the air, he aimed his lance with firm eye at the

belly, which, as he had observed, was the only part of its body unprotected by scales. The very likeness of the creature was so horrible, that at first both horse and dogs would turn away from it in trembling ; but after several efforts, Theodore was able to bring them to face it, and in time they became accustomed to the appearance of the counterfeit monster. When they were thoroughly practised in the task which he designed for them, he left home as secretly as he had come, and set sail for Rhodes with his horse, his dogs, and two faithful squires.

They landed on the island at nightfall, and found the country people lamenting the death of some shepherds, who had that evening been slain and mangled by the dragon as they were driving their flocks home from the marsh. Hearing this Theodore vowed that another sun should not set before he had done what in him lay to rid the country of this pest. Instead of repairing to the cloister, he took his way up the mountain with his attendants, and at midnight reached a little chapel which crowned its summit. While his squires watched without, he spent the night before the altar, recommending himself to the favour of Heaven, and when the dawn began to appear, he

rose from his knees, and equipped himself for the combat with a good heart. From head to foot he was encased in shining steel, over which he wore a red surcoat, embroidered before and behind with the silver cross of the order; his sword and spear were weapons of proof made by the best smith of his native land. As soon as the beams of the rising sun touched the mountain, Sir Theodore sprang upon his gallant steed and rode towards the haunt of the dragon.

Before long he came in sight of the mouth of the cave, and the knight was aware of the monster lying rolled up on the ground as if asleep. At the hideous sight the hounds began to bay, and the dragon awoke, uncoiled his scaly folds, and made the rocks re-echo with its outcry. Then Theodore turned to his squires and said words that might be his last—

“Bide you here and watch. And if I fall, return home without delay, and let no man know my fate.”

With this he drove the spurs into his horse, and rode boldly forward, and the dragon rushed forth to meet him with dreadful din, shaking the ground with its tread, and breathing fire and venom from its gaping jaws. The knight hurled his

spear. It struck the thick scales and rebounded as if it were but a twig. Undaunted, he drew his sword, and urged his steed on. But the poor beast, terrified by the unaccustomed sound and by the scorching breath of the dragon, swerved and turned in spite of all its rider's efforts. The monster was upon him; nimbly he leapt from his saddle, and with his good sword dealt blow after blow. Alas! it might as well have been a straw which he held in his hand. With one stroke of its tail the dragon felled him to the earth, and the shuddering squires already gave up their master for lost, while his horse wildly scoured the plain. But the faithful dogs had not so ill-learned their lesson. Now they fell upon the dragon, seized it with their fangs from beneath, and all its furious struggles and horrible cries could not force them to loose their hold. The monster, maddened with the pain, reared its huge body in the air at the same moment that Theodore recovered himself and rose to his feet. With all his might he drove his sword to the hilt in its white belly, unprotected by scales such as covered its back. The squires uttered an exclamation, and what was their joy to see the hideous beast sinking on the ground. The point

had reached its heart ; a deluge of black blood gushed forth from the wound ; the dragon gave one last scream that men heard and trembled for miles around ; then it fell upon its conqueror, crushing him to the ground with the weight of its carcass.

The knight's attendants ran eagerly up, and hastened to drag their master from beneath the dragon's body, which the bull-dogs still held in their grip. He was stunned and bruised, but otherwise unhurt. When they had unlaced his helm and poured water on his face, he came to his senses, and as soon as his eyes fell on the dead dragon, no other cordial was needed to bring back his strength. At last his hope was fulfilled, and Rhodes was free from this hitherto invulnerable enemy. Well might the youth be proud of this deed, which so many old and famous knights had failed to do !

Scarcely was the dragon dead before rumours of the conflict began to fly over the island, and from all sides the people came flocking to learn if the good news were true. When they saw with their own eyes that they had no longer anything to fear from the monster, they could not restrain their joy for this deliverance, and gratitude

towards their gallant deliverer. Being rested and refreshed, Sir Theodore mounted his horse and rode towards the city, accompanied by an increasing throng that struggled and pressed to come near him, and followed by his squires, drawing the dead body of the dragon behind them, as a proof of their master's prowess. When they drew near the walls, another crowd poured forth to meet them, eager to see the wondrous sight and welcome the victor. The whole population hurried out of doors to behold his triumphal entry, and every voice was raised in acclamation as the young knight rode through the streets, and made his way among the shouting thousands to the council chamber in which the knights of the order were wont to assemble.

Here were already gathered the noble brotherhood in their black hooded robes, with no other ornament than crosses of white linen. On either side of the stern Grand Master they took their places, and into their presence was brought the young knight, with a flush on his brow, as the rejoicing crowd which surged into the hall behind him, proclaimed his victory and made the vaulted roof ring with his name, and every eye was fixed upon him in admiration and pride.

"Peace!" rang forth the deep voice of the Grand Master, and in a moment all was still. "We know your tale. The dragon is slain. 'Tis well."

Now the looks of all were turned upon him; and men waited to hear from his lips what should be the guerdon of this so fearless champion.

"Rash youth!" spoke the venerable Master, "thou hast indeed proved thy courage, but thou hast transgressed my commands. Say, what is the highest duty of our sacred order? Knowest thou to which virtue above all our vows have bound thee?"

The blood fled from Theodore's face as he replied in a low voice, that thrilled in every ear—"Obedience."

"Even so. And what must be his doom who comes proudly to tell us that he has set his vows at nought?"

The youth bowed his head, and made no answer. A murmur ran through the hall, as if imploring pity. Once more the Grand Master commanded silence with upraised hand, and with knitted brow and sorrowful voice addressed the offender—

"Thy courage is but that of the infidel; nay, in this thou art no nobler than the monster thou

hast slain. In thy own breast dwells the fellest foe against whom it beseemed thee to make life-long war. Better that every one of our brethren should have perished before the dragon, than that one should have broken the bond by which, on the holy soil where our Lord gave us the example of humility, we have been consecrated to serve Him in conquering our rebellious hearts. He who forgets his vow and follows his own will in the hope of vain glory is no longer worthy to be a soldier of the cross. We spare thy life, which thou hast not spared at my bidding. But strip off these sacred emblems, these honourable arms. Depart to our deepest dungeon, and be thy name forgotten from this hour."

All were silent. Many a knight would have fallen on his knees for mercy to the brave youth, but none durst question the decree of their chief. Theodore himself prepared, without a word, to submit to his sentence. Meekly he disrobed himself and put off his shining armour. He took one last look at his sword, still stained with the dragon's blood; then laid all before the Grand Master's feet, and reverently kissing the old man's hand, turned to depart from his presence.

With folded arms and downcast looks he moved

towards the door, and the crowd, murmuring for pity, made way to let him pass. The Master followed him with kindling eye, then ere he was gone, a voice of joy and triumph rang through the hall.

“Come back, my son! ’Tis enough: once more thou art worthy to wear the cross; thou hast conquered thyself, and mayst now receive the honour due to him who has vanquished the dragon. Take back thy sword that has earned thee a place henceforth among our bravest and best.”

Before the eyes of all, the old man fell on the youth’s neck, and embraced him with tears. Now was Theodore’s triumph fulfilled. His fellow-knights might crowd round to take his hand and praise him for his bravery. Once more the people raised a shout of joy, and his name was on every lip. The whole city spent the day in feasting and rejoicing.

Long was that day remembered in Rhodes! They set up the head of the dragon above the city gates, where all that came thither might see and thank heaven for this deliverance. In time Sir Theodore became himself Grand Master of the Order, and his age was graced by wisdom as in

youth he had proved his courage. When he died, full of years and honours, there was graven upon his tomb: HERE LIES THE VANQUISHER OF THE DRAGON.





The Rescue of the Queen.

I.

T was the merry month of May, when the birds begin to sing among the trees, and the fresh flowers to spring in the meadows, and the hearts of all men are blithe and glad of the coming summer. Early on a bright morning, while the dew was still on the grass, had Arthur's queen, the Lady Guinevere, ridden forth a-maying, with a goodly company of knights and ladies all arrayed in green, and four squires, who, on the points of their spears, held a canopy of green silk above her head. Gaily they rode through woods and fields, fearing no harm, for the land was at peace, and laughed and sang as they decked themselves with the sweet flowers and the blossoming boughs. They knew not that the false knight Sir Meleagance lay in wait for them

with a great company of armed men. Fiercely had he loved the proud queen, and long had he watched to steal her away, but he feared King Arthur, and still more that best of all his knights, Sir Lancelot of the Lake, who was ever near her side. Right glad was he now to hear that this day the queen came abroad, and her peerless knight stayed at home. Now he vowed he would seize her by force, and bear her away to his castle, far among the forests and mountains.

So as the queen and her companions washed themselves in the dew, and wove garlands of flowers, and made merry by the side of a budding thicket, there suddenly burst upon them ten times their number of armed men, Sir Meleagance at the head, who ran to the queen, caught her horse by the bridle, and would have led her away.

“Traitor!” cried Guinevere in anger and alarm, “what mean you to do? Bethink thee how thou art of noble birth, and a knight of the Round Table, and thou to be about to dishonour it and the good king that made thee knight! Wouldst thou shame all knighthood and thyself and me?”

“Let this be as it may,” said Sir Meleagance; “wit you well, madam, that I have loved you many a year, and never till now could I get you

at such advantage, therefore I will take you while I may."

Meanwhile, all the queen's knights had sprung to horse and drawn their swords, and would have come to her aid. But what could they, all unarmed as they were, do against so many? Gallantly they fought, while the ladies cried and wrung their hands; many sore wounds they got and gave, and would all have died to rescue their mistress. But she, seeing them bleed, and knowing that they must lose their lives to no purpose in such a fray, was moved by pity, and cried to Sir Meleagance—

"Slay not my good knights, and we will go with thee, if thou suffer them not to be hurt; else I will rather slay myself."

"Madam," said he, "for your sake they shall be led with us to my own castle, and no man shall do them harm."

At the queen's bidding, her knights put up their swords; but they looked sternly at the traitor, and feared not to tell him to his face that he set his honour in more jeopardy than their persons. Meleagance heeded not, but charged his men to look well that none of the prisoners should escape to bear news of his evil deed.

For a little they stayed in this place, while the hurts of the wounded were dressed, and the queen found time to speak a word in the ear of one of her pages, that rode a swift horse.

"Flee thou," she whispered, "when thou seest thy time, and bear this ring to Sir Lancelot of the Lake, and tell him what has befallen, and pray him, as he loveth me, to come to my rescue, for this felon fears none but him. Ride, and spare not thy horse!"

So the boy watched his time, and suddenly he struck spurs into his horse's side, and fled away as fast as he could. Well guessed Sir Meleagance the errand on which he had gone. Those of his men who were best mounted made haste to chase the bold youth, and shot many arrows after him, but he outstripped them all, and soon disappeared in the wood.

The queen's eyes sparkled with joy as she saw the safe escape of her messenger.

"Ah, madam," said Meleagance, "ye think to have betrayed me, but I shall take heed to Sir Lancelot that he come not easily after you." With this he gave order to depart without delay, and on the road he placed a band of archers in ambush, charging them, that if Sir Lancelot of

the Lake came that way, they should shoot his horse, for they might not hope to overcome the man himself, so great was the fear of him throughout all the land. And now that Sir Meleagance had the queen in his power, he laboured to excuse himself and to gain her goodwill, not daring to offend her when he bethought him how her chosen knight must soon have warning of her peril. Thus they rode to his castle, and the queen and her knights held aloof, and would speak no words, good or bad, to this bold traitor.

Well might he be in dread! Ere the sun was at its height, the young page, urging his horse over flood and field, had come to the king's house, where sat Lancelot alone of all the knights. Breathlessly the boy gave the queen's message and delivered to him her ring. Eagerly Sir Lancelot called for his armour.

"For ever," he said, "am I shamed, if I rescue not that noble lady from danger and dishonour."

Then, as he quickly armed himself, the page told all his tale, how Sir Meleagance burst upon them with a hundred men, how the queen's knights would have fought to the death, and how she prayed for their lives and let the traitor bear her away.

“Ah!” cried Sir Lancelot, “I had rather than a kingdom that I had been there well armed. But now this felon knight shall hear of me, as I am a living man, for I will never hold till I come to his castle, and prove his treachery upon the head of him and all his.”

His good steed was led forth, he girt on his sharp sword, took his shield and spear in hand, and rode forth in all haste, with the young page to guide him on his way.

Swiftly they rode till they came to the meadow marked by blood and the trampling of horses and other signs of struggle. Hence a broad track lay through the wood, which they followed till it led them to a narrow pass, where of a sudden a band of archers sprang up and bid them turn back.

“Who are ye that bid a knight of the Round Table leave his right way?” said Sir Lancelot, and would have ridden on.

“This way shall ye leave, or else ye shall go it on foot!” was the answer; and with that the arrows flew out, and both the horses fell sore wounded on the ground.

“Shame on you!” cried the knight, getting clear of his horse’s body, and making at them with his sword. But they ran like deer, and he could

not come at them for the hedges and ditches that lay between, so he was fain to return to the path, angry and discomfited.

"Alas!" he said, "that ever a knight should do so treacherously to another; but it is an old saying, a good man is never in danger but when he is in danger of a coward. But this, too, Sir Meleagance, shall be added to thy reckoning."

The knight and the page must now go, as best they could, on foot. But Sir Lancelot was cumbered with his heavy armour, which yet he durst not leave, if he hoped to overcome the traitor. Sore annoyed, he strove to press on, and went slowly through the wood, for he would not turn back and was too eager to stay while another horse might be brought him. But as he chafed and lamented at this mischance, and by reason of the heat and the weight of his armour, could scarcely stir farther, there came by a foul cart driven by a churlish fellow, whom Lancelot bid hold.

"Say, carter, what shall I give thee to suffer me to ride in thy cart?"

"Thou shalt not come into my cart, for I am sent to fetch wood," replied the churl.

"I pray you, bring me to the nearest castle,"

said the knight courteously. But the fellow was still sullen, and refused, so thereupon Lancelot went up to him and gave him such a buffet that he fell from the cart, and lay on the earth as if dead.

Now, in these days it was thought great shame for a gentle knight to ride in a cart, and felons only were carried thus to a base death. This Sir Lancelot heeded little for the nonce, since all his thought was of the queen's peril, and nothing of his own honour. But the young page took it ill that this great lord whom he followed should wish to ride in such a mean manner, and he cried—

“Ah, sir, surely you were shamed for ever if you rode in this cart, for no knight or squire may ride thus without disgrace.”

“Boy,” said the knight sternly, “would ye be my squire, then know ye this, that no man may be shamed save by himself. If ye fear disgrace or danger in this adventure, return when you will but I must go on as I can, for Sir Lancelot of the Lake fears no man's ill word, when he serves his queen.”

The page hung his head and blushed. And now the churlish carter came to himself, and grovelling in terror before the knight, cried—

“Fair lord, spare my life, and I will carry you where you will.”

Sir Lancelot mounted into the cart, and bid drive on forthwith, and his young squire walked beside, half doubting if this could be the great knight whom all men held in such honour.

Slowly they went, jolting and creaking along the track, and sore troubled was Sir Lancelot when he thought how the queen was being carried fast and far away. Many country folk they met on the road, who stared to see a knight in full armour standing in a mean cart, and asked mockingly what he had done that was thus led to the gallows. At this the boy was angry, and would have himself chastised their insolence, but Sir Lancelot bade him hold, for he said a fool's scorn could hurt no man but himself.

Thus they fared on, and towards evening the road brought them before a castle. The boy ran forward, and sounded the horn that hung at the gate, at which sound the lady of the castle came forth with her damsels, and asked who was this knight that was being carried to be hanged, and what might be his crime.

“Nay, madam,” declared the page, “this is no felon, but the most noble knight in the world.”

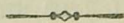
“Ha! ha! A most noble knight; and surely he is hard bestead when he rides thus uncouthly.”

“Lady,” said Sir Lancelot, “if you would but look on my shield, you might learn my name, and I would have you know, that I am bound on a great errand, and need the succour of all loyal folk.”

“Thou hast stolen the shield from some good knight,” cried she, still looking scornfully on him; and his brow grew stern, but he gently answered—

“Be that as it may, but suffer me and my squire to rest here this night.”

“Rest if ye will, but ye shall lie in my kitchen, and eat with my scullion knaves, and to-morrow ye may ride on to the gallows, or where you will.” And with this the lady of the castle turned away with her damsels, and Sir Lancelot bowed his head and was silent, for he could speak no hard words to a lady.



II.

The knight and the youth were left standing in the court-yard of the castle alone, and knew not where to bestow themselves. No man came out to welcome them. The damsels turned away

proudly like their mistress, and for no asking would make ready a bed for the knight of the cart. The scullions looked forth from the kitchen, and mocked at their sorry plight. But Lancelot still bade his squire not to lose cheer, for thus must the true follower of arms learn to bear all things, even to discourtesy, when need were. Yet he himself was full sorrowful, and ever thought upon the queen, and how he might most quickly come up with that wicked traitor.

Then it seemed that the lady of the castle had changed her thought of them, for as they stood there tired and abashed, a damsel came from her and bid them follow, and led them into a great hall lit with torches of wax and strewn with fresh rushes, where stood a table spread with a rich banquet and many vessels of gold and silver, as became such a stately mansion.

“Be ye welcome,” said the lady, now as courteous as she had before seemed unkind. “It is ever joy and pride to us to harbour such a knight in our castle and give him of our best.”

The young page looked at her with astonishment, and wondered if this were the same lady, but Lancelot showed no wonder, for he knew the ways of woman. And she aided him to disarm.

and with her own hands brought warm water in a golden basin, and put on him a scarlet mantle, trimmed with fur, and made him sit beside her at the table.

Weary and hungry, the knight was glad to be so well at ease. He sat down by the mistress of the castle, who, now that she was in kindly mood, appeared one of the loveliest ladies in the world. His squire and the damsels served them with all manner of dainty meats and goblets of red wine; and while they eat, minstrels sang and made music in the hall. Lancelot was fain to think that he had never elsewhere found better lodging and entertainment. But his heart was still heavy, so long as the queen was in the power of her enemies. The lady saw that he was troubled, and with smiles and laughter and merry talk, strove to cheer him, but in vain.

When supper was over, she ordered all the rest to leave them, and when they were alone, asked her guest why his mood was so sorrowful, and what adventure this might be which he pursued so eagerly. Then Lancelot told her how the queen had been stolen away, and how he should have ridden night and day till he came up with her.

"Truly, Arthur has many another knight to ride after his queen. And are there no ladies fairer than she?" said the hostess, looking on Lancelot with eyes that went to his heart like strong wine.

"Madam, what would you?"

"Look upon my face, and say if I am not one to be loved. See this castle and its wide lands, of all these thou mayst be lord, if thou wilt but turn aside from this adventure, and stay with one who loves thee better than her lands and riches."

"Nay," said Lancelot, turning his face from her bewitching smiles. "My honour, fair maiden, is dearer to me than life, and I may not leave this quest for any lady alive. I have vowed never to see the king till I bring back Guinevere and have punished this traitor. Who art thou that wouldst thus entice me to shame?"

The lady's face shone with a beauty more than earthly. A strain of enchanting music was heard, and a sweet perfume spread the hall. Sir Lancelot rose to his feet.

"Who art thou to despise me thus?" cried the lady, and began to weep, and would have thrown her arms round his neck.

The knight shook her off. She uttered a cry of

rage and grief and fled away, and at the same moment a strong cold wind rushed through the hall, dashed down the lights, and left all in darkness.

Lancelot staggered like a drunken man, amazed, as well he might be, at the customs of this house. He called loudly for his squire, but no one answered. He groped in the darkness to find the door, but in vain. The lady did not return. Not a voice or a footstep was heard throughout all the castle. He seemed to be alone. What should he do? As he moved about, feeling his way with his hands, he came upon a couch by the wall, and sank down, overpowered by weariness. Muttering a brief prayer, he stretched his limbs upon the couch, and would have given himself to sleep.

Whether he waked or slept he knew not, nor how long he lay, but he turned from side to side, and was troubled with frightful shadows of ill and a vision as it were of a dark cloud that rested upon himself and upon the queen, and he would have fled from it, and could not. Then the cloud opened, and in his dream he saw a hermitage and a little chapel full of dead men's tombs, and before the altar a lady's corpse lay upon a black bier, covered with a white cloth, and a knight knelt by

and wept sorely and confessed his sins, and his armour was covered with blood. And he strove to pray for that knight's soul, but his tongue clove to his mouth. Then, as it were, a peal of thunder deafened all his mind, and he woke and sat up, with the cold sweat on his brow, and a deathly chill through his blood.

What did he see? The stately hall of the castle had become a gloomy prison, where he lay on the bare earth, loaded with heavy fetters, and great drops trickled down the wall upon his shivering body, and snakes and vermin crawled around in the light of the moon that through the barred windows fell fearsomely upon the darkness of this dungeon.

Sir Lancelot held his breath, he struggled to free his arm, he made the sign of the cross on his forehead, and putting forth his strength, burst the chains that held him, and, all bewildered, sprang to his feet. All was ghostly silence. Then suddenly piteous cries burst forth from a chamber hard by, and the whole castle shook as with the tread of armed men. The knight grasped his sword, and ran to the place. The thick wall parted before him; he sped on, with the screams for his guide, and by the weird moonlight saw the

lady of the castle struggling in the arms of a tall knight, who was dragging her away. With one blow, Sir Lancelot laid him at his feet. Then forth rushed six more men in armour, brandishing great axes, with which they set upon him at once, while the lady clung to him, and hindered his arm. Calling shame on them for their cowardice, he struck about him, and had given them mortal wounds, but his sword passed through these grim forms, as if they had been air, and lo! they were gone. Astonished, Sir Lancelot looked around and saw no one; then a mist came before his eyes; and when it passed away, the whole scene had vanished like a dream. He was standing in the clear sunlight, and beside him the lady had taken her true form, and stood known for the Fairy of the Lake, his powerful protectress and the guardian of his youth.

"Thus, Lancelot, has thy worth been tried," spoke the voice he knew full well. "Scorn, lust, and fear, thou hast played the man against them all, and in this quest there is no mortal foe whom thou shalt not overcome."



III.

While Lancelot was being aided with succour and counsel by the Fairy of the Lake, Sir Meleagance was hurrying on with his prisoners. If horses and men could have endured, he would have ridden day and night, so much he feared to be pursued by Lancelot. And yet the road was so hard and so long, and so beset with perils, that he trusted Lancelot might not win safely to the end. The false knight knew not fully yet with whom he had to do.

At the first spot where they halted for the night the queen left her ivory comb on the grass, hoping that Lancelot might see it and know that she had passed that way. Next day, likewise, she laid a tress of her hair beside a fountain, which Lancelot failed not to find there and laid on his heart. And every night thus she left some token which might guide her deliverer; but Meleagance knew it not. Often he spoke to the queen, and would have her listen to his love, but she only wept, and bid him be sure that this wrong would be avenged, nor was her heart moved by all his vows and his promises that she should be a greater and richer lady than ever she

had been at Arthur's court. Always she answered him with grief and anger, till his mood changed, and he swore it should go ill with this proud lady when once he had her within his walls, and that no knight then should be able to rescue her from his hands.

Many days they rode, and at last came to the wicked lord's castle, a great and gloomy pile, fit to be the home of such a man.

"Here I have brought you, Lady Guinevere," said Meleagance mockingly, as the gate opened to let them enter. "Where is the man that shall bring you out?"

"Alas!" cried the queen, "ye know well to whom ye speak, but if my lord the king or Sir Lancelot were here, ye would speak in another wise; and so ye shall before this your work is ended."

"Madam, ye do me wrong, and yourself wrong, to be so proud," he said, leading her into the chamber prepared for her, while the yard of the castle was yet full of his men and of her wounded and captive train. "These friends will forget thee, and thou mayst well forget them; but here thou shalt dwell in prison till I can have fairer words for my pains."

“What voice is that?” cried the queen, starting up and running to the window.

And lo! there was Lancelot already at the gate—well she knew the shield borne by his squire—and all the castle rang with his shout—

“Where art thou, Sir Meleagance, false traitor, and false knight of the Round Table? Now come forth, for here am I, Sir Lancelot of the Lake, to fight with thee!” And with that he burst open the gate which the porter would have shut in his face, and made his way into the court-yard, none daring to stay him.

Queen Guinevere laughed for joy; but Meleagance was sore afraid at the sound of that voice. Suddenly he fell upon his knees, and said—

“Madam, I put myself into your power. Forgive me if I have done you wrong.”

“What would you now?” cried she. “In sooth, I well knew I should not be forgotten by this good knight.”

“Madam,” pleaded the cowardly traitor, “all shall be amended as you wish, and I wholly set myself at your mercy. Speak to my lord Sir Lancelot, and bid him hold. Then such cheer as may be made in this poor castle ye shall have till morn, and after that ye may all return to the

king, and myself and all that I have shall be yours."

Much and eagerly he spoke to her in the same wise, and all the time Sir Lancelot stood in the court with his drawn sword, and kept crying—

"Thou traitor, come forth!"

At last Meleagance came out, and the queen beside him. Lancelot ran forward to meet the felon knight, but was amazed to see him shrink behind the queen, and to hear her speak as if no wrong had been done—

"Sir Lancelot, why are ye so moved?"

"Ha, madam, so you ask me that question? Meseemeth," said Lancelot, "ye ought to be more wroth than I am, for yours is the hurt and dishonour."

"Truly," said the queen, "ye speak the truth, and heartily I thank you; but ye must come in with me peaceably, for all is put in my hand, and all that is evil shall be redressed, since this knight full sore repenteth him of what he hath done."

"Madam," said Lancelot, striving to keep down his wrath, "since ye have made friends with him, I may not be against it, though Sir Meleagance hath done full shamefully and cowardly to me. Ah, madam, and had I known ye would have so

soon made friends with him, I would not have made such haste unto you !”

“ Why say you so ? Do you repent yourself of your own good deeds ?” asked Guinevere. “ Be sure that I make friends with Sir Meleagance for no love or favour I bear him, but to have peace and no slander.”

Sternly looked Lancelot towards the traitor, as he said—

“ You know well I never loved slander ; but there is neither man nor woman alive, except my lord King Arthur and you, madam, that should hinder me from making that man’s heart full cold, or ever I departed hence.”

“ Well, do as ye please,” said the queen, looking hard at Lancelot, but he understood her not.

Now all this she had said, not from womanliness, as caring to show mercy to Meleagance, but from wilfulness, desiring to try Sir Lancelot if he would restrain his wrath at her bidding, and thus to prove her power over this best of knights. Never was knight so devoted to a lady’s will, and never was lady so unworthy of such a knight.

“ Madam,” said he, “ so ye be pleased, I care not,” and without more words, turned to her knights, and asked them how they did, and told

them how basely Meleagance had set archers to slay his horse, and how he was fain to let himself be carried in a cart. Then they told him of their hurts, and murmured against the traitor who had done them such wrong ; but they spake low because of the queen, albeit they marvelled that she cared not to be revenged.

Now, Meleagance seeing Guinevere and her champion at strife, as he thought, and deeming that he would yet have to answer to the king, took this time to make excuse for himself, and called out loudly, and accused the queen of shameful deeds, declaring that he would prove her a traitress to King Arthur.

“That is false !” cried she, with flushed brow and kindled eyes.

“False !” echoed Lancelot, returning to her side at the first word of dishonour done to her name.

“All this proud language shall not avail you,” said Meleagance, casting about in his mind for fresh villainies, when he saw this sword still ready to defend the honour of the queen. “I will prove what I say by my hands at fit time and place.”

“And I will prove thee false !” cried Lancelot,

rushing up to him like a hound let loose, while the queen fell swooning into the arms of her damsels.

"Beware what ye do," said the traitor, and his sword stayed in its sheath. "Though ye are never so good a knight, Sir Lancelot, as ye know well ye are renowned the best knight in the world, yet should ye fear to do battle in a wrong quarrel."

"Look thou to that, for I will prove thee a liar where and when thou wilt."

"Hold!" said Meleagance, thinking to gain time for some treason. "Here is my glove, as a sign that I will maintain that the queen has been false to her lord, and I will do battle with thee this day twelvemonths before the king at Carduel."

"And I receive your glove. Be witness, all ye, that I will meet this felon knight as he desires, and that he shall pay full dearly for all his wickedness."

So spoke Sir Lancelot, with no thought of treachery, for such men dread not such perils, holding other men loyal and true as themselves.



IV.

Not another hour would they stay beneath this roof, though Meleagance urged them to remain that night, for he had a wicked plot in his mind. But Lancelot departed as soon as the queen with her knights and ladies could get to horse, taking no other leave of the traitor than to bid him look to it that he failed not to meet him that day twelvemonths, then to maintain his charge before the king. The queen's knight would have appointed an earlier day, unwilling that his mistress should rest so long under a slander; but Meleagance made many excuses, as that he was still suffering from a wound, that he was at war with a lord of his country, that he had vowed a pilgrimage, and might not fight in arms till it were fulfilled. So thus they agreed and parted, each trusting, the one through valour, the other through treachery, that his cause would prevail.

Then Sir Lancelot and the rescued captives fared homewards. They journeyed slowly, the knights who had been wounded in defence of the queen being now set upon litters for their ease, and that their wounds might sooner be healed. Thus for many days they went joyfully, and drew

towards Carduel without meeting any hindrance. But on the way Lancelot's young squire told them of all the chances and dangers that befell this good knight as he had followed the queen—how he passed through the perilous forest and overcame its enchantments, how he slew the fiery dragon, how he freed a bridge which was kept by a knight that robbed and murdered all travellers, how he cut off the heads of two huge savages in a narrow pass, and how he destroyed the wicked custom of a castle where he spent the night. All this the knights and ladies heard with great wonder, and praised Sir Lancelot, saying that he was well worthy to be renowned the greatest knight in the world, and rightly honoured by high and low. But when they spoke thus, the queen was silent. In her heart she thanked her deliverer, and knew well what it was to have so trusty a friend, yet still she would try him with her wilfulness, and have men see how long this peerless knight would suffer her pride. And as he ever courteously bore with her, she feigned to mock him, and cried often—

“Ah! Lancelot, that a knight of the Round Table should have been drawn in a churl's cart!”

“Madam, I shall know to deal with any

knight that makes me this reproach," was all his answer.

But one day, seeing that she was in such a scornful mood, Sir Lancelot turned his rein and rode apart from the rest of the company with his young squire, who marvelled much that this good knight should be so used by a lady. But he spoke not his mind, since his master had bid him know that a knightly man must learn to rule his tongue as well as his steed, and would never hear but gentle words of the queen, for all her unkindness.

As thus they rode together and spoke of the battle with Sir Meleagance that was to be at Carduel, they came to a place where two ways met. And there sat a dwarf, passing ill to look on, and wept and wrung his hands, as in sore grief.

"Say, what ails you or yours that you make such moan?" asked Lancelot, checking his steed at this sight.

"Woe is me," replied the dwarf, "for my mistress, a fair lady that is in sore distress, and cannot be helped unless there come to her succour the good knight that rode in a cart to rescue the queen!"

"Then weep no more, for I am that knight, and

I will succour thy lady in all that I can. Tell me, where is this lady?"

"Sir, she dwelleth in a tower twelve miles from this place, and if I lead you to her, she will have great joy."

"That she shall have, if I may bring it her. Ride on," said Lancelot to his squire, "and say to the queen that I shall be with her anon, in a day or two at the farthest. Meantime, I will follow this adventure alone."

The young squire would have asked leave to follow him, but he knew that his lord's word was his will. So he hastened after the queen with the message, and Lancelot caught up the dwarf and placed him on his saddle, and rode away upon his adventure.

Twelve miles he rode, and twenty and more, before they came to the place where the lady was. The dwarf ever bade Lancelot haste, for his mistress was in sore need; and he spurred his steed and pressed on, thinking no evil. They passed through a dark forest, in which fierce wild beasts fled away from their path, and through a long deep valley, where all the rocks were white with dead men's bones, and by the edge of a lonely lake, dim with mist and vanishing among great

mountains, on which were seen no dwellings of men. And thus at last, as night was falling, they came to a strong tower on the brow of a mighty rock, so steep, that the horse could hardly win its way up the stony side.

“Here dwells my lady and weeps day and night, and here thou shalt learn what she requires of thee.”

As they neared the tower, the gate was thrown open, and the seneschal, clothed in black, came forth to welcome the knight with all reverence. He called out to bestow his steed in the best stall of the stable, and prayed Lancelot to come to supper, after which he should see the lady who had desired his aid, and had no knight save him to befriend her.

Much wondering that a lady should dwell alone in such a fearsome place, Lancelot followed the seneschal into the hall, where a great banquet was prepared, and a damsel came forward to rid him of his arms.

“Nay,” said Lancelot courteously, “for I cannot part with my sword till I learn how I may use it in the service of her at whose bidding I have come here.”

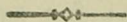
Then suddenly the seneschal’s countenance

changed, and he turned round with an evil frown, and said—

“Easily thou hast come here, but hardly shalt thou go away!”

Sir Lancelot started, and made a step forward, with his hand on his sword-hilt. But he had set his foot firmly on a trap-door, which gave way beneath him, and he fell helpless into a deep pit below.

The pit was full of straw, or that good knight would never have left it alive. As soon as he came to himself, and found himself lying on the straw, his body bruised, his armour battered, he leaped up and shouted as one possessed, and rushed from side to side like a caged lion. But all was darkness and solitude; he dashed himself in vain against the thick walls, and his cries only mocked him, re-echoed from the roof of his dungeon. Then Lancelot's dauntless heart sunk within him, for he knew that this was the doing of his enemy, and that he had been entrapped by treason.



V.

Glad was King Arthur to see his queen and his knights come back unharmed, and full wroth when he heard how Meleagance had impeached the Lady Guinevere of high treason, and how he had given his glove to Lancelot, that he would answer it in the lists.

"By my life," he said, "this traitor hath been over-bold. But where is Sir Lancelot?"

"Sir," said they all, "we know not where he is, but we deem he has ridden on some adventure, as he is oftentimes wont to do."

"Let him be," said the king. "He will not fail to be here anon."

But the time passed away, and Lancelot did not come, so that Guinevere sorrowed and feared, and sore repented her of how she had used that good knight, for she thought he had deserted her out of anger at her pride, and the reproach she made him concerning that churl's cart. And when months had gone by, and still he came not, the king sent out knights far and wide to seek him and bring him to the court. But nowhere could they find so much as tidings of him, and they

knew not that dark tower hidden in the mountains, where he was pining in prison.

Fiercely the good knight's heart swelled within him when he found himself thus held captive, and sorely he grieved to know that he could not keep his day, so that all men would hold him shamed, and his lady the queen must be condemned. His sorrow almost drove him mad in that dark dungeon, and he could scarcely have been known for the Lancelot before whom Melegance trembled. Through a little chink the sun shone in upon him for an hour each noon, and thus only he was able to mark how time went by, day after day, week after week, month after month, and every day was like a year to the hopeless prisoner. He had been starved to death, if the seneschal's daughter, pitying him for his goodly manhood and his misfortunes, had not let down, from time to time, a little bread and water into the pit where he lay on the straw, and cared not whether he lived or died, so long as he might not be free to do his duty, and to right the queen.

Thus wearily passed a year away, and next day the lists would be set at Carduel, and Sir Melegance would be there in arms to prove his wicked words. That night Lancelot heard a great

trampling of horses in the court-yard of the tower, and his heart was stirred within him, for he hoped this might be some of Arthur's knights come to deliver him. But the sounds ceased; no one came near his prison, and he gave himself to despair. It was in vain that he tried to take comfort, saying—

“Surely it will be understood by the king and queen that I am dead, or sick, or in prison. All men that know me will say for me that I am in some evil case, or else I had been there; and I wot well there will be found a good knight, either of my kindred, or some other that loveth me, to take my quarrel in hand.”

Soon his worst fears would come upon him again, and he cried bitterly—

“Ah, no! They will say that I was angered at the queen, or that I took her for guilty, and therefore I did not come to maintain her cause, so shall we both be dishonoured and destroyed for ever.”

So weak was Lancelot, that he wept like a woman at this thought. And all that night he did not sleep, but ceased not to cry out, and to lament, and to speak bitter words against the traitor that had done him this great wrong. He knew not that deliverance was at hand.

That evening a lady had arrived at the tower, with a great train of squires and damsels. It was the trampling of their horses that Lancelot had heard in his dungeon. The seneschal came out to meet her with all reverence, for he knew her for the sister of his master, Sir Meleagance, who had bid him obey her in all things as himself. So she was welcomed and lodged in the tower that night, and early in the morning she rose and sent for the seneschal.

"Say, who is this prisoner that maketh such dole in the dungeon," she asked. "So loud and often he cried that I could not rest for pity of him."

"Madam, this is a knight that my lord Sir Meleagance bid us keep here a twelvemonth gone. His name I know not, but here ye may see his shield, and in truth he was a goodly knight to be so prisoned."

The lady looked at the shield, and cried—

"I know this knight well, and I would have him ride with me. Bring him forth; I will answer for this to your lord."

The seneschal doubted, but the lady would not be gainsaid; and at her bidding he ordered Sir Lancelot to be brought from his prison.

They brought him out into the court-yard all amazed, and though the sun was scarce risen, the light dazzled his eyes that had dwelt so long in darkness.

"Sir," said the lady, "will ye ride with me on an errand I wot of."

"Ah, lady!" he cried, "I cannot go with thee at this time. For to-day, as I am good knight and true man, I must be at Carduel to fight before our lord the king."

"To Carduel would I bring thee," said the lady. "Ho, there! Lead forth this knight's horse."

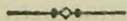
Sir Lancelot seized her hand, and would have fallen on his knees to thank her; but she bade him be silent, and refresh himself with food and drink before setting out.

At her bidding now the seneschal gave the knight all he desired, and brought him his shield and spear, and set him upon his own steed, that neighed for joy to see its master once more. Then they departed from the tower, the lady and Lancelot alone, and she told him that they must haste.

Wondering who she might be that thus befriended him, Sir Lancelot rode by her side, and full swiftly they galloped over mountain and dale,

by flood and field. As he felt his steed bound beneath him, the knight's strength came back, and his heart beat high when he had his good spear once more in his hand. He spoke to the lady, but she answered not a word, but waved her hand, beckoning him to follow faster. The good horse knew his master's voice, and needed not the spur. Faster and faster they flew, till the lady drew rein upon the brow of a hill, and pointed to the plain beneath. Lo! there shone the sun upon the towers of Carduel and the banners of Arthur's knights.

Till now Lancelot had hardly known whether this were not a dream, from which he should wake to find himself still wasting in his dungeon. But now it was these long days of captivity that seemed like a hideous vision of darkness. Words cannot tell his joy. Eagerly he turned from the sight to thank the lady who had brought him hither. But ere he could open his lips, her form and countenance changed, and she vanished before his eyes, and he knew that it was the Fairy of the Lake who, in this guise, had delivered him.



VI.

Now leave we Sir Lancelot galloping with all his might, and turn to a fair meadow near the town, where the lists were set forth in which this day the queen's guilt or innocence should be proved. There came Arthur, known among his knights by his stature and by the golden dragon that crowned his helmet. A great crowd from far and near had gathered to behold the battle, and great sorrow they made for the queen, who wept and wrung her hands when she saw that her champion did not keep his day. And there was Sir Meleagance, boasting and exulting as if his cause were already won, for he thought he had Lancelot fast in his dungeon, and of all the Round Table there was no other knight of whom he was in dread.

Sore troubled was the great king that day, since he had vowed that his wife should die a shameful death, if he who accused her of treachery could make good his charge in the lists. And still Sir Lancelot came not, and the hour appointed for the combat drew near.

"Some grievous mischance must have overtaken Sir Lancelot," said all the knights. "If he

were alive and not sick or in prison, he would surely be here, for never heard we that ever he failed his part in any battle."

"Then do me justice!" cried Meleagance loudly and often. "Or else bring forth some champion who will defy me, for here I come to attainth thy queen as traitress to thee and to her own honour, and which of you shall say me nay?"

The boldest knights of all that fellowship looked upon his mighty body and his keen arms, and none answered him. They feared to have to do with such a man, and it was little love they bore the proud Lady Guinevere, whom, in their hearts, those that knew her best took for guilty, since they well saw that she loved not her trustful lord. But as all stood silent, there pressed through the throng a youth and knelt before the king. It was he, the queen's erstwhile page, who had followed Lancelot on that great adventure.

"My lord Arthur!" he cried, with eager eyes, "if there be none better to take this cause in hand, I beseech you, give me leave to do battle here this day for my lord and master, and to save my lady the queen."

Loud laughed Sir Meleagance in scorn, and said—

"Win thy spurs, sir page, and meanwhile hold

thy peace among armed knights. I fight not but with worthy men."

"Ah," said the youth, the blood reddening on his beardless cheek, "there is no battle but God will have a stroke in it, and these are false and wicked words that thou art come here to defend. And so the king will knight me, and Heaven will help me; I shall prove this upon thy body."

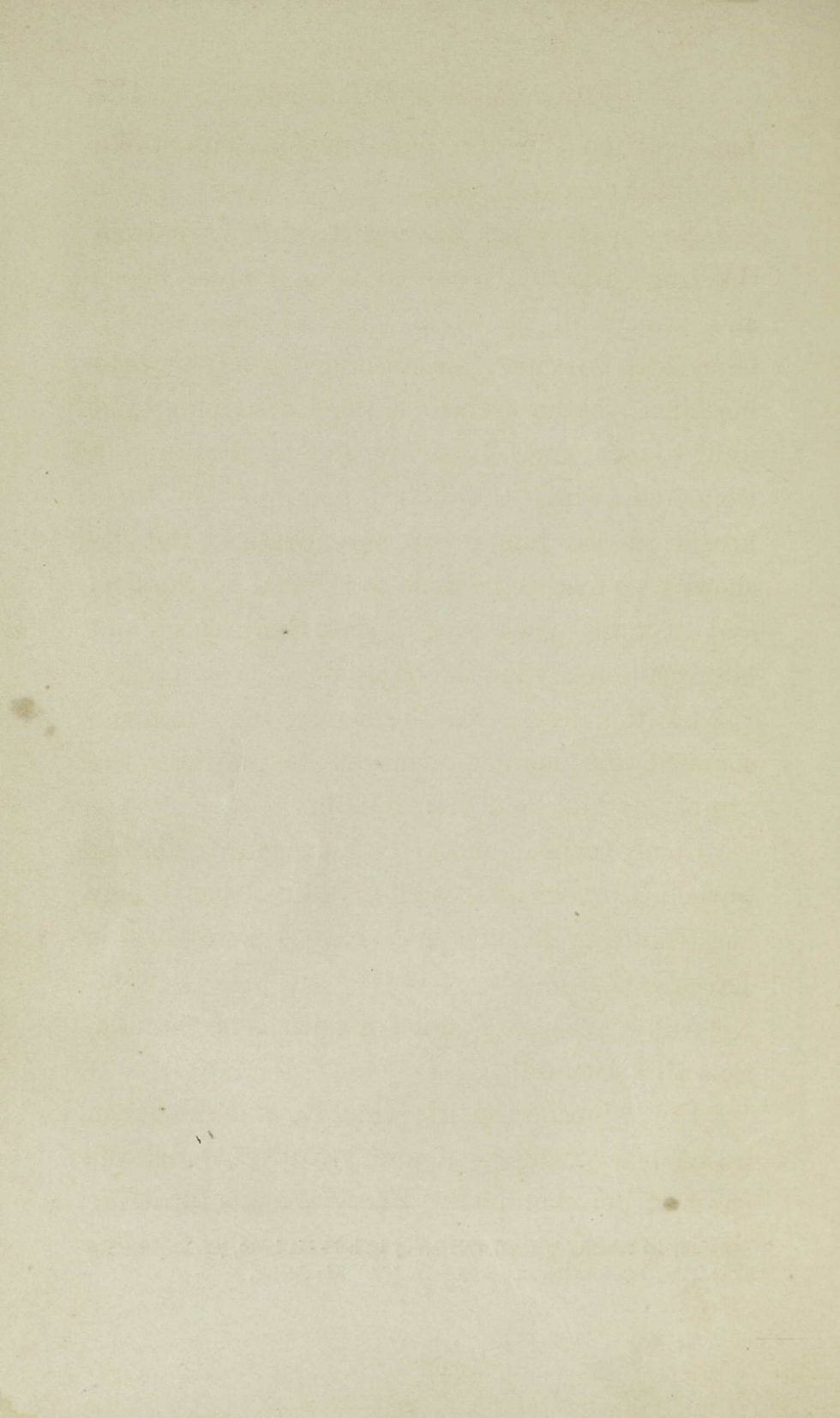
The knights murmured among themselves, and said that this boy was too young to be made a knight. But the king looked kindly on him, and said—

"Nay, to have been Lancelot's squire is enough. Gramercy, gentle youth, I give thee leave, and do thy best, for I dare well say there is some treason done to Sir Lancelot. Come thou to my pavilion. With her own hands the queen shall arm and equip thee for this fight, then on my best horse thou shalt meet this bold accuser, and Heaven defend the right!"

The people set up a great shout as the youth followed Arthur, and round the lists all pressed and strained to see what would now befall. Sir Meleagance sat upright on his great steed, and laughed grimly within the bars of his helmet, for now he hoped the proud queen, and the mighty



"Gracefully he reined his steed, and firmly he held his lance, yet he seemed a slender stripling to meet such an enemy."—p. 127. *The Rescue*,



Lancelot, and this rash boy should at one stroke be put for ever to shame.

It was noon when the youth came forth from the king's pavilion mounted upon a white horse, and armed all in white with a blank shield. Gracefully he reined his steed, and firmly he held his lance, yet he seemed a slender stripling and unfit to meet such an enemy, and all the knights wondered, while the ladies had pity in their hearts to see him go to sure death. But he showed no fear as he rode to the end of the lists and took his place over against the accuser, and both made ready for the onset.

Now the king gave the signal, the trumpets sounded, the heralds advanced to proclaim the combat, and all held their breath.

"Come, then," mocked Meleagance, setting himself firm in his saddle, "come, that I may chastise thee, for too long have I awaited this Lancelot!"

"And he is here!" cried a voice as of thunder, that all knew well.

"Hold!" bade the king loudly, and the queen raised her tearful eyes and joyfully uttered the name of her champion. Every eye was turned to the spot where Lancelot burst into the lists, his

horse all foam and sweat, his armour rusty and bespattered, and the traitor's glove in his helmet. At the sight, Meleagance grew pale behind his vizor, and his knees shook.

"This was the day and hour, and lo ! false and wicked knight, I have come to defy thee, in spite of all thy treachery. Let go, sir heralds, without more ado."

Meleagance spoke not a word. He gave himself for dead, and half turned to fly. But he might not pass through the crowd, and in despair he drove his horse towards Lancelot. Like a thunderbolt, the queen's knight fell upon him and hurled him to the ground, before men had done marvelling at this sudden sight. As he rose, Sir Lancelot leaped down and drew his sword. But the felon knight fought feebly, and soon he fell, and grovelled before his conqueror with craven prayers—

"Oh ! most noble knight, Sir Lancelot of the Lake, save my life, for I yield me unto you as overcome, and I beseech you, as ye be a knight and fellow of the Round Table, slay me not, and whether I live or die, I put myself in the king's hands and yours."

Sir Lancelot knew not what to do, for his heart

was full of deadly wrath against this felon knight; yet he was too noble to slay one who thus yielded himself. He looked to the king, but Arthur spoke not. He looked to the queen, but she gave no sign of mercy. Then loudly he let all know how this miserable man had entrapped him by treachery, that he might not keep his day, and asked what should be done to such a false and base knight. In all that assembly was none who did not answer that Meleagance must die.

"Then rise for shame," said Lancelot, "and perform this battle to the uttermost."

"Nay," cried the beaten man, "I will never rise till ye take me as yelden and recreant."

Lancelot lowered his sword, and said sternly—

"Sir Meleagance, I proffer you this: I will lay aside my helmet and my shield and disarm my left side, and let my left hand be bound behind me, that it shall not help me, and so I will fight with you."

A murmur ran from lip to lip.

"My Lord Arthur," called out Meleagance, starting upon his feet, "ye have heard this proffer. I will take it. Let him be disarmed and bounden according to his words."

"What say ye?" asked the king of Lancelot.
"Will ye abide by your proffer."

"Yea, my lord. I will never go from that I have once said," answered the knight, and Arthur gave command to do to him as he had said.

So they who guarded the lists saw to it, and the youth that had been his squire disarmed Sir Lancelot, first his head, and then his left side, and bound his left arm behind his back. This done, they left him against Meleagance in all his mail, and many a knight and lady marvelled that Sir Lancelot would jeopardy himself in such wise. Never had any seen so strange a fight.

On rushed Meleagance, with his sword raised high to strike the bare head and side which Lancelot turned towards him. Down came the sword, but lightly the good knight drew back, and deftly he turned aside the blow with his own blade, and strongly he smote again, and this stroke failed not its mark. Through helmet and skull it clove, and the sword dropped from the traitor's hand as his body rolled in the dust, while, all unhurt, Sir Lancelot greeted the queen and proclaimed her innocence, with none to say him nay.

Now tolled the death-bell for the felon knight.

They hacked off the spurs from his heels, and broke his sword over the dead body, and stripped it shamefully, and dragged it forth from the lists to be burned with all dishonour, that men might know to hate the deeds for which he had died. But at the great entreaty of the knights of the Round Table, the king suffered him to be interred, and on his tomb was declared how and by whom he was slain. And henceforth, says the chronicle, the king and queen made more of Sir Lancelot, and more was he cherished and esteemed by his fellows than ever he was before. And all men said that happy was Guinevere that had a knight to serve her, whom neither shame, nor peril, nor treason could overcome.





Roland and Oliver.



THE city of Vienne is closely besieged, for Duke Girard, its lord, is at feud with his sovereign, Charles the great King of France. Fiercely have they quarrelled over a wager at chess, and Girard must fly from the court, and call around him his kinsmen and vassals. Now they bravely defend the walls round which lies the mighty host of Charles. The twelve peers of France are there, Archbishop Turpin, the wise Duke Naymes, Ganilon the traitor, Lambert of Bourges, Ogier the Dane, Richard of Normandy, Renaud of Montauban, and many another knight renowned in song and story. Great feats of arms are done on either side, but all the land grieves for this war between those that should be at peace.

For two years the siege lasted, during which Charles remained before the city, unable to take it, and unwilling to retreat. The knights and squires were wont to pass much of their time in hunting and in the sports of chivalry. One day Oliver, Duke Girard's nephew, upon whose chin the beard was beginning to grow, had stolen forth from the city alone, without arms or signs of rank, and passing fearlessly through the king's men, essayed his skill among a band of youths who were playing at the quintain. All were astonished at the strength and grace of this young stranger, who far surpassed even Roland, the nephew of Charles, at the game in which, hitherto, he had always borne away the prize. Suddenly there rose a murmur that this was one of the enemy who had found his way into the camp.

"Seize him!" was the cry, and a score of mailed hands were laid on Oliver. He shook them off; he snatched up a tent stake and laid his assailants on the ground; he sprang upon a swift horse, and flew towards the town. The king's men followed hard and fast, and young Roland was foremost of them all. Already he was close upon the fugitive; he had raised his sword to strike, when he heard a cry from the

walls. He looked up, and there was the fair Alda, Oliver's sister, clasping her hands and raising her blue eyes to heaven, as she saw her brother's danger. The arm of Roland dropped to his side. He reined his steed, and let Oliver ride on unharmed. Those who beheld him thought he had been wounded by an arrow from the walls. The shaft had gone to his heart.

Night and day Roland henceforth thought of the fair Alda, and no longer cared to prove his courage in assaults against the city of her kinsmen. There were times of truce, too, when the ladies of Vienne rode freely through the king's camp, and then the youth might feast his eyes on her beauty. The day came when he was made a knight, and before ever he had dented his bright shield, he sought speech of this lady, and said—

"I dare not ask of thee to accept me as thy knight; but I trust that all the deeds of my life will prove that there is none more faithful and devoted to thy service."

"Ah, sir," replied the blushing maiden, "I wish well that we might be friends, but this may not be while thy house is at feud with mine."

From that day Roland strove to win his uncle's mind to peace, and in likewise counselled Duke

Naymes and the bravest of the peers. But Charles frowned, and said bitterly that he had expected other things from the new-made knight, and the false Ganilon whispered doubts and sneers, for Ganilon hated Roland ever since the young knight had disabled him in his first tourney. These whispers came to Roland's ear, and made his blood burn to show himself worthy of his spurs and to shame the slanderers.

Before long he had his wish. Now arrayed in rich furs and goodly mantle as beseemed a knight, came Oliver to the king's tent to treat for peace. Before all the barons and knights he told his errand, but the king's brow was stern as he answered—

"Peace Duke Girard shall not have, till he come with a saddle on his back to sue for it."

"Nay, my lord king," answered Oliver, "he were unworthy to be a peer of France if he thus debased himself."

Then spoke the false Ganilon—

"We have here the nephew in our hands. Let us hang him over against the gates, and thus teach the proud uncle to rebel against his king."

The eyes of Roland shone with anger, and he felled the traitor to the earth.

"It were shame to us," he cried, "if a messenger might not come and go freely, and speak all his will!"

"I have done my errand," said Oliver, preparing to depart. "If the king will remove his host, and seek no more to harm us, Duke Girard and all his men will henceforth serve him faithfully in all things. If not, ye know well how we can defend ourselves."

The wise Duke Naymes whispered in his master's ear, counselling him to fair words that might end this unworthy strife. But Charles sat silent with the cloud on his brow. Long had he stayed round this rebellious town, and he was not willing to depart till it had yielded to his mercy, or till not a soul within it should be left alive. Then suddenly Oliver turned to Roland, and cried—

"Shall thy uncle and mine be ever at war? Say, young knight, wilt thou meet me, and fight out this quarrel in single combat?"

"Ay, that will I, for France and the king!" answered Roland eagerly.

"So be it!" said Charles, rising from his seat. "These two are of like age and strength, and it behoves them to win their spurs. Go back to the duke, young sir, and offer him this covenant: that

if thou be vanquished, he shall leave the town forthwith; but if my nephew fall, I will raise the siege and let him live in peace."

Willingly all the peers raised their voices in assent, for they were wearied of this long war, and loved not to shed the blood of their countrymen. Thus it was agreed, and the combat was appointed to take place next day on a little island in the stream that rolled between the duke's castle and the camp of the king.

That night King Charles had a troubled dream. He dreamed that a falcon and a hawk fought fiercely together, but before he might know which overcame the other, he awoke and could sleep no more. Anxious, he vowed a pilgrimage to Jerusalem if Roland should have the victory. Meanwhile the fair Alda spent the night on her knees in the chapel of the castle. If Oliver were slain on the morrow, she would become a nun. And yet she could not pray that Roland might fall by his hands. As she did on her brother's armour, she wept, dreading both victory and defeat.

Now the hour of the combat had come. The bank of the river was thronged with spectators. The besieged covered the walls, and high above all sat the lady Alda with eager eyes. Opposite

stood the mailed host of the king. From either bank the young knights were rowed across, and left together on the island. Oliver was equipped in rich arms that a good Jew had given him when he was made knight. Roland had the famed sword Durandal, that could not be bent or broken, and the shield, with its red and white quarterings, that the Saracen was to know so well. Courteously they saluted each other, and the fight began forthwith.

Brightly shone their swords in the morning sun. Fiercely closed the young champions for life or death. Loud echoed the blows from the castle walls. The rivets flew from their armour, and splinters of steel fell into the river on either hand. All who beheld marvelled to see such strokes, at each of which it seemed that one of the fighters must fall. Blood and sweat poured down their bodies; they panted for breath; they exhausted their strength, but neither would yield an inch.

It was a good blade that Girard's nephew had from the Jew, but no steel could withstand the matchless Durandal. At last Oliver's sword broke in his hand. He was forced to his knees; already he almost felt the enemy's sword in his heart;

he closed his eyes and thought of heaven, and his sister's despairing cry rang in his ears.

But Roland flung away his weapon.

"Rise," he said, "I am the nephew of the King of France. I slay not unarmed men."

Oliver rose to his feet, and they faced each other with naked hands. They tore up two saplings, and with them struck mighty blows till these were broken. Then they locked their bodies together, and wrestled like lions, till both at the same moment came to the ground.

When they stood up breathless, the king saw them unlace their helmets and embrace.

"Ha! is my nephew tired of the fight," he cried, and Ganilon whispered into his ear that Roland was betraying him for love of that lady upon the castle walls.

"Nay," said the wise Duke Naymes, "I will go through the fire, or fight a Saracen giant, if Roland be false," and so spoke all the peers whose own hearts were loyal.

In friendly converse the youths reposed throughout the noonday heat. Another sword was brought to Oliver from the castle, and a great gold flagon of wine, from which they both drank to the lady Alda and pledged each other.

"Right glad am I," said Oliver, "to have to do with so good a man."

"And sad am I," said Roland, "to grieve so fair a lady."

They aided one another to lace on their helmets, and with fresh strength renewed the battle. The hot sun went down towards the west, but still they fought on, and the two hosts watched them, now with hope and now with fear. Again and again they paused to take breath; then crossed their swords once more. Would the day not see the end of this struggle?

Now it was Roland who lowered his blade.

"Hold!" he said. "I am fevered and weak, and if it please thee, I would fain lie down and rest a time."

"With all my heart," replied Oliver. "It were no honour to vanquish a knight through sickness. Rest and fear not; I myself will watch over thee."

Roland undid his helmet, and stretched himself on the earth. Then Oliver brought a great stone, and put it beneath his head to give him ease, and fanned his face, and fetched water in his own helmet.

"Ah! he yields—he is overcome!" cried the

king, and Alda had great pity of the fallen knight.

But the king's nephew stood up and laughed.

"Nay, I did but feign to try thy faith. I could fight on for days and nights, if need were. But, courteous sir, since ye use me thus, I would right willingly call thee my brother. And if I live, I will marry no lady but thy fair sister."

"And if I live, she shall marry no man but thee," said Oliver.

The sun went down as again they closed in desperate encounter. All that day had they fought with all their might, and neither could boast of victory. Again the good blades clashed, and the blows resounded over the water. The shades gathered round and hid them from sight. The anxious watchers could see but the sparks struck from helm and hauberk. And at last the darkness came between them, and the sounds of strife ceased.

They had fallen into each other's arms, and vowed lifelong friendship, since neither might prevail over the other as a foe. Roland undertook to make Girard's peace with his uncle. Oliver promised him the hand of his sister. Henceforth, as brothers, they should share wealth,

and honour, and love, and never again draw sword, unless it were fighting side by side.

And now a great uproar arose in the camp. News had come that the Saracens were invading France. Gladly now both king and duke heard their nephews' entreaty for peace, and willingly they agreed to turn their arms against the infidels.

The reconciliation was sealed by Roland's betrothal to Alda. All the land rejoiced that this long strife should thus be brought to an end, and with high hearts the united host marched to that great war in which Charles and his twelve peers won such renown. But in friendship and war, none were more renowned than Roland and Oliver, who lived together henceforth as brothers, and died together on the field of Roncevalles.





Florice and Blancheflower.

I.

IN the days when a great part of Spain was under the power of the Moors, a certain Italian prince and his newly married bride were travelling on foot through that country in lowly guise and without attendants, for they had vowed a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James at Compostella. The time was ill-chosen for such a journey. The Christians had been conspiring to shake off the yoke of their oppressors, and Felix, the Moorish king of Murcia, had sent out troops to punish their rebellion, with orders to put all men of the hostile faith to the sword, and to carry away their women and children as slaves.

The two pilgrims, weary and exhausted by the heat, had one day lain down to repose in the shade

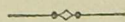
of a forest, when they were discovered by a band of Moorish soldiers, who killed the unhappy prince on the spot. His horror-stricken bride awoke to find herself covered with his blood and a prisoner in the hands of his murderers.

Topaze, for this was her name, was taken to the court of Murcia, and placed among the slaves of the queen, a beautiful woman about her own age, who, learning something of her misfortunes, was moved by pity, and behaved so kindly to the captive lady, that Topaze was encouraged to confide in her so far as to tell her real name and the whole of her sorrowful story, which did not fail to call forth the hearty sympathy of her new mistress. After this she was treated as an equal rather than a servant. The queen and the captive became close friends, and were constantly together. Moreover, the queen promised that the children whom each of them was now expecting to bring forth should be educated together, and taught from their infancy to love one another with as much warmth as their parents.

On the same day, the Moorish queen was delivered of a son and the captive princess of a daughter. They were born on Palm Sunday, which the Christians were accustomed to celebrate

with branches and garlands, and the queen, in allusion to the ceremonies of her friend's religion, ordered that the boy and girl should be named Florice and Blancheflower.

But Blancheflower's mother was not destined to rejoice in her child. Worn by grief and by the constant remembrance of her husband's cruel fate, she only lived long enough to hold the infant in her arms. The Queen of Murcia stood by, trying to cheer her, but her tears were not to be restrained, and as they fell fast on Blancheflower's forehead, she murmured the sacred words of Christian baptism, and besought the queen, as a last favour, that the child might be brought up in the precepts of her own religion to which she had thus consecrated it. Mingling her tears with her friend's, the queen promised what she desired; then Topaze kissed her hand in token of gratitude, looked up to heaven, and died.



II.

The royal lady did not forget her friend's last wishes and her own promise. The two children were brought up together as her own, and came to love each other like brother and sister. Blanche-

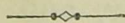
flower was instructed in the Christian faith, and in all the accomplishments of her sex, in which she showed as much readiness and skill as Florice did in the sports and exercises that should fit him to be a brave and warlike prince. He was as gallant as she was beautiful; from childhood they were a goodly pair; all her happiness was to win his love, and all his care to deserve hers.

But this intimacy was not seen with approval by other eyes than those of the good-hearted queen. The young prince's tutor, a mollah named Mohady, was a fanatical teacher of the Mahometan religion, and jealously watched his pupil's love for the Christian princess, fearing, not without reason, that it would prevent him from becoming a bigoted adherent of the faith of his fathers. He could not move the queen to listen to him on this point; with the king, however, he was more successful. Felix was not a harsh parent, but he prided himself on his zeal for the creed of Islam, and when he saw his son growing up so devoted to Blancheflower, he thought it was time to break off this too close friendship, and to that end, by the tutor's advice, resolved to send the young prince to the court of his uncle, the king of a neighbouring country, at whose famous court

he might finish his education as a knightly warrior, and have the opportunity of distinguishing himself in feats of arms.

Florice was in despair when he found that he was to be separated from his dear Blancheflower, and was only reconciled to this banishment when he remembered that it was to teach him to make himself more worthy of her. The parting between them was most sorrowful and affectionate. As a farewell gift, Blancheflower presented the prince with a talisman which had belonged to her mother.

“Take this gem, dear Florice,” she hurriedly said, as Felix drew near to separate them. “Never let it leave you; look on it daily, and if ever you see a cloud upon its bright surface, understand that I am in danger, and need your help.”



III.

Florice was received by his uncle with open arms, and treated with every mark of affection and regard. But nothing could make him forget Blancheflower. In the midst of the feasts and sports held in his honour, the thought of her ever

filled his heart ; from the gayest company and the brightest scenes he stole away to murmur her name. His only pleasure in this new abode was found in a little garden, where he planted her name in rows of white flowers, surrounded by a border of roses and violets. Here he would come to gaze on these dear letters as they rose from the earth, and to think of the happy day which should once more give back to his eyes the pure flower on which he had set his heart.

One morning Mohady, zealous for his pupil's piety, came before sunrise to call him to prayer, according to the custom of true Islamites. But early as it was, the prince had already stolen forth into his garden. There the tutor followed him, and found him standing over the bed of flowers that bore his beloved's name. He was singing to the accompaniment of a guitar. The suspicious tutor stole up softly, and heard the following words :—

“O thou for whom alone I live,
Though thou art far away ;
To sing and sigh my love, I come,
At break of day.

The sun that tints the Eastern sky
Brings nothing bright to me ;
One joy alone dispels my night—
To think of thee.

“The flowers that may not glad thine eyes
Give me but one delight ;
Thy stainless, lovely name they trace
In letters white.

“At least, I know that thou art safe,
And chase away my fears ;
Thy talisman is all undimmed,
Save by my tears.

“Yet needless this bright gem to warn ;
If trouble thee befell,
A tender instinct of my heart
Alone would tell.

“Ah ! nestling in my mother’s breast,
Rest, safe and pure, my dove !
And ever let her anxious care
Recall my love !

“O God ! to whom my Blancheflower kneels,
I too Thy grace implore ;
Grant me the hope and faith of her
Whom I adore.

“Then, at Thy shrine——”

Here Florice was interrupted by a loud cry, and turning round, saw his tutor, who raised his hands in horror and exclaimed——

“O great Prophet ! what frightful blasphemy do I hear ? A royal descendant of Omar is willing to renounce our religion for that of a Christian slave ! Truly the wise have said, that there are no crimes too great to be done for love !”

Mohady lost no time in sending news of this calamity to King Felix, earnestly urging him, as he valued his son's highest welfare, to take some opportunity of putting an eternal separation between Florice and the Christian maiden. At the same time he wrote a private letter to Ajoub, chief Iman of Murcia, a man of fierce temper and unscrupulous in the cause of the Prophet. When this bigot learned how the interests of his faith were threatened, he did not hesitate to contrive a foul plan which should strike at the root of the danger.

Florice was now more closely watched, and could no longer steal away into his garden to water Blancheflower's name with his tears. The constant surveillance of his tutor, plying him with arguments for the Mahometan creed, became insupportable to him. He remembered his desire to prove himself worthy of such pure love; he roused himself from his dejection, and longed for an opportunity of doing some gallant deed. He knelt before his uncle, and prayed to be made a knight, that he might go forth in arms as be seemed his race, and have noble warriors for his companions, instead of a cunning and heartless mollah.

His prayer was granted; the new-made knight rose from his knees with a flush of pride, and at that moment his first thought was to kiss the talisman, which he fondly hoped would give strength to his maiden sword. But as he drew it forth from his bosom, he saw to his horror that it had grown dark and clouded; the face of the gem seemed to be covered by smoke, with here and there a flash of fire. By this he knew that some dire danger was at that moment threatening his beloved. He shuddered and turned pale. Not an hour was to be lost. Hastily he did on his untried arms, and mounting a fleet steed which his uncle had given him, spurred madly away towards Murcia, letting no one know where he went.



IV.

All day and all night he rode without drawing rein, and by daybreak arrived at the gates of his father's capital. Here he was met by a sad procession of carts, escorted by soldiers and by executioners carrying torches. The first of these carts were filled with piles of faggots, and in the last was borne to a cruel death a woman veiled

in black, and loaded with chains, behind whom came a *cadi*, or minister of justice, with a scroll proclaiming her crime. As he saw all this, a terrible foreboding took possession of the prince's heart. He lowered his vizor, rode up to the procession, and in faltering tones asked who it was that was thus being led to execution, and what might be her crime.

"Ah!" said the veiled figure in a well-known voice, "I call Heaven and all the saints to witness that I die innocent!"

Florice was wild with rage and grief. He draws his sword, he bids the procession stop, and learns from the *cadi* that this was indeed his beloved *Blancheflower*, who had been accused of attempting the king's life. By her hands a peacock had been served at the royal banquet. Before any of the guests had tasted it, a morsel was flung by *Ajoub* to a little dog, which eat and fell dead in horrible agony. The bird was found to be poisoned, and who but *Blancheflower* had placed the poison in its body? Her guilt seemed clear; she had no friend save the queen, and no champion appeared in her defence; she had been sentenced to a cruel death.

"Nay!" cried Florice loudly. "I will defy

these false accusers to the last drop of my blood."

He had not arrived a moment too soon. Now he ordered the sad procession to turn back, and forthwith sent word to the king that an unknown knight claimed to defend the Christian maiden's cause. This demand Felix could not refuse. He ordered Ajoub to produce a champion to maintain his accusation, and one was soon found in the person of the Iman's son, a fierce warrior of enormous size and strength, who was already well known for his deeds of daring.

Forthwith the lists were prepared. At one end was placed the cart containing poor Blancheflower; at the other a great fire was lighted to consume her if her champion should lose the battle. Into the open space, surrounded by armed men, galloped the two combatants. The son of Ajoub threw down his gauntlet, and repeated his father's accusation against the princess, to which Florice loudly replied—"Traitor, thou liest in thy throat." Then the fight began.

The son of Ajoub did not obtain the easy victory which he had hoped. The unknown knight parried all his blows with skill and resolution, and waited for his huge opponent to

exhaust his strength by wild rage. Unfortunately, the horse of the former being severely wounded, became unmanageable, and in spite of all his efforts, bore him back to the edge of the lists, across which he seemed about to be forced, when Blancheflower, drawing aside her veil, exclaimed—

“Ah, Florice, if thou wert here to assist me!”

This sent a thrill of strength through the prince. He attacked with fresh energy, his sword seemed to move like lightning, and at every stroke was covered with blood; in his turn, the son of Ajoub began to be driven back; and at length Florice, uttering a prayer to the God of the Christians and of his mistress, at the same moment aimed a tremendous blow, which almost severed his adversary's head from his body. Down fell the false champion into the dust. With a cry of despair, Ajoub rushed forward towards the body of his son, but met with the same fate at the hands of the conqueror. Then one of the Iman's slaves, conscience-stricken, flung himself at the king's feet, and confessed that by his master's orders he had prepared the poisoned dish. Thus was the wicked plot revealed. The king and queen took the slandered maiden to their arms, and bid her

thank the gallant knight who had saved her from a frightful death. Ajoub's corpse was flung on the flames kindled for Blancheflower, and she was hailed as innocent by the joyful shouts of all the spectators.

The victorious knight did not reveal his name or rank, but having saluted the king and queen, and also the lovely damsel whose innocence he had made clear, he rode out of the city, and returned with all speed to his uncle's kingdom. Rightly he dreaded his father's displeasure if he ventured to proclaim his unabated love for the Christian princess and declare himself as her champion.



V.

Covered with blood and faint from his wounds, he reached the court of his uncle, where no inquiries could move him to tell what adventure he had essayed. His hurts were severe, but his mind tormented him more than his body. Secrecy and separation only fanned the flame of his love; he could not bear to think that Blancheflower was in the midst of enemies, while he lay helpless on his couch. His sufferings increased; and the physician who was called to him, was at no loss to

discover their chief cause, for the poor youth kept wildly repeating the name of Blancheflower, and no other thought seemed to live in his fevered brain. Florice's uncle, who had come to look on the prince with great kindness and esteem, learned the truth from the physician, and wrote to his brother, proposing that Blancheflower should be sent to him from Murcia, seeing that her presence alone would be able to cure a sickness that might end in death.

Alas ! this well-meant letter had a very different result from that hoped by the writer. King Felix was wroth to find that Florice still persisted against his wishes in this attachment to the queen's favourite. His hatred of Blancheflower was kindled again, and again he gave heed to the advice of Mohady, who kept persuading him that unless she were got rid of, the prince would certainly be turned away from the faith of his ancestors. And Florice, before he had recovered his strength, saw the talisman clouding over anew to warn him that fresh danger was approaching his beloved.

He rose from his sick-bed, and in spite of all that his friends could say or do, set out again for Murcia. But when he reached his father's home,

what terrible news met him on the threshold? Blancheflower, they told him, was dead, and his father, pitying and trying to comfort his unhappy son, showed him a splendid tomb on which were inscribed her name, her virtues, and her untimely fate.

"Would that I had died with her!" cried the prince, throwing himself upon the cold marble of the tomb, and vowing that he would never leave this spot, where all the hopes of his life lay buried.

He swooned away, and by his father's orders was carried into the palace and tended with every care. But the wound had gone to his heart; he lay overwhelmed with dumb despair; and all who saw him said that he must die.

Not once did he speak, till his mother, fearing for her son's life, came to his chamber, dismissed the attendants, barred the door, and with many tears told him a story, the first word of which sent the blood to his white cheek, and took the seal of misery from his lips. Blancheflower was not dead. This cruel tale, this mocking tomb, were but intended to deceive him, and to kill his love. The unhappy princess had been sold as a slave, and carried off by the merchants into the East. His sorrowful mother could no longer keep

this wicked secret, and willingly encouraged him in what she knew would be his first wish, to follow Blancheflower, and rescue her wherever she might be.

The prince's weakness left him as if by magic. He rose from his bed, and embracing his mother, declared that he would never see her again till he brought back her friend and his loved one. From that moment he gave himself up to the search. Agonised as he was by the thought of the sorrow and hardships which at that moment his dear princess might be bearing, made doubly bitter, perhaps, by the belief that he had deserted her, Florice was well aware of the need of prudence and foresight. The first step was to persuade his father that a sea-voyage might restore his health. This was easily done; the king, rejoiced to see his son coming to himself, ordered a ship to be prepared at once, and placed the prince on board under the care of the mollah Mohady. No companion could have been chosen less to the mind of Florice, who, however, did not oppose his father's wishes, and hoped to be able to get rid of this fanatical guardian. He learned the name of the Eastern port to which Blancheflower had been taken. Thither the ship was steered, and

every day that separated him from it seemed to the prince like a year.

But when they came in sight of land, a violent storm arose, and in spite of all their exertions, the ship was wrecked upon a wild and rocky coast. The tutor and all on board were drowned, all but Florice, to whom the hopes of rescuing his beloved mistress gave a preternatural strength. He alone escaped and swam to shore, carrying with him Blancheflower's talisman and a bag of valuable jewels.



VI.

When, exhausted by his struggles, the waves cast him on firm ground, he found nothing but bare rocks and barren sand; no sign of human habitation met his eye. But soon beginning to recover strength, he took his way inland, and after walking for some hours, reached a lovely valley, filled with fertile fields and well-built houses, which assured him that at least he had fallen among a civilised people. The first persons he met received him with kindness, and conducted him to the residence of the chief of the village, a venerable man, whose countenance

bespoke both benevolence and wisdom, and who no sooner learned the stranger's unfortunate plight than he offered him every assistance, and begged him to be his guest as long as he pleased. Florice was at once provided with dry clothes, and was conducted to a chamber, where he was invited to take the repose of which he stood so much in need. When he awoke, he found supper in readiness; and his host showed himself most able and willing to entertain him. Florice was touched by this kindness; he felt drawn towards the friendly chief, but it did not escape the observation of the latter that he scarcely eat or drank, and seemed to be pre-occupied by some great anxiety which banished all cheerfulness from his mind. With delicacy and sympathy, Saadi, such was the old man's name, ventured to invite his guest's confidence, and to hint that it would give him pleasure if he could relieve his distress. And Florice, unable to hide his secret, told him that he was a Mahometan prince, and that he pined with love for a Christian maid, who for his sake was suffering great misfortunes. The old man smiled benignly, and bid him have no fear that he would frown on such an attachment.

"I am," said he, "a Persian by birth, and a

worshipper of the Sun, a religion which teaches its votaries that all men are brothers, and that no difference of faith or race should be allowed to set barriers between them. I, too, have suffered much from the hatred of ignorance and fanaticism, and it will be the purest of pleasures to me if I can help another in such a case."

Then Florice could no longer contain himself, but opened his whole heart to his new friend, and told all his story, not concealing his name and rank, and informing Saadi how Blancheflower had been sold as a slave, and how his mind had no rest till he could find her and save her from this cruel fate.

"The first part of your task will not be hard," said Saadi, when he had listened attentively to this tale. "You are at present in the very country to which your love has been brought. And if she is fair as you say, she cannot fail to have been bought for the seraglio of the Sultan, who is now, indeed, absent with his army, but whose agents visit the slave-market on the arrival of every vessel, and make choice of all the most beautiful damsels."

"Where is this seraglio?" cried Florice, leaping from his seat, with hope and eagerness sparkling in his eyes.

"Softly, good youth. The Sultan's palace is not far from this spot, but you must be cautious how you approach it. It is surrounded by a wide park, to enter which is death. But I have a plan in my head, which I will communicate to you; and if once you can obtain admission, I am luckily able to help you. The Sultan, as I said, is at the camp. In his absence, the chief of the seraglio, a negro named Mozab, is all powerful. This man was once my slave, and I know him well. I taught him to play chess and to have a passionate liking for the game, of his skill in which he is ridiculously proud. If you can make use of this foible to gain intimacy with him, you will no doubt be able to learn what you wish to know, and afterwards we can concert together what should be done."

The prince warmly declared his gratitude for this advice, and, in his impatience, was for setting out at once. But Saadi, pointing out the need of the greatest caution, urged him to remain all night, and consider well the plan he proposed.



VII.

Florice allowed himself to be persuaded to pass the night at Saadi's house. But his anxiety prevented him from sleeping; all night he thought of Blancheflower, and longed for the moment when he should clasp her in his arms, or die in the attempt. At break of day he rose, and having been provided by Saadi with a horse, a falcon, and a bag of gold, he rode hastily in the direction of the Sultan's palace, a magnificent pile, crowned by domes and minarets that sparkled in the sun, and surrounded by beautiful gardens and a wide park full of the richest and rarest trees in the world.

About mid-day he came to the wall of this park, and, following out the old man's counsel, let loose his falcon, which flew towards the palace. Florice followed it into the park, but he had no sooner crossed the boundary than a troop of armed men sprung upon him, seized him, and led him into the presence of a splendidly attired negro, who fiercely asked him what rashness led one so young to such certain death.

"Most gracious lord," said Florice, bowing low before the negro, whom he perceived to be Mozab

himself, "I am a foreigner, and ignorant of your laws. As I was riding near this spot, my falcon flew towards the palace, and I followed it, knowing not that I should thus incur your displeasure. But surely you are too just and benevolent to punish me for a crime which I committed in ignorance."

Mozab's vanity was touched by the deference with which Florice addressed him. In a softer tone, he inquired where the stranger came from, and why he visited this country.

"I come from Spain," said Florice, "and my reason for visiting your country may seem a strange one. I am passionately fond of the game of chess, and I have attained such proficiency in it, that I could find no player to beat me at home. Hearing, then, of the skill of the chess-players of the East, I came hither to seek an opportunity of matching myself against them."

"Go no farther!" cried Mozab joyfully. "I myself will give you a lesson;" and turning to the guards, he bid them release the youth, since he was a stranger and ignorant of their customs.

The negro then courteously led the way to his own apartment, and Florice's heart beat high as he found himself a welcome guest in the palace, where

it might be that only a wall divided him from his beloved one. He strove, however, to conceal his emotion, which the negro did not notice, so impatient was he to show his skill. He offered refreshments to his new acquaintance, but scarcely gave him time to eat, and hastened to get out the chess-board. Mozab was covetous as well as vain; his eyes glistened when Florice drew out a bag of five hundred gold bezants, and laid them down as his stake.

The game began. At first the players seemed to be equally matched. Mozab put forth his best efforts, and, after a time, Florice, having taken the measure of his skill, let him think that he was gaining the advantage. The negro was chuckling and looking greedily at the gold bezants, when his adversary changed his tactics, and after allowing himself to lose one or two pieces, suddenly took the offensive, gave check twice and checkmate in another move.

Mozab could scarcely conceal his vexation. He muttered a few sullen words, ran to his cabinet, took out a thousand bezants, and proposed that they should play again for the double stake. Florice readily consented, and won this game with greater ease than the former. Then the

negro gave vent to his anger and disappointment, and called out—

“O Saadi! you have not taught me well enough!”

“Nay,” said Florice politely, “you were disconcerted by my unexpected arrival—you have not yet become familiar with my style of play. I am sure, if we were to be matched fairly, you would prove the stronger. As for the sum which I have staked, suffer me to show myself not ignorant of the customs of the East in addressing a great man, and accept this gold as a humble offering from one who desires no favour but that of being admitted to your society, and taking from you the lessons which you are so well able to give.”

Mozab was as delighted as astonished by this courtesy and generosity.

“By the Prophet! you are a man after my heart,” he cried. “Let us be friends. Come to-morrow and sup with me. To-night I must leave you, as I have to wait upon a new slave of surpassing beauty—a Christian maiden of Spain, who has just been added to the Sultan’s harem.”

Florice had almost betrayed himself by an exclamation of joy. What was his emotion when he found his hopes thus confirmed, and saw that he might count on obtaining the friendship of

Blancheflower's guardian? Eagerly, as he took leave of Mozab, he promised to return next day, and they separated with every protestation of friendly regard. But as Florice rode forth, and saw in the moonlight the towers which contained his love, he checked his horse, and felt that he could scarcely tear himself away from the spot. Fain would he have wandered all night round these sacred walls, happy if only he could remember that Blancheflower's sweet eyes were hidden behind them. But more prudent thoughts prevailed, and he returned to the house of Saadi, who was anxiously waiting to know how he had succeeded.

VIII.

Next day at the appointed time Florice presented himself before the palace, and was at once admitted by order of Mozab, whom he found impatient to begin the game. This time he proposed to play for but fifty pieces of gold, to which Florice agreed, and allowed his adversary to win three games. Such success put him into good humour, and he was still better pleased when the prince handed him the money in a gold-

embroidered purse with a diamond clasp, saying at the same time—

“I was certain you could beat me as soon as we were fairly matched. My father is the best player in Spain, but even he would have to acknowledge your superiority.”

The slaves now announced supper, which was served in a magnificent apartment, and consisted of such rich viands as Mozab thought worthy of his guest. First they loaded the table with savoury stews of flesh and fowl; the second course consisted of pastry and confectionery; the third of every kind of fruit. When this was removed, having ordered the attendants to leave them and locked the door, Mozab opened a cupboard and produced a jar of rich wine and two crystal goblets, which he invited his friend to fill, regardless of the precepts of the Koran. Florice pretended to drink; the negro made no pretence, but quaffed goblet after goblet of the forbidden juice, till he grew quite uproarious in his mirth. He chattered, he sang, he vowed eternal devotion to his new friend; he embraced Florice with drunken warmth, and as he staggered back to his seat, his turban fell off. Florice hastened to spring forward and pick it up. He carefully replaced it on the negro's

head, at the same time fastening it with a splendid emerald brooch, at the sight of which Mozab could no longer contain himself.

“Why, who are you,” he cried, “that give gifts worthy of an emperor?”

Florice seized the favourable moment of the negro’s admiration and astonishment. Taking him by the hand, and whispering in his ear, he told him who he was, and what had brought him thither, and besought Mozab to allow him to see Blancheflower, were it but for a moment.

Such a daring proposal at first took away the negro’s breath; he was in doubt whether he should not call the guard and have this audacious youth strangled on the spot; but as he hesitated, Florice threw round his neck a chain of pearls and diamonds worth a fortune, and bade him know that this was nothing to the rewards which he had the power and the will to bestow upon the man who should aid him in his enterprise. Avarice, drunkenness, friendship joined to break down Mozab’s fidelity to his master. He grasped the prince’s hand and promised to grant his request, if he, for his part, would keep the matter profoundly secret. Florice readily promised, and joyfully listened to the plan by which the negro proposed to aid him.

“Each of the Sultan’s wives has an apartment of her own,” he said, “into which no man enters but by my orders. Luckily, a way of conveying you to your mistress is not wanting. She begged me yesterday, as the sole favour she had to ask, to send her some flowers, and I have prepared a large basket of roses and lilies which to-morrow morning four eunuchs will bear to her chamber. In this basket it will be easy to conceal you ; but first you must pretend to leave the palace. As soon as you arrive at a little grove which you will see near the gate, let your horse go loose, and hide yourself among the trees. Thence I will fetch you before daybreak ; and, remember, the slightest imprudence on your part will betray us both to certain death, for though the Sultan is absent, he has spies throughout the palace who inform him of all disobedience to his orders.”

So spoke the negro, whom the importance and excitement of the occasion seemed to have sobered all at once. Florice assured him that he would obey his instructions closely, and left the palace, as directed, hiding himself in the grove, where he passed the night in a state of the most restless expectancy.

He thought nothing of the danger of what he

was about to do; his mind was on fire with hope of seeing Blancheflower and being at least able to die at her feet.

IX.

Mozab was faithful to his promise. Early in the morning he fetched Florice from the grove, and admitted him by a private entrance to his own apartments. There he made him lie down in a large basket, and completely covered him with roses and lilies. Then he summoned four black slaves, and bid them take the basket to the chamber of the Christian maid.

Grumbling under the unusual weight of their burden, the slaves carried Florice through passages and staircases that seemed to him endless. At length they paused, laid their burden down and withdrew. And then, to his rapturous delight, he heard the well-known voice of Blancheflower. She was speaking to herself in the once familiar language which recalled her lost liberty. The first word that met the prince's ears was his own name.

"Florice! Ah, if my Florice but knew my cruel fate. And yet, his fidelity could but little avail me. How could he tear me from the power

of this heathen tyrant, who soon—I shudder to think how soon—will return to his palace, and force me to submit to his hateful embraces. Never! I will rather die than become the wife of any man—save one!”

Dropping her tears upon the gay blossoms, the pure maiden, sweeter than all roses and fairer than all lilies, stooped down to take a handful of the flowers whose fragrance was like a memory of days gone by. Suddenly Florice stirred, and Blancheflower, affrighted, saw that some one was concealed in the basket. She could not restrain herself from a cry of alarm. The eunuchs, who were not yet out of hearing, rushed back at the sound.

The prince gave himself up for lost. But, with fortunate presence of mind, Blancheflower concealed her agitation, and told them that a gnat hidden among the flowers had stung her hand.

The slaves once more withdrew. Then Florice could wait no longer. He raised himself among the flowers, leaped forth, knelt at his trembling lady's feet, and, blinded by the joy of her presence, was only able to seize her hand and cover it with kisses.

“Florice!”

“O Blancheflower! with what peril and pain

have I sought you ! Never again let us be separated. Let us be betrothed here, on this spot. The God of the Christians is good, He will bless our union, and who then can part us !”

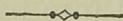
For a moment Blancheflower was silent, then with eager eyes, she asked Florice if he were willing to be baptised into her religion.

“By thy hands, yes !” cried the eager prince ; and, kneeling, they vowed to Heaven that henceforth their lives should be one in faith, as in love. It was a wild dream of joy.

But as Florice, rising, turned to clasp his beloved in his arms, she caught sight of the talisman which hung round his neck, and started back with an exclamation of alarm. Its bright surface was clouded over with the warning of danger.

At the same moment approaching steps were heard without, and a cry that the Sultan was at hand. Unexpectedly he had just returned from the army, and was hastening to visit the new acquisition to his harem, of whose beauty he had heard so much. Already he was at the door, and his attendants were ordering it to be opened. Florice felt for his sword ; alas ! he had left it in Mozab’s apartments. He threw himself before Blancheflower. She knelt and raised her hands in

prayer. He rushed to the door and strove to secure it. But in vain, the lock was burst open, and the Sultan, irritated at the delay opposed to his commands, stalked into the chamber, and raged like an angry lion to find a man within these sacred precincts.



X.

Escape and resistance were equally hopeless. The lovers were torn from each other's arms, and secured by the attendants. Nor was there delay of judgment. For such a crime there could be but one punishment. By order of the wrathful monarch, they were dragged forth to instant death in the court-yard of the palace.

Hand in hand the lovers went to their fate, and the hearts of all were moved with pity, who saw how fair and young were the doomed pair, and how tenderly they strove to cling together and to comfort each other in this bitter hour. Then as the Sultan urged the executioners to haste, Florice cast himself on his knees, and cried—

“Me only! slay one only, for I shall die twice if she dies for me!”

And Blancheflower threw herself before him,



“The Sultan stayed his uplifted arm. The sight of such devotion melted even his anger to pity.”—p. 175. *Florence and Blanche*.

and besought the Sultan rather to take her life alone—

“The guilt was mine ! Spare him, and let me suffer the penalty.”

The furious ruler drew his sword, and would have put them to death with his own hand. Then both knelt, and stretched out their necks together to receive the fatal blow, and Florice cried—

“I am a man ! Let me meet death first.”

The Sultan stayed his uplifted arm. His mood began to change. The sight of such loveliness and such devotion melted even his anger to pity. He saw how all around were weeping, he turned away his head, the sword fell from his hand. Then his lords and counsellors came near and besought him to have mercy. He bid the lovers rise.

The Sultan was a generous man at heart. When he heard the story of Florice's adventures, he not only forgave him, but promised to resign to him the maiden whom he had loved so tenderly and so truly—nay, he insisted on having their marriage solemnised at once, and entertained the newly wedded lovers with the greatest hospitality and magnificence. He even pardoned the faithless Mozab at the prayer of Florice, for there was no favour too great for the prince to ask, so well

did he gain upon the heart of this Eastern potentate, who had almost made him a victim to the first outburst of his anger.

Florice had now won the hope of his life. A single thought troubled him. How could his father be reconciled to this marriage? Would the king ever consent to receive a Christian princess as his daughter? They knew not what was then passing in the palace of Murcia, where King Felix lay on his death-bed, and messengers were hurrying forth to search far and wide for the young prince. When this news reached them, Florice and Blancheflower set out for Murcia in all haste, but arrived only in time to close the old king's eyes and to learn that he died repenting of his cruelty to the Christian maid, and beseeching her forgiveness.

Florice now mounted the throne of his ancestors, and he and his young bride did not fail to make themselves dear to the hearts of the people. His mother lived long to rejoice in the union of these two, whom she looked upon as equally her own children. The new king brought to his court the wise and benevolent Saadi, and governed in all things by his counsel. Thus, after so many troubles, fears, and dangers, these faithful lovers were at last happy and prosperous.



The Ransom.

SALADIN, the great Sultan of the East, was at the height of his power. Long had he afflicted the true faith, and made Christian blood to flow like water upon the soil of the Holy Land. Weary of his oppression, the knights of Christendom had at last joined to make a struggle against him. From all countries they came in arms, lords and heroes of renown, and if courage could have given victory, the Sultan would have been overthrown. But Heaven willed it otherwise; and in a great battle well-nigh all the Christian champions were slain or taken captive.

Among the prisoners was Hugo of Tabarie, forced to yield when from loss of blood he could no longer hold the sword with which he had laid

low many a turbaned infidel. Covered with wounds, he was brought into the presence of Saladin, who was right proud to have such a warrior in his power. And when he learned that this knight was a powerful prince in his own country, he asked him why he had not chosen to remain there in peace, rather than travel far across the seas to suffer hardships and affront death.

“Nay,” said the Christian, “that were the part of the churl that cares not but to eat and sleep like the beasts of the field. Honour and religion constrain us who are vowed to knighthood; and therefore, heedless of pains and dangers, we come to rescue the sacred sepulchre from your profane hands.”

“On a vain errand, truly, ye have come,” said the Sultan sternly. “And since the fortune of battle is thus, ye shall not go lightly away. Thy ransom must be a hundred thousand golden bezants, a fit price for such a prince; or thou must pay for this rashness with thy head.”

“So be it,” replied Sir Hugo, unmoved. “I am ready to die, if need be; but as for the ransom, if I were to sell all my lands, I could not bring half the sum.”

Saladin marked him well, and was pleased by his firmness of spirit.

“’Twere pity a brave knight should die for lack of gold. This much I grant thee : go freely back to thy friends and seek their aid, leaving me thy promise to return upon a set day. Surely the Christians will give much to save such a champion.”

Sir Hugo thanked the Sultan, and gave the promise required of him. The day was appointed for his return, and as soon as his wounds would allow him to travel, he set forth from the camp of the infidels, and went among the Christians of that part of the world, seeking to borrow money for his ransom. But alas ! he could not gather half that great sum before the day on which he had promised to return. There was nothing for him but to die, and in his heart sadly bidding farewell to his wife and children far over the sea, he came to deliver himself into the Sultan’s power, and told the tale of his ill-success.

“And I,” said Saladin, “have sworn by the Prophet that thou shalt die, unless the ransom be paid to the last bezant. Yet it grieves me to slay a man who has thus given himself to death rather than break his word. Many a one, in such

a strait, would have thought less of my trust than of his own safety."

"The word of a knight is stronger than iron chains and bars," said the captive proudly. "On the day when I was received into that sacred order I vowed to hold honour dearer than life, and he who doubts our good faith knows little of christian chivalry."

"I would know more of this order and its vows," said the Sultan, leading his prisoner aside into his chamber, where they might converse in private. Hugo hesitated, not willing to speak freely on these things to an infidel, but at Saladin's earnest entreaty he consented to describe the ceremonies of dedication to knighthood, and the monarch listened with interest and growing respect for such an institution.

This degree, he learned, is the noblest of earthly honours, beside which the pride of kingdoms, lordships, and wealth are as nought. The gentle youth who aspires to it, after worthily serving as page and squire, is duly prepared by vigil, fast, and prayer. Then Sir Hugo told how his hair is cut close, and how he is bathed in pure water, a type of that inward cleanness without which no candidate should dare to present himself. He is

now laid upon a soft couch, that may remind him of the rest that in Paradise awaits the faithful soldier of the cross. His limbs are covered with a shirt of spotless white, a symbol of the purity in which it ever behoves him to keep his body. Piece by piece his armour and habiliments are girded on, and the mystic meaning of each is explained. Over all is thrown a rich red robe, as a token that he must always be ready to shed his blood in every good cause. Now, bareheaded, he kneels lowly before the sovereign or warrior of renown at whose hands he is to be made knight, who strikes him on the shoulder with the flat of a sword, the last blow that he may receive without dishonour. Lastly, his spurs and helmet are fastened on, and his sword is given him with a solemn charge.

“Henceforth,” ended Sir Hugo, “he is bound to speak truth and to hate liars, to honour religion, to obey his king, to be courteous and helpful to all ladies, to sustain the right and to confound those that do wrong, to succour the oppressed in all the world, to despise hardships and death, and to fear the face of no man.”

Saladin heard, and for a while sat in deep reflection. Then he rose and without a word led his prisoner into a hall crowded with Saracen

emirs and chiefs. Silence fell on all that assembly when they saw their great sovereign, and thus he addressed them—

“Behold a gallant enemy who must die for want of ransom. Which among you will give of your wealth to buy his life?”

The generous Saracens pressed forward and vied with each other who should offer most in such a cause. Freely they poured out their gold before the Sultan, and soon the sum required lay in a glittering heap. Saladin turned to the captive and said—

“See, thou art free! and accept this gold which I give thee in return for the lesson thou hast taught me, and as a proof that there are noble minds in our host as well as among the christian knights. Go back to tell through Christendom that Saladin can be as courteous to the vanquished as he is well known to be fierce on the field.”

Overcome with surprise and gratitude, the knight could scarcely thank his generous conqueror. But when he found words, he prayed that with the gold he might be permitted to ransom some of his companions in captivity.

“’Tis well,” replied the Sultan, “that I have a

richer gift to offer thee, since gold is no meet guerdon for such a man. I set them all free—they are thine.”

He kept his word. The Christian prisoners were set free forthwith, and spent several days in feasting and sport among their enemies, now for the nonce become friends. Then, loaded with presents, and attended by an honourable escort, they were conducted to the camp of the Crusaders, by whom, henceforth, the magnanimity of Saladin was known and esteemed no less than his prowess in war.





The Son of Amadis.

I.

THE wanderings and trials of that renowned knight Amadis de Gaul, seemed at last to be at an end. Reconciled to his father-in-law, King Lisuarte of Great Britain, and triumphant over his enemies, he now ruled in the Firm Island, and was publicly united to the incomparable princess Oriana, who had long in secret been his. Archalaus, that wicked enchanter and implacable foe of his house, was a prisoner in the palace, where a dark iron cage and heavy fetters condemned him to brood in solitary rage over fresh schemes of malignity which he despaired of being able to carry out.

But the sky of their happiness was not long unclouded for Amadis and Oriana. One day they were walking together on the shore, when a veiled

woman in long black robes came and threw herself at the knight's feet.

"My lord," she cried with a lamentable voice, "have pity upon my unhappy lot! Never, they say, did lady appeal in vain to your generosity. No, sir, I will not rise from my knees till you have granted me a boon! And you, madam, do not fear: I seek nothing of your husband which will take him from your side. The gift is one within his power to grant by a single word, and I beseech you, by your love for him, to join your entreaties to mine that he will not deny me the favour I desire."

Oriana's tender heart was moved by the tears of this afflicted lady. She joined in requesting Amadis to fulfil her petition, which he, in his courtesy, needed no beseeching to do.

"Rise, madam," he said, taking her by the hand. "The boon you demand of me is already granted."

Then the lady rose, drew aside her black veil, and exclaimed triumphantly—

"Amadis, do you know me? I am the wife of Archalaus, and my demand is, that you let him go free."

Amadis and Oriana were indignant at the cunning and audacity with which this woman had beguiled them into granting her request.

But the knight had promised, and his word was sacred.

"Follow me," he said, and led the way to the narrow iron cage in which her husband was confined.

His gigantic form was bent double ; his hair and nails had grown to an enormous length ; his eyes gleamed savagely ; indeed, he looked more like a beast than a man, and his first words showed that the wretch's evil disposition was not a whit changed.

"Archalaus, how would you thank me if, for the sake of your wife, I were to set you free?"

"By ceaseless hatred and vengeance," hissed out the enchanter, gnashing his teeth, and glaring upon them so as to make Oriana shudder.

Amadis would waste no more time in parleying with this monster. He drew his trembling bride away, and gave orders that the prisoner should be at once released. This was done, and Archalaus and his companion made haste to leave the palace and to set sail from the shores of the Firm Island.

Amadis could now no longer give himself up to enjoyment of the delights of his new abode. Such a palace was not to be seen in all the world beside ; it was built of polished marble, adorned

within and without with gold, silver, ivory, amber, alabaster, rich woods from every country under the sun, and precious stones of all kinds. The garden around, blooming in perpetual summer, was filled with flowers of every hue, statues, fountains, sparkling brooks, cool arbours, delicious fruits in abundance, and the rarest and most beautiful trees, the branches of which resounded with the songs of gorgeously plumaged birds. Nothing had been left undone by the power of the magician who had made this palace and bestowed it as the reward of valour and constancy. But in the midst of all the magnificence of which he was now master, Amadis was ill at ease, troubled by a presentiment that some evil would ere long come of his generosity. He could scarcely look at the face of his beloved Oriana without thinking of the unknown calamity that Archalaus might at that moment be preparing for her.



II.

Too true were the forebodings of the lord of the Firm Island. Before many days had passed, there were gathered together in his palace the sovereigns of the neighbouring countries and several

of his old companions in arms, who had come to be present at the ceremony of knighting his son Esplandian. And as they sat at a banquet, came news that King Lisuarte had, while hunting in the woods, been ensnared by three damsels and carried away into captivity, but none knew whither. Here could plainly be seen the hand of Archalaus, who as yet durst not strike a blow at the prince himself, of whose power he had been made so well aware.

The guests hastened to console with Oriana under her father's misfortune, and willingly offered her the help of their arms. Never had the world seen such a goodly band of knights as met now in that hall, and were taking earnest counsel for the discovery and deliverance of Lisuarte, when loud cries of fear and wonder were heard without, suddenly interrupting their deliberations.

Amadis and his friends ran forth, sword in hand, and hurried down to the shore, followed by Oriana, leaning on her son Esplandian. What did they behold!

A mountain of fire seemed to be swiftly advancing towards them over the calm surface of the sea; it sent forth neither smoke nor flame, but glowed throughout with a brilliance which dazzled every

eye, even at a great distance. If it touched the shore, the whole island must be burned to ashes. The heat could already be felt more scorching than that of the noonday sun, when the fiery mass burst open with a terrific crash; the two sides fell hissing into the sea, and disclosed what appeared to be a monstrous green serpent, which cleft the waves with its gleaming wings stretched out like banks of oars. The head of this prodigy was raised out of the water higher than the mast of the largest ship, and its throat vomited forth streams of flame and frightful cries. As it kept approaching, the knights upon the shore, for all their intrepidity, were on the point of turning to fly, if the example of Amadis had not constrained them to hold their ground.

Their astonishment was still greater when the marvellous thing, now close at hand, was seen to undergo a new transformation. Its wings beat furiously, sending up to the sky clouds of spray, from which issued a stately gilded ship with glistening sails. From stem to stern it was covered with rare flowers and precious gems, and on the snowy deck stood a band of nymphs, surrounding a queenly figure upon a throne of emerald, and filling the air with the entrancing

music of golden flutes and harps. To these harmonious sounds, the magnificent vessel glided into the port.

"'Tis Urganda the Unknown!" cried Amadis, hastening forward to meet his powerful and beneficent protectress, as soon as this recognition released him from the spell of surprise.

It was indeed the fairy Urganda. Usually, she disclosed herself under the most strange and often the most hideous forms, which could inspire nothing but terror. But now, coming amidst her friends, she appeared in her natural beauty, as a blooming maiden, uniting all the freshness of spring with all the richness of summer. Amadis and Esplandian gave her their hands to lead her on shore; the assembled knights and kings pressed forward to salute her; and she, graciously embracing Oriana, spoke thus—

"Did I not assure you that you should see me again, if ever you were in need of my aid? I am come to let you know that Lisuarte is unharmed, and shall yet be set free. But, valiant and well-tried knights, it is vain that you will traverse sea and land to discover him; this achievement is reserved for one alone."

"For which of us?" cried they all in a breath.

“For him who is youngest among you, and must now enter upon the career that may prove him worthy of his illustrious birth.”

“For me?” cried young Esplandian, starting forth from his mother’s side with sparkling eyes.

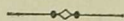
Urganda smiled and beckoned with her hand. Straightway her damsels began to play so marvellously upon their instruments, that the sweet sounds fell like a spell upon the ears of all who heard. Their eyes softly closed; they gave themselves up to the delicious music, and insensibly they all sank into a deep sleep.

It was hours before they awoke. Urganda had sailed away, and no trace of the wonderful green serpent was to be seen in the horizon. Esplandian was gone from among them. In the hand of Amadis was a scroll bearing these words—

“Do you, kings and heroes, return to your own countries to dwell there in repose, leaving glory and the prize of arms to those who begin now to climb the changeable round of Fortune, and contenting yourselves with the favour which she has hitherto shown you. And thou, Amadis of Gaul, who hast conquered so many fierce knights and cruel giants, let the honours already gained suffice thee; now taste the sweets and bitters of

royal rule, and learn to be diligent in great affairs, as in thy young years thou hast so long and so faithfully done the duties of a knight-errant. Rest henceforth in peace, knowing that a scion of thy race shall never be wanting to perpetuate thy renown! I have said: too often have I proved my goodwill towards thee and thine that thou shouldst hesitate to trust thy unfailing friend

“URGANDA THE UNKNOWN.”



III.

Esplandian had been carried off upon the deck of the Green Serpent. To the youth it seemed as if the music wafted him away in a delicious dream, and when he awoke, he found himself alone, lying upon the shore of an island, in the midst of the ocean.

He rose and looked around him. The island was nothing but a high, bare rock, rising steeply from the waves, and crowned by the ruins of a vast tower. There was no sign of life or vegetation upon its craggy sides, and no other land could be seen across the calm surface of the sea, nor was any sound heard in that solitude; even the water lapped silently upon the stony edge. It was a

place to try the spirit of the bravest ; but Esplandian did not fear. He felt certain that this was the first step of a glorious career of adventures to which his destiny was about to lead him ; and his heart beat high as he began to climb the rock, making towards the ruined tower.

The way was long and steep, and it seemed as if he should never reach that tower, but the young knight toiled on undaunted. He found himself clad from head to foot in new and brilliant armour, yet without sword or other weapon ; and before long he was aware of hissings and growlings within the deep caverns of the rocks, which told that there might be fierce beasts to be encountered. Still he turned not back. The rays of the noonday sun beat upon him till he had almost fainted from the heat, and often he was forced to halt to take breath ; then, looking down, he saw that he had mounted to a dizzy height, while the summit appeared ever nearer the clouds. But he was resolved to press on while strength was left him, and after hours of this laborious journeying, he stood at last upon the rocky platform from which rose the crumbling ruins of the tower, and amidst them a little temple of Hercules, which he now perceived for the first time.

This temple was one solid mass of granite, without window or other opening. Walls and roof were polished like a mirror, and there was no trace of chisel or mortar upon the smooth surface, which reflected back the sun so brightly, as for a time to dazzle Esplandian's eyes. The entrance was by a double door, likewise of granite, the two sides of which were firmly closed by a great sword buried to its jewel-studded hilt in the thick stone. It seemed as if no mortal strength could force open that door or withdraw the blade that barred it.

Well-nigh exhausted, the youth advanced slowly towards the entrance of the temple. At the sight of the sparkling hilt, he forgot his fatigue, and sprang eagerly forward to seize it. But before he could reach the door, a dreadful roar was heard echoing throughout the ruins, and an enormous dragon rushed forth.

Esplandian had scarce time to mark its red eyes and grizzly scales; in an instant it was upon him, and, weaponless as he was, hurled him to the ground, and wound its coils round his body. Half-choked, he struggled in the loathsome embrace, while the monster endeavoured in vain to tear his armour with its sharp claws. In vain, too, he

tried to free himself; but the son of Amadis was no easy prey. He clung to its wings, he dug his nails into the flesh, he pulled it down with all his might; man and monster rolled upon the rock in desperate wrestle; he dragged it towards the door of the temple, and despair gave him energy to lay his hand on the hilt of the sword. To his surprise the blade started out at the first touch, and with all the strength left him, he drove it into the dragon's throat. At the same moment the gates of the temple flew open with a crash, and all the island shook as if an earthquake was upheaving it. So terrible was the commotion, that as he felt the dragon's grasp relax, his brain spun round, and he staggered to his feet only to fall senseless on the rock.

When he came to himself, the shades of night had fallen, and the pale light of the rising moon showed the hideous form of the dragon lying motionless by his side. The temple was open, and its interior brilliantly illuminated. He stepped across the threshold, and saw that the light came from a tomb in the centre, which shone with a splendour like that of the sun. Upon this tomb couched a gold lion, that in its claws held a rich scabbard, and before it was an inscription in letters of fire—

THE SHEATH OF THE SWORD THAT CAN BE DRAWN FORTH BY NONE BUT HIM WHO IS DESTINED TO SURPASS THE RENOWN OF ALL KNIGHTS NOW LIVING.

Esplandian joyfully laid his hand upon the sheath, which yielded to him as lightly as the sword had done. He could not now doubt his high destiny and the protection of the sage Urganda, and would not delay an hour in proceeding on the perilous adventure reserved for him.

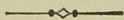
He left the temple, the heavy doors of which closed behind him with a sound like thunder, and took his way down the side of the rock, following the same path by which he had ascended. In his hand he bore the drawn sword, the blade of which flashed so brightly as to guide his footsteps and light up the crevices on either side. These crevices swarmed with venomous reptiles, which, now that the darkness had come on, stole forth and would have assailed him, but at the glow of the marvellous sword they fled back into their holes, and the youth went on unharmed, though all the air was filled with the angry hissing of the foul creatures, and he could feel their hot breath at every step.

The descent seemed as short as the ascent had

been long. A few minutes brought him down to the edge of the sea, and here he found a skiff moored, and in it an old man, dressed in Turkish garb.

“Who are you, and what do you here?” asked Esplandian, but the old man did not open his lips. By signs he gave the knight to understand that he was dumb, and in the same fashion invited him to enter the skiff.

Esplandian stepped on board, and immediately the mute seized the oars, and pushed off the frail vessel, which shot forth like an arrow into the open sea.



IV.

The little bark carried the young knight and his dumb companion safely across the ocean, and at last brought them in sight of a rugged country covered with woods. Towards this the skiff was turned, and no sooner had Esplandian leaped on shore than it sped away, leaving him alone at the foot of a mountain, on which might be seen a great castle, fortified with strong walls and tall towers.

The youth could not think that chance alone had brought him to this spot. Full of confidence

in the wise Urganda, and believing himself invincible with his good sword, he followed the coast, seeking carefully among the rocks for a path which might lead him to the castle. After wandering for an hour he came upon a little hermitage, surmounted by a cross, and ran forward to find the inhabitant of this retreat.

The hermit was coming from a fountain which bubbled from the ground in the wood behind his hut. As he issued from the wood, he was surprised to see an armed knight who saluted him in own language, and kneeling before him asked his blessing.

"For long," said he, "no inhabitant of this heathen land has saluted me thus. Your speech, your arms show that you must be a native of Great Britain. I also was born a subject of King Lisuarte. But say, how come you here, where your life and liberty are in such danger?"

"Holy father, fear not for me," replied Esplan-dian. "I can punish whoever dares to attack me. It is fate that has brought me here, and I burn with impatience to know what achievement it has decreed for me."

Then, believing that he might trust the hermit fully, he related to him what had happened on

the Firm Island, how Archalaus had been set free, and how King Lisuarte had been entrapped and carried off.

“Alas!” cried the old man, “your tale is but too true. You are now near the abode of this wicked enchanter, to which yesterday he returned, and brought with him a captive, who is rumoured to be a great prince. This may be no other than the King of Great Britain.”

“Would, then, that the sun were not near its setting! But to-morrow, I will deliver him.”

“My dear son,” said the hermit, looking kindly on his youth and his comeliness, “beware of offending Heaven by an enterprise so much above your power. This castle, named the Forbidden Mountain, is well-nigh inaccessible; and the giants who guard it would suffice to put a whole army to flight. Besides, if this prisoner should prove not to be Lisuarte, why should you imperil yourself for the sake of an unknown?”

“It is enough that he is an unfortunate prince: his need and the laws of knighthood call me to his aid. Grant me only shelter for this night, and to-morrow at daybreak show me a path that will lead me to this robber’s gates.”

The hermit no longer attempted to dissuade

this high-spirited youth. He seized him by the hand, bid him welcome to the humble retreat, and shared with him his frugal provisions.

While Esplandian lay down to rest, the good old man spent the night in prayers for his success. At daybreak he awoke his guest, aided him to arm, and conducted him to a path cut out of the rock, by which alone the castle of Archalaus could be reached. There he took leave of the youth, giving him his blessing, and embracing him with tears, for he scarce hoped to see him again.

With a light heart, Esplandian sprang up the steps, that by a winding ascent led him to the brow of the mountain, where stood the grim castle, on one side hanging over the sea, and on the other enclosed by a deep and broad moat. A narrow bridge crossed it and led to the heavy iron door, which appeared to be the only entrance. Before this door was posted a gigantic sentinel, who advanced towards Esplandian with uplifted axe, shouting to him to give up his sword, if he wished to escape death.

"It would be more to the purpose," replied Esplandian, "if you were to offer to lead me to your master, armed as I am. Go on—I am ready to follow."

“Ah! ah!” said the giant. “So you would play the babbler. Well, I am sorry to spoil your arms; they are new and handsome ones. For the last time: are you willing to give them up peaceably? Then, perhaps, I may allow you the honour of serving me.”

Without another word, Esplandian impatiently rushed upon him. The giant swung round his axe and brought it down, but the young knight caught the blow upon his shield.

“You should love well the shield that has saved you from such a stroke!” cried the giant, and raised his ponderous weapon for another blow, but before he could deliver it, Esplandian drove the magic sword through his armour, and pierced him from side to side, leaping back to escape the torrent of blood which gushed from the wound.

With his last breath, the fallen sentinel raised a cry of alarm; and as Esplandian sprang over his body, and rushed through the gate with drawn sword, he found himself confronted by a taller giant in green armour.

“Ah, wretch!” he cried in a voice of thunder. “How could the redoubtable Argantes have fallen under the arm of such a puny creature?”

“You shall know anon!” retorted the knight,

as the portcullis crashed down behind him, and he found himself alone in the castle of the enemy, with no hope of escape but in victory. He ran towards the giant, who came on no less eagerly, and the combat began with the utmost fury on either side. The giant's wrath redoubled as he felt his blood flow under the edge of the magic sword, and Esplandian's joy was great when he recognised that he had now to do with no less an adversary than Archalaus himself.

"Perfidious enchanter!" he cried, with a stroke at every word—"learn that it is the son of Amadis whom Heaven has sent to punish thy crimes!"

"Would that he were here himself! But at least I can avenge myself on thee for the long and harsh captivity which thy father forced me to undergo."

With this he whirled round his sword with both hands, but the mighty blow only cleft the air, for Esplandian leaped aside, and in his turn smote the enchanter so surely that, uttering roars of pain, he reeled towards the archway which opened into the next court. The young knight followed hard upon him. Archalaus struck wildly in the air, and could not parry the keen sword. Again and

again it pierced his armour, till the enchanter fell expiring in his blood before the eyes of the people of the castle, who were bringing forth chains to bind the audacious stranger.

“Furion ! Furion !” cried the traitor, and a young giant, unarmed, ran up in time to unlace his father’s casque, and to receive his last words—
“Avenge my death upon Amadis and all his race !”

Esplandian, generous as the other knights of his house, now lowered the point of his sword and drew back a few paces, unwilling to follow up his victory against an enemy whom he saw to be without defence. But he might not sheathe his blade. Furion, as soon as he saw that his father was dead, hurried back into the hall, calling out for his arms to be brought to him. Esplandian did not attempt to pursue him, but seeing an aged lady who came out wringing her hands and seemed to be the mistress of the castle, he advanced and addressed her respectfully—

“I regret, madam, that those whose fate you lament have forced me to combat and put them to death. I do not know where I am, but I cannot doubt that a supernatural power has led me here to deliver a great king who is confined in your

dungeons. Restore him to liberty, madam, and I will cease to trouble the place of your abode."

"Fool!" she exclaimed, kneeling by the body of her husband, "I hope yet to see you in a more pitiable case than even that king. The blood that you have just shed calls out for yours. Know that Archabone, the mother of Argantes and Furion, yet fears not thy race, and looks forward to its annihilation!"

Esplandian did not deign to reply to the furious woman, and he passed into the next court to escape her reproaches. Here a door was thrown open, and Furion issued forth covered with glittering armour, and holding an enormous scimitar in his hand. The first thing he did was to call his mother, and kneeling before her, he said—

"Come and enjoy the pleasure of seeing your husband and your son avenged. But as I am determined that my arm alone shall sacrifice this rash intruder, allow me to forbid that any one enter this court till the combat be ended."

With his own hand Furion then shut all the entrances, leaving open only the archway, from which his mother might watch the fight; and Esplandian courteously waited till these preparations were made. Then the two adversaries flew

at each other, and all the castle rang with the clash of their weapons.

The giant, who was at least eight feet high, seemed likely to have the advantage in the struggle; but the armour which Esplandian had received from Urganda resisted the most terrible blows, while the magic sword shore through Furion's mail as if it had been silk, so that his blood soon reddened the white pavement of the court; he began to give ground, and still Esplandian, unhurt and untired, followed him, till Arcabone trembled for her son. She would have rushed forth to separate the combatants, when, to her horror and despair, she saw that it was too late. The mortal blow had been struck. The boastful Furion gave one great cry, and fell lifeless at the feet of his opponent.

At this the mother fainted away, and her damsels came out to bear her into the castle. Esplandian, his mind always set on the deliverance of Lisuarte, followed them at a little distance, but, respecting a mother's grief, halted upon the threshold till she should have recovered her senses.

"Cruel!" she cried, when she opened her eyes and saw him standing without, all covered with the

blood of her sons. "Cruel knight, do you seek to put an end to the life which you have made miserable. What would you of me? I will give up my treasures and all the riches of the castle."

"Nay, madam," replied Esplandian, "I seek nothing that is yours, and it grieves me to have caused your tears to flow; but release straightway the king whom you hold here in prison, and resist no longer the will of Heaven."

"Come hither, then!" cried the treacherous enchantress. "I am ready to deliver thee the key of his prison."

Thus summoned, Esplandian stepped over the threshold. An enchantment had been laid upon it, so that no stranger could cross without falling senseless on the ground, and it was trusting to this enchantment that Arcabone had invited him to enter. But she knew not that the marvellous sword held him who bore it free from every spell. Without faltering, Esplandian passed over the charmed spot, and approached her fearlessly. Great was her grief to see that her wicked arts had no power over him.

"Ah, thou hast triumphed!" she cried. "Or rather, the power of my old enemy Urganda triumphs in thee. So be it! Follow me, and

thyself shall break the chains of him whose captivity has cost me so dear."

With this, bidding her attendants remain, she led the way to a damp, slippery staircase, which brought them into a vast subterranean vault. Esplandian followed her cautiously along the tortuous windings of this gloomy place. Here, indeed, she would willingly have profited by the darkness to attempt some new treachery, but Esplandian's luminous sword lit up all the vault, so that, as plainly as in daylight, he saw the dripping walls and the floor strewn with bones, and the dagger which the enchantress had half drawn from her bosom. The light of this wondrous blade took away all her hope; she no longer tried to wreak her vengeance upon the knight, but led him straight to the cell where the unfortunate Lisuarte was expecting and desiring nothing but death to end his sorrows.

"Who comes here to mock my misery?" he murmured, as the light of the sword burst upon him and dazzled his old eyes.

"One who in your cause, sire, would gladly shed half the blood that he owes to you."

"'Tis the voice of Esplandian!" cried the old king, stretching out his chained hands, and his

grandson fell upon his neck, while Arcabone, unable for rage to witness the triumph of her enemies, hurried away to seek some champion who might yet discomfit this victorious knight.



V.

The joy may be imagined with which the two kinsmen now embraced each other. Esplandian hastened to relieve his grandsire from the enchanter's chains, which fell off like threads at the touch of the magic sword. Lisuarte thanked heaven for his deliverance, and wondered to hear how this young scion of his house had overthrown these redoubtable giants. Then as they eagerly conversed, and imparted to each other what had befallen them since they parted on the Firm Island, a great noise of shouting was heard above, which reminded them that it was not well to tarry in this perilous part of the castle.

Esplandian took the old king's hand and led him through the dark windings of the vault and up the broken stairs, till they came out into the light of day. They now found themselves in a hall, the windows of which looked over the sea, and they could perceive that a large fleet of vessels had

just cast anchor below the castle. This was the fleet of Matroco, the eldest of the sons of Archalaus. He had been absent on a piratical excursion to the neighbouring coast, and now returned to hear of the fate that had overtaken his kinsmen. With enormous strides he was hastening towards the gate of the castle, and Esplandian, seeing him approach, went down to await him in the court where Furion still lay bathed in his blood.

This Matroco was the tallest and strongest of the sons of Arcabone, and she might well lament his absence when his brothers fell before her eyes under the hand of the son of Amadis. He was, moreover, of a less brutal disposition than the rest of his race, and his manners were even marked by a degree of chivalric courtesy unusual in a giant. But when he found his brother Argantes lying lifeless in the first doorway, all other thoughts gave way to the burning desire of revenge. What was his rage and grief to see a little further on the corpse of Archalaus? And he had scarcely shed a few tears over it, before his mother ran up and pointed to the body of his youngest brother in the next court.

“Is this thy work?” he cried, hurrying towards Esplandian, who awaited him with drawn sword.

"Ah! would thou hadst more lives than one, that thou mightst pay me fully for these I have lost!"

But now Arcabone, wrath and fear struggling in her mind, gave way to womanly weakness, and threw herself before him with tearful entreaties—

"Oh! dearest of my sons, do not expose thyself in combat with the destroyer of our race, but think that thou alone art left me to console and protect my age!"

"Madam," replied Matroco, gently putting her aside, "those whom you and I lament have died like brave men; their courage, if not my own, forbids me to shrink before their conqueror."

"Beware what you do," said Esplandian, willing to spare him. "Give heed to the tears of your mother. Those who have fallen beneath my sword sought their own fate in attacking me. My adventure is achieved, since I have here the king whom I came to deliver. Take back, then, this castle; I abandon it to you freely. All that I require of you is to repent of the cruelty and oppression which have made your race so hateful, and to embrace the true faith, in the strength of which I have come here to punish Archalaus, to

deliver Lisuarte, and to enlighten your heathen mind."

"I do not blame you," replied Matroco. "You have borne yourself like a brave knight; but you must not think to overcome me by empty words. Honour bids me avenge my kinsmen; and it is not at any man's bidding that I will change my faith. Shall a warrior of my might, hitherto victor in every combat, submit without a blow? No; it is for our arms to decide between us!"

With that he brandished his sword and ran upon Esplandian, who quickly put himself on his guard, and once more the clash of steel resounded from the walls.

Their first blows were more terrible than any which had been struck that day. Both were received upon their shields; but while Esplandian's was not even dented, the magic sword carried away half the buckler of Matroco. No words can describe the fury of the combat which now ensued, and which lasted for more than a hour before either champion would yield an inch. Breathless and bleeding, they fought on, so that all who saw them wondered, and it seemed as if there could be no end to the battle till both fighters fell lifeless. In spite of the goodness of Esplandian's armour, he

was wounded in several places; but Matroco was covered with wounds from head to foot, and his mail was strewn in shreds all around. For the first time in his life he drew back, and leaned heavily upon the hilt of his sword. The strength of that giant-brood, men said, was wont to be at its height at mid-day, and thereafter to decrease as the sun sank towards the west. It was now long past noon, and the last son of Archalaus began to fear that his hour was come. Esplandian was still able to pursue his victory, but his generosity forbade him to press upon the enfeebled foe.

“Pagan, see how your evil deeds are visited upon you through my hands!” he exclaimed. “It is not to me that I conjure you to submit yourself, but to Heaven, which you have too long offended by your pride and perverseness.”

Matroco trembled and sank upon his knees, crying — “Christian, thou hast conquered! I repent me of all I have done, and I would fain be instructed in thy faith.”

Joyful to see the change wrought in the giant’s disposition, Esplandian held out to Matroco the hilt of his sword, and said—

“Ah! worthy foe, take now my sword as a sign of the victory thou hast gained over thyself.”

To this Matroco replied by desiring that a priest should at once be sent for to receive his confession and admit him into the true Church. He also gave orders for the release of the Christian prisoners on board his fleet. Lisuarte and Esplandian, perceiving that his wounds could not be staunched, and that he was growing weaker every moment, took him up in their arms and carried him gently into the chamber of his mother, who followed, rending the air with her cries. The knight forgot his own wounds in attending to those of his enemy; but it was too plain that they were mortal.

The hermit arrived in haste, and while he was shriving the wounded man, Esplandian went out to give directions for the burial of the slain. Before long, he was summoned back by the loud lamentation raised round the bed of Matroco, and entered in time to see the penitent giant lift his eyes to heaven and expire. His last words were to implore the holy man's blessing.

Lisuarte knelt by the bedside and wept to see this heathen come to such an edifying end. The old Arcabone, out of her senses with grief, as she beheld the death of her last and dearest son, snatched up his sword, and would have struck the king with all the strength of madness and despair.

Esplandian seized her hand, not a moment too soon; they drew her away, and the hermit vainly endeavoured to calm her. With a piercing scream, she rushed to the window, and before a hand could be laid upon her, had hurled herself over the precipice into the waves rolling far beneath at its base.

The mariners of Matroco's fleet, seeing her fall, were launching their skiffs to rescue her. But now upon the horizon appeared the terrible mass of fire; already the beating of the gigantic wings could be heard; and the Green Serpent, Urganda's mysterious vessel, came swiftly towards the Forbidden Mountain. At the sight the sailors were horror-struck. Some hastened to seek safety on land, some cut the cables of their ships and tried to sail away. The whole fleet was scattered like minnows at the approach of a strange monster, and the body of Arcabone floated lifeless and unheeded upon the water.

Thus perished all the race of Archalaus!





The Knight and the Abbot.

I.

THE young Jehan de Saintr  was already renowned as a model of knighthood. He had distinguished himself in tournaments not only in France, but at all the courts of Europe ; he had been marked out by the especial favour of his sovereign ; he had just taken part in a most glorious war against the Turks, and now he was returning to the home of his ancestors, for the first time since the beginning of his career. His father being dead, it was right that he should thus visit the castle and receive the homage of his dependants, but there was a stronger attraction to draw him from court and camp. He hoped to see again his neighbour and mistress, the Dame des Belles-Cousins, a lady of the blood-royal of France, whom he had loved from boyhood, and

who, on the day he was made knight, placed upon his arm the rich enamelled bracelet that ever since he had worn and treasured as the gage of her fidelity.

On the morning after his arrival, carefully attiring himself in a satin doublet embroidered with gold and pearls, new scarlet hose, and a gay velvet cap, he mounted his swiftest horse, and taking with him a single squire, galloped impatiently towards the castle where she dwelt with whom his dearest thoughts had remained throughout all his adventures. But when he reached the park, he met an old servant of the princess, who told him that his mistress had just ridden out upon her palfrey, attended by three of her ladies, with the intention of hunting in the forest. Saintr  did not hesitate to follow her with all haste. He plunged into the forest, and guided by the blowing of the horns and the baying of the dogs, soon came to a glade where to his joy he saw the beautiful Dame des Belles-Cousins, looking more beautiful than ever as her face glowed with the excitement and exercise of the chase. To fly towards her, to leap from his horse, to salute her eagerly, was the work of an instant. The lady, who did not know of his return and had reasons for not wishing to see him,

gave a cry of surprise, and coloured, though not with pleasure.

“Ah! is it you, my lord De Saintré?” she said coldly, and with evident embarrassment. “I did not expect you so soon. Why have you left the king your master? Why have you come to seek me here?”

Saintré, surprised and confounded, fixed his eyes on the lady, who turned hers away.

“Madam! is it indeed you who speak thus and receive so coldly your faithful knight?”

“If I am not mistaken,” she replied haughtily, “your words convey some reproach. What right have you to come to trouble me in my amusements?”

The knight felt as if his knees would no longer support him in his grief and astonishment. He drew back, and the lady was about to turn away, when a tall and handsome man, in the habit of a monk, but with a hunting-horn round his neck, spurred up to her, and cried out, taking no heed of Saintré—

“There is not a moment to be lost, if you would see the death of the stag!”

The princess smiled, struck her palfrey, and rode away at the churchman’s side, without deigning

another word to Saintr , who remained motionless, unable to divine the cause of this cold reception. He turned to Catherine, one of the princess's ladies, and asked who was this man that had just led her mistress away.

“Ah! brave and unhappy Saintr , how the times are changed!” cried Catherine and the other ladies sorrowfully, for they all knew and esteemed the young knight.

Then they told him that this was the Abbot of a monastery of St. Bernard close at hand, which a few weeks before their mistress had visited to perform her religious duties at a great festival, and being wonderfully pleased by her reception, had ended by allowing the Abbot to gain such influence over her, that she was no longer happy out of his company.

This explanation opened Saintr 's eyes, and tormented his heart. Eager either to confirm or to remove his suspicions, he remounted his horse and accompanied the damsels to the spot where the stag had just been killed, and where the Abbot was gallantly presenting its foot to the Dame des Belles-Cousins.

Saintr  now approached them with an air of reserve, and bowed low to the lady, who returned his salutation, saying—

"No doubt, sir, you have come from your castle to take part in the chase?"

"No, madam. Hearing that you had retired from the court, I feared you might be ill, and my anxiety did not allow me to lose a moment in coming to inquire for you."

"Indeed, you are foolish to disquiet yourself. You may see that I have never been better than I am now. And," she said, smiling to the Abbot, "I have never known so much enjoyment as has lately fallen to my lot."

The Abbot, who had meanwhile been informed of the knight's name and rank, now prevented his reply by addressing him in a somewhat familiar manner—

"My lord De Saintré, I learn that we are neighbours; it shall not be my fault if we do not become friends." Then, without waiting for an answer, he turned to the lady and said, with a still more familiar air, and in a tone which allowed the knight to hear him: "Madam, shall I not beg the lord de Saintré to dine with us to-day at the abbey?"

"Do as you please," she rejoined, with some constraint. "However, you need not tear his cloak to hold him, if he should refuse your invitation."

Saintr , who had by this time recovered his self-possession, and was determined to have a full explanation of his mistress's change of mind, at once accepted the Lord Abbot's invitation; and all the party now made for the monastery. On the way, the knight rode behind with Catherine and the other ladies in attendance, and contented himself by closely watching the conduct of the princess, while the presumptuous monk played the part of her cavalier, treating her with the utmost freedom, whispering often in her ear, and seeming to jest upon the serious air with which Saintr  followed them, scarcely able thus to hide his rage and vexation. Nor were these feelings lessened when, on his springing forward to assist the lady from her horse, she thanked him coldly, and desired the Abbot rather to perform this service. Times were indeed changed!

The magnificence with which they were received at the abbey was the cause of not a little surprise to the young knight, who was not aware of the degeneracy into which many of these religious institutions had fallen. It seemed as if they had arrived at a palace where preparations were being made for the wedding of a great lord, rather than at the retreat of disciples of the severe St.

Bernard. The repast was served in a pleasant apartment surrounded by gardens ; the table was spread with the finest linen and gaily ornamented with flowers. The dishes were various and exquisitely cooked, and the wines, not only of the country, but of Greece and Spain, shone in goblets of crystal among dishes of fine fruit. The Abbot did the honours of the repast with all the gaiety of a man of the world, mingled with the pride of a rich monk who felt assured of his high position. He conversed gallantly with the ladies ; he tried to engage Saintr  in conversation, and when he received small encouragement, took his revenge by exhibiting the terms of intimacy on which the most honoured of the guests allowed him to be. When several flagons had been emptied, his mirth became louder and more reckless, till, egged on by the looks and words of the Dame des Belles-Cousins, he even ventured upon some jests against chivalry and its professors, at the same time pressing her foot, as if to call her attention to his pleasantry. Saintr  saw this movement and how it was received. Though he had resolved to wear an air of cold indifference towards this heartless woman, he could not but blush for her, and sorrowfully turned his eyes down towards the rich bracelet

on his wrist. The monk's spirits rose higher as the knight's looks grew more grave and could no longer hide his displeasure ; and he cried in a tone of raillery.

“What ails you, my lord De Saintré? You seem to be ill-satisfied with your fare and your company. Is it the wine which you find not good, or does a knight admitted to the table of great kings scorn the pittance of us poor monks?”

Saintré assured him that no one could wish for better cheer, and that, moreover, the presence of such an illustrious lady would lend honour to the vilest hovel. The churchman took offence at this phrase, and rejoined roughly—

“All these knights and squires who go running over the world would think themselves lucky to find sometimes such hovels as this on their journeys.”

The lady laughed loudly, and pressing the Abbot's foot in her turn, seemed to urge him to carry on the jest.

“You must confess, Lord de Saintré,” he continued, “that of all these fellows in armour, there are few led by the true love of glory. Finding themselves idle at the court, they begin by looking about for some silly woman to befool ; if they find

her, they do their best to deceive her and themselves; they are rejected, they groan, they weep; but the ladies, who are too ready to believe in great passions, become often their dupes in the end. One of the surest means of bringing this about is to undertake for a lady what they call enterprises of love. Then, wearing some token on their arm, their neck, or their leg, they make these poor women believe that this is done for their sake, and that they are about to run the greatest dangers to be able to lay the prize at the feet of their mistresses. They find their advantage in this, for, it being the custom of great courts to encourage such undertakings, they know that they will receive from the bounty of their master the means of jaunting about the world and amusing themselves to their heart's content. When they have well tramped the roads, they return with a lying varlet at their backs, whom they dress up as a herald-at-arms; and as they make him brag of their exploits even more than they do themselves, the result is a string of false tales, a false reputation, and a brilliant reception, which is not in the least deserved. What do you say, madam?" added the impudent Abbot. "Do you think that I am far wrong?"

"I think," said the princess, "that you have just described most exactly all these young adventurers."

"Ah, madam!" cried Saintr , with a look that made her quail. "Ah, madam! is it possible that you should think so? I am astonished that a princess, who from her birth and position ought to be the patroness of chivalry, should allow it to be thus reviled in her presence with so much falsehood and audacity."

"Truly, my lord De Saintr ," interrupted the monk, "there may be some exceptions; but in general I have given a faithful account of all these people who cover themselves with iron, and who would often be very much alarmed if they fell in with a real danger."

"Lord Abbot," replied the knight sternly, "you are too presumptuous. Respect an order which endows you, protects you, and secures you in the possession of the riches you so much abuse. If you were able to support by deeds the rash words that you have just uttered, you should soon suffer the punishment they deserve."

"Faith!" cried the Abbot, "I would support them before and against any one, if it might be on equal terms, and with arms such as I am

accustomed to use. It is very easy for a man so wrapped up in armour that it would be hard to prick him with a needle, to brave a poor fellow of a monk who has nothing but his frock and his rosary ; but if, to support what you have said, you were to present me a champion who would consent to wrestle with me, for example, madam should soon see which of us two is right."

The Dame des Belles-Cousins kept screaming with laughter at this dispute. With her eyes, her feet, and her hands she applauded the Abbot, and seemed to be urging him on to fresh insolence. She knew that he was a man of great strength and accustomed to all sorts of bodily exercises, so, losing all restraint, and seeking only to provoke and mortify her former lover, she cried out mockingly—

"Lord Abbot, know you not what you risk by such a challenge, and do not you see that my lord De Saintr , who happens to be here without his arms, ought not to hesitate in accepting it?"

"Very good," said the Abbot. "If the sport pleases the gentleman, I am his man. No ; I will not go back from my word. And I shall be delighted if madam will consent to be a spectator of this contest, and to crown with

her own hands whichever of us shall gain the victory."

Saintr   felt bitterly the cunning and malice of her whom he now despised and detested as much as before she had been undeservingly loved. But his high spirit would not allow him to be defied with impunity by a boastful monk; though he knew that wrestling was a sport to which he was not used, he rose, and said, with a proud glance at the fickle lady—

"It is, indeed, madam, the only kind of combat which you merit to have undertaken for you!"

As soon as the Abbot saw Saintr   on his feet, he joyfully sprang from the table, and hastened to seize and kiss the hand which the knight had so often pressed. Then, in his exultation, he dragged rather than led the princess to a green meadow before the walls of the monastery, where the young brothers of the order were accustomed to disport themselves, and where commodious seats were arranged under the shadow of leafy planes and sycamores. There the ladies took their places, and the monks stood round in a circle. The Abbot lost no time in stripping off his hood and scapulary, disclosing long, brawny limbs, more like those of a warrior than a churchman; while

Saintr  was relieved of his doublet by his squire, and burned with vexation to hear the lady loudly praising his opponent's manly strength, and confidently predicting for the monk an easy victory.

The knight, however, endeavoured to conceal his feelings, and with a good grace presented himself to the sinewy grasp of the Abbot. Cautiously they locked their arms and legs together; then the struggle began. It was a fine sight to see how they wrestled together with firm-set lips and strained muscles. They bent, they writhed, they tottered, they exhausted all their strength and skill; for a little, it seemed as if they were equal in force. But the monk was too well practised to this kind of encounter; he stood like a tower in the arms of Saintr , whose feet soon flew into the air.

"Oh! do beg my lord to spare me!" cried the impudent Abbot, as he laid the slender form of his adversary full length on the grass, amid the laughter and applause of the spectators, loudest of all being the voice of Dame des Belles-Cousins, that echoed mockingly—

"Spare him, Saintr ! Spare the poor monk!"

While Saintr , angry and ashamed, was rising

from the ground, the Abbot knelt at the lady's feet and said to her with mock gravity—

“Madam, you behold how I have just maintained my words in the lists. But if my lord De Saintré is willing to try a second fall, I will let him see that since I have laid down my scapulary, I can as well as he be obedient to the custom of the jousts, which prescribes that a last lance should be broken in honour of the ladies.”

“Ah!” she cried, “I believe my lord too gallant to refuse obedience to this custom. But if he declines, I will all my life hold him for a craven knight, and will put him to shame before the queen and all the court.”

Furious at the heartlessness of one who was now become as hateful to him as hitherto she had been adored, Saintré did not hesitate to attempt a second trial of strength, in which he had no better luck than before. The vigorous monk, still boasting and laughing at the knight's vain efforts, had again the triumph of putting him out of breath and hurling him to the ground.

This unequal struggle might not even yet have ended if the ladies of the princess, who esteemed Saintré and by no means shared the delight with which their mistress saw the most renowned

champion of France befooled and overthrown by her favourite, had not persuaded her to recollect herself and return to the banqueting chamber, whither the excited and exulting Abbot presently followed her. But some of the oldest monks in the community, who had long been scandalised by their superior's way of life, took this opportunity of remonstrating with him on his conduct, and ventured to represent that more respect was due to the young lord De Saintré, whose forefathers had been among the richest benefactors of the abbey, and whose resentment they might justly feel after the unseemly way in which he had been treated among them. The Abbot was not, or pretended not to be, insensible to their reproaches. He agreed that he might have pushed his pleasantry too far, and promised to behave so that the knight should excuse what had happened.

Meanwhile, Saintré, tired and bruised, adjusted his apparel, and hiding his indignation, was meditating schemes of vengeance. In a short time he appeared among the company with an affected air of frankness and good-humour. The Abbot rose at once and politely led him to his place.

"My lord," he said, "such are our country

games, and in deigning to take part in them, you have not less shown the goodness of your character, than you have proved its loftiness, arms in hand, at the head of our armies."

It is a torment rather than a pleasure to hear oneself praised by a man one hates, especially if he has gained some advantage over us. But Saintr  was able to dissimulate his feelings, and receiving with apparent cordiality the compliments of the Abbot, he said gaily to the Dame des Belles-Cousins—

"Is it not, madam, a pity that so tall a man, so well made and with such sinews, should be counted among the peaceful sons of St. Bernard? Of what use might he not have been to the service of the king, if he had rather borne arms! Two knights such as he would set to flight a whole troop of the bravest men-at-arms; and it would be difficult to find any one with an air so martial, so redoubtable as the Lord Abbot would have if we could only see him arrayed in good armour and fighting at the head of the foremost ranks."

"Truly," replied the lady, blind upon the merit of her favourite, "I believe that most of those whom we see shining and prancing in such posts could not compare with so sturdy a warrior."

The Abbot was delighted in his heart, but he affected to receive this praise with great modesty.

"I might, perhaps, have been worth something in this profession," he said, "if I had served for a time as squire to the lord De Saintré, the flower of our knighthood."

Similar compliments passed between them, so that complete friendship seemed to be restored. And before the party broke up, Saintré begged them all to dine with him next day at his castle. The princess at first received this request with much haughtiness; she affected that her royal birth forbade her to become the guest of a simple baron, and it was only on the solicitation of the Abbot, anxious to reinstate himself in the good graces of his neighbour; that she consented to accept the invitation. It may be judged whether the knight was well pleased to owe this favour to the influence of his priestly rival, but he pretended to receive it with gratitude, and taking his leave, rode home to his castle, where he had certain preparations to make for the entertainment of his visitors after a fashion which will presently show us that the chevaliers of old had not always the finest sense of courtesy and magnanimity.

II.

Next day, accordingly, the princess arrived upon her palfrey shortly before noon, attended by her ladies, as well as by the Abbot, who rode at her side upon a mule, which he endeavoured to make prance and curvet as if it had been a war-steed.

Saintr   met them at the gate with all marks of respect and pleasure, and conducted them through the ante-chamber, lined with his gentlemen and pages, to the hall where a sumptuous banquet had been prepared. There was at first a certain reserve and awkwardness between the host and his guests; fortunately, before long the clock of the castle struck the hour of twelve, and the dinner was served. The young master of the house led the princess to the gilded seat that had been set for her at the head of the table; the Abbot sat down without ceremony upon a stool at her side; the ladies took their places, while Saintr   himself remained standing, and, with a napkin thrown across his shoulder, prepared to serve the great lady, nor would he sit down except at her most pressing desire, and then only at the end of the second course.

He had not neglected to place before the Abbot

more than one flagon of rich wine, which he knew that the voluptuous churchman loved too well to keep his head long clear from their enticing fumes. In fact, the conversation soon became lively and unrestrained. The lady seemed to forget her former lover altogether, or believing that her manner towards him had made him sufficiently understand the distance which was henceforth to be between them, gave her attention entirely to the Abbot, who, pluming himself on her infatuation, talked, and laughed, and assumed all the airs of a man of fashion, while Saintr  sat silent and gloomy at his own table.

After a time, however, they condescended to take some notice of their host, complimenting him on the excellence of his repast, on the beauty of his castle, and especially on the decorations of the hall. The walls were hung with standards, suits of complete armour, and other trophies which he had taken from the infidels. Saintr  saw and encouraged the interest which the Abbot showed in these military equipments; he pointed out the large and heavy armour of a sultan whom he had killed with his own hand, and remarked that there were few men robust enough to wear it.

"Faith, my lord!" cried the Abbot, draining his goblet, "if it were a question of wearing it for a couple of hours or so, even of running and jumping in it, and if the wearer might have it for his pains, I believe you would not have far to look for some one who would agree to such a bargain."

"Indeed," replied Saintr , "I believe that if any one could gain this wager, it would be a man of your stature and strength; for the sultan who wore these arms was the most terrible Turk with whom I ever had to do, and I could not have killed him if his badly fastened hauberk had not presented me an opening through which I plunged my sword into his body. But if I thought that you could make any use of them, I should be delighted to offer them to you."

The Dame des Belles-Cousins was completely duped by the polite and even friendly air with which Saintr  said this, and, curious to see how these fine arms would become the tall figure of the Abbot, who in her eyes was such a hero, she urged him to try them on.

"Well," he said, helping himself to another cup of wine, "I remember that I have in my church a great St. George all covered with rusty and battered armour. If my lord De Saintr  is

willing to put me to the trial, I will see if I cannot win this armour to do honour to my poor old saint."

Everybody applauded this proposal, and the monk got up and laid aside his frock, while Saintré took down the different pieces of the sultan's armour, and disposed himself to act as squire to this strange knight. He took care to lace the casque and hauberk firmly on with double knots, and tightly closed the rivets with a hammer, so that the wearer would have some difficulty in ridding himself of this unaccustomed guise. As soon as the Abbot was equipped from head to foot, he began to walk up and down with a ridiculously martial air, delighted thus to display himself before the ladies. Their attention being taken up, Saintré then slipped away unnoticed, and with the aid of his squire, hastily did on his own armour in an adjoining chamber.

The Lord Abbot was strutting, and swelling, and pluming himself like a turkey-cock, drinking in greedily the praises of the foolish princess, when suddenly the master of the house returned in full armour, followed by a herald-at-arms in his livery, who carried two bucklers, two swords, two battle-axes and two poniards. At the same moment

they saw the doors of the hall occupied by armed men, who presented the points of their weapons and forbad all egress.

“What does this mean, Saintr ?” cried the princess, turning pale, while the Abbot stopped short and attempted in vain to raise the vizor of his helmet, through the bars of which he could not see clearly what was going on. “What are you going to do?”

“Nothing but what is just,” said the knight sternly. “Yesterday this Abbot of yours provoked me at his house to a kind of combat in which he was long practised; you seemed to encourage him, and you forced me into accepting his challenge. To-day, in my turn, I challenge him at those weapons with which I am best acquainted, and if you have any sense of justice, madam, you will press him also not to refuse me.”

Meanwhile the herald was offering the Abbot his choice of weapons, and he was refusing with the most pitiable air of reluctance, and looking around in vain for some way of retreat.

“Saintr , Saintr !” cried the lady imploringly; and as he turned away without heeding her, she endeavoured to assume a tone of authority, and said—“Do you dare to insult a princess of my

rank ! Forbear, sir, or fear the most severe effects of my indignation."

But the knight was neither to be entreated nor threatened. He seized her by the arm and forced her back into a chair, crying—

"Do you dare, perfidious and disloyal woman, to boast of your august rank after shaming it by the behaviour which has lost you one of the most faithful and devoted of lovers. No ! I no longer recognise you either as the sovereign of my soul or as the cousin of my king ! And thou, wretch !" he added, making a stride towards the quailing Abbot, "no longer hesitate to make use of thy strength and of the arms of proof with which I have covered thee. Defend thyself like a man, or in an instant I will have thee thrown from the windows of my castle, armed as thou art, and thou shalt perish like a dog before the eyes of this unworthy lady of thine !"

The monk saw that his only chance was to defend himself as best he could. Trusting in his enormous strength, he chose a battle-axe and a dagger from the arms presented him by the herald, and Saintr  took the same weapons. They stood facing each other for a moment ; then the Abbot, who was taller than his opponent by a head, ran

desperately upon him, hoping to annihilate him at a single blow. But Saintr  adroitly caught the blow on the back of his axe, and without caring to return it, clapped his point to the vizor of the Abbot, and making as if he would have pierced the bars, bore him back several paces till he stumbled across one of the tressels of the table and fell heavily backwards, making the hall ring with his fall and the clash of his armour. Both unable and unwilling to rise, he lay motionless under the gleaming axe of the knight, who seemed about to cleave off his head, when the Dame des Belles-Cousins shrieked out—

“Stay, stay! O Saintr , what would you do?”

“Punish him before your eyes, O most faithless of all ladies! But tremble not; his base blood shall not be shed by my hand.” With this he opened the helmet of the Abbot, who lay breathless, quaking, and unable to speak for terror. As he panted and gasped, Saintr  seized his tongue, dragged it out, and slit it with his dagger. “Thou shalt be chastised only as all revilers should be, for the false words which thy foul mouth has vomited out against the sacred order of Chivalry and those who profess it.”

The Dame des Belles-Cousins had fainted on



"Both unable and unwilling to rise, the Abbot lay motionless under the gleaming axe of the knight."—p. 238. *The Knight and the Abbot*.

her seat, and her weeping ladies ran round her. Saintr   felt a movement of pity, but checked it, and tearing from his arm the bracelet which had been her gage of love, he flung it down by her side. Then looking upon her face with a bitter smile, he strode from the hall.

All was ready for his departure. In the court he mounted his horse and rode away, leaving the castle to his servants, and the Abbot and the princess to console each other as best they could.





Steel-Heart.

I.

NERONE, the daughter of the old King of the Borders, sat at the window of her bower. She looked forth on the wide plain surrounding her father's castle, and saw a knight riding towards it, whose bright arms flashed in the light of the setting sun. He rode slowly, as one in pain, and as the maiden looked she feared he would fall from his horse for weakness, and her heart was drawn to him in compassion. Quickly she arose and bade a couch be made ready, and sent forth two of her damsels to meet the knight and bring him in, while with her own hands she sought out rich clothes and healing salve for his wounds.

At the gate of the castle she greeted this guest, all covered with blood, and so sore hurt that he

could hardly dismount from his horse. He raised his vizor, disclosing a winsome and youthful countenance, as she gave him welcome, but when she was fain to know his name, and how he came by such hurt, he prayed her to excuse him.

“For,” said he, “on the day that I was made knight, I vowed to tell my name to none save him who should overcome me. Even now, hard by this place, I met a knight who would have forced me to reveal myself, and he came nigh to have slain me. Yet at the last I vanquished him, and still my vow holds good.”

“I would not have thee break thy vow for me,” she said smiling. “Such a brave knight must sure have some fair lady who holds his name in her heart.”

“Nay, till this hour I have seen no maiden to whom I might give my love,” said he—and their eyes met.

“There are many ladies who would prize it well,” she replied; and with such speeches he was led into the chamber prepared for him.

There the king’s daughter removed his blood-stained armour, and washed his wounds, and bound them up with her own white hands, and brought

him cordials and medicines, and when his pain was thus relieved, she left him to repose.

"A knight without a name! There are full many knights whose names were better hidden than told," said her old father, when he learned what manner of guest was within his walls.

But to Nerone it seemed that he did the stranger wrong to speak thus lightly of his worth. She thought she had never seen such a goodly youth, and made sure that, whatever his name might be, it bore no shadow of dishonour. All night she dreamed of him, and in the morning she went early to see how he did.

Alas! his wounds were little like to heal. He was weaker and fevered, and all the skill of Nerone and her damsels could not give him ease. Throughout that day, and many days after, he lay tossing on his couch, speaking wildly, and knowing not where he was. With all gentleness the king's daughter tended him, placing pillows under his throbbing head, bringing him drink to assuage his burning thirst, and singing softly to soothe him to sleep like a fretful child. For hours she would sit by his bed, looking into his shining eyes that knew her not; and the more she looked, the more she loved him. Often she wondered who and

whence he was; she examined his arms, but his gilded shield was blank, and there was no token from which she might learn his name. He was young and strong; he would recover and ride away; she would never see him more, and he might never know how her heart was moved towards him. At last, unable to restrain herself, as he lay helpless and insensible, she softly drew the ring from his finger, and hung round his neck her own chain of gold. With this ring she vowed she would never part.

Now, while the nameless knight thus lay sick in the castle, there arrived with a great train Fergus, king of the north country, a cruel and treacherous and ill-favoured lord, whom men loved little, but feared for his power. He had heard tell of the beauty of the fair Nerone, and was come to seek her for his wife, not thinking to be denied. But when the maiden knew his errand, she grew red as the rose, then pale as the lily, and said that she had no wish to wed this king, however rich he might be.

The King of the Borders was well willing to see his daughter the bride of Fergus, and said much to urge his suit.

“Knights, barons, and princes have sought thy

hand, and still stubbornly dost thou say them nay. My daughter, men begin to say that thou hast a heart as hard as steel."

"He who can gain my heart shall learn what it is," was her answer; and she would have turned away, but her father held her.

"And who so fit to gain and have all that is thine as this king, our neighbour? No maiden can easily find such a husband."

"Nay, then, let him show himself worthy of me!" she cried, with all a maiden's pride. "I know one that is a better knight by far, and so he could bear arms, he would prove it right soon."

"I see that thy wits have gone astray with that young stranger. But, Nerone, bethink thee, a king's daughter is not a prize for every wandering knight. Fergus can give thee rank and wealth, and when I die, his kingdom will be added to mine, and thou shalt be queen over all."

"I shall be rich enough with him I love. And rather let me have a husband that can defend my lands and my honour. If I am a king's daughter, I am not to be had for the asking, unless a man can win me."

And no more gracious answer would she give to

Fergus, strive as he might to gain her favour. The more he saw her, the more he desired her; but she grew to hate the sight of him from day to day. She would have none of his gifts; scarce could he get speech of her; from the feasts and revelry with which they made entertainment for him in the hall of the castle, she ever stole away to watch by the side of her wounded knight, and told herself that such a gallant youth must rise to be greater than all the kings of the north and the south. To her great joy, she now saw that he began to amend. Before many days she might hope to know that she had judged aright of his skill and valour. With her own hands she furnished up his arms, and with her own eyes she saw that his steed was well cared for, that it might not fail its master in the hour of need. Then, when the blood came back into the knight's pale face, she spoke to her father, telling him that she no longer desired to remain unwedded, and requesting that a tournament should be proclaimed for a month from that day, at which he who best held the lists against all comers should win her hand. Her heart foretold who must be the victor.

The old king loving his daughter well, con-

sented to her wish, and gave orders for this tournament to be held with great pomp. He trusted that the prize would fall to the suitor favoured by himself. Fergus was indeed a tall and strong knight, but a craven at heart, from whom the maiden had done well to shrink at first sight, as a dove flies from a bird of prey. This was no way of wooing for him. When he knew that this nameless knight and many others of renown would dispute the prize with him, he resolved to win his wish by foul means, rather than risk the issue of a fair field.

He took leave of the King of the Borders, and feigned to ride away from that land. But he gathered his men, and lay secretly in wait, and broke into the castle by night. The king was old, and the nameless knight lay still sick; there was none to oppose the false Fergus. He seized the king's daughter, and forced her away with him, heedless of her anger and entreaties.

"Ah, treacherous guest and disloyal knight!" she cried, as he held her fast on his saddle-bow and spurred fiercely on, while she through her tears looked back into the darkness towards her father's home, and stretched out her hands in vain. "Truly my heart told me to beware of such

love, and bitterly had I repented if I had smiled on such a wooer."

"Like ye not the wooing?" laughed Fergus. "Then our wedding must be the merrier."

"False and cruel, there can be no mirth for me where thou art," she wept piteously; but he rode faster on, saying—

"Weep thy fill now. But a maiden cannot for ever keep a heart of steel."

Thus he bore her away to a castle far away by the sea-shore. Meanwhile her old father was wroth to lose his child, yet feared to follow, lest worse should befall both him and her. But when the nameless knight heard of the villainy wrought to this lady that had tended and befriended him in his sickness, he forgot all his pain, sprang from his couch, with his wounds not yet healed, and got to horse, vowing never again to lie in a bed till he had punished this traitor and brought the maiden back to her father's house. And so rode he far and long in search of her.



II.

In the castle to which Fergus carried Nerone lived his two sisters, as cruel and evil-minded as

himself. And since still the king's daughter would not even speak to him for all his offers of love, he left her there in charge of his sisters, saying—

“Take this maiden with a heart like steel, and teach her to love ere I come again.”

So now poor Nerone must lead a hard life with these pitiless women. At first, indeed, they tried fair words to win her to be their brother's bride, but when these did not avail, they used her with all unkindness. They stripped her of her rich garments and dressed her in a ragged gown; they forced her to scrub, and cook, and wash, and when, for weakness, she could not perform these tasks to their mind, she was beaten without mercy, like the meanest slave. Her food was scanty bread and water, and she had no other bed than a plank of wood, while her tormentors fared plentifully and lay softly before her eyes. And every day they told her, with threats and blows, that she had but to relent and speak the word, then she should enjoy the best of all, as their sister and their brother's wife.

But no word of willingness would she speak, though she became daily more white and thin, and her strength served her less and less to go

through these unwonted labours. Her only comfort was to sit alone in a dark corner of the hall, and weep silently, and think with sorrow of her home, and her father, and that goodly knight without a name.

Thus the weeks passed by, and to Nerone it seemed that she could no longer endure her life, till she prayed for death to release her from the hands of these cruel ladies. And this was the manner of her release.

One day, for some trifling fault, they beat her so cruelly, that she fell on the ground in a swoon, and was taken for dead. Now the sisters were afraid, for they thought they had killed her, and dreaded their brother's wrath. When Nerone came to herself and heard them lamenting and wringing their hands, a bold device entered her mind. Since no one appeared to rescue her, the only hope of escape was in herself, and no fate could be worse than that which she now endured. With this thought, she lay still, she closed her eyes, she held her breath, and feigned to be indeed a corpse.

Then the sisters caused her to be wrapped in a costly shroud, decked with gold and jewels, as became a king's bride. The body was laid upon

a bier, and with great pomp carried by night to a tomb without the castle walls, while funeral hymns were sung and the passing bell tolled for this unhappy lady. The sisters followed her to the tomb and made great moan, but less for her sake than for their own.

They did well to fear their brother's anger. Next day he arrived at the castle, and when he heard that Nerone had died under their cruel hands, his anger was beyond bounds, and he ordered the wicked sisters to be beheaded forthwith. Then he flew to the tomb to take one last look at the face of her whom he had loved so unworthily. But the tomb was open and empty. Some thief, they said, must have robbed it for the sake of the rich ornaments of the corpse. In the bitterness of his sorrow, Fergus cursed himself for what he had done, and, raging like a madman, rode away from the place, after commanding the castle where such woe had been wrought, to be razed to the ground.

Before long he fell in with the nameless knight, now healed of his wounds and eager to avenge the wrong done to the daughter of the King of the Borders. As soon as he saw the shield of Fergus, he bore down upon him, fiercely bidding

him look to himself, for one or other of them must die that day.

Fergus laid his lance in rest, and they rushed together without more ado. At the first shock the king of the north country was hurled to the ground, and never rose again.



III.

But the fair Nerone was not dead. When the funeral procession had retired, she rose from the bier and stole forth unseen. Full glad she was to be once more free; but now she must contrive means not to fall again into the hands of her persecutors.

In a cottage near the castle lived an old woman, who alone had shown her kindness during her captivity. To this cottage she made her way under the cover of darkness and told her tale, and was welcomed and sheltered for that night. The kind woman would have concealed her longer, but she feared to remain near the castle. Her hostess had a son of her height; she dressed herself in his clothes, and, thus disguised, set out on foot, caring not where she went, so that she escaped from Fergus and his sisters.

For many days she wandered over the mountains and valleys, living on the charity of the country people, and passing everywhere for a boy. Her tender feet bled from the stones, and she shivered in the cold winds. She knew not where to find a friend. She feared to return home, lest her father should give her up to Fergus. Often she had to sleep on the bare ground, and was terrified by the roar of wild beasts. And at last, since she could do no better, she hired herself to a peasant, to keep his sheep.

"Steel-Heart," she said, was her name, and that she had travelled from a country far away.

Time passed by, and Nerone still stayed in this place, patiently keeping sheep, and thinking herself forgotten. But at last there came riding by a gallant knight, and her heart beat fast when she saw the gilded shield that bore no device save the words *Sans nom*. This was his shield whom she had tended while he lay wounded in her father's castle, and it was no other voice that she now heard, as the knight reined his steed and looked curiously upon her.

"Pretty shepherd-boy, what is thy name?"

"Sir, they call me Steel-Heart," she answered, turning her blushing looks to the ground.

"With such a name methinks a youth might love to follow arms rather than to herd sheep. Say, wilt thou come with me, and serve me as my squire?"

"I ask no better!" she cried, with sparkling eyes.

Willingly, then, Steel-Heart threw her crook away, and followed this knight wherever he might go. Kindly he taught her the duties of a squire, courteously making allowance for her ignorance, and assisting her in those tasks which her feeble arms could not yet perform. If this was to serve, she told herself, she would rather serve such a master than be queen of the richest country in the world. And when first she undid his cuirass, what was her joy to see still round his neck that golden chain which she had placed there while he lay sick and unconscious of her loving care. She still treasured the ring which she had drawn from his finger, but she forbore to show it him, for she thought—

"He will not care to be reminded of me now. Doubtless, he will soon see some other lady more worthy of him. And, so I am near him, I can be content."

The knight rode on, and knew not that she

whom he still sought to find was with him night and day. Faithfully she served him as his squire, and followed him to many tournaments and feats of arms. Then proud and glad she was to see how he bore himself, and how all went down before his lance and shrank back from the edge of his sword; yet, in the heat of the fight, she trembled for his life, and had much ado to school herself to stand by and not betray the womanly fears that belied her name. But for his sake she endured such sights, as if her heart had indeed been of steel; and ever he came out victorious, and no man could earn the right to make him tell his name. The squire rejoiced, but the knight was sad in the midst of his triumphs, and he told her—

“For all this I care not, so long as in vain I seek a lady who, I think, loves me well, and suffers great wrong. Good Squire Steel-Heart, it will be a happy day that brings me to deliver her; and till then, I can take no rest.”

Nerone's heart was full; she thought the time was come when she must speak, yet still she kept silence, not knowing how to disclose herself. That night while he slept she placed his ring upon the knight's finger; and when he rose in the morning he saw it and knew it, and was

astonished. But not yet did he know the face of his young squire, to whom he loved so well to speak of that lady that bound up his wounds in her father's castle.

Thus the nameless knight rode east and west and north and south, and at last returned to the castle of the King of the Borders, to tell that his search had been in vain. The old king was almost blind with grief as well as age, and knew not his daughter's face. And none knew her in the guise of the squire Steel-Heart, when thus she returned to her home.

After waiting on her master's needs, she crept into the darkest corner of the hall and sat there unseen of all. When supper was over, the king called for music, and the minstrels came. Great songs they sang of the deeds of yore; then the squires and damsels played on the lute and sang tender strains of love; and Steel-Heart listened, keeping her eyes on the face of her knight.

He, in his turn, was asked if he would sing.

"Nay, I have no skill," he said. "But where is my squire Steel-Heart? I warrant he has a sweet voice."

So summoned, Nerone came forward and took the lute, and, standing in the firelight, began to

sing to it, in such a voice that the old king trembled as he heard, and all eyes were turned upon the young squire. Thus ran her song—

“Dreams not that wounded knight of her who watched
him night and day?

In vain a hateful suitor came and tore the maid away.

He sought in vain to win her love; he said her heart
was steel;

But ah! her heart another had—’twas true through woe
and weal.

“They thought her dead, but death came not to such a
woful wight;

She feigned to die, yet lived unknown again to tend her
knight.

She laced his helm and bore his shield, as squire and
serving boy;

And ah! while near her own true love, she asks no
other joy.”

At the first sound the knight started, calling to mind the voice that had sung to him in his sickness. As the song went on, he gazed upon his squire like one in a dream. And now when it ended, a cloud seem to have passed from his eyes. He sprang to his feet, and seized her hand.

“Nerone!” was the cry, as she fell into the arms of her father, weeping for joy.

The knight stood all amazed. Then Nerone turned to him, and he knelt before her.

“Ah! true maiden and faithful squire, thou hast

conquered me by love, and to thee I may tell my name! I am Hector, the King of the South. Be thou the mistress of me and all that is mine!"

Throughout the land all now was mirth and gladness. The King of the Borders joyfully gave his daughter's hand to this adventurous youth, who, since he had slain Fergus, was the sovereign lord of both North and South. The three kingdoms were henceforth joined in one, over which Hector and Nerone ruled happily and gloriously, till they alone were alive to remember the days when he rode unknown save as the knight without a name, and she followed him as his faithful squire with the heart of steel.





The Demon Knight.*



BRAVE and virtuous knight named Albert, journeying attended by a single squire, was one night hospitably entertained at the castle of a certain lord. After supper, the household gathered round the fire in

* This tale will be recognised as the foundation of the well-known episode in "Marmion":—

"Wonder it seemed, in the squire's eyes,
That one, so wary held, and wise—
Of whom 'twas said, he scarce received
For gospel, what the church believed,
Should, stirred by idle tale,
Ride forth in silence of the night,
As hoping half to meet a sprite,
Arrayed in plate and mail."

It would not have been used here, if it had not seemed the most characteristic specimen of a class of tale which was not to be left unrepresented.

the great hall, to pass the hour before retiring to rest. No minstrel or jongleur being present, they were fain to amuse themselves and the stranger by repeating old tales and traditions, well known in the neighbourhood. Among these was one which all but the guest had heard a hundred times, but which none ever heard without awe; for indeed it was a tale to move the boldest heart.

Not many miles from this castle was an ancient camp, surrounded by a natural rampart of earth, with but one opening to the circular field within which, so the story ran, had been the scene of a terrible slaughter in days long gone by. No human habitation was in sight, and no rash hand had ventured to turn up this earth, still stained, as men believed, with blood. Even by daylight the country people would scarcely dare to enter the enclosure. It was said to be haunted by a shape of dread, whose name was not to be spoken in a whisper, and whom no living eyes had seen. But if any man were courageous enough to seek this spot, armed and alone at the dead of night, and to call upon the spectre to appear, his challenge would not fail to be answered. A figure of prodigious height and strength would rise from

the ground, mounted and equipped as a knight. Then the too bold adventurer must defend himself with all his might, for one or other of the combatants was surely doomed to fall in that ghostly encounter. Many stout-hearted adventurers had not shrunk from the trial, but not one ever returned to tell how he had fared with the Demon Knight.

Such was the tale at which old men still shuddered, and which made the youths and damsels creep closer together, and draw into the dying light of the hearth. When it was finished, all sat still, and no word was spoken till the master of the castle suddenly rose and proposed to his guest that they should retire for the night.

Albert willingly agreed, for he was tired by a long day's journey, and meant to set out at an early hour next day. The members of the household dispersed, hurrying through the shadows of the vaulted corridors, and casting fearful looks from side to side. The guest was conducted to his chamber and left to repose.

But the story of the Demon Knight had taken too strong hold of his mind to be easily shaken off. The lights went out one by one; the rest of

the castle sank into slumber ; no sound was heard but the steady tramp of the warder without and the breathing of his squire sleeping at the door of his chamber—while still the young knight lay awake, thinking of what he had just heard. Restlessly he turned from side to side, and tried in vain to banish the curiosity which had been so powerfully excited in him. He closed his eyes, and his mind was filled with visions of the spectral champion. He opened them and saw the moonlight falling through a barred arch upon his glittering arms. From moment to moment his brain grew more and more heated, and a mad desire to seek this mysterious spot possessed him with greater and greater force. He had never feared to face a foe in mortal form, and never could he hope to find such a chance to win glory as in this combat, where all others had failed. How could he rest when such an adversary was awaiting him?

So his fevered thoughts ran on, and at last he could no longer resist the impulse which urged him to this perilous adventure. He leaped out of bed and roused his squire, who was amazed to learn his master's intention, but knew him too well to oppose it. By the moonlight he did on

the knight's arms; then, softly stealing down to the court-yard, they saddled their horses, and left the castle without awaking any one but the porter. From him Albert received directions for the way to the old camp, and paid no heed to his earnest warning not to approach it at such an hour.

They rode forth, and were soon galloping recklessly across a bare, bleak moor, full of pits and morasses, in the centre of which rose the hollow mound said to be haunted by this phantom. It was a cold and cheerless night; heavy clouds rolled over the sky, and only by occasional glimpses of the moon did they catch sight of the dark ramparts towards which they were hastening. But Albert did not halt till he was close to the entrance of the camp. There, beneath the weird shadows of a thunder-blasted oak, he drew rein and looked around.

The night air had cooled his excited mood, and he felt half inclined to return without entering the magic circle. His squire, too, terrified by the look of the place and the tale told of it, now ventured to beg him to desist from such a hopeless undertaking. A moment's reflection, however, told Albert that he could not withdraw with

honour, and he resolved to proceed, come what might. Ordering the squire to await him beside this tree, and to go back to the castle if he did not return by sunrise, he rode forward to the entrance.

His horse neighed, and plunged violently, and all its master's strength was required to make the high-spirited animal leap the trench and pass through the opening of the circle. As they entered, and the hoofs fell upon the soft turf within, the moon was suddenly hid by a cloud, and the enclosure was plunged in darkness. All was silent as the grave. A cold wind swept by, striking a deadly chill through Albert's limbs. His heart beat as he strained his eyes into the surrounding shadows, and feared to see them peopled by phantom forms. He felt the horse trembling under him, and his own knees began to shake. But he manned himself; and firmly grasping his lance, raised his voice with an effort—

“Appear!”

The word sounded deep and hollow as in a vault, and was rolled back by echoes on every side. And instantly Albert was aware that a shadowy thing, dark even in the darkness, had risen like a vapour from the earth, and was taking

shape opposite him as a huge knight mounted upon a huge horse. No word it spoke, and there was no clash of these ghostly arms; but the young knight perceived that the unearthly form was bearing down upon him, and that he had need of all his courage and skill. Driving the spurs deep into his horse's flanks, he urged it wildly forward; and they met halfway. Never had Albert felt such a shock. His own lance seemed to glide off the armour of his adversary; as for himself, he scarcely knew how it went with him. He was borne from his saddle; his brain whirled round as he put his hand to his sword hilt; all was blindness and amazement; he struck wildly in the air; and the first thing of which he was clearly conscious was lying helplessly on the ground, while the phantom stood over him with naked sword and spoke fearful words—words such as no human lips can frame, and no human ears can hear, save when the soul stands upon the brink of eternal loss.

The young knight shuddered to know that he was being bidden renounce his redemption and vow for ever to serve the powers of evil. He gave himself up for dead. He closed his eyes; his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth; his limbs

seemed to be frozen with horror. He could only press to his heart the cross upon the hilt of his sword; then he gained strength for a moment, and murmured the name of CHRIST.

A wild shriek rang through the ramparts. Albert raised his head, and saw that his demon foe had vanished at the sacred word. The moon came out from the clouds and lit up the grassy ring. It was empty, save for himself and the black steed of his late adversary. His own horse had fled.

Earnestly thanking Heaven for his deliverance, Albert seized the rein of the black steed and led it away. Beneath the oak tree he found his horse and squire, who, seeing it return riderless, had given his master up for lost. In a few words, the knight told him what had happened, and they rode back to the castle, where they arrived before daybreak.

The rattling of the drawbridge and the trampling of hoofs brought forth the inhabitants, who hastened forward to learn the young knight's tale. At first they refused to believe him, thinking he was relating a dream. But when they saw the horse which he had won from the Demon Knight, they could no longer doubt, and broke out into

loud cries of wonder and admiration, as well they might.

Albert received their praises with modesty, and retired to remove his armour, accompanied by the master of the castle, who could not contain his joy to see his guest return from such an adventure alive and unhurt. So he himself supposed ; but when they came to disarm him, one of his thigh-pieces was found full of clotted blood from a severe wound which he had not noticed till now. And now he began to recall the incidents of the desperate struggle, and became aware that his foe had hurled at him the fragment of his broken spear and thus given him this hurt.

Meanwhile, in the court-yard, a crowd was gathered round the horse of the vanquished. By the light of torches, it could be seen to be a magnificent charger of prodigious size, black as jet, with large eyes shining like fire, and a great mane streaming from its proudly arched neck. It foamed, and reared, and pawed the ground so furiously that few cared to draw near it. Suddenly the cock crew. With an angry snort, it broke from the hands of the squire, dashed through the gate, and disappeared in the grey light of early dawn.

Albert lay long at the castle before recovering from his wound. At length it healed, but every year for the rest of his life it broke out afresh upon the same night and at the very hour of that ghostly encounter. Men said that henceforth the ancient camp was freed from its dreadful spell; and no eye has ever again beheld the Demon Knight.





The Challenge.

THE King of England had married a daughter of the King of France, and held high festival at Greenwich, then the residence of his court. From all parts of Europe came princes and knights to be present at this ceremony and to take part in the tournaments which had been proclaimed in honour of it. Seldom had such splendid rejoicings been seen in any land. Every hour not devoted to tilting in the lists was taken up by magnificent processions, solemn religious services, and sumptuous feasts in the royal palace. For the common crowd there was no lack of games and spectacles; oxen were roasted whole at blazing bonfires, wine ran freely in the market-place, prisoners were released, alms were bountifully distributed to the poor. Mirth

and joy filled all the country, and every voice was raised to invoke blessings upon the royal pair.

On the first day of the tournaments the honour of knighthood was conferred by the king's hand upon a number of bachelors, the flower of the young nobility of his own and the neighbouring countries. Among the new-made knights were a young Spaniard called Tirante the White, from the colour of his armour, and the Seigneur de Villermes, the heir of one of the greatest families in France, both of whom were no sooner girded with their swords than they bid fair to distinguish themselves among their compeers. Neither of them hesitated to touch the shields of the oldest and best-tried champions, and both bore themselves so gallantly in every encounter, that all men said the sovereigns to whom they owed allegiance were happy to have young knights so well able to win their spurs on a stricken field.

The festivities were brought to an end by a grand banquet, at which these two youths were among the guests. When after supper the knights and ladies met to dance in the hall, Tirante's regards were attracted by the elegance and love-

liness of the young Lady Agnes, a near relation of the queen, who was yet singularly pleasing and modest in her manners, with none of that pride which is so often found in persons of lofty birth. So the young Spaniard ventured to approach and request her hand for the dance; after which he addressed her with a profound reverence—

“The virtue, the high rank, the beauty, the gracefulness, and the wit which unite in you, fair Agnes, unite also to make me most desirous of being counted among the humblest but most faithful of your servants. Grant me, I pray you, that knot which you wear upon your bosom, that I may carry it all my life in token of your condescension; and I swear by the order of chivalry which I have received, that in your honour I will fight with any knight to the death, on foot or horseback, armed or disarmed.”

“Ah! why risk your life for such a one as I?” cried Agnes, blushing; but she took off the knot, set with diamonds, and handed it to the young knight, who received it on his knees, saying, as she fastened it in his cap—

“Madam, I can never thank you enough for the present you have just made me, which I will ever value more than the crown of a kingdom.”

But this was beheld with jealous eyes by the Seigneur de Villermes. He seized an opportunity to draw Tirante aside, and said—

“Sir, you have much audacity; never knight ventured to make such a demand of such a lady as the peerless Agnes. By goodwill or by force, you must give up to me the favour which you have just received at her hands, for I have more right to it than you, since from my youth I have served and respected this lady. I must have it; do not force me to deprive you of your life as well,” he continued, touching the hilt of his sword.

“Forsooth!” replied Tirante, “I should be regarded as the most infamous and worthless of knights, if I gave up to you this favour which I have sworn to preserve with my life. Sir, your words are too high; I must bring down your pride.”

Then as the Frenchman laid his hands upon the jewelled knot, Tirante hurled him back, and both blades flew out of the scabbards. It was all the spectators of this scene could do to part them. Out of regard for the presence of the king and queen, however, they put up their swords for the present, and each retired to his lodging, accompanied by his friends.

Before long the page of De Villermes brought to Tirante a letter in these terms—

“To thee, Don Tirante, surnamed the White, who hast been the destruction of so many champions. If thou art not afraid to risk thy life, I leave thee the choice of arms: armed, disarmed, on foot or horseback, naked or clothed, it matters not to me, so long as I may fight with thee to the death. Written by my own hand, and sealed with my seal. DE VILLERMES.”

Tirante read the letter, and dismissed the page courteously, with a present of ten crowns of gold. Then he went out to search for the herald king-at-arms, and after binding him to secrecy, showed him the challenge which he had just received, and begged him to go at once to Villermes to arrange the terms of the combat. And, though the other was the aggressor, he left to him the choice of arms. A blank paper signed and sealed was delivered to the king-at-arms by Tirante, who at the same time presented him with a mantle of rich brocade edged with fur.

The herald at once sought out Villermes, and drawing him apart, said—

“My lord, I wish well that I might bring you and Sir Tirante into accord, but if you

persist in your resolution, here is your letter and his reply: it is, as you see, a *carte blanche* signed by his hand and sealed with his arms. You are the aggressor, but decide all as you will, and let the combat be as soon as you please."

The Lord of Villermes was charmed with his rival's courtesy. He replied to the king-at-arms that he willingly accepted the right of choice given him by his enemy, and proposed that they should fight on foot, with no armour save a linen shirt, a buckler of paper, and a helmet of flowers. Neither should use any other weapon than his sword. The time was fixed for that same evening, at an hour when the king and the court would be attending divine service.

Armed in this fantastic fashion, the French and the Spanish knight met in a secluded grove. No spectators were present except a few of their most intimate friends and the herald who was appointed to be judge of the combat. Before giving the signal for its commencement, he made a final attempt to reconcile them, but neither would listen to any such entreaty.

"So be it!" he said, withdrawing, and leaving them face to face, when he had declared that this

combat was *à outrance*, and that one or both could not leave the field alive.

Meanwhile the idle page of Villermes had thought to please Lady Agnes by telling her what was passing. Far other was the effect of his story on her gentle heart. She turned pale, and wrung her hands, bitterly reproaching herself for her innocent share in this quarrel.

"Alas!" she cried, once and again, "that for my sake such knights should fall to such strife. Never can I have a happy hour if one of them perish in this deadly combat; and all my life shall I wear no other robe than the bloodstained robe of the slain, to be a token to all ladies how they lightly bestow their favours!"

Her lips had scarce strength to frame this vow before she swooned away in sight of the king, as he was coming from chapel. He stayed to ask what ailed the lady, and when they told him of the strange fight that was even then being fought, he frowned for the first time since his wedding-day. There was no need for the queen to beseech his interference. Ordering his horse, he rode quickly to the scene of the combat.

He arrived in time to see both combatants almost at the end of their strength. The garlands



“‘Hold! shame upon you,’ he spoke, looking sternly from one to the other; ‘shame it is to seek your brother’s blood for so light a cause.’”—p. 275. *The Challenge;*

of flowers which formed their helmets had long since been trampled in the dust; their useless bucklers were cut into shreds; their fine linen shirts were covered with stains and great streams of blood, and gashes through which the frightful wounds could be seen. Yet the knights, though scarce able to stand, were still fighting feebly; but their swords fell from their hands, and they staggered back, as the king on his foaming horse burst between them and cried—"Hold!"

"Shame upon you!" he spoke, looking sternly from one to the other. "Shame it is to seek your brother's blood for so light a cause. Are there no foes of God and man, that thus ye strive for a foolish conceit and to win the praise of fools? Never does the true knight lack enemies against whom it behoves him to risk his life, but little do ye regard the vows of knighthood, and well may it come to ruin through such as you who have brought our revels to this end by your false pride and idle wrangling. Therefore for a year and a day I forbid you both to wear in my court the arms which ye have girded on without learning to rule your spirits better than angry boys; and henceforth let all know that they do but harm their own fame and the love of ladies and

the service of their sovereign, who draw the sword save in a worthy cause, in which alone it can be sheathed without dishonour."

Exhausted by loss of blood and overwhelmed by shame, the young knights could not utter a word. As the king turned away, they fell helpless on the ground, wet with their wasted blood. Litters were brought, and they were carried slowly back to their lodgings. It was long before their severe wounds were healed; then both departed to the East to fight against the Turks in the ranks of Christendom.

THE END.

OSB

M

MONCRIEFF

OLD...

[1877]

37131 013 246 327



THE
JOHN SULLIVAN HAYES
COLLECTION

A Bequest to
THE OSBORNE COLLECTION - TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY
in memory of

JOHN SULLIVAN HAYES & JO ANN ELLIOTT HAYES
from their children

ANN ALCYN AND ELLIOTT HAYES

977.05 KVM

