



Complete Works of
Sir Thomas Malory

DELPHI  CLASSICS

Series Five

The Complete Works of
SIR THOMAS MALORY

(c.1434-1471)



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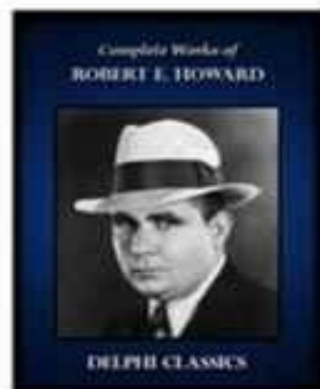
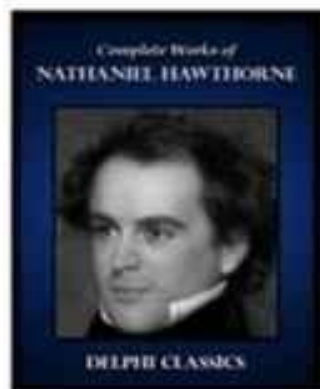
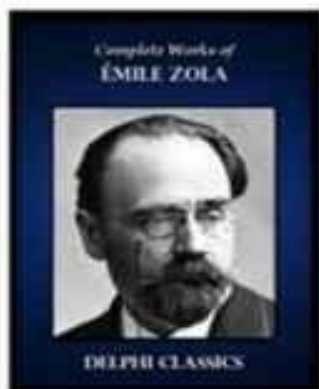
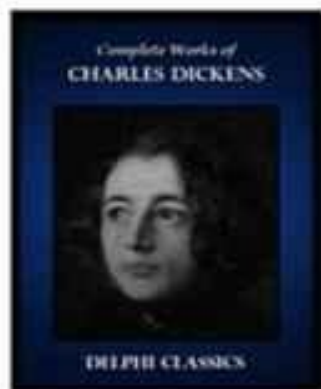


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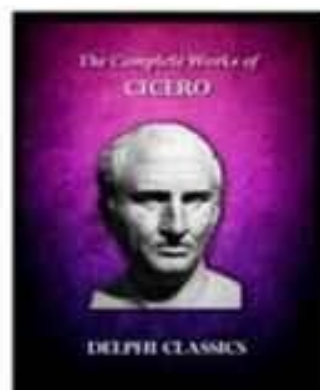
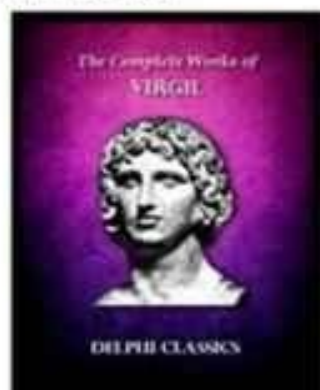
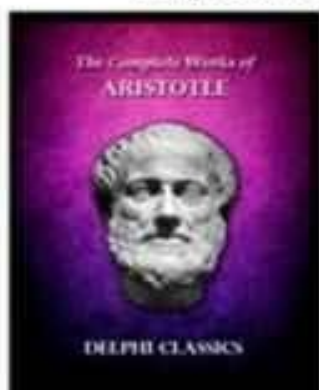
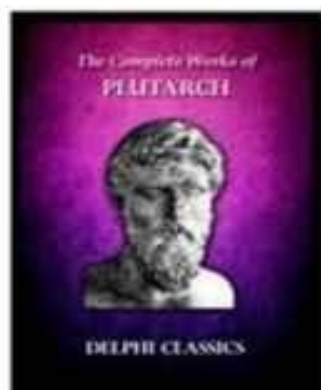
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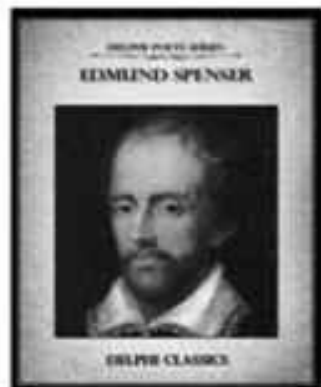
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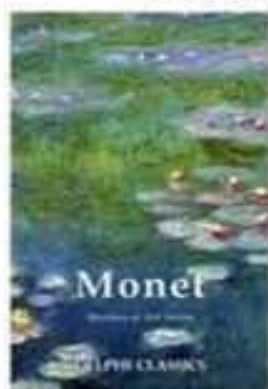
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The Complete Works of
SIR THOMAS MALORY



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Le Morte Darthur



Newbold Revel, Warwickshire—generally agreed to be Sir Thomas Malory's birthplace



First published in 1485 by William Caxton, *Le Morte Darthur* ('the death of Arthur') is a compilation by Sir Thomas Malory of romance-era tales concerning the legendary King Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot and the other Knights of the Round Table. Malory interprets existing French and English stories about these figures and adds original material, including the Gareth story.

Historically recorded as a member of the landed gentry of Warwickshire in the English Midlands, Sir Thomas Malory was reportedly a knight that flourished in the 1440s. However, in spite of the chivalrous behaviour of the knights whose adventures and quests he recounts, Malory's own life was punctuated with a series of terrible crimes, including attempted murder, cattle raids, poaching, extortion, robbery and rape. Twice he escaped from prison and twice he was excluded by name from general pardons, the last whilst completing his composition of *Le Morte Darthur*.

It is believed Malory started work on the collection of tales while he was in prison in the early 1450s, completing the collection of tales by 1470. The full title for the book was "The hoole booke of kyng Arthur & of his noble knyghtes of the rounde table", but Caxton instead titled the work with Malory's name for the final section of the cycle. The Middle English language used in *Le Morte Darthur* is much closer to Early Modern English than the Middle English of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, bearing a close resemblance, especially in a modernised spelling text, to an Elizabethan English work.

Only two copies of Caxton's original 1485 printing are still known to exist, which are housed in the collections of the Morgan Library and Museum and the John Rylands Library. The work proved popular and was reprinted, with some additions and changes, in 1498 and 1529 by Wynkyn de Worde who succeeded Caxton's press. Three more editions were published before the English Civil War: William Copland's (1557), Thomas East's (1585), and William Stansby's (1634), each of which contained additional changes and errors, including the omission of an entire leaf. Thereafter *Le Morte Darthur* went out of fashion until the Romantic revival of interest in all things medieval in the nineteenth century.

In 1934, a manuscript of *Le Morte Darthur* was discovered in the library of Winchester College which was found to be closer to Malory than Caxton's printed edition of 1485. Neither text derived from the other and both are removed from Malory's original holograph. Curiously, although Caxton did not use the Winchester manuscript in preparing his printed text, it was in his possession at the time, as can be determined by type smudges on the manuscript. The Winchester Manuscript is now judged by scholars to be the closest text to Malory's translation and compilation.

Caxton separated Malory's eight books into twenty-one books, dividing each into a total of 50 chapters, while adding a summary of each chapter and a colophon to the entire book. Malory's original eight tales are:

1. The birth and rise of Arthur: "From the Marriage of King Uther unto King Arthur the King Reigned After Him and Did Many Battles"
2. King Arthur's war against the Romans: "The Noble Tale Between King Arthur and Lucius the Emperor of Rome"
3. The book of Lancelot: "The Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lac"
4. The book of Gareth (brother of Gawain): "The Tale of Sir Gareth"
5. Tristan and Isolde: "The Book of Sir Tristrams de Lyons"
6. The Quest for the Holy Grail: "The Noble Tale of the Sangreal"
7. The affair between Lancelot and Guinevere: "Sir Launcelot and Queen Gwynevere"

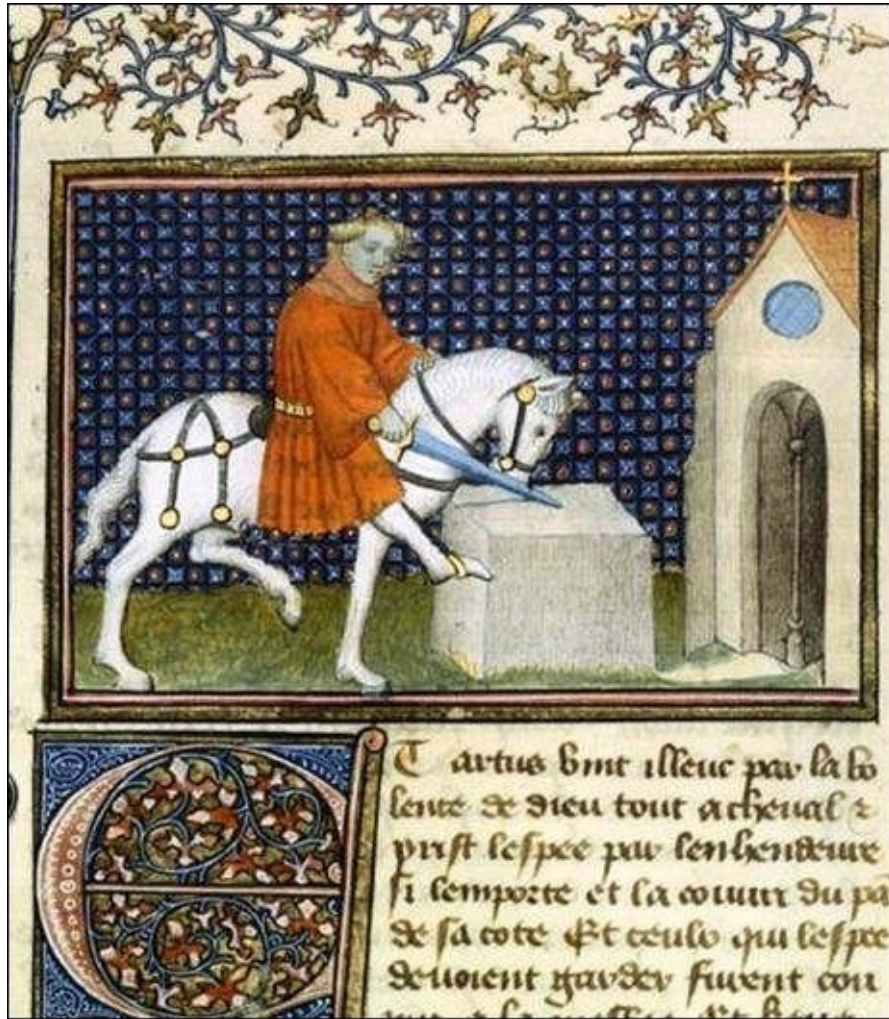
Most of the events in *Le Morte Darthur* take place in Britain and France in the latter half of the fifteenth century. In some parts, the story ventures farther afield, to Rome and Sarras, near Babylon, recalling Biblical tales from the ancient Near East.

The first book concerns the birth of Arthur, who was the offspring of Uther Pendragon and Igraine due to the supernatural meddling of Merlin. Following his birth, Arthur is taken by Sir Ector to be fostered in the country. He later becomes the king of a leaderless England, after removing the fabled sword from the stone. Arthur goes on to win many battles due to his military prowess and Merlin's counsel. He then begins to consolidate his kingdom.

This book also tells “The Tale of Balyn and Balan”, which ends in accidental fratricide and the begetting of Mordred, Arthur's incestuous son by his half-sister, Morgause. Throughout the book Malory addresses fifteenth century preoccupations with legitimacy and societal unrest, which themes often reoccur in *Le Morte Darthur*. Malory's concern with legitimacy reflects the concerns of 15th century England, where many were claiming their rights to power through violence and bloodshed. Genealogy was a means to legitimise power in a less arbitrary manner and Malory often calls this into question. In the end, the book still holds out for hope even while the questions of legitimacy and morality continue in the books to follow. Arthur and his knights continually try and fail to live up to their chivalric codes, yet remain figures invested with Malory's desperate optimism.

The beginning of **Arthur**. For he was chosen king
by adventure and by grace for the most part of the barons. And he was
Arthur son of **Uther** as **Merlin** made hit openly known. And
yet many things and things should him greet things for that cause. And **Merlin**
Arthur on that day all the most part of his life he was ruled by the command
of **Merlin**. So hit fell on a time **Merlin** sende unto **Merlin** and
advised that let me have no rest but I muste take a wyff. I wolde now
take hit by thy command and advice. Hit ys well done for **Merlin** that
ye take a wyff for a man of your comite and nobill people
not be w^t oute a wyff. For is it any thing. **Merlin** that
ye love more than I no. ye sende **Merlin** I love **Merlin**
my were the thing daughter of **Merlin** of the land of **Merlin**
lande the **Merlin** gold. In this house the table rounde that ye
tolde me ye had hit of my father **Merlin** and that **Merlin** is
moste valiant and sayest that I knowe hit by or yet that
I cande fynde. **Merlin** sende **Merlin** ad off her beaute and fayre
nesse she is one of the fayrest on hve. But and ye loved her not
so well as ye do I shold fynde you a damysell of beaute and
of goodnesse that sholde love you and please you and your
part were nat sette. But before ad named her is sette
she wold be lott to retorne. that is to wote the thing **Merlin**
Merlin that **Merlin** that **Merlin** that **Merlin** that **Merlin** that
gold for you to take to wyff. for she warned you that **Merlin**
celor sholde love you and fynde you a gayne. and so she turned
tale to the adventures of the **Merlin**. **Merlin** is desired of
the thing for to fynde men w^t you of people enquire of **Merlin**
and so the thing granted you and so **Merlin** wente forth
unto the thing **Merlin** of **Merlin** and tolde you of the desire
of the thing of she wolde fynde unto the wyff **Merlin** that
that is to me sende the thing **Merlin** the best thing that
en I fynde that so wote a thing of probesse and noblesse and wolde
my daughter. and ad for my lande I wolde geff you of I wyff

A page from the Winchester Manuscript



Detail from a fifteenth century French manuscript, portraying Arthur pulling the sword from the stone

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Detail of 'The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon' by Edward Burne-Jones, 1881

CAXTON'S PREFACE

⁽¹⁾AFTER that I had accomplisshed and fynysshed dyvers hystories as wel of contemplacyon as other hystorial and worldly actes of grete conquerours and prynces, and also certeyn bookes ensaumples and doctryne, many noble and dyvers gentylnen of thys royaume of Englonde camen and demaunded me many and oftymes wherfore that I have not do made and enprynte the noble hystorie of the Saynt Greal and of the moost renommed Crysten kyng, fyrst and chyef of the thre best Crysten and worthy, Kyng Arthur, whyche ought moost to be remembred emonge us Englysshemen tofore other Crysten kynges.

For it is notoyrly knowen thorough the unyversal world that there been nine worthy and the best that ever were, that is to wete, thre Paynymes, thre Jewes, and thre Crysten men. As for the Paynymes, the first were tofore the Incarnacyon of Cryst, whiche were named, the fyrst Hector of Troye, of whome th'ystorye is comen bothe in balade and in prose, the second Alysander the Grete, and the thyrde Julyus Cezar, Emperour of Rome, of whome th'ystories ben wel knowen and had. And as for the thre Jewes whyche also were tofore th'Yncarnacyon of our Lord, of whome the fyrst was Duc Josue whyche brought the chyldren of Israhel into the londe of byheste, the second Davyd, kyng of Jerusalem, and the thyrde Judas Machabeus, of these thre the Byble reherceth al theyr noble hystories and actes. And sythe the sayd Incarnacyon have ben thre noble Crysten men stalled and admytted thorough the unyversal world into the nombre of the nine beste and worthy, of whome was fyrst the noble Arthur, whos noble actes I purpose to wryte in thys present book here folowyng. The second was Charlemayn, or Charles the Grete, of whome th'ystorye is had in many places, bothe in Frensshe and Englysshe; and the thyrde and last was Godefray of Boloyne, of whos actes and lyf I made a book unth' excellent prynce and kyng of noble memorye, Kyng Edward the Fourth.

The sayd noble jentylnen instantly requyred me t'empynte th'ystorye of the sayd noble kyng and conquerour Kyng Arthur and of his knyghtes, wyth th'ystorye of the Saynt Greal and of the deth and endyng of the sayd Arthur, affermyng that I ought rather t'empynte his actes and noble feates than of Godefroye of Boloyne or any of the other eyght, consyderyng that he was a man borne wythin thys royaume and kyng and emperour of the same, and that there ben in Frensshe dyvers and many noble volumes of his actes, and also of his knyghtes.

To whome I answerd that dyvers men holde oppynyon that there was no suche Arthur and that al suche bookes as been maad of hym ben but fayned and fables, bycause that somme cronycles make no mencyon ne remembre hym noothynge, ne of his knyghtes.

Wherto they answerd, and one in specyall sayd, that in hym that shold say or thynke that there was never suche a kyng callyd Arthur myght wel be aretted grete folye and blyndenesse, for he sayd that there were many evydences of the contrarye. Fyrst, ye may see his sepulture in the monasterye of Glastyngburye; and also in Polycronycon, in the fifth book, the syxte chappytre, and in the seven book, the twenty-thyrde chappytre, where his body was buryed, and after founden and translated in the sayd monasterye. Ye shal se also in th'ystorye of Bochas, in his book DE CASU PRINCIPUM, the seconde parte of his noble actes, and also of his falle. Also Galfrydus, in his Brutysse book, recounteth his lyf. And in dyvers places of Englonde many remembraunces ben yet of hym and shall remayne perpetuell and also of his knyghtes: fyrst, in the abbey of Westmestre, at Saynt Edwardes shryne, remayneth the prynte of his seal in reed waxe, closed in beryll, in whych is wryton PATRICIUS ARTHURUS REGIS BRITANNIE GALLIE GERMANIE DACIE IMPERATOR; item, in the castel of Dover ye may see Gauwayns skulle and Cradoks mantel; at Wynchester, the Rounde Table; in other places Launcelottes swerde and many other thynges.

Thenne, al these thynges consydered, there can no man resonably gaynsaye but there was a kyng thys lande named Arthur. For in al places, Crysten and hethen, he is reputed and taken for one of the nine worthy, and the fyrst of the thre Crysten men. And also he is more spoken of beyonde the see moo bookes made of his noble actes, than there be in Englund; as wel in Duche, Ytalyen, Spaynyssh and Grekysshe, as in Frensshe. And yet of record remayne in wytnesse of hym in Wales, in the tour of Camelot, the grete stones and mervayllous werkys of yron lyeng under the grounde, and ryal vautes which dyvers now lyvyng hath seen. Wherfor it is a mervayl why he is no more renommed in his owne contreye, sauf onelye it accordeth to the word of God, whyche sayth that no man is accept for prophete in his owne contreye.

Thenne, al these thynges forsayd aledged, I coude not wel denye but that there was suche a noble kyng named Arthur, and reputed one of the nine worthy, and fyrst and chyef of the Cristen men. And many noble volumes be made of hym and of his noble knyghtes in Frensshe, which I have seen and redde beyonde the see, which been not had in our maternal tongue. But in Walsshe ben many, and also in Frensshe, and somme in Englysshe, but nowher nygh alle. Wherfore, suche as have late ben drawen oute bryefly into Englysshe, I have, after the symple connyng that God hath sente to me, under the favour and correctyon of al noble lordes and gentylnen, enprysed to enprynte a book of the noble hystories of the sayd Kyng Arthur and of certeyn of his knyghtes, after a cople unto me delyvered whyche cople Syr Thomas Malorye dyd take oute of certeyn bookes of Frensshe and reduced it into Englysshe.

And I, accordyng to my cople, have doon sette it in enprynte to the entente that noble men may see and lerne the noble actes of chyvalrye, the jentyl and vertuouse dedes that somme knyghtes used in the dayes, by whyche they came to honour, and how they that were vycious were punysshed and ofte put to shame and rebuke; humbly bysechyng al noble lordes and ladyes wyth al other estates, of what estate or degree they been of, that shal see and rede in this sayd book and werke, that they take the good and honest actes in their remembraunce, and to folowe the same; wherin they shalle fynde many joyous and playsaunt hystories and noble and renommed actes of humanyté, gentylnesse, and chyvalryes. For herein may be seen noble chyvalrye, curtosye, humanyté, frendlynesse, hardynesse, love, frendshyp, cowardyse, murdre, hate, vertue, and synne. Doo after the good and leve the evyl, and it shal bryng you to good fame and renommee.

And for to passe the tyme thys book shal be plesaunte to rede in, but for to gyve fayth and byleve that al is trewe that is conteyned herin, ye be at your lyberté. But al is wryton for our doctryne, and for to beware that we falle not to vyce ne synne, but t'exersyse and folowe vertu, by whyche we may come and atteyne to good fame and renommé in thys lyf, and after thys shorte and transytorye lyf to come unto everlastyng bysse in heven; the whyche He graunte us that reygne in heven, the Blessyd Trynyté. AMEN.

Thenne, to procéde forth in thys sayd book, whyche I dyrecte unto alle noble prynces, lordes, and ladyes, gentylnen or gentylwymmen, that desyre to rede or here redde of the noble and joyous hystorie of the grete conquerour and excellent kyng, Kyng Arthur, somtyme kyng of thys noble royalme thenne callyd Brytayne, I, Wyllyam Caxton, symple persone, present thys book folowyng whyche I have enprysed t'enprynte: and treateth of the noble actes, feates of armes of chyvalrye, prowess, hardynesse, humanyté, love, curtosye, and veray gentylnesse, wyth many wonderfull hystories and adventures.

BOOK I. THE TALE OF KING ARTHUR

I. MERLIN

⁽¹⁾HIT befel in the dayes of Uther Pendragon, when he was kynge of all Englonde and so regned, that there was a myghty duke in Cornewail that helde warre ageynst hym long tyme, and the duke was called the duke of Tyntagil. And so by meanes kynge Uther send for this duk chargyng hym to bryng his wyf with hym, for she was called a fair lady and a passyng wyse, and her name was called Igrayne.

So whan the duke and his wyf were comyn unto the kynge, by the meanes of grete lordes they were accorded bothe. The kynge lyked and loved this lady wel, and he made them grete chere out of mesur and desyred to have lyen by her, but she was a passyng good woman and wold not assente unto the kynge. And thenne she told the duke her husband and said, 'I suppose that we were sente for that shold be dishonoured. Wherfor, husband, I counceille yow that we departe from hens sodenly, that we maye ryde all nyghte unto oure owne castell.'

And in lyke wyse as she saide so they departed, that neyther the kynge nor none of his counceill were ware of their departyng. Also soone as kyng Uther knewe of their departyng soo sodenly, he was wonderly wrothe; thenne he called to hym his pryvy counceille and told them of the sodeynly departyng of the duke and his wyf. Thenne they avysed the kynge to send for the duke and his wyf by grete charge:

'And yf he wille not come at your somons, thenne may ye do your best; thenne have ye cause to make myghty werre upon hym.' Soo that was done, and the messagers hadde their ansuers; and that was thys, shortly, that neyther he nor his wyf wold not come at hym. Thenne was the kyng wonderly wroth; and thenne the kyng sente hym playne word ageyne and badde hym be redy and stuffe hym and garnyssh him, for within forty dayes he wold fetche hym oute of the byggest castell that he hath.

Whanne the duke hadde thys warnyng anone he wente and furnysshed and garnysshed two strong castels of his, of the whiche the one hyght Tyntagil and the other castel hyght Terrabyl. So his wyf dame Igrayne, he putte in the castell of Tyntagil, and hymself he putte in the castel of Terrabyl, the whiche had many yssues and posternes oute. Thenne in all haste came Uther with a grete hoost and leyde a syege aboute the castel of Terrabil, and ther he pyght many pavelyons. And there was grete warre made on bothe partyes and moche peple slayne.

Thenne for pure angre and for grete love of fayr Igrayne the kyng Uther felle seke. So came to the kynge Uther syre Ulfius, a noble knyght, and asked the kynge why he was seke.

'I shall telle the,' said the kynge. 'I am seke for angre and for love of fayre Igrayne, that I may not be hool.'

'Wel, my lord,' said syre Ulfius, 'I shal seke Merlyn and he shalle do yow remedy, that youre hert shal be pleasyd.'

So Ulfius departed and by adventure he mette Merlyn in a beggars aray, and ther Merlyn asked Ulfius whome he soughte, and he said he had lytyl ado to telle hym.

'Well,' saide Merlyn, 'I knowe whome thou sekest, for thou sekest Merlyn; therefore seke no ferther for I am he. And yf kynge Uther wille wel rewarde me and be sworne unto me to fulfille my desyre that shall be his honour and profite more than myn, for I shalle cause hym to have alle his desyre.'

'Alle this wyll I undertake,' said Ulfius, 'that ther shalle be nothyng resonable but thow shalt have thy desyre.'

'Well,' said Merlyn, 'he shall have his entente and desyre, and therefore,' saide Merlyn, 'ryde on your wey, for I wille not be long behynde.'

Thenne Ulfius was glad and rode on more than a paas tyll that he ⁽²⁾came to kynge Uther Pendragon

and told hym he had met with Merlyn.

‘Where is he?’ said the kyng.

‘Sir,’ said Ulfius, ‘he wille not dwelle long.’

Therwithal Ulfius was ware where Merlyn stood at the porche of the pavelions dore, and then Merlyn was bounde to come to the kyng. Whan kyng Uther sawe hym he said he was welcome.

‘Syr,’ said Merlyn, ‘I knowe al your hert every dele. So ye wil be sworn unto me, as ye be a true kyng enoynted, to fulfille my desyre, ye shal have your desyre.’

Thenne the kyng was sworne upon the four Evangelistes.

‘Syre,’ said Merlyn, ‘this is my desyre: the first nyght that ye shal lye by Igrayne ye shal gete a child on her; and whan that is borne, that it shall be delyverd to me for to nourisshe thereas I wil have it, for it shal be your worship and the childis availle as mykel as the child is worth.’

‘I wylle wel,’ said the kyng, ‘as thow wilt have it.’

‘Now make you redy,’ said Merlyn. ‘This nyght ye shalle lye with Igrayne in the castel of Tyntigayll. And ye shalle be lyke the duke her husband, Ulfius shal be lyke syre Brastias, a knyghte of the dukes, and I will be lyke a knyghte that hyghte syr Jordanus, a knyghte of the dukes. But wayte ye make not many questions with her nor her men, but saye ye are diseased, and soo hye yow to bedde and ryse not on the morne tyll I come to yow, for the castel of Tyntigayll is but ten myle hens.’

Soo this was done as they devysed. But the duke of Tyntigayll aspyed hou the kyng rode fro the syde of Tarabil. And therfor that nyghte he yssued oute of the castel at a posterne for to have distressid the kynges hooste, and so thorowe his owne yssue the duke hymself was slayne or ever the kyng cam to the castel of Tyntigayll. So after the deth of the duke kyng Uther lay with Igrayne, more than thre houres after his deth, and begat on her that nyght Arthur; and or day cam, Merlyn cam to the kyng and bad hym make hym redy, and so he kist the lady Igrayne and departed in all hast. But whan the lady herd telle of the duke her husband, and by all record he was dede or ever kyng Uther came to her, thenne she merveilled who that myghte be that laye with her in lykenes of her lord. So she mourned pryvely and held hir pees.

Thenne alle the barons by one assent prayd the kyng of accord betwixe the lady Igrayne and hym. The kyng gaf hem leve, for fayne wold he have ben accorded with her; soo the kyng put alle the trueth in Ulfius to entrete bitwene them. So by the entreté at the last the kyng and she met togyder.

‘Now wille we doo wel,’ said Ulfius; ‘our kyng is a lusty knyghte and wyveles, and my lady Igrayne is a passynge fair lady; it were grete joye unto us all and hit myghte please the kyng to make her his quene.’

Unto that they all well accordyd and meved it to the kyng. And anone lyke a lusty knyghte he assentid therto with good wille, and so in alle haste they were maryed in a mornyng with grete myrthe and joye.

And kyng Lott of Lowthean and of Orkenay thenne wedded Margawse that was Gaweyns moder and kyng Nentres of the land of Garlot wedded Elayne: al this was done at the request of kyng Uther. And the thyrd syster, Morgan le Fey, was put to scole in a nonnery, and ther she lerned so moche that she was a grete clerke of nygromancye. And after she was wedded to kyng Uryens of the lond of Gore that was syre Ewayns le Blaunche Maynys fader.

Thenne quene Igrayne waxid dayly gretter and gretter. So it befel ^[3] after within half a yere, as kyng Uther lay by his quene, he asked hir by the feith she ought to hym whos was the child within her body. Thenne was she sore abashed to yeve ansuer.

‘Desmaye you not,’ said the kyng, ‘but telle me the trouthe, and I shall love you the better, by the feythe of my body!’

‘Syre,’ saide she, ‘I shalle telle you the trouthe. The same nyghte that my lord was dede, the houres after of his deth as his knyghtes record, ther came into my castel of Tyntigayll a man lyke my lord in speche

and in countenance, and two knyghtes with hym in lykenes of his two knyghtes Barcias and Jordan and soo I went unto bed with hym as I ought to do with my lord; and the same nyght, as I shal answere unto God, this child was begoten upon me.'

'That is trouthe,' saide the kyng, 'as ye say, for it was I myself that cam in the lykenesse. And therfor desmay you not, for I am fader to the child,' and ther he told her alle the cause how it was by Merlyns counceil. Thenne the quene made grete joye whan she knewe who was the fader of her child.

Sone come Merlyn unto the kyng and said, 'Syr, ye must purvey yow for the nourisshyng of your child.'

'As thou wolt,' said the kyng, 'be it.'

'Wel,' said Merlyn, 'I knowe a lord of yours in this land that is a passyng true man and a feithful and he shal have the nourysshyng of your child; and his name is sir Ector, and he is a lord of fawnyng and lyvelode in many partyes in Englund and Walys. And this lord, sir Ector, lete hym be sent for for to come and speke with you, and desyre hym yourself as he loveth you that he will put his owne child to be nourisshyng to another woman and that his wyf nourisshye yours. And whan the child is borne lete hym be delyverd to me at yonder pryvy posterne, uncrystned.'

So like as Merlyn devysed it was done. And whan syre Ector was come he made fyaunce to the kyng for to nourisshye the child lyke as the kyng desyred, and there the kyng graunted syr Ector grete rewardys. Thenne when the lady was delyverd the kyng commaunded two knyghtes and two ladyes to take the child bound in a cloth of gold, 'and that ye delyver hym to what poure man ye mete at the pryvy posterne yate of the castel.' So the child was delyverd unto Merlyn, and so he bare it forth unto syr Ector and made an holy man to crysten hym and named hym Arthur. And so sir Ectors wyf nourysshye the child with her owne pappe.

Thenne within two yeres kyng Uther felle seke of a grete maladye. And in the meanewhyle his enemyes usurped upon hym and dyd a grete bataylle upon his men and slewe many of his peple.

'Sir,' said Merlyn, ye may not lye so as ye doo, for ye must to the feld, though ye ryde on an hors-lyttar. For ye shall never have the better of your enemyes but yf your persone be there, and thenne shall ye have the vycictory.'

So it was done as Merlyn had devysed, and they caryed the kyng forth in an hors-lyttar with a grete hooste towarde his enemyes, and at Saynt Albons ther mette with the kyng a grete hoost of the North. And that day syre Ulfyus and sir Bracias dyd grete dedes of armes, and kyng Uthers men overcome the northeryn bataylle and slewe many peple and putt the remenaunt to flight; and thenne the kyng retorned unto London and made grete joye of his vycictory.

And thenne he fyll passyng sore seke so that thre dayes and thre nyghtes he was specheles wherfore alle the barons made grete sorow and asked Merlyn what counceill were best.

'There nys none other remedye,' said Merlyn, 'but God wil have his wille. But loke ye al barons be there before kyng Uther to-morne, and God and I shalle make hym to speke.'

So on the morne alle the barons with Merlyn came tofore the kyng. Thenne Merlyn said aloud unto kyng Uther, 'Syre, shall your sone Arthur be kyng after your dayes of this realme with all the appertenance?'

Thenne Uther Pendragon torned hym and said in herynge of them alle, 'I gyve hym Gods blissyng and myne, and byd hym pray for my soule, and righteously and worshipfully that he clayme the crowne upon forfeiture of my blessing,' and therwith he yelde up the ghost. And thenne was he entred as he longed to a kyng, wherfor the quene, fayre Igrayne, made grete sorowe and alle the barons.

Thenne stood the reame in grete jeopardy long whyle, for every lord that was myghty of men made hym stronge, and many wende to have ben kyng. Thenne Merlyn wente to the Archebisshop of Caunterbury and counceilled hym for to sende for all the lordes of the reame and alle the gentilmen with their armes that they shold to London come by Cristmas upon payne of cursyng, and for this cause, the

Jesu, that was borne on that nyghte, that He wold of His grete mercy shewe some myracle, as He wold come to be Kynge of mankynde, for to shewe somme myracle who shold be rightwys kynge of thre reame. So the Archebisshop by the advys of Merlyn send for alle the lordes and gentilmen of armes that they shold come by Crystmasse even unto London, and many of hem made hem clene of her lyf that her prayer myghte be the more acceptable unto God.

Soo in the grettest chirch of London — whether it were Powlis or not the Frensshe booke maketh mention — alle the estates were longe or day in the chirche for to praye. And whan matyns and the first masse was done there was sene in the chircheyard ayenst the hyhe aulter a grete stone four square, lyke unto a marbel stone; and in myddes therof was lyke an anvylde of stele a foot on hygh and theryn stuck a fayre swerd naked by the poynt, and letters there were wryten in gold aboute the swerd that saiden thus: ‘WHOSO PULLETH OUTE THIS SWERD OF THIS STONE AND ANVVYLDE IS RIGHTWYS KYNGE BORNE OF ALL ENGLOND.’ Thenne the peple merveilled and told it to the Archebisshop.

‘I commande,’ said the Archebisshop, ‘that ye kepe yow within your chirche and pray unto God still that no man touche the swerd tyll the hyhe masse be all done.’

So whan all masses were done all the lordes wente to beholde the stone and the swerd. And whan they sawe the scripture som assayed suche as wold have ben kyng, but none myght sterve the swerd nor meve hit.

‘He is not here,’ said the Archebisshop, ‘that shall encheve the swerd, but doubte not, God will make hym knowen. But this is my counceill,’ said the Archebisshop, ‘that we lete purvey to knyghtes, men of good fame, and they to kepe this swerd.’

So it was ordeyned, and thenne ther was made a crye that every man shold assay that wold for to wynne the swerd. And upon Newe Yeers day the barons lete maake a justes and a tournament, that alle knyghtes that wold juste or tourneye there myght playe. And all this was ordeyned for to kepe the lordes togyders and the comyns, for the Archebisshop trusted that God wold make hym knowe that he shold wynne the swerd.

So upon New Yeres day, whan the servyce was done, the barons rode unto the feld, some to justes and som to torney. And so it happed that syre Ector that had grete lyvelode aboute London rode unto the justes, and with hym rode syr Kaynus, his sone, and yong Arthur that was hys nourisshed broder and syr Kay was made knyght at Alhallowmas afore. So as they rode to the justes ward sir Kay had lost his swerd, for he had lefte it at his faders lodgyng, and so he prayd yong Arthur for to ryde for hym the swerd.

‘I wyll wel,’ said Arthur, and rode fast after the swerd.

And whan he cam home the lady and al were out to see the joustyng. Thenne was Arthur wroth and saide to hymself, ‘I will ryde to the chircheyard and take the swerd with me that stycketh in the stone for my broder sir Kay shal not be without a swerd this day.’ So whan he cam to the chircheyard sir Arthur alight and tayed his hors to the style, and so he wente to the tent and found no knyghtes there for they were atte justyng. And so he handled the swerd by the handels, and lightly and fiersly pulled it out of the stone, and took his hors and rode his way untill he came to his broder sir Kay and delyvered hym the swerd.

And as sone as sir Kay saw the swerd he wist wel it was the swerd of the stone, and so he rode to his fader syr Ector and said, ‘Sire, loo here is the swerd of the stone, wherfor I must be kyng of thys land.’

When syre Ector beheld the swerd he retorned ageyne and cam to the chirche, and there they alight al thre and wente into the chirche, and anon he made sir Kay to swere upon a book how he came to the swerd.

‘Syr,’ said sir Kay, ‘by my broder Arthur, for he brought it to me.’ ‘How gate ye this swerd?’ said syr Ector to Arthur.

‘Sir, I will telle you. When I cam home for my broders swerd I fond nobody at home to delyver me his swerd, and so I thought my broder syr Kay shold not be swerdles, and so I cam hyder egerly and pulled it out of the stone withoute ony payn.’

‘Found ye ony knyghtes about this swerd?’ seid sir Ector.

‘Nay,’ said Arthur.

‘Now,’ said sir Ector to Arthur, ‘I understande ye must be kyng of this land.’

‘Wherfore I?’ sayd Arthur, and for what cause?’

‘Sire,’ saide Ector, ‘for God wille have hit soo, for ther shold never man have drawn oute the swerde but he that shal be rightwys kyng of this land. Now lete me see whether ye can putte the swerde theras it was and pulle hit oute ageyne.’

‘That is no maystry,’ said Arthur, and soo he put it in the stone. Therwithalle sir Ector assayed to pulle oute the swerd and faylled.

‘Now assay’, said syre Ector unto syre Kay. And anon he pulled at the swerd with alle his myght but it wold not be. 6

‘Now shal ye assay,’ said syre Ector to Arthur.

‘I wyll wel,’ said Arthur, and pulled it out easily.

And therwithalle syre Ector knelyd doune to the erthe and syre Kay.

‘Allas!’ said Arthur, ‘myne own dere fader and broder, why knele ye to me?’

‘Nay, nay, my lord Arthur, it is not so. I was never your fader nor of your blood, but I wote wel ye are of an hyher blood than I wende ye were,’ and thenne syre Ector told hym all how he was bitaken hym for to nourisse hym and by whoos commandement, and by Merlyns delyveraunce.

Thenne Arthur made grete doole whan he understood that syre Ector was not his fader.

‘Sir,’ said Ector unto Arthur, ‘woll ye be my good and gracious lord when ye are kyng?’

‘Els were I to blame,’ said Arthur, ‘for ye are the man in the world that I am most beholdyng to, and my good lady and moder your wyf that as wel as her owne hath fostred me and kepte. And yf ever be Goddes will that I be kyng as ye say, ye shall desyre of me what I may doo and I shalle not faille yow. God forbede I shold faille yow.’

‘Sir,’ said sire Ector, ‘I will aske no more of yow but that ye wille make my sone, your foster broder syre Kay, senceall of alle your landes.’

‘That shalle be done,’ said Arthur, ‘and more, by the feith of my body, that never man shalle have that office but he whyle he and I lyve.’

Therewithal! they wente unto the Archebisshop and told hym how the swerd was encheved and by whome. And on twelfth day alle the barons cam thyder and to assay to take the swerd who that wold assay, but there afore hem alle ther myghte none take it out but Arthur. Wherfor ther were many lordes wroth and saide it was grete shame unto them all and the reame to be overgovernyd with a boy of no hyghe blood borne. And so they fell oute at that tyme, that it was put of tyll Candemas, and thenne all the barons shold mete there ageyne, but alwey the ten knyghtes were ordeyned to watche the swerd day and nyght, and so they sette a pavelione over the stone and the swerd, and fyve alwey watched.

Soo at Candalmasse many moo grete lordes came thyder for to have wonne the swerde, but the myghte none prevaille. And right as Arthur dyd at Cristmase he dyd at Candalmasse and pulled out the swerde easely, wherof the barons were sore agreved and put it of in delay till the hyghe feste of Eester. And as Arthur sped afore so dyd he at Eester. Yet there were some of the grete lordes had indignacion that Arthur shold be kyng, and put it of in a delay tyll the feest of Pentecoste. Thenne the Archebisshop of Caunterbury by Merlyns provydenche lete purveye thenne of the best knyghtes that they myghte gete, and suche knyghtes as Uther Pendragon loved best and moost trusted in his daye. And suche knyghtes were put aboute Arthur as syr Bawdewyn of Bretayn, syre Kaynes, syre Ulfyng

syre Barsias; all these with many other were alweyes about Arthur day and nyghte till the feste of Pentecost.

And at the feste of Pentecost alle maner of men assayed to pulle^[7] at the swerde that wold assay, but none myghte prevaille but Arthur, and he pulled it oute afore all the lordes and comyns that were there. Wherefore alle the comyns cryed at ones, 'We wille have Arthur unto our kyng! We wille put hym no more in delay, for we all see that it is Goddes wille that he shalle be our kyng, and who that holdeth ageynst it we wille slee hym.'

And therewithall they knelyd at ones both ryche and poure and cryed Arthur mercy bycause they had delayed hym so longe. And Arthur foryaf hem and took the swerd bitwene both his handes and offred it upon the aulter where the Archebisshop was, and so was he made knyghte of the best man that was there.

And so anon was the coronacyon made, and ther was he sworne unto his lordes and the comyns for to be a true kyng, to stand with true justyce fro thens forth the dayes of this lyf. Also thenne he made alle lordes that helde of the croune to come in and to do servyce as they oughte to doo. And many complayntes were made unto sir Arthur of grete wronges that were done syn the dethe of kyng Uther of many londes that were bereved lordes, knyghtes, ladyes, and gentilmen; wherfor kyng Arthur maade the londes to be even ageyne unto them that oughte hem.

Whanne this was done that the kyng had stablissed alle the countreyes aboute London, thenne he lete make syr Kay sencial of Englonde, and sir Baudewyn of Bretayne was made constable, and sire Ulfyus was made chamberlayn, and sire Brastias was maade wardeyn to wayte upon the Northe fro Trent forwardes, for it was that tyme the most party the kynges enemyes. But within fewe yeres aftur Arthur wan alle the North, Scotland and alle that were under their obeissaunce, also Walys; a parte of it helde ayenst Arthur, but he overcam hem al as he dyd the remenaunt thurgh the noble prowesse of hymself and his knyghtes of the Round Table.

Thenne the kyng remeved into Walys and lete crye a grete feste, ^[8] that it shold be holdyn at Pentecost after the incoronacion of hym at the cyté of Carlyon. Unto the fest come kyng Lott Lowthean and of Orkeney with fyve hondred knyghtes with hym; also ther come to the feste kyng Uryens of Gore with four hondred knyghtes with hym; also ther come to that feeste kyng Nayntres Garloth with seven hondred knyghtes with hym; also ther came to the feeste the kyng of Scotland with sixe hondred knyghtes with hym, and he was but a yong man. Also ther came to the feste a kyng that was called the Kyng with the Hondred Knyghtes, but he and his men were passyng wel bisene at poyntes; also ther cam the kyng of Cardos with fyve hondred knyghtes.

And kyng Arthur was glad of their comynge, for he wende that al the kynges and knyghtes had come for grete love and to have done hym worship at his feste, wherfor the kyng made grete joye and sent the kynges and knyghtes grete présentes. But the kynges wold none receyve, but rebuked the messagers shamefully and said they had no joye to receyve no yeftes of a berdles boye that was come of lowe blood, and sente hym word they wold none of his yeftes, but that they were come to gyve hym yeftes with hard swerdys betwixt the neck and the sholders; and therefore they came thyder, so the told to the messagers playnly, for it was grete shame to all them to see suche a boye to have a rule of soo noble a reaume as this land was. With this ansuer the messagers departed and told to kyng Arthur this ansuer, wherfor by the advys of his barons he took hym to a strong towre with fyve hondred good men with hym. And all the kynges aforesaid in a maner leyd a syege tofore hym, but kyng Arthur was well vytailled.

And within fyftene dayes ther came Merlyn amonge hem into the cyté of Carlyon. Thenne all the kynges were passyng gladde of Merlyn and asked hym, 'For what cause is that boye Arthur made your kyng?'

'Syres,' said Merlyn, 'I shalle telle yow the cause, for he is kyng Uther Pendragons sone borne'

wedlok, gotten on Igrayne, the dukes wyf of Tyntigail.'

'Thenne is he a bastard,' they said al.

'Nay,' said Merlyn, 'after the deth of the duke more than thre houres was Arthur begoten, and thirtene dayes after kyng Uther wedded Igrayne, and therfor I preve hym he is no bastard. And, whi saith nay, he shal be kyng and overcome alle his enemyes, and or he deye he shalle be long kyng of all England and have under his obeysaunce Walys, Yrland, and Scotland, and moo reames than I w now reherce.'

Some of the kynges had merveyl of Merlyns wordes and demed well that it shold be as he said, and som of hem lough hym to scorne, as kyng Lot, and me other called hym a wytche. But thenne we they accorded with Merlyn that kyng Arthur shold come oute and speke with the kynges, and to com sauf and to goo sauf, suche suraunce ther was made. So Merlyn went unto kyng Arthur and told hym how he had done and badde hym, 'Fere not, but come oute boldly and speke with hem; and spare hem not, but ansuere them as their kyng and chyvetayn, for ye shal overcome hem all, whether they wil or nylle.'

Thenne kyng Arthur came oute of his tour and had under his ¹⁹gowne a jesseraunte of doub maylle, and ther wente with hym the Archebisshop of Caunterbury, and syr Baudewyn of Bretayn and syr Kay, and syre Brastias; these were the men of moost worship that were with hym. And wha they were mette there was no mekenes but stoute wordes on bothe sydes, but alweyes kyng Arthur ansuerd them and said he wold make them to bowe and he lyved, wherfore they departed with wrat. And kyng Arthur badde kepe hem wel, and they bad the kyng kepe hym wel. Soo the kyng retorny hym to the toure ageyne and armed hym and alle his knyghtes.

'What will ye do?' said Merlyn to the kynges. 'Ye were better for to stynte, for ye shalle not her prevaille, though ye were ten so many.'

'Be we wel avysed to be aferd of a dreme-reder?' said kyng Lot. With that Merlyn vanysshed away and came to kyng Arthur and bad hym set on hem fiersly. And in the menewhyle there were thre honderd good men of the best that were with the kynges that wente streyghte unto kyng Arthur, and that comforted hym gretely.

'Syr,' said Merlyn to Arthur, 'fyghte not with the swerde that ye had by myracle til that ye see ye g unto the wers; thenne drawe it out and do your best.'

So forthwithalle kyng Arthur sette upon hem in their lodgyng, and syre Bawdewyn, syre Kay, and syr Brastias slewe on the right hand and on the lyfte hand, that it was merveylle; and alweyes kyng Arthur on horsback leyd on with a swerd and dyd merveillous dedes of armes, that many of the kyng had grete joye of his dedes and hardynesse. Thenne kyng Lot brake out on the bak syde, and the Kyng with the Honderd Knyghtes and kyng Carados, and sette on Arthur fiersly behynde hym.

With that syre Arthur torned with his knyghtes and smote behynd and before, and ever sir Arthur was in the formest prees tyl his hors was slayne underne the hym. And therwith kyng Lot smote doun kyng Arthur. With that his four knyghtes reskowed hym and set hym on horsback; thenne he drewe his swerd Excalibur, but it was so bryght in his enemyes eyen that it gaf light lyke thirty torchys, and therwith he put hem on bak and slewe moche peple. And thenne the comyns of Carlyon aroos with their clubbis and stavys and slewe many knyghtes, but alle the kynges helde them togyders with his knyghtes that were lefte on lyve, and so fled and departed; and Merlyn come unto Arthur and counceilled hym to folowe hem no further.

¹¹⁰So after the feste and journeye kyng Arthur drewe hym unto London. And soo by the counceill of Merlyn the kyng lete calle his barons to counceill, for Merlyn had told the kyng that the sixe kynges that made warre upon hym wold in al haste be awroke on hym and on his landys; wherfor the kyng asked counceill at hem al. They coude no counceill gyve, but said they were bygge ynough.

'Ye saye well,' said Arthur, 'I thanke you for your good courage; but wil ye al that loveth me speke

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