

Wolfram Von Eschenbach

Parzival



PARZIVAL

WOLFRAM VON ESCHENBACH was the greatest of the medieval German narrative poets. Very little is known about his life, but it is generally accepted that he belonged to a Bavarian family of the lower nobility, that he may have served a Franconian lord and that for the better part of his creative period he enjoyed the patronage of the great medieval German maecenas Hermann, Landgrave of Thuringia. He probably died between 1220 and 1230.

Although Wolfram left some brilliant lyric poems, chiefly dawn songs of his youth, it is in his narrative poems – *Parzival*, the unfinished *Willehalm* and so-called *Titirel* fragments – that his claim to be a poet of world stature lies. *Parzival*, on which Richard Wagner based his music-drama *Parsifal*, is a romance of self-perfection in knighthood, in which both the chivalric and the spiritual receive their due; *Titirel* relates in an elegaic measure the story of Sigune and Schionatulander prior to their appearances in *Parzival*; *Willehalm* is a crusading poem with epic qualities which tells the story of the famous William of Toulouse.

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His other publications include *The Memorial Feast of Kökötöykhan* – a Kirghiz epic, edited and translated and with a commentary. His translations for Penguin Classics are Gottfried’s *Tristan* and the fragments of Thomas’s *Tristran* (together in one volume) and *Nibelungenlied*, and with this, his third volume for the series, he has made available to the English-reading public

substantial portion of the finest narrative poetry of the medieval German Golden Age. His most recent publication is *The Mohave Heroic Epic of Inyo-Kutavêre*.

Professor Hatto is now living in retirement. For many years he enjoyed a Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship in support of his studies of epic poetry in Central Asia and Siberia, which he is continuing. He is a widower and has one daughter.

Parzival

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Foreword

Parzival is the retelling and ending by one genius, Wolfram von Eschenbach (fl. c. 1195–1225), of the unfinished romance of another, the *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes, a poem otherwise known from its prologue as *Li contes del graal* or ‘The story of the Grail’. Chrétien’s poem is the earliest extant narrative of the Grail, though he tells us that his patron Philip, Count of Flanders, had lent him its ‘book’, presumably in one or other respect a source, but a work of absolutely unknown content.

Wolfram, whose great stature as a poet is known independently from his earlier love poetry and his later epic *Willehalm* and elegiac *Titirel*, rose magnificently to the challenge of retelling and completing Chrétien’s mystery story, achieving it in a very different and indeed inimitable style.

If, glimpsing the title ‘Parzival’, the reader picks up this book in the hope of finding the Story of the Grail, he will not find it. He will find instead the Story of *a* Grail, together with everything else he is entitled to expect of a story told by one of the world’s great narrative poets and humorists. There never was a Story of *the* Grail, and never could be. On the other hand there were stories of as many different Grails as there were writers or syndicates exploiting the potent name.

Chrétien himself first speaks of *a* ‘graal’, and it is clear from the best (though not all) manuscripts of *Perceval* that he intended a vessel, some sort of dish like the one named ‘gradalis’ in Medieval Latin, from which the Old French ‘gra(d)al’ took its rise. After introducing *a* graal into his narrative, Chrétien logically refers to it as *the* graal when he has occasion to mention it again. In the present state of our knowledge the notion cannot be disproved that Chrétien, the originator of Arthurian romance in the higher courtly mode, also launched the subsidiary genre of Grail Romances in his *Perceval* of post 1181 A.D.; which is not the same as saying that there were no narratives or cults centred on esoteric vessels or other objects before *Perceval*, for if one chooses to take the matter loosely one can go far beyond Byzantium in space and, if licentiously, as far back in time as the Pharaohs.

How open a question the physical nature of ‘the Grail’ still was in c. 1200, when Wolfram embarked on his *Parzival*, is shown by the fact that his Grail – he calls it ‘Grâl’ – was a Stone and that although it had the loftiest spiritual connections it also had some very earthy

aspects, since it served up meats hot or cold, wild or tame, and a whole variety of alcoholic beverages to individual taste, so that, as has been wittily observed, it also functioned as ‘*un buffet ambulante*’. Since the French scribes of some of the surviving manuscripts of the *Perceval* show themselves unaware that Chrétien’s Graal was a vessel, the German Wolfram with a knowledge of French that left something to be desired, could readily be forgiven for being unaware of it. On the other hand, Wolfram was sufficiently strong-minded to set aside any prior knowledge he might have had that Chrétien’s Graal was a vessel and choose a Stone as apter to his purpose. At the other extreme, Robert de Boron in his *Joseph d’Arimathie* composed some time between *Perceval* and 1199, not only has the Graal as a vessel – the Chalice of the Last Supper – but also fills it with Blood from the Cross, anticipating if not already clinching the pious pun ‘*San greal (Holy Grail): Sang real (True Blood)*’.

All that the Grails of medieval romance have in common is the function of indicating a goal worth striving for or preserving, and in content at least a modicum of sanctity.

These preliminary remarks on ‘the Grail’ are intended to free the reader’s thoughts from any distorting impressions or expectations he may have gained from Malory, or from nineteenth-century poetry or music drama, so that he can take as they come the many and varied scenes from medieval courtly life as Wolfram paints them – scenes which despite the Arthurian setting are of course based upon the style of life which Wolfram knew at the German courts of the very brilliant Hohenstauffen period.

Thanks to the food-producing powers of the Grail, peasants are dispensed with by the Grail Community, and even outside in the world at large they are rarely mentioned, while because of the Grail’s direct link with Heaven both for the annual regeneration of its powers and through the decisive news-flashes it receives, priests are required only for the odd baptism and marriage which is again reflected in what is narrated of the world outside. In this way, Wolfram frees his noble listeners from all memory of bad conscience towards the peasantry and of humiliation at the hands of the clergy, whether from the pulpit or in the confessional, in order to focus their attention entirely on the problems of knights and ladies while entertaining them, that is, on loyalty in love real or ritualized, on loyalty within family and feudal bonds, on fighting and bloodshed, and on a proper relationship with God.

At one point in his poem Wolfram humorously wonders how it is possible for so impecunious a knight as himself to describe such wealth and luxury as he unfolds. We in our

turn wonder, with no humour but on the contrary with much bitterness, how it was possible for a knight of such humble station and education to enshrine in his poetry an understanding of the Christian message deeper and truer than that of all the popes and most of the saints of his day, touching not only Christendom but also Heathendom, after a century of Crusades. Comprehend this miracle we cannot, but gratefully accept it we can – and are indeed compelled so to do, as under Wolfram's virile and gentle guidance we read how God loved knights and ladies as well as He loved peasants and clergy, and perhaps all the more indulgently because in many ways they were morally more exposed.

Wolfram von Eschenbach was a ministerialis or technically 'unfree' knight bound to the service of a lord, though *qua* knight he was free to defend his honour anywhere and evidently also able to change his patron, finding his main benefactor in this respect not in the neighbourhood of his native Eschenbach but in Thuringia with its famous maecenas, the Landgrave Hermann. Although Eschenbach is in Franconia, Wolfram alludes to himself as a Bavarian, and it is permissible to see Eschenbach as the mid-point of a series of concentric circles linking localities at ever-increasing distances – with a proportionate increase in vagueness and fantastic charm – from the tourneying-ground of Klein-Amberg, only a few miles east of Eschenbach, to furthestmost Asia where the sky comes down. Such knights ministerial as Wolfram were the main bearers of the great efflorescence of secular poetry in Germany in the first half of the Hohenstauffen period, when poetry became emancipated from clerical domination. Bright boys of the subservient nobility were picked out and sent to monastery schools to learn the Three R's so that their lords could administer at least the outer territories for themselves while their consciences remained in clerical hands.

Like Wolfram's statement that he was following a Grail romance not by Chrétien but by the otherwise unknown 'Kyot the Provençal',* his claim not to know his A B C must be discounted as one of his many tactical jokes. In his Apology, inserted between the second and third chapters, Wolfram takes his stand not as a poet but as a knight, and in such bold and definite terms that he would have been howled down by the roughnecks of Thuringia had he not been a crack-jouster. In this proud stance he roundly disclaims that his story can be a book. This is clearly mockery of his senior, the poet Hartmann von Aue, who introduced and excused his masterpieces *Der arme Heinrich* and *Iwein* as the fruits of a scholar's leisure. With his *Erec* and *Iwein*, Hartmann was the unassailable Arthurian narrator – until Wolfram von Eschenbach flung down his gauntlet (p. 83), a challenge which the great Gottfried von

Strassburg rebutted with much parody and persiflage in the *Literary Excursus* of his *Tristan* (Penguin Classics, p. 105). All that we can safely glean from these exchanges to the present purpose is that Wolfram neither was nor claimed to be learned (notably in Latin), as both Hartmann and Gottfried clearly were. Some who take Wolfram's assertion of analphabetism seriously point to strange transmogrifications in his riot of exotic names, and infer oral transmission. Yet this born bard-improvisator, only half-submerged by his conventional 'literary' persona, absorbed information about the world *vastly* from any available source, and at least one scholar who cites the transmogrifications goes on to speak of Wolfram's unbounded delight in manipulating language somewhat in the manner of J. R. R. Tolkien, though of course with less real freedom. The view of the present writer is that Wolfram had a practical grasp of letters and numbers adequate to supervising, say, his lord's falconers, his general stores, gold plate, cavalry horses, uniforms, munitions of war and other logistic affairs for the field of battle, under the Marshal – all matters with which he betrays an uncommon technical familiarity.

Some scattered topical references, as well as polemical exchanges embedded in the text, enable us to date Wolfram's *Parzival* between the years approaching 1200 and those following 1210, the richest years in the history of medieval German poetry; for they also saw the appearance of the *Nibelungenlied*, *Iwein*, *Tristan*, and the superlative political poetry of Walther von der Vogelweide, not to mention his love-lyrics and those of several other fine poets.

There is evidence that after finishing *Parzival*, which he assembled according to a loose-leaf system – some pages sent flying round Germany never caught up with the main sheaf – Wolfram returned to it to patch and touch it up. One minor strand of narrative in *Parzival* derived from a single short scene of Chrétien's, that of the tragic young lovers Sigune and Schionatulander, so obsessed him and his audience that after the four scenes given them in *Parzival* he told the prior history of the pair in elegiac strophes of his own devising in the miscalled *Titurel*. Whether before, during or after the making of *Titurel*, Wolfram returned almost to the end the Old French *La bataille d'Aliscans* in his epic *Willehalm*, soon to be published in English from other hands in this same series. *Willehalm* was based upon a *chanson de geste* and deals with the double clash of two great armies, the Frankish and the Saracenic, who seek a crucial decision amid vast carnage undreamt of in the sport of *Parzival*. In *Willehalm*, Wolfram again rose superbly to the challenge, which of its nature too

him to greater heights.

Writing in a dense, sententious and at times consciously gnomic style, Wolfram makes heavy demands on his audiences. As a faithful translator I have in the main passed his demands on to my readers. Many passages of the original have virtually no syntactic structure – *Parzival* is definitely no book – and so the bare act of translation has inevitably tidied them up. Thus the reader must imagine Wolfram to be in one sense rougher and less tidy than he appears in these pages. In another sense he is tidier than I could possibly render him, in that his compelling thought derives much structure from his sappy and vigorous use of medieval German courtly couplets. Most characteristic of his style is a succession of versed sprung statements in which he leaves it to his audience to supply the logical nexus, as we often do in living speech. In my translation I have left to the reader as much of this work required of him by Wolfram as I safely could, chiefly by means of innumerable dashes and colons. If my pages tend to look a little odd, then so does my original. I offer no apology since otherwise I should have had to apologize to Wolfram for watering him down more than was absolutely necessary. For to translate this extraordinary poet, more than any other I know, is to risk watering him down unbearably. The consolation is that when one has dared to do so the flavour may still be recognizable.

For the further guidance of the reader I have furnished an Introduction to a Second Reading after my translation. Here I can truthfully say – and it is a tribute to Wolfram's supercharged utterance – that my Introduction to a Second Reading could have been many times its length without diffuseness or repetition. When that insight dawned on me I stopped it.

I am indebted to so many scholars at home and abroad over the half century during which I have been at grips with *Parzival* that, contrary to usage, I make no specific Acknowledgements here bar one. To have done otherwise would have been invidious, since many would inevitably have been overlooked. I have thanked them all privately in any case and I now thank them again in my heart. For very recent and expert advice, however, in a field that is virtually all his own, I thank my old friend and colleague F. P. Pickering, Professor Emeritus of the University of Reading, who made it possible for me to identify the area within which my enlightened publishers should seek and find the illustration on the outer cover. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to my friend and colleague Dr Maric Gibbs for her vigilant and perspicacious reading of the proofs when as a teacher she was already fully engaged.

Chapter 1

IF vacillation dwell with the heart the soul will rue it. Shame and honour clash where the courage of a steadfast man is motley like the magpie. But such a man may yet make merry, for Heaven and Hell have equal part in him. Infidelity's friend is black all over and takes on a murky hue, while the man of loyal temper holds to the white.

This winged comparison is too swift for unripe wits. They lack the power to grasp it. For it will wrench past them like a startled hare! So it is with a dull mirror or a blind man's dream. These reveal faces in dim outline: but the dark image does not abide, it gives but a momentary joy. Who tweaks my palm where never a hair did grow? He would have learnt close grip, indeed! Were I to cry 'Oh !' in fear of that it would mark me as a fool. Shall I find loyalty where it must vanish, like fire in a well or dew in the sun?

On the other hand I have yet to meet a man so wise that he would not gladly know where to find the guidance this story requires, what edification it brings. The tale never loses heart, but flees and pursues, turns tail and wheels to the attack and doles out blame and praise. The man who follows all these vicissitudes and neither sits too long nor goes astray and otherwise knows where he stands has been well served by mother wit.

Feigned friendship leads to the fire, it destroys a man's nobility like hail. Its loyalty is so short in the tail that if it meet in the wood with gadflies it will not quit a bite in three.

These manifold distinctions do not all relate to men. I shall set these marks as a challenge to women. Let any who would learn from me beware to whom she takes her honour and good name, beware whom she makes free of her love and precious person, lest she regret the loss of both chastity and affection. With God as my witness I bid good women observe restraint. The lock guarding all good ways is modesty – I need not wish them any better fortune. The false will gain a name for falsity. – How lasting is thin ice in August's torrid sun. Their credit will pass as soon away. The beauty of many has been praised far and wide; but if their hearts be counterfeit I rate them as I should* a bead set in gold. But I do not reckon it a tawdry thing when the noble ruby with all its virtues is fashioned into base brass, for this would liken to the spirit of true womanhood. When a woman acts to the best of her nature you will not find me surveying her complexion or probing what shields her heart: if she be well proofed *within* her breast her good name is safe from harm.

Now if I were to judge of men and women as I know them a long story it would be. Hear then, what manner of tale this is, telling of things both pleasant and sad, with joy and trouble for company. Grant there were three of me, each with skill to match mine: there would still be need of unbridled inspiration to tell you what, single-handed, I have a mind to tell ! †]

I will renew a tale that tells of great fidelity, of inborn womanhood and manly virtue so straight as never was bent in any test of hardness. Steel that he was, his courage never failed him, his conquering hand seized many a glorious prize when he came to battle. Dauntless man, though laggard in discretion! – Thus I salute the hero. – Sweet balm to woman’s eyes yet woman’s heart’s disease! Shunner of all wrongdoing! As yet he is unborn to this story whom I have chosen for the part, the man of whom this tale is told and all the marvels in it.

There is a custom still observed today wherever our western neighbours’ laws prevail. It holds even on German soil in one odd corner – you don’t need me to tell you that! Whoever it was that held those territories yonder ruled – nor was it shame to him – that the eldest brother (strange though true) should have his father’s whole inheritance. That death should sever the rights of which their father’s life assured them was the cadets’ misfortune. Before they held in common. Now, the eldest holds alone. Was that not a wise man who laid it down that age should have possessions? – ‘Youth has its fill of good things, old of sighs and sorrows!’ – ‘There never was a fate so pitiful as age *cum* poverty!’ I will not palter with the truth: that kings, counts, dukes should suffer dispossession of their acres, all but the oldest son – what an outlandish ordinance!

Thus it was that heroic Gahmuret, the daring yet restrained, lost lands and strongholds where his sire with pomp and royal sway had borne crown and sceptre till he met his death in knightly combat. He was bitterly lamented, having kept honour and faith entire till the end. His elder son then summoned the princes of the realm. They came in brilliant style, for they were entitled beyond question to receive great fiefs from him. Now when they had come to court and their claims had been heard and their fiefs confirmed, hear how they proceeded. Prompted by loyalty the whole assembly, rich and poor, humbly and earnestly petitioned the King to show his love for Gahmuret as a brother, and dignify himself by leaving him a portion of Honour from his lands so that all might see whence the knight derived his freedom and his title, and not utterly dispossess him.

The King received this gladly. ‘You know how to ask in reason,’ he said. ‘I will grant you this and more. Do you not call my brother “Gahmuret of Anjou”? Anjou is my country. Let

both be named from it!’ And his majesty continued ‘My brother may look to me for staunch support in more than I can name at such short notice. He shall be a member of my Household. Truly, I shall prove to you that we two had one mother. He has little, I enough. This I shall share with him so liberally that my heavenly bliss shall not be at stake in the eyes of Him that giveth and taketh. – With justice to dispense He may do either!’

When they saw that their lord was loyal it was a happy day for those mighty princes. Each made his separate bow of thanks. Nor was Gahmuret slow to voice the assent which his heart had spoken.

‘My lord and brother,’ he said good-naturedly, ‘had I the wish to be an inmate of your noble House or that of any other man it would have been idle comfort I had secured. But loyal and discerning that you are, consider my reputation and advise me with an eye to present circumstances: it is here you can lend a helping hand. I own nothing but my equipment. Had I achieved more with it, such as had brought me wide renown, I should be remembered somewhere in the world. I have sixteen squires,’ he went on, ‘of whom six are armed and cased in steel. Give me in addition four pages of gentle birth and breeding. These shall share fully in all my prizes. I am off to see the world – not the first time I have ranged abroad. My fortune watches over me perhaps I shall win the recognition of a good lady and then, if I am worthy and am allowed to serve her, reason tells me I shall not do better than conduct this affair in all sincerity. May God lead me along the paths of good fortune! When our father Gandin ruled your kingdom we used to ride in company, suffering many a doleful pang for love. You were a knight and thief in one, you knew how to woo and conceal! How I wish that I too had the trick of stealing love, had your skill, and found true favour in my partner!’

The King sighed, ‘Alas!’ he cried, ‘that I ever set eyes on you, for my heart that was whole you have cut in two with your jesting and still do, if we must part. My father left us both great wealth. I will mark you out an equal share, for I love you from my heart. Dazzling gems, red gold, men, weapons, mounts, clothes – accept as much from me as will let you travel as you please and maintain your name for generosity. Yours are the pick of many virtues. Though you had been born of Gylstram, or had you hailed from Hromgla, I should always have given you that place in my affections which you now hold. You are my brother, never doubt it!’

‘It is your courtesy that makes you praise me so, my lord. Then help me in that measure. If you and my mother wish to give away your worldly goods my fortunes will rise not fall. But

my heart is set on the heights! I do not know why it quickens so – *here* – as though it would burst. Oh where is my ambition taking me? I shall attempt it if I can. The day is approaching when I must leave.’

The King gave him all and more than he had asked: five chargers, picked and tried, strong and swift and spirited, the best in all his lands, numerous vessels of gold and many ingots. The King was pleased to fill him four sumpter-panniers with these things, and then, at his command, a pile of precious stones was added. When the panniers were full, the squires who were in charge of them were clothed in fine tunics and given good mounts. Then, when Gahmuret went into his mother’s presence and she clasped him in her arms so tight, grief would be checked no longer.

‘Fil li roy Gandin,’ said this womanly woman, ‘will you no longer stay with me? Oh, was not I that bore you? And you are Gandin’s child no less. Is God blind where He should help or is He deaf that He does not lend an ear to me? Am I to bear fresh sorrows? I have buried my heart’s own vigour, my eyes’ sweet pleasure! If God means to rob me further, Judge though He be, then the talk I hear of His succouring us is all lies, seeing that He thus abandons me!’

‘God console you for my father, ma’am,’ replied the young Angevin, ‘there is good cause for you and me to lament him, but none for any man to bring sad news of me. I am for the way in foreign parts to mend my fortunes. That, ma’am, is the turn my life has taken.’

‘Dear son,’ said the Queen, ‘since you are set on serving a great lady and winning her love do not disdain these things of mine to help you on your way. Tell your chamberlains to receive from me four heavy sumpter-panniers containing broad silks entire that never knew the scissors, and many lengths of samite. Sweet son, if you would make me happy, name the day of your return.’

‘Madam, I do not even know what lands shall see me, only – whichever path I take or leaving you – you will have dealt by me nobly and as befits the honour of a knight. The King too, has dismissed me in a way that calls for my dutiful thanks. I am sure you will cherish him the more, whatever comes of me.’

The story tells us that this dauntless hero had, from the love and friendship of a lady, received costly gifts to the value of a thousand marks. (Whenever Jew asks pawn today, he would not turn up his nose, but take them at that price.) A certain lady-love of his had sent them to him. There was profit in his service: women’s love and a kind reception. But cure of his love-pangs it brought him none!

The warrior took his leave, never to set eyes on mother, brother or brother's lands again.

This was great loss to many. He warmly thanked all who had shown him marks of favour before he left. He thought it more than his due: of his courtesy he never let it appear that they had done it because bound. In disposition he was as straight as straight could be. Those who proclaim their own worth court incredulity: so let a man's neighbours and those who witness his exploits abroad vouch for it – then his tale would be believed!

Gahmuret cultivated self-control and moderation in all things. He was not given to boasting, endured great honour calmly and was free of loose desires. Yet the noble man kneed of no crowned head, whether king, emperor or empress, in whose household he would care to serve except his whose hand was highest over the nations of the earth. Such was his innocent wish.

He had heard there was a man in Baghdad so powerful that two thirds of the earth or more were subject to him, and whose name was so revered that, in the heathen tongue, he was called 'The Baruc'. So irresistible was the power he wielded that many kings were subject to him for all their crowns.

The Barucate stands today. See how they dispense the Christian rite in Rome, as enjoined on us by Holy Baptism: in the other place you see the infidel order. They get their papal letters from Baghdad, and, so far as it is free of crooks and crannies, deem it straight! The Baruc gives them bulls of indulgence for their sins.

There were once two brothers of Babylon, Pompeius and Ipomidon, from whom the Baruc seized Niniveh, which had always belonged to their forbears. They were giving a very good account of themselves when the young Angevin appeared on the scene. Gahmuret found favour with the Baruc, and, noble man, accepted his pay for service there and then.

You will not mind if he has to have a different coat-of-arms from the one his father Gandolf bequeathed him? As one who aspired to preferment, his lordship displayed Anchors on his trappers, cut from dazzling ermine. The rest – his shield and vestments – had to follow suit. His harness was greener than an emerald, of the colour of the silken fabric known as Achmardi,* finer than brocade, of which he ordered a tabard and a surcoat. Anchors ermine were sewn on these, with cord-of-gold for cable.

His Anchors had essayed neither main nor headland, they had not bitten anywhere. A noble exile, never finding billet or rest, he had to bear this burdensome device, these Anchor-signs from land to land.

Through how many lands did he ride, or sail around in ships? If I must swear to these, my
word of honour as a knight, upon my oath, is telling you just as my source tells me – I have
no other witness. It says that his manly vigour won the first place in heathendom, in Persia
and Morocco. In other places, too, Damascus and Aleppo, and wherever knights gave battle
in Arabia and under the walls of Araby, his prowess achieved it that none would challenge
him in single fight. Such was the fame he won there. The ambition in his heart reached out
for glory. All others' deeds crumbled and fell away in his path almost to nothingness. That
was the lesson all had to learn who met him in joust. He strove with undeflected courage
such was the verdict in Baghdad.

From there he made his way to the Kingdom of Zazamanc. Here people were all lamenting
the death of Isenhart who had lost his life in the service of a lady. It was sweet and constant
Belacane who had brought him to this pass. She had never allowed him to enjoy her love, so
now he lay dead for love of her. His kinsmen were avenging him in open war and ambush
and were beleaguering the lady with their, armies. When Gahmuret came to her country she
was making a stout defence. Vridebrant of Scotland and the men of his fleet had burned the
land before retiring.

Now hear what befel our knight. Tossed thither by stormy seas and but narrowly escaping
death he came sailing into the harbour up to the Queen's palace, where he was observed by
many eyes. He looked out on to the plain. Many tents were pitched all round the town
except towards the sea. Two great armies lay there. He sent to inquire whose town it was, for
neither he nor any of his mariners knew of it. They told his envoys that it was Patelamun
and sent their message with friendly tokens, imploring him by their gods to aid them – they
were in great need, fighting for survival.

When the young Angevin heard of their wretched sufferings he offered his services for hire
as many knights still do, else they must give him some other reason why he should endure
their enemies' spite. Sick and sound alike answered him then with one voice that their gold
and jewels were his, he should be master of it all and want for nothing if he stayed with
them. Yet he had no need of hire: for as to gold of Arabia he had brought numerous lumps
it with him! And the people of Zazamanc were all as dark as night – he had had enough
their company! Nevertheless he gave orders for quarters to be taken, and they were only too
pleased to give him the best. The ladies were still reclining at their windows, looking on at
taking careful note of his squires and of the details of his turn-out.

I do not know how many sable furs the generous warrior bore on his shield of ermine. The Queen's Marshal made it out to be a great Anchor, and very glad he was to see it there. His eyes told him he had seen this knight before, or else his double. That must have been at the time of the Baruc's siege of Alexandria, where Gahmuret's prowess had been quite unequalled.

Thus great-hearted Gahmuret rode into town in style. He ordered ten sumpters to be loaded. These marched through the streets followed by twenty squires on horseback. His baggage-train could be seen ahead: unmounted pages, cooks and scullions, they had gone on in advance. After the squires rode twelve noble pages, some of whom were Saracens, well-bred and with engaging manners. After these, horses with trappers of cendale were led, eight in a bunch. The ninth carried Gahmuret's saddle. The shield I mentioned was borne beside by a merry page. Next rode trumpeters, such as are still in demand today. A drummer beat his tabor and tossed it high into the air. His lordship would have thought it a poor show had there been no flautists, no good fiddlers three! These all passed on with measured step. The great man brought up the rear himself with his master-mariner, an esteemed and experienced man.

All the inhabitants were Moors, every man and woman of them. The knight saw a profusion of battered shields pierced through and through by spears, many of them hanging on doors and walls. There was weeping there, and wailing. Numbers of men had been laid on beds by the windows for the fresh air, so badly wounded that even when they had had the doctors they could not recover. They had been in among the enemy, and such has always been the lot of those who would not flee. Countless horses were being led back past him gashed by spear and sword. He saw many dusky ladies on either side of him whose colour resembled the raven's.

His host received him amiably. This had a pleasant outcome for him later. What a very gallant man he was! In charge of one of the great Gates, he had delivered many a hack and thrust. With him Gahmuret found a number of knights, their arms in slings and heads in bandages. But their wounds were not such as to keep them from fighting, they had not lost their vigour.

The Burgrave begged his guest in the friendliest way to dispose of him and his without ceremony. He led Gahmuret to his wife, who then kissed him, which was little to his liking. They then went for refreshments. This done, the Marshal left him and went before the Queen.

to claim a rich reward for the news he was bringing.

‘Madam,’ he said, ‘our cares have given way to joy! The man we are entertaining here is a knight of such high quality that we must forever thank the gods for their grace in bringing him to us.’

‘Now tell me, I command you, who is this knight?’

‘He is a proud warrior, a high-born Angevin, who has taken the pay of the Baruc himself. You should see how little he spares himself, when he is unleashed! How beautifully he swerves away and veers to the attack! He shows his enemies what mischief means! I saw him fighting gloriously when the Babylonians were out to relieve Alexandria and drive the Baruc off by force. What hosts were felled there in that rout! It was there that the charming fellow exerted himself so mightily that there was nothing they could do but run away. He is given the reputation of having distinguished himself beyond all others in many lands.’

‘Now watch for a suitable occasion and see that he comes and talks to me here. We have an armistice today, you know, so that the gallant man can ride up here to me – or must I go to him? His skin is a different colour from ours. I only hope this is no sore point with him? I wish I had known of it before. I would show him all honour if my councillors wished it. If it is his pleasure to approach me, how shall I receive him? Is he near enough to me in birth for my kiss not to be thrown away?’

‘He is known to be a scion of royal stock, let my life be pledge for it, ma’am. I will tell your princes to robe themselves and wait on you until he and I ride up. Instruct your ladies. For I shall go down at once and bring you the noble stranger so well-endowed with charming qualities.’

No sooner said than done. The Marshal went briskly about his mistress’s bidding. Rich robes – I heard they were *very* costly – were quickly brought for Gahmuret, and these he donned. To meet his wishes they were embellished with heavy Anchors of Arabian gold. The Marshal, who well knew how to requite a love-gift, mounted a horse which a jousting knight had once ridden against him – he had thrust him off it, to the latter’s chagrin! You ask ‘Does his host bear him company?’ He and all his knights! And indeed they were happy to do so. They rode on together and dismounted before the Palace, where many knights were assembled in splendid robes. Linking hands, his pages preceded him, two and two. Their lord found a bevy of ladies there in exquisite gowns. As they lit on the Angevin the Queen’s eyes did great hurt to her. He looked so very winsome that, irresistibly, he unlocked her heart.

which until that time her femininity had kept locked fast. She advanced a pace or two towards her guest and bade him kiss her, and then led him to the wall that faced the enemy and there, under its broad windows, they sat down on a quilt of samite spread on a soft divan. If anything is 'brighter than the day' the Queen does not resemble it. She had a woman's heart and was all that a knight could want in other ways, but not 'like the dew on a rose' – she was of a swarthy aspect. Her crown was a bright ruby through which her head was visible. The lady of the land told her guest what pleasure his coming gave her.

'My lord, I have heard much of your prowess as a knight. I beg you of your courtesy to forgive me if I complain to you of sorrows that touch my heart.'

'You shall not call on my aid in vain, ma'am. Whatever it is that has vexed or vexes you, this right hand can ward it off, let it be duly appointed to your service. I am but one man, but if any has wronged you, or wrongs you still, I interpose my shield. But that will scarcely cost the enemy.'

At this a prince politely interposed, 'If we had a leader our enemies would not escape so lightly, now that Vridebrant has sailed away. Back at home he is freeing his own country now that the kinsmen of King Hernant (whom he slew for Herlinde's sake) are harrying him for they will not refrain of their own accord. But he has left some stout fighters behind: Duke Hiuteger, who has wrought great havoc on us, and all his company. They fight with skill and vigour. Gaschier of Normandy, too, that grand old campaigner, has many mercenaries here and Kaylet of Hoskurast knights in greater number, a host of warlike strangers. It was Vridebrant, King of Scots, with four allies, who brought them to this country, together with many warriors fighting for their hire. Down by the sea to the west lie Isenhardt's men, their eyes streaming with tears. Never, since their lord was slain in joust, have they been seen anywhere but they were overwhelmed with grief. It rains in their hearts to overflowing.'

'Tell me, if it is your pleasure, why they hem you in so fiercely with their armies,' the stranger asked his hostess, like the gallant man he was. 'You have so many brave fighting men. It saddens me to see them borne down by the malice of enemies bent on ruining them.'

'I will tell you, sir, since you wish it. A noble knight once served me. Fine qualities burgeoned on him like blossoms on a spray. This knight was brave and discerning. Loyal and bore fruit in him nourished from deep roots. His breeding excelled all breeding. He was more modest than a woman. He was brave and daring. No hand more liberal ever grew on knight in any land before. (What will happen when we are gone I do not know, let others say.)'

was untutored in the ways of perfidy. In hue he was a blackamoor like me. His father was King Tankanis. He too had high renown. My suitor's name was Isenhart. As a woman betrayed myself to let him serve me for love without his bringing it to a happy consummation, so that I must forever rue it. People imagine I sent him to his death, but treachery is not in my nature, though his vassals accuse me of it. I loved him more than the gods and do not lack witnesses to vouch for it, since the gods, both his and mine, know the truth of it. Many were the love-pangs I suffered for him, yet my woman's shyness made me delay his reward – and the end to my remorse! My virgin state spurred him to win fame in many feats of arms. At last I put him to the test to see if he would prove a lover. Proof was soon forthcoming. He gave away his war-gear for my sake. That Pavilion standing there like a palace was his, Scots brought it to this battlefield. Rid of his equipment he did not spare himself. Life seemed to have lost its charm for him, for he sought many an encounter bare of his armour. At this time a prince of my court named Prothizilas, a fearless man, rode out to try his fortunes, but disaster overtook him. It was no sham death that he took from his journey in the Forest of Azagouc with a brave man who also met his end there – Isenhart my suitor. They each received a spear through shield and body. Wretched woman, I mourn it still, nor shall I ever cease to regret their deaths. The affection I bear them blossoms forth in grief. I was never yet wife to any man.'

It seemed to Gahmuret that although she was an infidel, a more affectionate spirit of womanliness had never stolen over a woman's heart. Her modest ways were a pure baptism as was the rain that fell on her – the flood descending from her eyes down to her sable breast. Her pleasures in life were devotion to sorrow and grief's true doctrine.

'The King of Scots invaded me from overseas with all his army,' she went on. 'He was Isenhart's cousin on his mother's side. It was not in their power to do me greater hurt than I had already sustained in Isenhart, I must say.' The lady fell to sighing. Through her tears she cast many a shy glance at Gahmuret, as between strangers, and her eyes told her heart he was well made. She was a judge of fair complexions, too, since before this she had seen many fair-skinned heathen. With this there was born between them a steadfast longing – she gazed at him, and he at her.

At length she ordered them to pour the farewell drink, though had she dared she would have left it. She was vexed that her command was not ignored, for it has never failed to dismiss gallants who would have dallied with the ladies. Yet her life had become his, and he

had inspired her with the feeling that his life too was hers.

He rose to his feet. 'I am inconveniencing you, ma'am,' he said. 'I have been forgetting myself, sitting here so long. It troubles your humble servant deeply to see you so distressed. I am yours to command, my lady. My vengeance shall be wherever you desire.'

'I well believe it, sir,' said she.

His host the Burgrave is not neglectful of his entertainment. He asks him if he would care to ride out and take the air. – 'And see the battlefield, and the defences at the Gates of Gahmuret, worthy knight, replied that he would indeed like to view the scene of combat.

A merry company of knights rode down with him, both young and old. They conducted him round the sixteen Gates and explained at length how not one had been barred – 'Day or night since revenge was sought for Isenhart. The fighting between us has hung in the balance, yet all that time not one was closed. Loyal Isenhart's men have given battle before eight Gates and have inflicted great losses on us. These noble princes and vassals of the King of Azagor fight fiercely.'

A gay pennant was flying above the brave troop before each Gate, showing a knight pierced through with a lancethrust in the manner of Isenhart's death. From this his army had chosen its device.

'To assuage their grief our answer is this: our pennants show a woman with two fingers of one hand raised in oath, proclaiming she had never suffered so much as since that day when Isenhart was slain – his loss was torment to her heart. And so the Lady Queen Belacane's image was raised aloft in black upon a ground of white samite, as soon as we recognized the emblem, which could only add to the loyal woman's grief. Ours are planted high above the Gates. Before the other eight we are still hemmed in by proud Vridebrant's army, Christian folk from over the sea. Each Gate is in the care of a prince who sallies forth to battle with his banner. We have captured one of Gaschier's counts, and he is offering us a large ransom. He is a son of Kaylet's sister, so that any damage Kaylet does must be paid for by this other. We rarely have such luck! Between the moat and their encampment there is a stretch of country some thirty courses broad, sand, not turf. Many jousts take place there.'

Gahmuret's host had more to tell him. 'There is a knight who never fails to seek a joust before the walls. If the lady who sent him here were to fail to reward him for such loyal service what profit would his thirst for battle bring him then? This man is the proud Hiuteger. I must tell you further that this reckless knight has halted before the Palace Gate

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