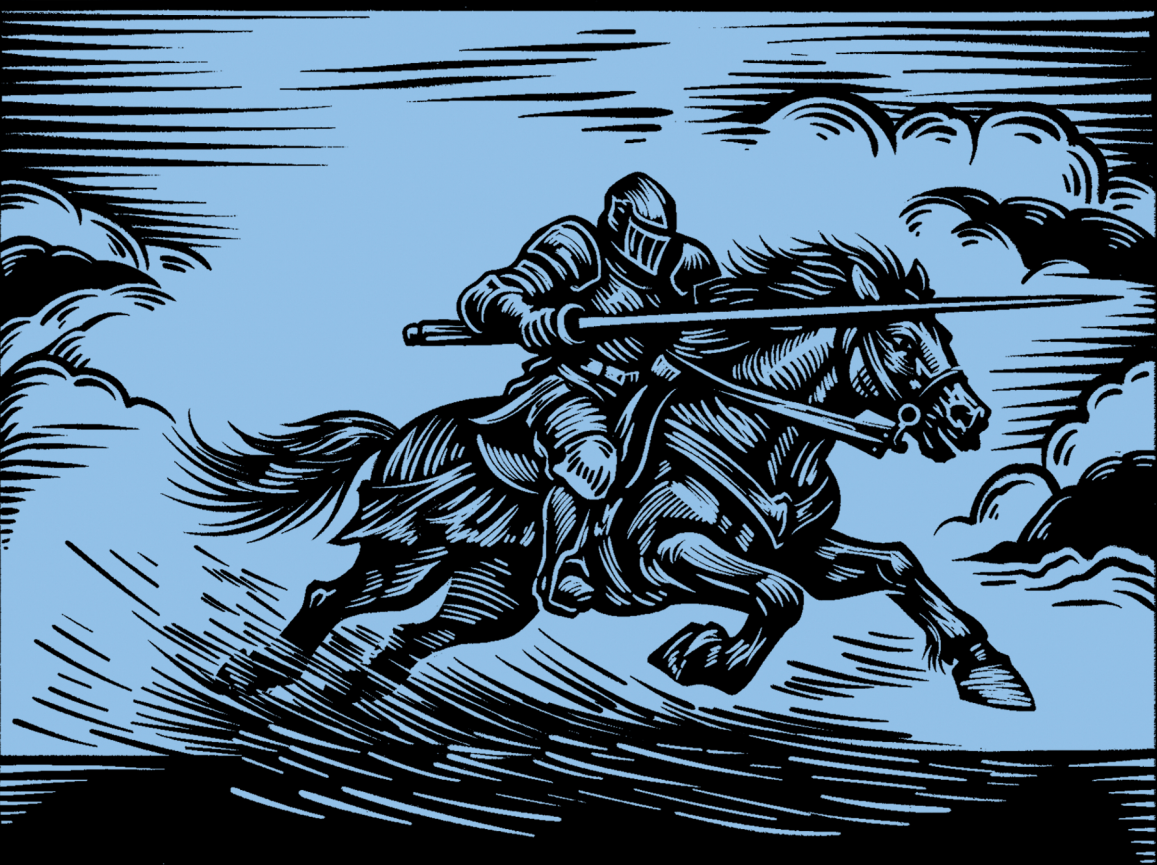


OF VALOR, LOVE, AND THE PURE OF HEART.

THE STORY OF THE  
CHAMPIONS  
OF THE  
ROUND TABLE

THE CHRONICLES OF KING ARTHUR: BOOK 2



HOWARD PYLE

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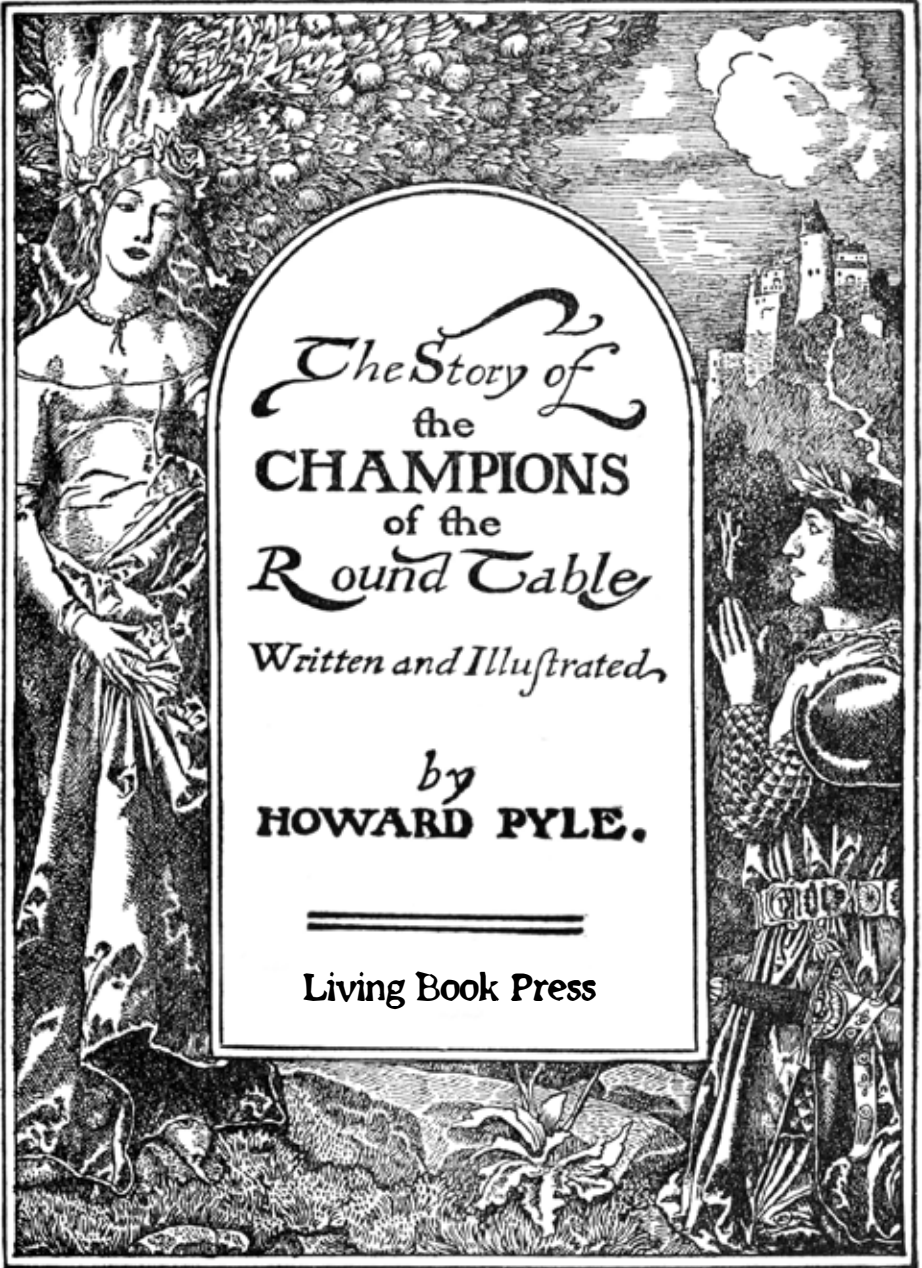
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*The Story of*  
the  
**CHAMPIONS**  
of the  
*Round Table*

*Written and Illustrated,*

*by*  
**HOWARD PYLE.**

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Living Book Press



# ir Launcelot of the Lake. *♣*





## Foreword

*In a book which was written by me aforetime, and which was set forth in print, I therein told much of the history of King Arthur; of how he manifested his royalty in the achievement of that wonderful magic sword which he drew forth out of the anvil; of how he established his royalty; of how he found a splendid sword yclept Excalibur in a miraculously wonderful manner; of how he won the most beautiful lady in the world for his queen; and of how he established the famous Round Table of noble worthy knights, the like of whose prowess the world hath never seen, and will not be likely ever to behold again.*

*Also I told in that book the adventures of certain worthy knights and likewise how the magician Merlin was betrayed to his undoing by a sorceress hight Vivien.*

*Now, if you took any joy in reading that book, I have great hope that that which follows may be every whit as pleasing to you; for I shall hereinafter have to do with the adventures of certain other worthies with whom you may have already become acquainted through my book and otherwise; and likewise of the adventures of certain other worthies, of whom you have not yet been told by me.*

*More especially, I believe, you will find entertainment in what I shall have to tell you of the adventures of that great knight who was altogether the most noble of spirit, and the most beautiful, and the bravest of heart, of any knight who ever lived—excepting only his own son, Galahad,*

*who was the crowning glory of his house and of his name and of the reign of King Arthur.*

*However, if Sir Launcelot of the Lake failed now and then in his behavior, who is there in the world shall say, "I never fell into error"? And if he more than once offended, who is there shall have hardihood to say, "I never committed offence"?*

*Yea, that which maketh Launcelot so singularly dear to all the world, is that he was not different from other men, but like other men, both in his virtues and his shortcomings; only that he was more strong and more brave and more untiring than those of us who are his brethren, both in our endeavors and in our failures.*





## The Champions of the Round Table

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**T**he Lady Nymue beareth  
away Launcelot into the  
Lake:





## Prologue

**I**t hath already been set forth in print in a volume written by me concerning the adventures of King Arthur when he first became king, how there were certain lesser kings who favored him and were friendly allies with him, and how there were certain others of the same sort who were his enemies.

Among those who were his friends was King Ban of Benwick, who was an exceedingly noble lord of high estate and great honor, and who was of a lineage so exalted that it is not likely that there was anyone in the world who was of a higher strain.

Now, upon a certain time, King Ban of Benwick fell into great trouble; for there came against him a very powerful enemy, to wit, King Claudas of Scotland. King Claudas brought unto Benwick a huge army of knights and lords, and these sat down before the Castle of Tribble with intent to take that strong fortress and destroy it.

This noble Castle of Tribble was the chiefest and the strongest place of defence in all King Ban's dominions, wherefore he had intrenched himself there with all of his knights and with his Queen, hight Helen, and his youngest son, hight Launcelot.

Now this child, Launcelot, was dearer to Queen Helen than all the world besides, for he was not only large of limb but so extraordinarily beautiful of face that I do not believe an angel from Paradise could have been more beautiful than he. He had been born with a singular birth-mark upon his shoulder, which birth-mark had the appearance as of a golden star enstamped upon the skin; wherefore, because of this, the Queen would say: "Launcelot, by reason of that star upon thy shoulder I believe that thou shalt be the star of our house and that thou shalt shine with such remarkable glory that all the world shall behold thy lustre and shall marvel thereat for all time to come." So the Queen took extraordinary delight in Launcelot and loved him to the very core of her heart—albeit she knew not, at the time she spake, how that prophecy of hers concerning the star was to fall so perfectly true.

Now, though King Ban thought himself very well defended at his Castle of Tribble, yet King Claudas brought so terribly big an army against that place that it covered the entire plain. A great many battles were fought under the walls of the castle, but ever King Claudas waxed greater and stronger, and King Ban's party grew weaker and more fearful.

So by and by things came to such a pass that King Ban bethought him of King Arthur, and he said to himself: "I will go to my lord the King and beseech help and aid from him, for he will certainly give it me. Nor will I trust any messenger in this affair other than myself; for I myself will go to King Arthur and will speak to him with my own lips."

Having thus bethought him, he sent for Queen Helen to come into his privy closet and he said to her: "My dear love, nothing remaineth for me but to go unto the court of King Arthur and beseech him to lend his powerful aid in this extremity of our misfortunes; nor will I trust any messenger in this affair but myself. Now, this castle is no place for thee, when I am away, therefore, when I go upon this business, I will take thee and Launcelot with me, and I will leave you both in safety at King Arthur's court with our other son, Sir Ector, until this war be ended and done." And to these Queen Helen lent her assent.

So King Ban summoned to him the seneschal of the castle, who was

named Sir Malydor le Brun, and said to him: “Messire, I go hence to-night by a secret pass, with intent to betake me unto King Arthur, and to beseech his aid in this extremity. Moreover, I shall take with me my lady and the young child Launcelot, to place them within the care of King Arthur during these dolorous wars. But besides these, I will take no other one with me but only my favorite esquire, Foliot. Now I charge thee, sir, to hold this castle in my behalf with all thy might and main, and yield it not to our enemies upon any extremity; for I believe I shall in a little while return with sufficient aid from King Arthur to compass the relief of this place.”

So when night had fallen very dark and still, King Ban, and Queen Helen, and the young child Launcelot, and the esquire Foliot left the town privily by means of a postern gate. Thence they went by a secret path, known only to a very few, that led down a steep declivity of rocks, with walls of rock upon either side that were very high indeed, and so they came out in safety beyond the army of King Claudas and into the forest of the valley below. And the forest lay very still and solemn and dark in the silence of the nighttime.

Having thus come out in safety into the forest, that small party journeyed on with all celerity that they were able to achieve until, some little time before dawn, they came to where was a lake of water in an open meadow of the forest. Here they rested for a little while, for Queen Helen had fallen very weary with the rough and hasty journey which they had traveled.

Now whilst they sat there resting, Foliot spake of a sudden, saying unto King Ban: “Lord, what is that light that maketh the sky so bright yonder-ways?” Then King Ban looked a little and presently said: “Methinks it must be the dawn that is breaking.” “Lord,” quoth Foliot, “that cannot very well be; for that light in the sky lieth in the south, whence we have come, and not in the east, where the sun should arise.”

Then King Ban’s heart misgave him, and his soul was shaken with a great trouble. “Foliot,” he said, “I believe that you speak sooth and that that light bodes very ill for us all.” Then he said: “Stay here for a

little and I will go and discover what that light may be.” Therewith he mounted his horse and rode away in the darkness.

Now there was a very high hill near-by where they were, and upon the top of the hill was an open platform of rock whence a man could see a great way off in every direction. So King Ban went to this place, and, when he had come there, he cast his eyes in the direction of the light and he straightway beheld with a manner of terror that the light came from Tribble; and then, with that terror still growing greater at his heart, he beheld that the town and the castle were all in one great flame of fire.

When King Ban saw this he sat for a while upon his horse like one turned into a stone. Then, after a while, he cried out in a great voice: “Woe! Woe! Woe is me!” And then he cried out still in a very loud voice, “Certes, God hath deserted me entirely.”

Therewith a great passion of grief took hold upon him and shook him like to a leaf, and immediately after that he felt that something brake within him with a very sharp and bitter pain, and he wist that it was his heart that had broken. So being all alone there upon the hilltop, and in the perfect stillness of the night, he cried out, “My heart! My heart!” And therewith, the shadows of death coming upon him, he could not sit any longer upon his horse, but fell down upon the ground. And he knew very well that death was nigh him, so, having no cross to pray upon, he took two blades of grass and twisted them into that holy sign, and he kissed it and prayed unto it that God would forgive him his sins. So he died all alone upon that hilltop.

Meanwhile, Queen Helen and Foliot sat together waiting for him to return and presently they heard the sound of his horse’s hoofs coming down that rocky path. Then Queen Helen said: “Foliot, methinks my lord cometh.” So in a little came the horse with the empty saddle. When Foliot beheld that he said: “Lady, here meseems is great trouble come to us, for methinks something hath befallen my lord, and that he is in sore travail, for here is his horse without him.”

Then it seemed to Queen Helen as though the spirit of life suddenly went away from her, for she foresaw what had befallen. So she arose

like one in a dream, and, speaking very quietly, she said: "Foliot, take me whither my lord went awhile since!" To this Foliot said: "Lady, wait until the morning, which is near at hand, for it is too dark for you to go thitherward at this present." Whereunto the Lady Helen replied: "Foliot, I cannot wait, for if I stay here and wait I believe I shall go mad." Upon this, Foliot did not try to persuade her any more but made ready to take her whither she would go.

Now the young child Launcelot was then asleep upon the Queen's knees, wherefore she took her cloak and wrapped the child in it and laid him very gently upon the ground, so that he did not wake. Then she mounted upon her palfrey and Foliot led the palfrey up the hill whither King Ban had gone a short time since.

When they came to that place of open rocks above told of, they found King Ban lying very quiet and still upon the ground and with a countenance of great peace. For I believe of a surety that God had forgiven him all his sins, and he would now suffer no more because of the cares and the troubles of this life. Thus Queen Helen found him, and finding him she made no moan or outcry of any kind, only she looked for a long while into his dead face, which she could see very plainly now, because that the dawn had already broken. And by and by she said: "Dear Lord, thou art at this time in a happier case than I." And by and by she said to Foliot: "Go and bring his horse to this place, that we may bear him hence." "Lady," said Foliot, "it is not good for you to be left here alone." "Foliot," said the Queen, "thou dost not know how much alone I am; thy leaving me here cannot make me more alone." Therewith she fell to weeping with great passion.

Then Foliot wept also in great measure and, still weeping like rain, he went away and left her. When he came again with King Ban's horse the sun had risen and all the birds were singing with great jubilation and everything was so blithe and gay that no one could have believed that care and trouble could dwell in a world that was so beautiful.

So Queen Helen and Foliot lifted the dead king to his horse and then the Queen said: "Come thou, Foliot, at thine own gait, and I will go

ahead and seek my child, for I have yet Launcelot to be my joy. Haply he will be needing me at this moment." So the Queen made haste down the steep hill ahead of Foliot and by and by she came to the margin of that little lake where they had rested awhile since.

By now the sun had risen very strong and warm so that all the lake, and the meadows circumadjacent, and the forest that stood around about that meadow were illumined with the glory of his effulgence.

Now as Queen Helen entered that meadow she beheld that a very wonderful lady was there, and this lady bare the child Launcelot in her arms. And the lady sang to Launcelot, and the young child looked up into her face and laughed and set his hand against her cheek. All this Queen Helen beheld; and she likewise beheld that the lady was of a very extraordinary appearance, being clad altogether in green that glistered and shone with a wonderful brightness. And she beheld that around the neck of the lady was a necklace of gold, inset with opal stones and emeralds; and she perceived that the lady's face was like ivory—very white and clear—and that her eyes, which were very bright, shone like jewels set into ivory. And she saw that the lady was very wonderfully beautiful, so that the beholder, looking upon her, felt a manner of fear—for that lady was Fay.

(And that lady was the Lady of the Lake, spoken of aforetime in the Book of King Arthur, wherein it is told how she aided King Arthur to obtain that wonderful, famous sword yclept Excalibur, and how she aided Sir Pellias, the Gentle Knight, in the time of his extremity, and took him into the lake with her. Also divers other things concerning her are told of therein.)

Then the Queen came near to where the lady was, and she said to her, "Lady, I pray you give me my child again!" Upon this the Lady of the Lake smiled very strangely and said: "Thou shalt have thy child again, lady, but not now; after a little thou shalt have him again." Then Queen Helen cried out with great agony of passion: "Lady, would you take my child from me? Give him to me again, for he is all I have left in the world. Lo, I have lost house and lands and husband, and all the other joys that

life has me to give, wherefore, I beseech you, take not my child from me.” To this the Lady of the Lake said: “Thou must endure thy sorrow a while longer; for it is so ordained that I must take thy child; for I take him only that I may give him to thee again, reared in such a wise that he shall make the glory of thy house to be the glory of the world. For he shall become the greatest knight in the world, and from his loins shall spring a greater still than he, so that the glory of the House of King Ban shall be spoken of as long as mankind shall last.” But Queen Helen cried out all the more in a great despair: “What care I for all this? I care only that I shall have my little child again! Give him to me!”

Therewith she would have laid hold of the garments of the Lady of the Lake in supplication, but the Lady of the Lake drew herself away from Queen Helen’s hand and said: “Touch me not, for I am not mortal, but Fay.” And thereupon she and Launcelot vanished from before Queen Helen’s eyes as the breath vanishes from the face of a mirror.

For when you breathe upon a mirror the breath will obscure that which lieth behind; but presently the breath will disappear and vanish, and then you shall behold all things entirely clear and bright to the sight again. So the Lady of the Lake vanished away, and everything behind her where she had stood was clear and bright, and she was gone.

Then Queen Helen fell down in a swoon, and lay beside the lake of the meadow like one that is dead; and when Foliot came he found her so and wist not what to do for her. There was his lord who was dead and his lady who was so like to death that he knew not whether she was dead or no. So he knew not what to do but sat down and made great lamentation for a long while.

What time he sat thus there came that way three nuns who dwelt in an abbey of nuns which was not a great distance away from that place. These made great pity over that sorrowful sight, and they took away from there the dead King and the woeful Queen, and the King they buried in holy ground, and the Queen they let live with them and she was thereafter known as the “Sister of Sorrows.”

Now Launcelot dwelt for nigh seventeen years with the Lady Nymue

of the Lake in that wonderful, beautiful valley covered over with the appearance of such a magical lake as hath been aforetime described in the Book of King Arthur.

And that land of the lake was of this sort that shall here be described:—

Unto anyone who could enter into the magic water of that lake (and there were very few of those who were mortal who were allowed to come to those meadows of Faery that were there concealed beneath those enchanted waters) he would behold before him a wide and radiant field of extraordinary beauty. And he would behold that that field was covered all over with such a multitude of exquisite and beautiful flowers that the heart of the beholder would be elated with pure joy to find himself in the midst of that waving sea of multitudinous and fragrant blossoms. And he would behold many fair and shady groves of trees that here and there grew up from that valley, each glade overshadowing a fountain of water as clear as crystal. And he would perhaps behold, at such pleasant places beneath the shade of those trees, some party of the fair and gentle folk of that country; and he would see them playing in sport, or he would hear them chanting to the music of shining golden harps. And he would behold in the midst of that beautiful plain a wonderful castle with towers and roofs uplifted high into the sky, and all shining in the peculiar radiance of that land, like to castles and battlements of pure gold.

Such was the land unto which Launcelot was brought, and from what I have told you you may see what a wonderful, beautiful place it was.

And the mystery of that place entered into the soul of Launcelot, so that thereafter, when he came out thence, he was never like other folk, but always appeared to be in a manner remote and distant from other of his fellow-mortals with whom he dwelt.

For though he smiled a great deal, it was not often that he laughed; and if he did laugh, it was never in scorn, but always in loving-kindness.

It was here in this land that Sir Pellias had now dwelt for several years, with great peace and content. (For it hath been told in the Book of King Arthur how, when he was upon the edge of death, the Lady Nymue of

the Lake brought him back to life again, and how, after that time, he was half fay and half mortal.)

And the reason why Launcelot was brought to that place was that Sir Pellias might teach him and train him in all the arts of chivalry. For no one in all the world was more skilful in arms than Sir Pellias, and no one could so well teach Launcelot the duties of chivalry as he.

So Sir Pellias taught Launcelot all that was best of knighthood, both as to conduct of manner, and as to the worthiness and skill at arms, wherefore it was that when Launcelot was completely taught, there was no knight in all the world who was his peer in strength of arms or in courtesy of behavior, until his own son, Sir Galahad, appeared in the courts of chivalry as shall by and by be told of.

So when Launcelot came forth into the world again he became the greatest knight in all the history of chivalry, wherefore that prophecy of his mother was fulfilled as to his being like to a bright star of exceeding lustre.

Accordingly, I have herein told you with great particularity all these circumstances of his early history so that you may know exactly how it was that he was taken away into the lake, and why it was that he was afterward known as Sir Launcelot, surnamed of the Lake.

As to how he came into the world to achieve that greatness unto which he had been preordained, and as to how King Arthur made him knight, and as to many very excellent adventures that befell him, you shall immediately read in what followeth.





## PART 1

# The Story of Sir Launcelot

*Here beginneth the story of Sir Launcelot, surnamed of the Lake, who was held by all men to be the most excellent, noble, perfect knight-champion who was ever seen in the world from the very beginning of chivalry unto the time when his son, Sir Galahad, appeared like a bright star of extraordinary splendor shining in the sky of chivalry.*

*In this Book it shall be told how he was taken into a magic lake, how he came out thence to be made knight by King Arthur, and of how he undertook several of those adventures that made him at once the wonder and the admiration of all men, and the chiefest glory of the Round Table of Arthur-Pendragon.*



# Sir Launcelot greets Queen Guinevere:





## Chapter First

*How Sir Launcelot Came Forth From the Enchanted Castle of the Lake and Entered Into the World Again, and How King Arthur Made Him Knight.*

**I** KNOW not any time of the year that is more full of joyfulness than the early summer season; for that time the sun is wonderfully lusty and strong, yet not so very hot; that time the trees and shrubs are very full of life and very abundant of shade and yet have not grown dry with the heats and droughts of later days; that time the grass is young and lush and green, so that when you walk athwart the meadow-lands it is as though you walked through a fair billowy lake of magical verdure, sprinkled over with a great multitude of little flowers; that time the roses are everywhere a-bloom, both the white rose and the red, and the eglantine is abundant; that time the nests are brimful of well-fledged nestlings, and the little hearts of the small parent fowls are so exalted with gladness that they sing with all their mights and mains, so that the early daytime is filled full of the sweet jargon and the jubilant medley of their voices. Yea; that is a goodly season of the year, for though, haply, the spirit may not be so hilarious as in the young and golden springtime, yet doth the

soul take to itself so great a content in the fulness of the beauty of the world, that the heart is elated with a great and abundant joy that it is not apt to feel at another season.

Now it chanced upon the day before Saint John's day in the fulness of a summer-time such as this, that King Arthur looked forth from his chamber very early in the morning and beheld how exceedingly fair and very lusty was the world out-of-doors—all in the freshness of the young daylight. For the sun had not yet risen, though he was about to rise, and the sky was like to pure gold for brightness; all the grass and leaves and flowers were drenched with sweet and fragrant dew, and the birds were singing so vehemently that the heart of any man could not but rejoice in the fulness of life that lay all around about him.

There were two knights with King Arthur at that time, one was Sir Ewain, the son of Morgana le Fay (and he was King Arthur's nephew), and the other was Sir Ector de Maris, the son of King Ban of Benwick and of Queen Helen—this latter a very noble, youthful knight, and the youngest of all the Knights of the Round Table who were at that time elected. These stood by King Arthur and looked forth out of the window with him and they also took joy with him in the sweetness of the summer season. Unto them, after a while, King Arthur spake, saying: "Messires, meseems this is too fair a day to stay within doors. For, certes, it is a shame that I who am a king should be prisoner within mine own castle, whilst any ploughman may be free of the wold and the green woods and the bright sun and the blue sky and the wind that blows over hill and dale. Now, I too would fain go forth out of doors and enjoy these things; wherefore I ordain that we shall go a-hunting this day and that ye and I shall start before any others of the lords and the ladies that dwell herein are awake. So let us take our horses and our hounds and let us take certain foresters and huntsmen, and let us go forth a-hunting into the green forest; for this day shall be holiday for me and for you and we shall leave care behind us, and for a while we shall disport ourselves in pleasant places."

So they all did as King Arthur bade; they made them each man ready

with his own hands, and they bade the huntsmen and the foresters to attend thereupon as the King had ordained. Then they rode forth from the castle and out into the wide world that lay beyond, and it was yet so early in the morning that none of the castle folk were astir to know of their departure.

All that day they hunted in the forest with much joy and with great sport, nor did they turn their faces toward home again until the day was so far spent that the sun had sunk behind the tops of the tall leafy trees. Then, at that time, King Arthur gave command that they should bend their ways toward Camelot once more.

Now this time, being the Eve of Saint John, fairies and those folk who are fay come forth, as is very well known, into the world from which they dwell apart at other times. So when King Arthur and those two knights and their several foresters and huntsmen came to a certain outlying part of the forest, they were suddenly aware of a damsel and a dwarf waiting where the road upon which they were travelling crossed another road, and they perceived, from her very remarkable appearance, that the damsel was very likely Fay. For both she and her dwarf sat each upon a milk-white horse, very strangely still, close to where was a shrine by a hedge of hawthorne; and the damsel was so wonderfully fair of face that it was a marvel to behold her. Moreover, she was clad all in white samite from top to toe and her garments were embroidered with silver; and the trappings and garniture of her horse were of white samite studded with bright silver bosses, wherefore, because of this silver, she glistered with a sudden lustre whensoever she moved a little. When King Arthur and the two knights who were with him drew nigh this damsel, much marvelling at her appearance, she hailed him in a voice that was both high and clear, crying: "Welcome, King Arthur! Welcome, King Arthur! Welcome, King Arthur!" saying three words three times; and "Welcome, Sir Ewain!" "Welcome, Sir Ector de Maris!" addressing each of those lords by his name.

"Damsel," quoth King Arthur, "it is very singular that you should know who we are and that we should not know you. Now, will you not