

Of Arthour and of Merlin

anon

late-thirteenth or early-fourteenth century, a partial Middle English retelling of the early-thirteenth century Old French Prose Lestoire de Merlin

Translated and retold in Modern English prose

by

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This romance has been translated and retold from the Middle English verse romance *Of Arthour and of Merlin* found in National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.2.1, the Auchinleck Manuscript, edited by O D McCrae-Gibson for the Early English Text Society, 1973 and 1979, published by Oxford University Press.

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Jhesu Crist Heuen-king · Al ous graunt gode ending · And seynt Marie Pat swete Ping · So be at our bigining ·
And help ous at our need · And leue ous wele to spede · Pat we habbeP ever to don · And scheld ous fram our fon
– Jesus Christ, King of Heaven, grant us all a good ending; and Saint Mary, that sweet thing, help us to live our lives well and shield us from our foes.

Children who are set to their books receive great benefit from this in later life, for they can see and understand much of God's truth, which will protect them from sin and suffering and allow them to see, if they open their minds to it, that they will never die. Those who know French and Latin are at a great advantage in this. But I will say no more of French and Latin, I shall speak in English. Those who were born in England should be able to understand English. Noblemen use French but every Englishman understands English, and I even know of some noblemen who speak English and have no French, so I will begin my tale for their sake, with God's permission. I will speak English, and may God protect us.

I shall begin this romance.

In England, there was a king, a very noble man named Constans. He was valiant in battle and full of wisdom, a man of great honour, with the reputation of a prince and conqueror, for King Angys of Denmark, and many other mighty heathens as well, were constantly at war with him, but he overcame them all and drove them out of his land so that they dared not face him in battle again.

The king had three sons: Constantine, Aurelius Ambrosius and Uther Pendragon. But the eldest son Constantine had chosen the Church as his vocation; he loved God and holy works, and for this reason he implored his father to let him be a monk at Winchester and to make Aurelius Ambrosius, his brother, or Uther Pendragon, his other brother, heir to the throne instead. The king was reluctant to do this; but nonetheless, Constantine entered the monastery at Winchester, without his father's blessing.

Soon afterwards, as I find it written, the king fell ill and seemed close to death. He sent for all his noblemen, and when they were assembled he said: 'Gentlemen, all of you, I am going to die. Therefore I ask you, for the love of me, for God's love and for charity, when I am dead and rotten in clay, help my children and take Constantine, my eldest son, and give him the ring and crown and obey him as your lord.'



They all agreed to do this.

The king had a steward whose name was Vortigern. He was a powerful and intelligent man, but avaricious and deceitful as well. He had served the king for a long while and because of his strength and courage, the king had relied upon him in many of his conflicts. Now, he gave him lands and wealth in order that he might look after his children when he was gone; the king made him swear that he would educate and protect his children. Vortigern swore that he would do this. (And when the king was dead, this traitor soon reneged upon his pledge and did the children harm, which was a great pity.)

The king died and was buried at Winchester. Earls and barons at once followed the wishes of the late king and made Constantine their king, and because he was a monk, he was called King Moyne thereafter. But the steward, Sir Vortigern, was not pleased with this at all and spoke against it as angrily and forcefully as he dared.

Word of this soon reached King Angys, who quickly gathered warriors from Denmark and Saxony to wage war against King Moyne. He filled many longships with princes and noblemen, they set mast and sail and soon arrived at England's shores. (England at this time was called Great Britain.)

The Britains, who are now the English, quickly got news of this. King Moyne implored Vortigern to exercise his power and to assume the role of steward, as he had done before, but Vortigern said no. He made some excuse why he couldn't fight, and no amount of silver or gold would tempt him. His motive was treason, pure and simple. He wanted to be king himself.

King Angys arrived with a great army. King Moyne marched to confront him and fighting broke out very quickly, with broken spears and shattered shields and many knights knocked from their horses. But our men and King Moyne were overcome and had to flee to Winchester with a great deal of sorrow and despair that such slaughter had befallen England. Many knights had been killed, and a great number of men lost their lives.

King Angys quickly overran castles and towns, one after another, and put his own men inside to defend them from ours, and sent for every able-bodied man he could find, young and old, to help him secure his position.

There were at this time many kings in the country whom King Constance had forced to pay homage and whose kingdoms had been absorbed into his own realm, and many of

The Middle English tale Of Arthour and of Merlin is an abridgement of the Old French Lestoire de Merlin, the second part of a huge prose epic known as the Vulgate Cycle. It deals with the reigns of Vortigern, Uther Pendragon and King Arthur, culminating, or rather coming to an abrupt and rather premature halt, as King Arthur is consolidating his rule over the kings of Britain and at the same time fighting pagans who are swarming over his lands like vermin, turning it into a wasteland.

Running through this entire story is the character of Merlin. He is the power behind the throne, the druid enchanter who can cause tents to collapse and fire to consume them, the shape-changer who can appear now as a child, now as an old man, as a learned clerk and now as an invincible warrior and standard-bearer, leading King Arthur and his knights into battle. And as these battles unfold, they assume more and more of a mythological feel. King Arthur's struggle culminates in a fight against a swarm of giants who are fourteen feet tall, led by their ruler King Rion who can lift in one hand a mace that no man should be able to lift at all. He is seventeen feet tall.

This version of the story in the White Book of Mottistone is identical to the one found in National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.2.1, the Auchinleck Manuscript.

them were distressed that things had turned out as they had. They implored Christ to help them and to save them from this fate. They came together one day and called the king an incompetent, the child of a brothel, and said that if Vortigern had been their king: 'We wouldn't be in this mess.' They told each other that they would rather have Vortigern as their king than anything else, suspecting already that he had ambitions in this regard, so they sent twelve men, the most persuasive they could find, to sound him out and ask why he wouldn't help to defend England as he had done in the past.

The twelve went to Vortigern as agreed, and greeted him with honour. Vortigern invited them to sit beside him and to tell him what they wanted. They said that the news was very bad, that they had suffered defeat at the hands of King Angys and that their lands had been taken away from them, many knights and barons had been killed and many were mourning fathers and sons. Therefore the advice of all the land was that he should take up the reins of command and try to mitigate this disaster, so that there should be no more harm inflicted.

'I am neither your duke nor your king,' replied this wicked man. 'So why have you come to ask me this? I pledged my oath to King Constance long before you were on the scene, I warred against you, far and wide, but I am no longer under any obligation, neither to you nor to anyone. Therefore, go to your king and ask him to protect you.'

'Sir,' replied a baron, 'our king is a clown. When he sees swords drawn he is the first to flee. His advice is no good. He's so afraid, he can't think. All the time that you were in command, we were never overcome. That we're getting the worst of it now is down to your absence. We all agree on this.'

'That is probably true,' said Vortigern. 'But I have no intention of risking anything in order to bring honour to a fool. If your king was to die, however, I might be persuaded to come and help you.'

'Sir, are you asking us to kill King Moyne?'

'No, but get out of here! While he's alive, you'll get no help from me.'

The barons departed and devised a plan to kill their king. They found King Moyne in his hall, eating at his table. They all leapt upon him and cut off his head with a sword, before a word was said. Anybody who dared to approach them was dealt with severely. When the deed was done, they all escaped out through a doorway.

Violence and conflict ensued. Many men lost their lives because of it, but since the king was dead, it was incumbent upon them to choose another king as quickly as possible, to bring peace amongst warring factions and to help to defend them from King Angys. But Uther Pendragon was still too young to bear arms and so was his brother Aurelius Ambrosius, so another candidate had to be found, and the opinion was widely held that they could do no better than to offer the crown to Vortigern. Not many could be found to argue against this, and most agreed that it should be so.

So whether for love or for whatever other reason, no one dared to stand against the idea. Vortigern was chosen by everybody to be their king.

April is a joyous time of year, a lusty time, a time for action: flowers spring forth in field and meadow, birds sing in the woodland and young men whistle a happy tune and look forward to taking a beautiful wench down the aisle – so to speak. The barons seized their moment and went at once to see Vortigern. They greeted him jovially and told him that England's sovereignty had been put in danger by wicked men, that is to say, by King Moyne, but that he was now dead and his brothers were too young to assume the throne: 'And because we know you to be valiant and trusted in battle,' they said, 'and of all men the best to protect us from our enemies, as you have done in the past, we have chosen you to be our king. The ring and the crown are yours. Everybody, high and low, rich and poor, is in agreement with this.'

'Thank you,' replied Vortigern, and he was crowned king immediately and without dissent. But at his coronation, two barons who knew of the treason that had been committed and who greatly lamented that the rightful king's blood should have been spilt in this way, spoke together and decided to make sure that the two children were taken overseas, and they arranged for this to happen, and no one knew anything about it except for themselves.

The king held a noble feast and then afterwards presided over a parliament where he commanded that the children should be brought to him at once. They were sought for but could not be found. Vortigern realised that he had been crossed; he understood the danger and grew nearly mad with rage (and no wonder, the children will do him great harm when they get older.)

But Vortigern quickly forgot about it, and so did everybody else; dukes and princes, freemen and servants, knights and men, were soon fully occupied in getting ready to expel King Angys by force of arms. They prepared for war against their enemies, some on fine warhorses, others on smaller steeds and many on foot, but no less useful for that with their crossbows and longbows. They confronted Angys and his heathen followers with many bolts shot, spears broken and shields hacked to pieces, many arrows through the throat and many knights knocked to the ground with their helmet caved in and coat of chainmail ripped apart. A lot of noble horses were killed. But our men performed heroically with their swords of sharpened steel and kicked many a wealthy heathen into the pains of hellfire.

King Angys saw that he was getting the worst of it and fled on horseback. He made it to a castle where a lot of his men had already gathered. Those who were left behind had a hard time of it. A cry of 'Mercy!' was no help to them; they were hacked down with axe and spear, knife and sword, and those who were overrun were brought quickly to the ground. There was no escape for anyone, only death. In this way, our folk won the day, and at once began to lay siege to the castle where King Angys was holed up.

When the siege had lasted for quite a while, Angys sent them word that if they would guarantee him safe passage, he would take what remained of his army back to his own country and never threaten England again.

Vortigern took counsel and agreed to these terms, on condition that they swore an oath to adhere to them. He let them depart in safety, and they made their way to the beach and sailed away.

Vortigern and his army celebrated joyously for many days afterwards. When this feast was over, the twelve traitors I mentioned awhile back, those who had killed King Moyne, conceived the curious notion that it might be a good idea to go to Vortigern to ask for a reward for committing this heinous crime.

'King,' they said, 'consider how you are now supreme. Show how noble and generous you are to those who, through their love for you, have given you the power that you now hold. We killed our lord. Give us a reward for it.'

Vortigern look sternly at them: 'By the law that God gave us, you shall have a fitting reward – you shall be hanged and drawn for killing your king. That is the punishment for regicide.'

Horses were fetched at once. The men had their feet tied to these horses and they were pulled apart limb from limb on the pavement, then hanged. Many of the knights and noblemen who were looking on were appalled to see their peers treated in this way and ran at Vortigern as though at a deadly enemy, but Vortigern's men intervened and steadfastly defended him. Many a head was kicked in, many a throat cut and much blood lost, but Vortigern managed to escape this attack.

The noblemen quickly spread word to their friends and relatives, that very night, how Vortigern had encouraged the murder of their king and then had their fellows executed without trial, and how they must exact revenge for these injustices. Each of them so influenced and persuaded his friends that soon a great weight of indignation had built up; many earls, barons and knights openly rebelled, battles were fought over the months and years that followed and many a lady grieved for her lord.

At last, Vortigern was persuaded that his position was getting hopeless, for the rebels were growing stronger and the men loyal to him were getting fewer and fewer, so he sent letters to young King Angys, asking if he would come and help him against all those who wanted him dead; if he did so, he would give him half his kingdom in return. Angys was very pleased to hear this and sent messengers to every duke, earl, baron and knight in his realm, in fact, every man who could wield a weapon, and soon many thousands of grim and sturdy fellows were embarking with him for England. Vortigern welcomed them with great joy when they arrived.

Vortigern kept to his agreement and gave Angys half the realm of England, or at least, half of that which he still controlled, in return for Angys's help in defeating his enemies. This arrangement was made binding, and they quickly made preparations for battle.

Their adversaries had already assembled just a few miles from Salisbury, waiting for them. Soon, many a colourful banner was torn to the ground, the poles broken and the cloth ripped to shreds, and many powerful lords were killed. Knights slew one another and many horses were disembowelled. I can tell you this for certain: that no pity was felt for the enemy on either side. Swords clashed against helmets, spears and arrows rained down, coats of chainmail were ripped open and many men impaled through the body. There was much slaughter on both sides, in a very short time; headless corpses littered the ground, men with their sides and bellies split open by lances and the bolts from heavy crossbows. Many ladies and damsels would weep floods of tears afterwards.

Vortigern had four men under his command for every one of ours, and soon the barons could not withstand the onslaught and began to flee for their lives, some by sea to their families, others overseas to seek refuge. Those whom Vortigern captured alive he had hanged and drawn, regardless of whether this was just or in accordance with the law. To all the others, he confiscated their lands and possessions, their castles and towers, and gave them all to heathen noblemen. There was much goodwill and affection between Angys and Vortigern.

Angys had a daughter, a very attractive girl (she was a heathen Saracen) and Vortigern fell in love with her and married her, earning himself God's curse all his life, for he allowed and encouraged Christian men to marry heathen women and so mixed our blood like flesh and maggots. Many thousands were married in this way, as we find it written in the book, and almost all of England was given to the devil.

Feasts were prepared often, great feasts, and Vortigern lived a life of luxury, his thoughts concerned solely with eating, drinking and hunting, and this lasted for many years. But one day, Vortigern sat thinking about the two children who had gone overseas, and of the many noblemen whom he had banished or who had fled abroad, and he was suddenly concerned that there might one day be a danger from this that he should prepare for, so he arranged for the best carpenters and the finest masons to be quickly found. His command was obeyed. Soon thousands had been gathered, their tools at the ready, willing to do the king's bidding. The king called them all together and said:

'Listen, all of you, and listen carefully. I have decided that a castle shall be built, a castle of timber and stone, reinforced with lime cement, the strongest fortress that the world has ever seen. If I should ever find myself hard-pressed, I can take refuge in it from those who may claim that I have seized their inheritance from them, hide from them there and defend myself. It shall be located on Salisbury Plain. Make sure that the walls are true, use the finest quality stone and see that the tower is impregnable and that the ditch is as deep as possible. Now that you know what I want, go and do it for me. I will pay you handsomely for this work.'

The workmen went off, three thousand or more of them, took axes to timber and chisels to rock, others dug and consolidated the ground for all they were worth and before the end of the day they had laid the foundations of a fine castle. These craftsmen were swift

and sure in their labour, and before evening the stonework was chest high, so the book says. When night fell, they went home to rest, as is a workman's right. They returned in the morning to a dreadful sight: all the foundation stones were scattered everywhere, lying upside down on the ground. The workmen were very angry indeed, but they cleared everything up and started all over again, and they carried on working until the sun set, achieving as much as they had the day before. But when they came back the next day, their work was all uplifted again and scattered here and there. This went on for months. All that they achieved in a day was destroyed again by the morning of the next.

News of this reached the king and he was puzzled by it, and angry. He tried by every means possible to find out what was hindering the work, but no answers were forthcoming. No craftsman seemed able to explain it, and no clergyman could either.

Vortigern sat in his hall amongst his knights and his barons, banged his fists on the table and commanded angrily that men of religion be brought to him at once, the best in all the land. His command was quickly obeyed. Men of religion were sought for, far and wide, and swiftly brought before him. He put the question to them: why was his castle falling down every night? No one could answer him. He threatened them with death if they couldn't tell him why his castle wouldn't stand.

Ten of these men of religion were chosen, the ten deemed to be the wisest, and they were shut in a room so that they wouldn't be disturbed, and no one was allowed to interrupt them, by the king's command, except to bring them food, and they spent nine days shut up in that room. They were astronomers and the wisest of the wise, but even so, all that they could determine for certain, when they studied the night sky, was that a child had been conceived on Earth without any man being involved.

They went before the king and told him that a child had been born without any involvement from a man, a child who knew well-nigh everything that there was to know.

'If you kill him without warning,' they said, 'his blood will be worth its weight in gold to you. If the stonework of your castle is smeared with it, it will probably stand forever.'

The king was delighted with this discovery and secretly chose twelve people to scour the land, in four groups of three, to look for this child and to kill him. If they came across him, they should let nothing stop them but without any hesitation they should cut off his head without giving the slightest warning, and without saying anything to him. This was the instruction that these men of religion gave, for they feared that it would be the end of them if the child was allowed to speak.

So these men went off on the king's business to the four quarters of England, groups of three, in four directions, looking for the child. The ten men of religion were constrained by the king to remain with him until it was clear that they had been telling the truth. If it turned out that they had been lying, their lives would end right there and then.

But let us leave these heathen clergymen for a moment. The twelve went off to search for the child. And before I unveil any more of this romance, I would like you to understand

how this child was conceived and what his name was. So please listen to me.

He who was and is and shall be for evermore, chose for himself here on Earth a sweet queen inside whom he could take on the flesh and blood he needed in order to redeem us on the cross; and because of his crucifixion, we have been granted the power to resist the devil, and the chance to go to heaven when we die – blessed be his name, and that of Mary, his sweet mother.

Now listen: of those devils who fell out of heaven with Lucifer, some went straight to hellfire, some fell into water, some onto land, and some remained in the air. They've stayed in these places ever since, after Our Lord ejected them, and they retain the power to harm mankind, here as well as there. I won't go into any more detail than is necessary, but the devils that live above us are constantly lustful and now and again they make a body for themselves out of the air and have the power to descend to the ground and do harm to those who ignore God's commandments; although it is not so bad now, for through the might of sweet Jesus many of them have already been destroyed, but there is no time now to explain this in any greater detail.

But the devils I'm talking about saw how Jesus, through his mercy, was born of Mary and had redeemed all of mankind as a result, and were so incensed by this that they vowed to emulate it and to bring to ruin as many as Jesus had saved. This was their plan, and it will astonish you but this is what happened: there was at this time a rich man in England who had a wife and four children, a son and three daughters. The devil whom I'm talking about, this fiend who lived in the air, descended to the ground and made the wife do all his bidding and so gained power over them all. They grew angry with one another and squabbled and fought so much that one day, in the evening, through the power of this fiend, the wife cursed her son shamefully and offered his soul to the devil. The fiend was delighted to hear this and quickly plotted the son's downfall; during the night, he entered the house and strangled him where he lay. The wife arose the next morning, found her son lying dead and quickly went and hanged herself for shame and grief, and when her husband became aware of this he suffered a seizure for sorrow and died without the benefit of any priest.

All the people who lived in this district felt great sadness and sympathy for the man and his wife, for they had been good people. A hermit lived nearby who came to visit the scene of this tragedy; his name was Blaise and he was very upset at what he saw and was convinced that it was the devil's work. He found the three daughters, eagerly heard their confessions and gave them absolution for all that he could get them to tell him and gave them due penance for their sins. He instructed them in the right way to serve God, and then he went home.

These three maidens served God willingly, with fear and love in due proportion. But the devil who had fallen to Earth, the one whom I told you about, took on the likeness of a man and went to an old woman and offered her money if she would accompany him

to these sisters in order to dupe and persuade the eldest to take young lovers. It was the law at this time that any woman caught having sex outside of lawful marriage was buried alive, unless she accepted that she was a prostitute and a common whore, with all that that entailed. Only upon this understanding was she allowed to live. This old wife – may a curse fall on her – visited these three sisters and feigned concern for the girls' plight, saying to the eldest: 'What a shame, my sweet maid, when you have such an attractive body, your feet and hands are so beautiful, you have a lovely face and you are so perfectly proportioned, that you have no young man to give you pleasure. Think how lovely that would be.'

'If I do this,' replied the maiden, 'I will be buried alive!'

'No,' said this old queen, 'you can do it discretely and in private, in your own bed, and then you can marry the young man afterwards.'

As a result of this old woman's persuasion and the fiend's encouragement, the elder sister let a young man have sex with her. She enjoyed it very much, but she was quickly found out, seized, judged to be guilty and buried alive. Everybody was very upset at her fate, particularly following that of her parents, and tears were shed all round.

But the fiend hadn't finished yet. He brought a young man to visit the middle sister and she let him have sex with her. This was quickly discovered, justice took its course and she was faced with the same sentence that had been meted out to her sister, but said she would become a prostitute, a common whore to all men. Many wept to hear this, but she had a lot of takers at this news.

Alas, that the fiend has such power to harm those whom Jesus has saved by his suffering!

The third sister was so distraught at the fate of her family that she nearly fell into despair, but through God's help she remembered the hermit who had come to visit them. She went to see him and confessed her life to him, as well as all the things that had happened to her sisters and parents. The hermit was astonished to learn what had happened, and fervently instructed her to keep Christ always in her mind and to shun the law of the devil, to succumb to neither anger nor gluttony, laziness nor lechery, backbiting nor unfaithfulness, greed nor envy, but to shun all these things and to live a good life, and he taught her how to live such a life, and he also taught her not to be such a fool as to lie down to sleep before blessing the door and the window of her bedroom, and all the corners of the room as well. He instructed her in all of this, and then she went home.

But the fiend was not finished yet. He inspired the girl's sister, who was under his influence entirely, to visit her. This whore arrived on the doorstep with a gang of harlots and began issuing threats, demanding her inheritance. They ran at the sister and started kicking and punching her, but thankfully she managed to escape into a room. She shut the door against them, neighbours heard the commotion and her screams for help and they came and drove the whores away.

This poor, foolish girl spent the rest of the day wracked with shame and regret, and when darkness fell, she lay fully clothed on her bed and fell asleep without blessing the room as the hermit had taught her.

The fiend quickly came to her. There was nothing to stop him, there was no mark of Our Lord anywhere. He lay beside the maiden and impregnated her.

The maiden woke up, suddenly feeling her legs uncovered. She could feel that she was being made love to! She jumped to her feet and found that the door was still locked. Nothing seemed to be disturbed, but this only served to increase her terror, because she rightly imagined that it must have been the devil. She didn't know what to do, she tore her fair hair with both hands, beat herself and spent all the rest of the night in tears.

The next morning, she went at once to see the hermit and told him what had happened. He expressed regret that she had not done as he had instructed her, and was very sorry for her.

'Alas, sir,' she said. 'As soon as men see that I am pregnant, I will be killed.'

'I am sure that this is true, although I marvel at your story,' he replied. 'Be assured, daughter, if I see that you are with child, I will do all in my power to help you, until I can see the child. Go home, now, my daughter. Keep Christ in your heart, do penance day and night and serve Jesus with all your strength. He may yet choose to save you.'

The maiden went drearily home and spent her time serving God as best she could, but every day her womb grew bigger. There was no way of hiding it. Her belly became so enormous that it was quickly noticed and she was taken to give an explanation for it. She was terrified as she stood before the judge.

The hermit learned what had happened and went quickly to witness the proceedings. The judge cleared his throat and began to question the girl:

'Oh maiden, I am inclined to feel great pity for you,' he said. 'You must at least have had an inkling that the devil was behind your parents' deaths, and the death of one of your sisters also, and your brother, and now you stand before me having brought death upon yourself by having unlawful sex. You shall be taken from here and killed, for this is what the law requires.'

'Sir,' she replied, 'I have never unlawfully lain beside a man, I swear this by Christ.'

'Then it is a marvel indeed!' exclaimed the judge. 'You are lying. You must be lying! You cannot be telling me the truth, for I can plainly see that you are pregnant.'

'I have become pregnant without having had sex with any man,' she replied. 'On that night a strange creature came to me, I have no idea what it was but I swear to God that it was no man.'

The judge swore by Saint Alban that he had never heard anything like it. 'I don't believe you,' he said. 'Since Adam and Eve were banished from Paradise, no child has ever

been born without the involvement of a man, except for one, and that was Jesus Christ, through the power of God the Father. But because you claim that you are bearing a child and no man has been involved in its conception, before anyone buries you alive I will get twelve married women to tell me if a child can possibly be conceived without the seed of any man.'

Twelve wives were selected. They came before the judge and swore that no child had ever been born without the involvement of a man, except for Jesus Christ, through God's grace. To this they gave their oath. Then Blaise the hermit spoke up:

'Judge, please listen to me,' he said. 'This girl has no way of proving her claim, we can all agree to this. I have heard her confession and taught her the law, and I am satisfied that she has no recollection of any man having had sex with her. And although she deserves death, the child is innocent. It would be a great injustice to kill two for the crime of one. So let her be taken into custody, let her bear the child and then suckle and look after it for two and a half years, and when the infant is old enough to walk and speak, then justice can be done.'

'By God!' exclaimed the judge. 'This is excellent advice. We shall do exactly as you say. She will not be killed today.'

They decided to incarcerate her in a tower and to refuse her all visitors except for an old midwife who was to guard her. They quickly took her to this tower and shut her in. It was so high that no one could gain entry, and there was only a single window with a pulley system for drawing up food and everyday provisions.

When it was time for her to give birth, the maiden produced a strange-looking child, the book says. It had the form of a boy, but was blacker than most babies and much hairier. After the child had been born, they lowered the infant down on a rope and Blaise quickly christened the little boy Merlin. The fiend was very angry at this, for it denied them the power that they had hoped to have. After the child had been christened, Blaise put the baby back onto the rope and the wise-woman drew him back up, then walked to the fire and held the child, looking at his face and his demeanour.

'Away, you foul thing!' she exclaimed suddenly. 'Alas that your mother should suffer such an end for your sake. You disgusting creature!'

The child replied loudly: 'You're lying, you old hag! No one will kill my mother while I'm alive.' The old woman was so startled that she nearly dropped the child.

'In the name of God, you have no power to harm me,' she muttered.

His mother heard this and implored her child to tell them who he was. But for all their insistence, Merlin remained silent. But I can tell you, they were astonished, and when word of it got out, so was everybody else.

Six months later, Merlin's mother held him by the fire and wept bitterly to herself: 'Alas, my sweet son, for your sake I shall be buried alive.'

Merlin spoke: ‘Mother, no. I swear, no judge will ever have you buried while I can walk and talk,’ and from that day onwards, Merlin told her everything she wanted to know.

When the child was old enough to walk, the judge came to visit and summoned the woman to face justice. He swore, in the name of the Virgin Mary, that she should be killed at once. The child Merlin replied mildly to the judge:

‘Any man worth his salt knows that no one can fight against destiny, and it was through destiny and through grace that I was put into her womb. What choice did she have?’

The judge looked angrily at Merlin and insisted that she must be buried alive.

‘You won’t be able to do it, however hard you might try,’ Merlin replied. ‘I’ll tell you why if you like: it was a fiend who brought about my conception and put me into a holy vessel. He imagined that I would be born an evil child, but I have been christened and have



chosen to follow the good. But through my father’s parentage I am able to know of things past, as well as everything that exists, why it is and what, and how, and of things to come as well – not everything, but some of it. I know very well who my father is, but you don’t know who yours is. And because of this, I say that your mother is more deserving to be buried alive than mine.’

The child answered so confidently and eloquently that everybody was amazed that a two-year-old could speak with such assurance.

‘You lie!’ the judge exclaimed. ‘My father was a nobleman and my mother a lady. She is still alive, and I know that no man ever went to bed with her improperly, by the Mother of God!’

‘Judge, be silent, or I shall make it known far and wide how many men she’s slept with. Send someone to fetch her and if she doesn’t admit to it, then you can pull me apart with wild horses.’

The judge quickly instructed that his mother be fetched, and she was soon standing before him.

‘Merlin, say again what you just said, in front of my mother – if you dare.’

‘Now I can see that your decisions and judgements are not very wise,’ said Merlin. ‘If I explain everything regarding how you were conceived in front of all these people here, your mother will have to be buried alive and it will be your fault.’

When the judge understood the escalating gravity of the situation, the three of them retired to a private chamber.

‘Now, Merlin, tell me, who was the man who fathered me?’

The child swore by Saint Simon: 'It was the parson in her town. They played intimately together and, as a result, you were conceived.'

'You bastard! You're telling great lies!' exclaimed the old lady. 'His father was a baron. The man is a fool who listens to a word you say. You are a nothing but a freak, an ill-conceived freak and you ought to be killed. That will stop you from telling lies and slandering people like this.'

'Madam, be quiet! No man has any right to kill me. I am a gift to this land, and you deserve to be buried alive. Your son will see the truth of this. Your lord returned unexpectedly from Cardoil, much to your distress. It was night and the parson lay in your arms, in bed. Your lord began knocking on the chamber door and you sprang to your feet in nothing but your smock, well-nigh mad with terror. You shot open a window and let the parson out. Then you shut the window behind him. But the two of you had already conceived this knight here. What do you say, madam? Have you anything to say?'

The lady couldn't utter a word. The colour drained from her face.

'What do you say to this?' asked the judge.

'Sir, it is the truth, by Jesus Christ! Whatever you might do, I can't deny it.'

The judge looked mortified. He was beside himself with shame. Merlin took him aside, into a corner of the room:

'Sir, listen to me. Let your mother go home, and send a young man secretly to follow her. She will quickly go to tell the parson that they have been betrayed by me. When the parson hears this, he will be so distressed, for shame and sorrow, he will go to a bridge and throw himself into the water, taking his own life. Unless things happen in just this way, you can have me killed.'

The judge did as Merlin advised. He sent a spy to follow his mother, and events unfolded exactly as Merlin had said they would. The judge was duly convinced, and allowed Merlin and his mother to go free.

Shortly afterwards, Merlin went to see the hermit, Blaise. Blaise asked Merlin to explain, in God's name, and without fear of any consequences, how he had come to be conceived and born, and Merlin told him everything. And he said: 'I will be an advisor to four kings, they are going to receive my counsel, and you shall write a chronicle of their achievements. I will dictate it to you, for the benefit of all those who come after us.'

Merlin told Blaise many things that the hermit has committed to writing, and it is through this book that he made that we can appreciate everything that Merlin did in Britain at this time.

When Merlin was five winters old he had a healthy, outdoor complexion and a natural courage and curiosity. We find it written that he persuaded his mother to become a nun, and she willingly served Jesus Christ forever afterwards, with all her strength and com-

mitment.

So one day, to continue my story, as each of these groups of three searchers scoured the land, looking for this strange child on the instructions of King Vortigern, one of the groups happened to enter the town where Merlin was living. He was playing in the street with some other boys when one of them took exception to him and cried: 'Go away you fiend! You bastard, you don't know who your father was, some devil I imagine, sent to harm us.'

The messengers happened to be passing. Immediately, they recognised the significance of this outburst, brought their horses to a halt and drew their swords. Merlin shook his head and laughed. He was only five years old, but he could speak boldly enough:

'A curse on you, you fool, you shout too loudly. Here come some king's men who have been looking for me all year. But they're wasting their effort. They'll want to kill me quickly, but when they look at me, they'll lose their nerve, and by the time they depart, we'll be good friends.'

As the messengers approached, Merlin ran towards them. He laughed at them and said: 'Welcome, all of you. You have come from Vortigern and you want to kill me. But you won't do it. If you take my blood to the king, it won't do him any good. Those who told him this were lying to him, when they said that my blood would make his castle strong again. It won't. And if you kill me, he'll only learn the truth of this for himself.'

'Saint Mary!' exclaimed one of the messengers. 'How do you know all this?'

'I am quite aware of the king's business, I'm aware of everything that will happen on Earth and all that will be said and done concerning it.'

These men were amazed. It seemed foolish in the extreme to harm the boy.

'So don't kill me,' said Merlin. 'I'll shield you from harm, I promise. I'll demonstrate the truth in front of the king and explain to him why his castle keeps falling down and how those learned men he's taking advice from have lied about me. The king will see the truth of it. If you'll let me, I'll travel back with you.'

All three of the messengers agreed at once. 'Certainly, child, we agree to this. But tell us your name, or who your mother is, so that we can confirm who you are, you are so young.'

'Then follow me,' said Merlin. 'You shall see my mother and she'll tell you.'

By midday they arrived at the nunnery where his mother lived, and she confirmed everything that Merlin had told them. She explained how her son had saved her from the judge, from being buried alive, by a wit and wisdom that was far beyond his years. They were all astounded. Then Merlin led them quietly to his teacher, Blaise, who gave similar confirmation. Merlin spoke at length to Blaise, and the hermit wrote it all down afterwards.

That night, the messengers retired to their inn, and the following morning, as we see it written, Merlin and the messengers took their leave and rode contentedly off, towards the place where the king was to be found.

One day, they passed through a market town where many people were buying and selling things. Merlin paused and had a good laugh at some shoe sellers. One of the messengers asked him what he was finding so funny.

‘Can you see the new shoes that that man has just bought, made of strong and durable leather, all waterproofed with dubbin? He intends them to last, but I swear, *he* won’t see the day out, himself. He’ll die before he reaches his front gate.’

The messengers wondered at this, but soon afterwards they saw the man lying dead.

They found an inn, and set off again next morning, as soon as it was light. They travelled onwards until they came to a town, and as they were passing a churchyard they saw a body on a bier, being taken for burial, with priests and clerics singing in front of it, and many other people accompanying. Merlin looked on and gave out a great belly laugh. The messengers rode up to him and asked why he had laughed so loudly.

‘You would laugh as well, if you knew,’ he replied. ‘Amongst all these folk I can see an old man weeping bitterly. It would be better if he skipped and jumped for joy! And I can see another quite happily singing his psalms who would be better wringing his hands. I’ll tell you why: it will amuse you. The dead body is that of a ten-year-old child. The priest who is singing so joyfully is the child’s father, and if he knew, he would be wringing his hands in sorrow, both in grief and in shame. And can you see the silly husband, wringing his hands in grief? He ought rather to be singing and skipping along instead, for the priest’s son, who would have done him much harm if he had lived, is now dead.’

They approached the mother, and she confessed to the truth, but she pleaded with them not to divulge it, and they agreed not to.

Forth they went, towards the king, and Merlin burst out laughing for a third time. His companions asked him what he was finding so funny.

‘I’ll tell you,’ he said. ‘Vortigern’s wife, the queen, has caused a wrongful judgement to be made. Her chamberlain is a woman who goes in the guise of a man. Because he seemed so good-looking, our faithless queen asked him to be her lover, for she thought he was a man. This chamberlain refused, she said that no amount of gold would persuade her to do it, upon which the queen accused her in front of my lord the king, saying that the man had tried to force himself upon her. The king was understandably very angry and swore that if he could find any witnesses to it, the chamberlain would be hanged and dismembered for it. Now go, one of you, as quickly as you can, find the king and tell him everything I have told you. Advise him to find out the truth out for himself.’

One of the messengers went off, on a swift horse, and didn’t rest until he arrived before the king in his hall.

‘Hail, King Vortigern, may God keep you and maintain you, and preserve your mighty hand!’ he cried. ‘We have scoured the land in order to seek a child, as you instructed, whom men call Merlin. He is now five years old, bold and intelligent, and he knows things which he should not know, and he can predict the future. Your ten learned clerics are lying about him. He will swear to this in front of you when he arrives, and he will explain to you why your castle keeps falling down, so that you can remedy it. And also, he’ll tell you about your wife’s chamberlain, so that you won’t kill or hang this person unjustly, for it is wrong to kill a woman for a man’s misdemeanour, even if she dresses in a man’s clothes. If you find that what I say isn’t true, you can hang him by all means.’

Vortigern was astounded, and so was everybody else. The king sent for the chamberlain, who had already been thrown into prison, and when they stripped him they found him to be a woman, a maiden. The king was beside himself with curiosity; he seized the messenger by the front of his doublet and demanded to know how he had known about this.

‘Merlin told us! As we were making our way here! He knows the truth about many things.’ Then the messenger told the king the story of his conception, what he was like and everything he had said to them as they were riding along.’

‘If you are telling me the truth,’ said Vortigern, ‘I will confer great lands upon you for finding him. I’ll make your companions rich as well.’ At once, he commanded dukes, earls and barons to make themselves ready to ride out with him to meet Merlin.

It was well after nightfall when this welcoming-party intercepted Merlin on the road. The king greeted Merlin with warmth and friendliness, and many words were exchanged that I cannot go into now, it would take too long, I would be all day writing it down, but I will relate everything that is pertinent to the story. They found comfortable lodgings that night and set off early the next morning for the place where the castle was being constructed.

‘Tell me now, my son,’ said Vortigern, ‘why is it that nobody can get a castle to stand here on this ground? Why does every day’s work come crashing down again during the night?’

‘Sir, it is no wonder that your castle falls. Beneath here is a deep torrent of water that races over two large stones and deep beneath these stones two dragons are coiled up. One is as white as milk, the other as red as firelight. They are both burning with anger at each other, and when the sun sets every night they try to fight one another, and by the ferocity of their struggles, all your work is toppled over. I advise you to dig down and uncover them, and then your workmen will be able to build a castle just as you desire, one that will stand for a very long time.’

Vortigern didn’t know what to say, and neither did anybody else, so he had an army of workmen fetched to dig into the ground and they soon encountered the water that Merlin had predicted. They dug two deep wells, diverted the water into them and by

doing so, laid bare two great stones. Between these stones was a great spread of gravel and earth that the dragons had thrown up. Many men were on hand to raise these two stones, and when they did so, they uncovered the two dragons coiled up with their tails beneath them, just as Merlin had described. One of the dragons was as red as fire with eyes the size of a shining helmet, breathing fire and with a long tail and a body like a whale; a terrifying beast to meet with. The other dragon was not as large but had terrifying claws, a tongue like a burning coal protruding from its gaping mouth, and at the end of his long, ridged and scaly tail was a great barb like a hook.

They both began to rear up. All the people who were looking on cried out in terror. There was no king or earl, baron or knight, freeman or serf who dared to stay a moment longer. Everybody ran for their lives! The dragons rose from their den and took no notice of the men who were fleeing but set upon one another viciously, breathing flames so fiercely that all the vegetation about them was burned to ashes. They bit one another and slashed with claw and tail. The earth shook beneath them, so fierce was the battle, and even the weather changed: storms rolled in as they bit and grappled and clawed and breathed fire at one another; they rose and fell and fought as though they were insane. They fought for almost a day without any rest, until the red dragon began to gain the upper hand and drove the white dragon into a valley, but here they both rested for a while. Then the white dragon reared up and the fight began anew. The white dragon pursued the red back up onto the high ground once more and here he got the better of the red dragon, he threw it to the ground and by the strength of his fiery breath, he burned the red dragon to ashes. There was nothing left of it. Then the white dragon flew away, and no one knows where it went to, no one has ever seen it since.

All those who were watching this were utterly astonished, both at the dragons' fight and that this child Merlin should have been able to predict it so accurately.

'Sir, you have witnessed clearly for yourself what I told you would happen,' said Merlin to the king. 'Now bring before me those ten clerics who wanted to have me killed and I will ask them why, my lord, they thought that my blood should be of any help to you.'

'Certainly,' replied King Vortigern. 'I will summon them, and have no fear, everything will be done according to your wishes and with your advice.'

The king sent for the ten clerics, and when they came before him, Merlin asked them in Latin how they had come to believe that his blood would make Vortigern's castle stand solidly upright. The clerics replied, with terror in their eyes:

'We saw a configuration of stars and planets in the night sky that told how you had been born on Earth and that your blood would make the castle stand upright. We truly believed that this was what we saw. Now do with us what you please.'

'Ah, you were misled, do you not see? The configuration you saw was the work of my father. He has no power over me now and for this reason he would rather that I was dead. But because you were deceived by him – my lord the king, I ask that you let these men

live. I am willing to forgive them all their guilt in this matter.'

The king quickly absolved them of all blame and they thanked him profusely. Then everybody went back to their lodgings. Merlin remained with the king all that year, and by virtue of his wisdom and understanding, the castle was swiftly built. It was built of stone and wood, it was high and strong, and there was no other building like it in the whole land.

When the castle was completed, everybody advised the king that he should find out from Merlin the meaning of why the dragons had fought and what their fight signified. 'It must prophesy something,' they said, with conviction.

Merlin came before the king and everybody repeated this request. 'Why did the dragons fight?' they asked. 'What does it all mean?'

Merlin was reluctant to answer them. The king stepped in:

'Merlin, unless you tell me, I will have you killed,' he said.

'That would be very unjust of you,' Merlin replied. 'If you were to take it into your hands to kill me or to have me put in chains, you may well fail. Many men don't achieve what they want to, and certainly, King Vortigern, I'm not afraid of the power that you wield. But if you will produce guarantors to assure me of my safety, I will tell you the truth and explain to you what the dragons signify.'

All who heard this wondered what it might be that Merlin was so reluctant to reveal, and the king did as well; he swore upon a book that he hadn't the slightest intention of harming Merlin, whatever he might say, and he found two dukes who were willing to stand as guarantors. 'Then listen,' said Merlin. 'The red dragon represents you and all your power, which was able to act from a distance to bring about the death of Moyne, the rightful king. You saw the red dragon drive the white into the valley beside a wood, which signifies you driving the rightful heirs out of this kingdom. The white dragon represents the rightful heir to this land, who is angry that you rule his lands unlawfully. That he flew into the valley and rested, and then recovered his strength and drove the other back, signifies the massive army that he is at this moment gathering, in a land over the sea. That the white dragon drove the red one back onto Salisbury Plain and overcame him there and burnt him to ashes with his fiery breath signifies that the rightful heir of this land will hold you at his mercy and force you to take refuge in your castle, with your wife and your children, and many of your noblemen, and there he will destroy you all with fire.

'The long tail of the red dragon signifies the long tail of wicked descendants you will leave behind, and those of your wife's father Angys, who will also be overthrown and killed. His descendants and yours will bring grief to this land. The spiked club at the end of the white dragon's tail signifies the rightful heirs and descendants who will destroy all of yours. Truly, sir, this is the meaning of the fighting dragons. Make yourself ready, I advise you, A great army is on its way, as I speak.'

The fear could be seen in Vortigern's eyes, he bit his lip and his face dropped.

'You must tell me what to do,' he said. 'Tell me how I can fight them. Do this or you are a dead man.'

'Sir, this is what will happen, there is no changing it.'

Vortigern jumped up and tried to seize Merlin, but he had disappeared. The king and all those in the hall tried angrily to find him, but without success. Merlin had whisked himself away, and was soon with his teacher, Blaise, where he related all that had happened concerning the red and white dragons, and its full meaning, and Blaise wrote it all down. The red dragon, Merlin said, stood for all the destruction that the descendants of Vortigern and those of King Angys, would cause, and the great turmoil that England would have to suffer as a result, both shortly and in the distant future. All that Merlin prophesied was written down in a book of scripture, setting out all that will happen in England, but the meaning is so dark and hidden, and hard to decipher, that few can understand it, to be honest, so I won't dwell on it here. I shall continue, instead, with my tale.

Listen, everybody! May is a merry month, the days lengthen, flowers bloom, birds sing in the woods, damsels dance and people, everywhere, are very cheerful. A baron came to Vortigern during this season as he was sitting at dinner and said: 'Alas! My lord the king, I have some bad news for you. You must act decisively, with great authority and prepare the land for war. Uther Pendragon, his brother Aurelius Ambrosius and a large number of others are almost at Winchester. Sir, you must act at once! Send for help. They're nearly upon you. Summon fighting men who can repel these invaders and kill them all.'

Vortigern leapt to his feet and called for his chancellor. He hurriedly sent off a great many letters to powerful earls, dukes and knights, and to his father-in-law, King Angys. He sent greetings to the freemen of Winchester and instructed them to close the city gates at once, to guard their loyalty and make the city secure so that his foes couldn't get in, if they wanted to earn his love. He said he would come to their aid as quickly as he could.

Fighting men soon gathered around Vortigern. King Angys of Denmark arrived with a great army, pagan warriors and cunning tacticians on the field of battle, many thousands, men of all sorts, and when they were all assembled, the decision was made to give battle to the enemy as quickly as possible, so that they couldn't get a foothold in the country. They raised their banner and marched to Winchester.

Uther Pendragon and Aurelius Ambrosius made for Winchester as well, with such a huge army that it covered both valley and downland as it advanced. They unfurled their own banner, which depicted a bright, glittering lion, which had been their father's emblem. The freemen of Winchester could see it clearly and they recognised it, causing them to

remember their former king Constance with affection, and his young son Moyne who had been killed, and to concede that Vortigern had held the crown unjustly for many years – may a curse fall on him and all his friends and compatriots. The freemen of Winchester decided that, come what may, for good or ill, even if they were all hanged for it, they couldn't support Vortigern, and so they turned their loyalty to Uther Pendragon. They threw the gates of Winchester open and let the forces of Uther Pendragon in, welcoming them all with shouts and cheers, and gave the city and the castle over to them.

As Vortigern was approaching Winchester he was told of Uther Pendragon's good fortune. He was furious and vowed that it would do his enemies no good. He and his army rode towards the city as quickly as they could. Uther Pendragon rode out of Winchester and displayed his banner so that each side could see it. The armies were so close to each other that many of the barons and knights of this land recognised the emblem of King Constance and changed their allegiance. Many thousands changed sides and gave their loyalty to Uther Pendragon, shouting to Vortigern: 'You wicked traitor! You will pay for your treason!'



Vortigern drew his sword and slew many of them, for he had counted them loyal, but they attacked him ferociously and he found himself in great difficulty. Vortigern was a noble knight and he put up a good fight. King Angys came to his aid with many fine, pagan warriors, valiant men who knew how to spur a horse and break a lance, and they set upon the turncoat barons intending to slaughter them mercilessly. One of these noblemen who had changed sides broke from the fighting and galloped over to Uther Pendragon.

'Welcome, heir of this land!' he cried. 'But for Christ's sake, don't wait here any longer! Many noblemen have changed sides already, for love of your father and through great fondness and respect for you, and they are in grave danger because of it. Vortigern and King Angys are attacking them mercilessly and will kill them all if you don't do something quickly to help them!'

'By God above, now I shall see who is on my side,' cried Uther Pendragon.

Princes, dukes, earls and knights spurred their horses and shot off like arrows from crossbows with their lord Uther Pendragon. Soon the air was filled with the sound of steel clashing against steel. Lances were shattered, swords drawn and many knights killed. Uther Pendragon and his brother fought like frenzied lions, striking many blows. Uther struck men so hard with his sword that he split heads in two, from top to chin, and others he decapitated entirely. Many men were killed, bodies lay everywhere, and although Vortigern was a fine warrior, the knights and noblemen who had changed sides made all the difference and he was forced to flee the battlefield to his new castle on

Salisbury Plain with all his men. Aurelius Ambrosius and his brother Uther Pendragon took vengeance with their swords of steel and sent many hundreds of pagans to the pains of hell. When King Angys saw so much killing, he fled as well, to a stone castle that he thought would be able to protect him. All those left behind were cut to the ground and slain mercilessly.

Uther Pendragon pursued Vortigern, and when they reached the castle gates they threw wildfire at them and found them easy to set fire to. Vortigern and his wife and child burnt there in that fire, for the whole castle was burnt to the ground.

Men can see wrong enduring for many years, but always, in the end, it changes for the good. Thus ended Vortigern, who believed in pagan gods for a long time, and although he was strong and powerful, his injustices gained him nothing in the end.

Uther Pendragon went at once to lay siege to King Angys, but the castle seemed impregnable. Five noblemen who were involved in that siege, and had formerly been with King Vortigern, approached Uther one day and told him the story of Merlin, how miraculously he had been born and how messengers had been sent to search for him, how he was brought before the king and seemed to know things that he shouldn't know. They told Uther how he'd interpreted the underground dragons as predicting the death of Vortigern and how he'd suddenly vanished when Vortigern had tried to seize him.

'In all honesty, sir, if he was here to advise you now,' they said, 'you would very quickly have the castle captured and King Angys slain, we're sure.'

Uther Pendragon sent messengers off at once to try to find Merlin.

One day, the messengers were sitting in a tavern in the West Country, having their dinner, with plenty of food and drink before them, when an old man came in. The man had a white beard, a good stick for walking and stout shoes on his feet, but said that he was dreadfully hungry and asked the messengers at their bench to give him something to eat, for God's love. They replied that he'd get nothing from them, for if he was old he also looked quite fit and healthy and ought to go and do some honest work to earn his own food and drink.

'Go away, you fraud!' they shouted.

'Fellow,' the old man replied, 'I am no fraud. I am an old man of this world, I've seen and heard many wonders and you are just youngsters, and if you knew better, you wouldn't be so rude to an old man. You're supposed to be helping Uther Pendragon. An old man may well be able to help you to find Merlin. The prince was insane to send idiots like you off on such an errand. It's in the nature of Merlin that if he stood here before you and spoke to you right by this door here, you wouldn't have a clue it was him. You've met him three times already today, and still you have no idea. So I would advise you to go home, for you haven't a hope of finding him. Tell your prince to take five barons with him and come quickly to speak with Merlin. He'll be waiting for him right here, beside this forest.'

As soon as he had finished speaking, the old man left. No one had any idea who he was or where he had gone. The messengers searched, but there was no trace of him. This is what is written: that it was Merlin himself who spoke to them. The messengers were bewildered and didn't know what to do, so they returned to Uther Pendragon to tell him what had happened.

Uther Pendragon was astonished, and so was everybody else who heard what the messengers had to say. All agreed that the meeting with Merlin should take place. Uther asked his brother Aurelius Ambrosius to take charge of the siege and to make sure that King Angys didn't get away. Aurelius Ambrosius remained at the siege while Uther Pendragon went off to the forest to find Merlin.

The first person he encountered in the forest was a swineherd with his pigs. The man was wearing an old hat on his head, wearing grey clothes, and holding a staff with a white dog snuffling around him. He seemed a strong fellow, and Uther Pendragon rode up to the man and asked if he had heard anything of Merlin.

'Yes, sir, by Saint Mary! Merlin was here with me just now. If you had come a short while ago you would have seen him. If you know what he looks like, he can't be far away. Go in that direction and on the right hand side you'll see a good path going through the forest. Go quickly along there and you'll soon catch up with him, I'm sure.'

The prince was very pleased and set off at once. The directions were good, Uther quickly found the path and followed it along until he and the noblemen accompanying him came upon a peddler making his way through the forest with a great pack of wares on his back. Uther asked him if he had seen Merlin.

'Yes, by Saint Martin! Just a short while ago. He can't be far. Ride on as quickly as you can, you won't need to go more than I mile, I should imagine, and you'll either meet up with him or someone who'll be able to tell you where he is.'

Uther Pendragon and all his companions spurred their horses and very shortly came upon a noble-looking youth, a young squire, dressed in grey and holding a hunting spear in his hands. Uther Pendragon greeted him courteously, then asked him intently if he had seen the child Merlin.

'Yes, sir, by saint Michael!' the youth answered, in a foreign accent. 'I know Merlin very well. Merlin was here only a moment ago, in fact, and had you ridden a little faster you might have caught up with him. But in all honesty, he's a strange boy, is Merlin. I know him so well that without my help you won't be able to find him. If you want to speak with Merlin, ride into the next town and wait there. Take lodgings at an inn and Merlin will come to see you tonight. Then you'll be able to speak with him.'

Uther Pendragon was very pleased. He and the noblemen who were with him spurred their horses and found a comfortable inn at the next town. That night, the same young squire came to Uther Pendragon and exclaimed, as I see it written in this book: 'Sir prince, may God keep you! I am Merlin, and I understand that you wish to speak with

me?’

Uther Pendragon jumped to his feet and embraced Merlin, delighted that he had found him at last. Whatever Merlin wanted, he would have, he said. Merlin replied that he was more than willing to be at Uther’s command, whenever and wherever he might be. Uther was very happy to hear this, and thanked Merlin profusely.

‘But I must tell you,’ said Merlin. ‘I have come from Aurelius Ambrosius. Your brother has just killed King Angys.’

Uther Pendragon was as joyful as a bird is to see the dawn, and so was everybody else. The next day, they all went back to the castle and found Angys dead, his head set on a spike and his body mutilated. None of those who were with him had been harmed in the slightest. Uther Pendragon asked his brother how on Earth this could have happened?

‘Last night a squire came to me and quickly warned me that Angys intended to kill me as I sat in my pavilion, so I was ready for him and able to cut him to the ground. I don’t know what he thought he was doing, but I was able to strike him with the edge of my sword and decapitate him.’

‘Brother, that was Merlin who warned you,’ said Uther Pendragon. ‘He is standing beside me now.’ Aurelius Ambrosius thanked Merlin profusely and offered him everything that was his, if he could continue to be under his care like this.

As they were speaking, a man arrived from the enemy forces, offering to surrender the castle, on the sole condition that its occupants could be guaranteed safe passage back to their own country. Merlin answered that they should go in peace, if the prince agreed to this, and by his leave. So this is what they did. They went back home, and all of the country came to swear allegiance to Uther Pendragon, and when the oaths had been taken, by common consent he was crowned King of England. The coronation feast was held in Winchester and it lasted for seven nights.

Merlin was very drawn to Aurelius Ambrosius. He loved Aurelius’ little toe more than the rest of the body of mankind put together! Aurelius was a great warrior and never shunned an opportunity to take shield and spear onto the battlefield. He was a fine swordsman as well, but three years later his luck ran out: a pagan army assembled in Denmark, led by two of King Angys’s nephews who had gained the support of many kings and a huge number of warriors; they gathered a large number of longships and sailed into Bristol. Merlin was aware of this and said to Uther Pendragon and to his brother Aurelius:

‘I must warn you, soon you will face the mother of all battles. A Danish army made up of fine warriors is intent upon avenging the death of King Angys. This country will never have seen such a huge invasion before. One of you is going to die in this conflict. Which one of you it is I won’t say, so don’t press me on which of you is destined for heaven’s bliss, only take good heart, both of you. But split your forces into two when battle approaches. Uther Pendragon, you command an army on the land, and Aurelius

Ambrosius, you take a large contingent to the seashore, and do all that you can to bring death and destruction upon your enemy.’

They did what Merlin advised and split their forces into two. Merlin refused to say which of them was going to be killed.

Uther Pendragon advanced towards the pagan army with many men supporting him, and as soon as they met, he greeted the enemy with sword and lance. Many heathens had their heads split open, their neck bones sliced in two, arms cut off, bodies cut in two, knights cast from their horses. It is impossible in words to do justice to the magnificent display of chivalry, so the book says.

Aurelius Ambrosius, to whom Merlin had a particular fondness, took his forces along the coast to try to harry the Danish army from the rear. Merlin sent word to Uther Pendragon, urging him to fight with confidence and freedom, secure in the knowledge that he would not die that day. Uther was joyful when he heard this! He fought with anger and enthusiasm; he and his men did marvellous feats of arms, and all those who had disembarked from ships were soon driven back again to the beaches. When they saw that it was futile trying to advance against Uther Pendragon, and they had nowhere to flee, they turned their attention to Aurelius Ambrosius who was driving into their flank. With redoubled effort they attacked him and by sheer weight of numbers he was killed.

When Uther Pendragon learned that his brother was dead, he was mad with anger. He commanded his dukes and knights to fight with even greater ferocity, and at the end of the day, of over thirty thousand pagans only five escaped alive. On our side, three thousand and eleven were killed. The ground was so soaked in blood that a man could walk for two or three miles using the bodies of dead men as stepping stones.

When night fell, Uther Pendragon returned to his encampment with dukes and earls, kings and barons, valiant squires and young men, and the next morning, on Merlin’s advice, they looked for the body of Aurelius Ambrosius so that they could give him a proper burial.

Uther Pendragon was lauded as a fine warrior for bravely defending his kingdom. He lived for many years afterwards in great health and splendour. No one anywhere had any desire to challenge his rule. He was guided always by Merlin’s advice, much to his great benefit. He conquered the powerful King Claudas, and also King Harinan, by virtue of whom he acquired Gascony, Normandy and Boulogne, and also the marches of Poitiers, as well as Champagne and Anjou. King Harinan had a beautiful wife whose name was Ygerne, and when Harinan died, Ygerne married the Duke of Cornwall, whose name was Hoel.

Uther Pendragon also defeated King Ban, and his brother Bohort, two of the finest men alive. King Ban ruled over the city of Benoit in Brittany, with much of its surrounding land, and his brother ruled over the city of Gaines, so these two brothers governed separate regions.

Following these victories, Uther Pendragon instigated the Round Table, on the advice of Merlin. The finest knights in the world were to sit around it. All who sat there had to be proven warriors and the most excellent of knights, strong and fit, tenacious and intelligent, loyal and brave, never fleeing a field of battle while the strength to stand and fight remained in them, unless darkness was falling, and self-reliant, with no more need for others than a monk in his cell. Like monks, they formed a brotherhood, eating together, supporting one another and needing no one else. When there was conflict, they were sent there at once. The valiant Uther Pendragon founded this table, but he had no power to bring it to its fulfilment, for had all the knights in the world been sitting at it, this could not be done until that knight was born who would be able to achieve the mystery of the Grail.

When Pentecost approached one year, the celebration of the time when the Holy Ghost came amongst the twelve apostles, our king Uther Pendragon invited dukes, earls, knights and kings to a feast in Cardoil. It was his fervent intention that it should last for seven nights, and every man was expected to bring his lady along with him. From Kent to Northumberland, from Wales and from Scotland, barons, earls, dukes and knights came to feast with the king.

By this time, Hoel was dead and baron Tintagel was Duke of Cornwall. The new Duke of Cornwall had married Hoel's widow, the beautiful Ygerne, and they both came to attend the feast. Men took them by the hand and brought them to the king, who welcomed them warmly. But afterwards, the king's demeanour changed; he was so stricken with desire that he didn't know what he was doing. Ygerne retired with the ladies to a chamber, where she was complimented for her beauty and made a fuss of. The king invited the Duke of Cornwall to sit with him at the high table, to sit right beside him and to eat from the same serving dishes. Tintagel had a knight called Bretel who looked after his wine cellar and served him day and night at the table, as was the norm. Ygerne had a chamberlain, a gentleman named Jurdains.

King Uther Pendragon sat at his feast, but seemed to be doing a lot of thinking and little in the way of eating. He took a cup in his hand that was worth the revenue from a whole shire and said: 'Bretel, come here. Take this goblet to your lady, Ygerne. Invite her to drink from it and then to put it amongst her other belongings.'

Bretel took the cup and was soon before his lady. He went down on one knee and greeted her on the king's behalf. 'Madam, the king has toasted your good health and sends you this cup to keep as a present. He drank from this same goblet, and now it is yours.'

Ygerne could see the significance of what was going on and sensed danger. 'Go back to King Uther Pendragon,' she instructed Bretel, 'and tell him that I cannot accept this gift without my lord's permission. It would be very wrong of me to do so.'

Bretel returned to the king and conveyed the message. The king was dismayed. But the Duke of Cornwall, who was anxious not to anger the king, quickly gave his permission, so Ulfin, the king's counsellor, took the goblet back again. Ygerne reluctantly accepted

it this time – she really had no choice – although she was visibly concerned and began weeping copiously, much to the astonishment of those sitting nearby.

After dinner, when the tablecloths had been cleared away, the king gave worthy gifts to dukes, barons and knights, as was the custom, but none to compare with the one he had given to the Duke of Cornwall, for whose wife the king burned with desire. After this, the ladies were invited to return to the hall. The king took Ygerne by the hand and invited her to sit beside him on the bench. He called for spiced wine and poured it for the lady he considered to be the most beautiful in the whole kingdom. Other kings and dukes took Uther Pendragon's lead and selected beautiful ladies to sit beside. The hall was soon filled with convivial conversation.

The king asked Ygerne if she would allow him the grace of sharing her bed with him and letting him make love to her.

'I would rather be hanged than break my marriage vows,' she replied. 'I shall never be unfaithful to my husband in that way, not for gift nor for love.'

Their conversation came to an end. The king said nothing more, although his mind was turning towards another plan. When the evening drew to a close, everybody went to their rooms and their lodgings. The king was almost beside himself with desire, although no one seemed aware of this except for Ulfín, who told him not to be distressed, he would win her love in the end, he was sure.

Ygerne and the Duke of Cornwall went eagerly to their lodgings. The lady took her husband into their room and fell to her knees before him: 'My lord, if it is your desire,' she said, 'we must depart at once! The king is out to shame me. The favour he has been showing you tonight is only because of the favours he wants from me in return! He has propositioned me already, and I'm sure that he will not shrink from forcing himself upon me, if I refuse him.'

When the duke understood this, he became very angry. He had brought five hundred knights with him to Cardoil and he sent for them immediately. When they arrived, he told them what his wife had told to him, said that he was returning home and that they should get their horses and themselves ready to set off for Cornwall before dawn, for he would rather die in battle than suffer shame and injustice like this.

His knights agreed and began to make preparations, and by dawn they had all departed.

The king saw the sky brightening. He had had little sleep that night. He quickly arose, and his chamberlain brought him his clothes. When he was dressed he descended to the hall, where he spent the time sighing and pacing up and down. Soon, barons and ladies entered the hall and shortly they all made their way to church to hear Mass. Everybody began to look around, wondering where Ygerne and the Duke of Cornwall were. When

Mass had been sung, the king asked:

‘Where is the Duke of Cornwall? I hope he isn’t unwell.’

‘He has gone home, sir,’ said a knight, ‘along with his wife and all his retinue.’

‘Oh, this is shaming me!’ exclaimed the king. ‘Thief! He has departed against my wishes, without asking for my leave. He will pay for this!’ for the king’s custom and decree was that nobody of noble estate, or of any worth, should leave the feast without his permission before seven days had elapsed. The penalty for this was death. When the king understood that the duke had gone back to Cornwall without leave to do so, he railed at the insolence of it and said to all his people that the duke deserved death for such a grievous insult. The king gathered his weapons, and so did all the knights of the Round Table (the noblest men alive) and so did many kings who had sworn allegiance to Uther, along with all their earls, barons and knights, and then, thus armed, they rode to capture the Duke of Cornwall, who was now the king’s enemy.

The Duke of Cornwall, who had anticipated this from the start, sent far and wide for friends and experienced fighting men and soon had fifteen thousand noble knights willing to help him to defend his lands. But even so, they were heavily outnumbered. But all his cities, towns and castles were well-provisioned and considered themselves able to withstand a siege.

The king advanced with his army and burnt towns with great ferocity. He laid protracted siege and killed many men – unjustly, it must be said. Tintagel, the Duke of Cornwall was secure inside a strong castle. Our king, Uther Pendragon, laid siege to it; he hewed great oaks to scale it and sent miners to tunnel underneath its walls, he hurled stones from catapults, but the duke, that noble knight, was able to defend his castle.

Three miles away lay Ygerne the beautiful, in a castle on a precipice that was truly impregnable. Both Jurdains and Bretel were with the duke; in fact, all who could bear arms were with him, to help to defend his castle. Uther Pendragon found himself in stalemate for a long while and his thoughts were full of anger and betrayal. He couldn’t get to the man he wanted, nor to the woman he wanted either, and he felt sick in every bone. His love for Ygerne was affecting him deeply.

One day, the king was so disgruntled and out of sorts that he took his chamberlain, Ulfin, out for a ride and they came upon a beggar. The man greeted the king graciously.

‘Beggar,’ the king replied, morosely, ‘I’ll tell you in all honesty, I haven’t anything to give you.’

‘Sir, tell me then, what is it that’s upsetting you? Why do you seem so pissed off with life?’

‘Ulfin, can you hear this beggar daring to speak to a king in this way?’

Ulfin looked at the beggar quizzically and guessed who he was.

‘Can you not see him winking at you, sir? It is a beggar of some distinction, I think, and it might cheer you up to know that it is Merlin.’

At once, Merlin changed his appearance and it was clear that it was indeed him. The king was overjoyed! He jumped from his horse, embraced Merlin and kissed him with great enthusiasm, and so did Ulfin.

‘I know of all your foolishness,’ said Merlin. ‘I know how madly you are in love with the beautiful Ygerne. So what would you give me if I said that, before tomorrow, I could release you from this pain of longing?’



‘Merlin, help me now and I’ll give you anything you want, if you can let me have that sweet lady.’

‘Will you give me any child that results from the night’s fulfilment?’

‘Yes,’ said Uther Pendragon. ‘I promise.’

‘Then say nothing, and before dawn tomorrow you shall have all that you desire.’

The king’s mood was transformed. He went to his pavilion at once and the supper he enjoyed with his companions was a very happy and convivial one. During the night, Merlin instructed the king to have his men quickly arm themselves and attack the castle where the Duke of Cornwall was being besieged, and he told them how to achieve its surrender. It could be accomplished before morning. Everybody fell to arms and made ready, but Ulfin, Merlin and the king remained where they were, speaking instead of the capture of love’s prize.

Merlin asked Ulfin and the king to get their horses ready and to come with him, and they set off very shortly for the castle where Ygerne was hiding. When they were close to it, Merlin demonstrated how devious he was by looking for some special plants, and when he found them, he rubbed them between his hands and smeared the juice all over the king’s face and body until he began to look like the Duke of Cornwall. He did the same to himself and made himself look like Jurdain, who was chamberlain to the duke’s household, and Ulfin he made to look like Bretel, the keeper of the duke’s wine cellar. Then they approached the castle.

When they stood before the gates, they beat firmly on them and were let in at once by the servants, who had no reason to doubt that it was their master who was seeking admission, for he was clothed appropriately and looked just like him. They led them in with great honour and escorted Uther Pendragon straight to Ygerne’s chamber. The king followed merrily along, with joyous expectation. He had never been happier in all his life.

‘You go and do what you need to do,’ said Merlin. ‘But be warned, before you leave her

bed next morning, all hell will have broken loose outside.'

The king wasn't worried about this, but strode purposefully towards Ygerne's chamber. Ygerne thought it was her lord and happily welcomed him into her bed. The king didn't waste any time. They made love together for as long as he desired to do so, and that night, by God's grace, the noble King Arthur was conceived.

A little later, a cry rang out. The Duke of Cornwall has been killed! Merlin came to the bed where Ygerne and the king lay together. 'Arise!' he whispered. 'You must get up now. Show yourself to your men. The rumour has gone around that you have been killed.'

The king leapt out of bed, kissed Ygerne, took his leave, so the book says, and quickly went down to the hall, where the people seemed very pleased to see him, for they thought it was their own lord standing before them. The messenger was rudely insulted and called a liar, for bringing such unreliable news. The messenger, in his turn, insisted flatly that he was telling the truth, and gave great oaths in support of his conviction, insisting that he was there when the castle was taken and had heard the people wailing in lamentation for the duke.

The king asked that his chestnut horse be made ready, and he would demonstrate that he was not dead. He galloped out of the gate; and just in time, for approaching the castle was one of the duke's men with corroborating news.

Merlin, Ulfín and the king had gone only a little way away when they heard sounds of distress and keening. When the lady heard this, she was mortified. She knew that she had been beguiled, and knew also that she had conceived a child that night. So overwhelming was her sorrow and shame that she was in great distress.

As we find it written in our book, Merlin went to a stream and washed the king with fresh water, and soon he was back into his own appearance once again. Then he washed Ulfín and himself and they were quickly back to normal as well. Then all three of them went to the king's forces and, just as day was dawning, they saw the body of the Duke of Cornwall. Our king was very happy about it, it has to be said.

Not long afterwards, an accord was made between Uther Pendragon and Ygerne, through the advice of some worthy men, and by virtue of this excellent advice, the king married Ygerne, much to her joy. At this same marriage festival, King Nanters of Garlot wedded Blasine, Ygerne's daughter from her marriage with Hoel, and from that marriage issued the strong and worthy knight Galaas. At the same time, King Lot married Belisent, another of Ygerne's daughters by Hoel, and from their union was born Sir Gawain, and his brothers Gaheris, Agravain and Gaheriet, and no four better knights were ever seen in this land. And there was a fourth wedding as well: King Uriens, the king of Schorham, married a third daughter of Ygerne by Hoel, and they went on to have Sir Yvain, that noble and valiant knight. These three sisters were all daughters by Hoel, and there were other sisters as well, fathered by the late Duke of Cornwall, but they had to look elsewhere for husbands, as we find in the book.

After these four weddings, which all took place together, there was a magnificent feast, with minstrels, jousting and tournaments; it lasted for a fortnight!

When the feast was over, Merlin came to see the king, reminding him of the good advice that he had given to him in the past, and said: 'Sir, remember what you promised to me: the child who grows inside your queen. This is what you must do: her womb is swelling – feel her tonight and see how he moves, that little man. When you do so, ask her who's child it is. She will tell you the truth. You must order that the infant, as soon as it is born, should be taken to the gates and given away to whoever happens to be there. I will choose someone to receive that noble child. You have a baron in your land, a mighty warrior and a nobleman by the name of Antor. His wife is with child, like the queen, and there is nobody of any greater worth who could suckle your son than she. Ask Antor to foster the child and for his wife to give it milk, and if he agrees, the child, I guarantee, will become the noblest man in the whole world. But don't let on to the queen that the child is really yours.'

The king swore by Christ that he would never tell her, and he did as Merlin asked.

The queen was frightened. 'Lord, I am carrying a child! I have no idea who made me pregnant; it was conceived on that same night that my husband was killed. I thought it was my husband, I swear. Do what you like with me. I have told you the truth.'

'Madam, there's no need to be fearful. I forgive you any guilt, so long as you take the baby to the castle gates as soon as you can after it is born and give it to the first person you find there, so that I never hear anything more of it.'

'Sir,' she said, 'gladly. It shall be done exactly as you say.'

The king got up the next morning and sent for Sir Antor, a man of great renown. When he arrived, the king took him aside into a room, away from all his men, and revealed his personal affairs to him and explained how he could help him. He said that he had conceived a child, and told him when and how. 'Let your wife look after it, let her wet-nurse it, and I'll see that you are amply rewarded with rich lands and fine horses.'

Scarcely had the king arranged all this when the queen gave birth to a lovely little boy, who was taken at once to the castle gates. A grey, old man received the infant, as the book says. It was Merlin, and he went at once to a church and honourably had the baby christened Arthur. Then Merlin went quickly to Sir Antor's wife and gave the child to her. He found her recovering from childbirth; he gave the baby into her hands and asked her to look after it well: 'Your reward will be great,' he said.

Merlin went away then, and nobody saw him for a long time afterwards.

Antor's son was called Kay, and his wife took that child from her breast and let Arthur suckle there. The milk was very good and Arthur flourished and grew into a fair and noble child. He was courteous, well-mannered, well-spoken and strong and brave as well – he had no fault of character at all. He often saw his father, but had no inkling either

that the king was his father or that the queen was his mother. He knew nothing of his real father while Uther Pendragon was alive, as I find it written in the Brut, and he considered his father to be the noble knight Antor.

Arthur's mother died, sadly, and was buried with honour. After Ygerne's death, the king took to his bed with a great sickness and the end seemed to be approaching for him as well. Merlin appeared before him, and the king recovered his senses a little. The king asked Merlin where he had been, why he hadn't seen him for such a long time, and Merlin replied: 'Far away. But now my work starts. You will be dead soon and off to the bliss of heaven. Your son will become king after you, with God's grace and with my help, and in his reign the marvels of the Sangreal will be manifest and achieved.'

The king showed pleasure at this and gently thanked God. Merlin then went away, and the king died that same day. Everybody wept for him, knights and commoners, servants and noblemen, the holy Bishop Brice presided over the funeral service and the king was nobly lain to rest. After his interment, a parliament was called to which all who had power in the land were required to attend. A great number of people gathered for it: kings, earls, barons and knights, princes and dukes, but nobody had the slightest idea that Arthur was Uther Pendragon's son, except for Sir Antor and Sir Ulfyn, and Merlin of course. Because he had not been conceived in wedlock, Arthur's paternity was kept a secret. The parliament sat for many days, trying to decide whom to choose to be their new king. But none of them could agree. Each of them wanted the crown for themselves. It went on like this for half a year, and still there was no agreement.

On Christmas Eve, Bishop Brice determined to knock heads together.



'Gentlemen,' he said, 'you have shown yourselves to be completely unable to choose a king. So I pray, for the love of Christ, make your best efforts to come up with something at this most auspicious of times. Let us go to church together tonight and pray to Christ that he choose a king from amongst us who will uphold the right and vanquish the wrong. Let him choose this man and send us a sign by the end of the service tomorrow morning. Let it happen like this.'

And they all said: 'Amen,' to that.

So everybody went to church that night and to Mass the following morning, and solemnly beseeched God to give them a rightful king. When the service was finished, they all went out of the church and in front of the church door they found a stone standing on the ground, a large, high rock with the upper half of a sword sticking out of it, a very fine-looking sword. All the noblemen looked at it in wonder. When the bishop caught sight of it he thanked Jesus Christ! On the pommel, I have to tell you, was written the

words 'I am called Excalibur, a worthy possession for a king: I can cut through iron and steel'. This writing was in English.

'Whoever can draw the sword from this stone shall be our king,' declared the bishop. 'This is God's will, and we have agreed to abide by it.'

Everybody accepted that this should be so. King Lot went up to the stone at once and tried to pull out the sword, but for all his strength, and try as he might, he couldn't do it. King Nanters had a go, and King Clarion of Northumberland as well, but to no avail. There was not a king nor a duke nor an earl who could move the sword at all. Everybody tried, but the sword stayed in the stone until Candlemas, and by the time Easter came around, everyone born in England had had a go, but the sword remained where it was. Men came from across the sea to try their strength, but all attempts ended in failure.

The sword remained unmoved until Pentecost, during which time a tournament was held nearby, attended by noblemen from far and wide. Sir Antor's son Kay was knighted for the occasion; Kay, who was pushed from his mother's breast when Arthur arrived. Kay was a fine knight, although he stammered a little, a feature which remained from childhood and the failings of his nurse. Arthur had been a page at the court of King Lot for a long while, but when Kay was made a knight, Sir Antor advised his son to send for Arthur and to make him his squire, for he was strong and honourable, a fine young man, the best in all the land. Kay was very happy to comply with his father's instructions and so Arthur returned home, and he and Kay went to the tournament together.

Kay put on a good show and did very well, toppling many fine knights from their horses, with lance and sword. He gave one stroke so savagely that his sword broke into two pieces. He instructed Arthur: 'Quickly, go back to my mother and ask her for another sword.'

Arthur set off at once; he rode swiftly home, but he couldn't find his mother so he returned to where the sword was sticking out of the stone. No one was there because everybody was at the tournament. Arthur grasped the hilt in his hand and tried to draw it out. It came out easily. Holding the sword in his hand, he mounted his horse and soon arrived back at the tournament.

'Have this sword, Sir Kay,' he shouted. 'I couldn't find our mother.'

Kay recognised the sword at once. 'Where did you get that!' he exclaimed.

'Not far from here. I found it sticking in a stone.' Arthur hadn't seen the sword before and didn't know the whys and wherefores of it at all.

'Don't say a word to anyone,' said Sir Kay at once. 'Don't tell a soul that you drew it out of that stone and I'll see that you don't go unrewarded.'

'I won't tell anyone, I promise,' said Arthur.

Sir Kay went at once to his father, Sir Antor, and led him to the church of Saint Saviour.

'Look, I've drawn the sword from the stone!' he declared. 'I should now be made king, it's the law.'

Sir Antor looked at the sword. 'You're telling me tales, by God above! If you're telling me the truth, you'll going to have to prove it first. Put the sword back in again. Then, in front of these noblemen here, draw it out again, and if you can't, then shame on you.'

They both went to the stone and Kay stuck the sword back in. But although he was fit and strong, he couldn't take it out again.

'Tell me the truth, son,' said Sir Antor.

'Arthur brought it to me.'

Antor had Arthur summoned and led over to the stone. Swiftly and gently he was able to draw out the sword once more. Arthur put it back in again and drew it out many times. Antor was delighted and went at once with Arthur into the church for a little privacy.

'Arthur, listen to me,' he said. 'Since you were born, I have nourished you and looked after you,' and then he went on to explain how Arthur had been conceived and born, how his father was Uther Pendragon and how, at his father's request: 'I found a wet nurse for Kay, and you suckled at my wife's breast. So take courage,' he said. 'You have been brought up as my son and it is right that you should do as I ask, so I beg you now to do me the favour that I shall ask in a moment. I will help you to be king and to maintain your rule with much honour, Arthur my son.'

'May Christ defend me from going against anything you might ask!' exclaimed Arthur.

'Thank you,' said Antor. 'Now I ask you, for your love, to make my son Kay your steward, for as long as you live, in good times and in bad, and never to desert him. In return, I shall do all in my power to help you now, with God's grace, so that you will meet with success.'

'Of course I will,' said Arthur. 'Kay shall be my steward and I will never desert him, whatever happens. If I ever do, may Christ desert me!'

Antor quickly knighted Arthur and found him all the accoutrements pertaining to his new rank: a fine warhorse, a saddle and a helmet, a leather doublet, coat of chainmail and plate armour to go on top, as well as a shield, a good sword and a sturdy lance. He assigned forty knights to be under Arthur's command; the next morning they went to the tournament and by the end of the day Sir Arthur had won the prize and earned the acclaim of everybody. The day after that, Sir Antor went to Bishop Brice and told him that he knew of a fine and noble knight: 'who deserves to be our king, for he is able to draw the sword from the stone.'

The bishop was delighted to hear it and quickly sent for Arthur. In front of every king, duke and earl in the realm, Arthur took the sword in his hand and drew it out, then pushed it back in again. Everyone was amazed, for no one had been able to move it at

all; none except for this one knight, now, who stood before them. Kings and earls threw questions at him, requiring him to prove his claim, but Arthur kept his cool and answered everything that was thrown at him, and with Antor's help he was chosen to be king. Messengers were sent far and wide to many kings and princes – to all who wished to come, in fact – inviting them to attend the coronation feast on the eve of Saint John.

Merlin suddenly appeared seeking Arthur the prince, and Arthur was extremely pleased to see him. Merlin quickly advised that Duke Ulfen should be sent for, along with Sir Jurdains and Sir Bretel, who had been with the Duke of Cornwall. All three of them came swiftly, much to Merlin's great pleasure.

'I want you to know how Arthur was conceived,' he said, and then Merlin told them everything that had happened on that night. Ulfen confirmed it, and said that he should know because he was there, and Sir Antor said that the king had confided the same account to him, exactly as Merlin had just related it. Sir Jurdains and Sir Bretel were filled with love and loyalty for the new prince, because Ygerne had once been their lady, and they at once swore fealty to Arthur, promising to aid him, come what may. Then these four noblemen, as well as Merlin, went to the bishop's lodgings and told him how Arthur was Ygerne's son and who his father was, and the bishop thanked God that Arthur was Uther Pendragon's son.

'But listen,' said Merlin. 'A fierce war lies ahead of us. Six kings at this coronation feast will rebel against you and you will need to arm yourselves against them. See that you protect one another like brothers, for I can tell you that if you do, the honour will be yours and Arthur will prevail.'

They swore that they wouldn't fail one another, not for any gold, and the bishop promised that he would help them as much as he could. What need is there to pad this tale out? All the provisions necessary for a coronation feast were procured and quickly put into place.

June is a very pleasant month; fennel hangs everywhere in towns and cities, violets and roses adorn a maiden's bedroom, the sun is hot, the day is long and the birds are merry with their singing. It was in this joyful atmosphere that King Arthur was crowned king in Cardoil. King Lot, who had married Arthur's half-sister Belisent and who ruled over the land of Lyones, was present at the ceremony; he was a strong and courteous leader and had brought five hundred brave and hardy knights along with him. King Nanters was present as well; he held the land of Garlot and was a valiant warrior also, well able to look after himself in a fight, and he had married Arthur's half-sister Blasine. He came along with seven hundred knights of his own, on brave and dependable horses. King Uriens was there, a young man who had also married a daughter of Ygerne by Hoel and who ruled over the land of Gore; he came with twenty thousand magnificent knights! And King Carodas was there, the king of Strangore, a mighty man and a knight of the

Round Table who had come a long way with six hundred knights, all of them excellent on the tournament field with lance under shield. King Yder attended the ceremony, the king of the Marches, and he brought six hundred knights along with him, and also present was King Aguisaunt; of all the six he was the youngest and the richest, a very powerful man, and he came with five hundred fearsome warriors, all of them Scots.

Many others attended the coronation as well, and all were made very welcome. In front of everybody, Bishop Brice conducted the service and crowned Arthur as king, and when the ceremony was over, they all went to eat. The tablecloths were already spread, and when the highest noblemen had been seated, everybody received the finest service, food and drink of the finest quality; there was venison and wild boar, swans, peacocks and bitterns, pheasants, partridges and cranes, and it kept on coming. There was spiced wine and claret, for the noblemen and for everybody else as well, nobody was forced to drink ale. The service was excellent.

When all had eaten their fill, King Arthur got to his feet and began to distribute gifts to the noble and the worthy and to receive their allegiance. As he was doing so, King Lot, King Nanters and four other kings made it known that they were going to refuse his gifts and withdraw their acknowledgement of his crown. They rose up arrogantly, each king with all his knights and retainers, and declared forcefully that no bastard king would ever rule over them! They threatened Arthur with violence. Men rushed to come between them. Merlin appeared, and shouted that Arthur was no bastard, indeed, that he was of higher royalty than anybody else in the hall. He told them all the facts of how Arthur had been conceived and born, and everyone with any intelligence thanked Jesus Christ for this news – that their king was of Uther Pendragon's descent. But the rebels said to Merlin:

‘Then he was brought about through your witchcraft? Traitor! No son of a whore shall ever be our king. He must die at once!’

They advanced towards Arthur, but he was well armed and well protected, as were all of his friends. They stood their ground and managed to force the rebels out of the hall with their swords and knives. The six kings were very angry at this, and all their barons swore an oath that they would never have more than one meal a day until they had taken revenge upon Arthur, and they quickly erected their war pavilions outside the walls of Cardoil.

The bishop stood on the castle wall and shouted down at those in the pavilions, insisting that Arthur was of royal blood, conceived by a king and born of a queen. Uther Pendragon knew this, he had blessed the child, his own child, and wished him well before taking him to Sir Antor to be fostered and nourished. If they required the descent of their new king to be of even higher royalty than this, they were either stupid or mad: ‘He is a king and a king's son, and I curse all of his enemies, through the mouth of Christ, by east, by west, by north, by south, from this moment on!’ shouted the bishop.

‘Get lost!’ came the reply.

Merlin descended from the wall and organised a defence, but he could only find four thousand men who were fit and strong enough to fight, and these were all foot soldiers, except for three hundred and ten. The other side had enormous numbers to call upon; their forces covered the countryside for miles about.

Merlin told them not to be afraid, 'so long as you do as I advise,' he said.

They went with him to the gate, all of them fully armed. Here, Merlin cast an enchantment upon the enemy and such a malign influence upon the pavilions that they caught fire spontaneously. Wildfire spread in a wall of flames as Merlin cried: 'Quickly, kill your foes!'

Those with horses galloped swiftly across to the burning pavilions and struck their enemies so savagely with spear and sword that many lost their lives in this way. They killed four hundred and fifteen men before any of them knew what was happening, for they were desperately trying to escape from the flames and some of them had lost their wits completely, the attack was so sudden.

There were so many of them, though, that this slaughter would have made little difference, but the enchantment so terrified them that they retreated en masse until they came to a valley about a mile away. Here the six kings made a stand and tried to fight off the attack, but more than ten thousand had fled, so stunned and terrified they were.

The kings made their men regroup and said that it was a humiliation that Arthur, with such a puny force, had been able to drive them away from Cardoil so easily. Everyone made his excuse, and all of them swore by the moon and the sun that they would seek revenge and that Arthur would pay for this setback, so they turned to face him again.

Nanters, the king of Garlot, spurred his horse, but Arthur saw him approaching. Nanters was carrying a heavy lance, so Arthur chose one to match, put his feet into the stirrups and spurred his horse into a gallop. Nanters hit Arthur on the shield causing his lance to shatter into five pieces, Arthur's blow broke King Nanter's shield in two and knocked him off his horse. King Lot rode into the attack, in defence of his nephew, and received the same treatment from Arthur. Men rushed over to rescue King Lot and Arthur quickly found himself in danger of his life, so he drew the sword that he had taken from the stone, the sword Excalibur, and swung it at a knight; the edge sliced the man in two, head and back, and cut down into the saddle. Every knight that Arthur used the sword against was hurt by it, and fear of it soon began to spread.

By now, King Nanters and King Lot had remounted, and, joined by the other four kings, they all began to attack Arthur at once. Arthur was struck by four lances at the same time and his horse toppled and fell on top of him. Sir Antor, Ulfin and Bretel saw what was happening and rode to the rescue. Sir Kay rode at King Aguisaunt and pierced him through the shoulder with his lance, sending him tumbling to the ground, and the blow also knocked King Carodas off his horse as well. Sir Ulfin and King Nanters met; their lances shattered and both were pinned to the ground by their horses where they

fell. Sir Antor toppled King Yder from his horse, Sir Bretel and King Uriens struck severe blows at one another, while King Lot made another attempt to kill Arthur. Kay saw this and swung his sword with great anger, and through sheer strength he managed to topple King Lot, and was about to finish him off when his men intervened to rescue him. Kay showed great valour in keeping them all occupied, allowing Arthur to remount.

Back on his horse, Arthur caused carnage around him, supported by men on foot, with axes, staves and bows. The opposing forces began to flee, the six kings along with them, and Arthur pursued the retreating army, killing many. He overtook King Yder and would have cut off his head with Excalibur, but he was a little off target and decapitated the king's horse instead. Yder fell to the ground. The five kings turned around and managed to rescue him, but not before suffering many wounds themselves. But they got him away. When King Yder was remounted they all fled as fast as their horses could gallop, swearing to take revenge for this defeat.

King Arthur gathered his men together and divided all the spoils that he had gained, the horses and the arms, then he thanked God for this victory, rode into Cardoil and put on a lavish feast that lasted for a fortnight. Everybody who wanted to come to it was very welcome. When this feast was over, Merlin went to King Arthur and advised that it would be courteous and beneficial for him to go to London, and that when he arrived in that town, he would instruct him further, but not before the king had put on a feast there for the whole country. King Arthur did this; he went to London and was received there with great honour. A little after Saint John's Mass the king invited the whole land to come to London to feast with him, as was fitting and proper, and through Merlin's advice, he filled all the posts that were required for his new kingdom. Merlin chose only those who had the ability to serve in their role with skill and authority.

Merlin took to one side Sir Antor, Ulfen, Bretel and Kay, as well as King Arthur, and said to them privately: 'Listen to me now: eleven kings and a duke have sworn to kill Arthur. I'm telling you the truth. They are holding a parliament in the Marches as we speak. You are not strong enough to defeat them without help. I'll tell you what you must do. My lord Uther Pendragon won the vassalage of King Ban, and his brother Bohort; they are fine men, strong and valiant, and were sworn to my lord Uther Pendragon. I advise that you send word to them of what has happened. Send messengers to Britany telling them that Uther Pendragon is dead, and ask them to come at once to this parliament to pay homage to his son Arthur. They will come at once, I know, and they will lend you their help against King Lot, and they'll help you in other ways as well, which I'll tell you about in the fullness of time.

'Ulfen, you shall carry this message, and Sir Bretel shall accompany you. Make sure that you are well-armed and on good horses, for you will need to fight before you return. Now go, for the love of Jesus!'

Sir Ulfen and Sir Bretel armed themselves with their finest equipment and quickly set off. When they had crossed the English Channel they found themselves in a great wil-

derness, between France and Britany. There were many mountains and plains to cross. On one occasion, seven armed knights appeared from the uplands, galloping towards them with great cries and shouts, commanding them to yield and surrender. Bretel took his lance and shield and rode to meet one of these knights, catching him in the throat; the man fell to the ground at once, as dead as a stone. Bretel took on another assailant immediately and skewered him through the body with his lance, but the shaft snapped as the knight fell, so that he had to break away, leaving the dead knight on the ground with the point of his lance still in him.

Two more knights were bearing down quickly. Ulfin positioned his horse to face them. One he struck through the shield and caught the man on the head. He'd eaten his last meal, that's for sure! The other broke his lance against Ulfin, who was unhurt by the impact, but Ulfin's lance caused a dreadful injury to his assailant, piercing him through the saddle and the groin. Knight and steed fell to the ground and the knight broke his neck as he landed. But Ulfin's lance was now shattered, as well as Bretel's, and three others were approaching quickly, intent upon taking revenge for their four companions.

They lowered their lances, but to no avail. Bretel showed what a skilful and courageous warrior he was by drawing his sword and killing one of them instantly, cutting his head off with one swing of the blade. Another received a blow from Ulfin's sword that sliced the man's head from top to tooth, as it says in the Brut. The remaining knight, who was their leader, turned and fled, as swiftly as he could. He could see that if he stayed any longer, he was a dead man.



These seven assailants had been knights of King Claudas, who was at war with King Bohort and King Ban. Claudas had been defeated and had gone to Rome to find support, and while he was away, his knights had gone into the wilderness to live by robbery and manslaughter. But they'd got their just deserts now.

Ulfin and Bretel continued their journey at once and didn't stop until they came to King Ban.

'May Jesus Christ watch over you, and protect with his grace all the fine noblemen of Britany, all those I see around me,' said Ulfin. 'The noblemen of Great Britain bring you news that they would rather not have to bring. Your lord King Uther Pendragon is dead. But his son Arthur has been crowned king. Arthur sends his greetings and his complements and invites you and your noble brother to attend a parliament that he has announced, so that you may take part and become more familiar with the laws of his land.'

King Ban welcomed the messengers and said that he would gladly do as the new king

asked, and so would his brother. He made Ulfin and Bretel very welcome, with good company, while he sent word to his brother King Bohort, and in full accord the brothers sailed with a large entourage for this country, to meet Uther Pendragon's heir.

In every town from Portsmouth to London, there was singing and dancing in the streets to celebrate their arrival. Come rain or shine, the streets were decorated with flags and banners and all the guilds and professions of every town rode together in their finest attire to welcome the kings. Maidens danced in every street.

When they arrived at King Arthur's court, they were nobly welcomed. Arthur himself rode out to meet them; he greeted them with all courtesy and led them into his hall. Accompanying them was their brother Gvinbaut who was a noble clerk; may God save me but he was the best astrologer in the whole world, apart from the learned clerk Merlin. At this feast, Merlin teased Ulfin and Bretel about the knights whom they had killed; which astonished everybody, for Merlin hadn't been there and shouldn't have known anything about it. Nobody did, until then. King Ban and King Bohort were particularly amazed, and so was Gvinbaut, who got into such a deep discussion with Merlin that men might have learnt much about the workings of the celestial sphere, the sun, the moon and the stars, the complicated rotations of the sky and many other secrets, if they had listened carefully to Merlin and Gvinbaut talking together.

Shortly afterwards, Merlin swore upon a holy book, and Sir Ulfin, Sir Antor, Sir Kay and Sir Bretel as well, that Arthur was Uther Pendragon's son by queen Ygerne. Upon hearing this, the two kings swore an oath of allegiance at once, and paid homage to him, as was customary and right. Then Arthur put on a feast that lasted for a fortnight. A wonderful tournament took place where all the young and brave knights tested one another by forming into two sides and doing battle against one another. Aside from Sir Kay, the best young knight there was Lucan, the keeper of the king's cellar, a man of great strength and courage, but many others excelled themselves as well, and fourteen young men in particular, including Lucan and Kay, were adjudged to have taken away the prize. No finer tournament had ever been seen before.

When all this fun was over, Merlin approached the two kings and said: 'My dear lords, you are sworn to King Arthur and you must ride with him to Camelot, to King Leodegan, for my advice is that he should marry that king's precious daughter Guinevere. She is intelligent and beautiful, the fairest maiden in the whole land, and her father Leodegan is a fine man himself, but king Rion is making war upon him, along with twenty other kings. You must help him, and thereby win yourselves fame and honour.'

'We would certainly like to,' replied King Ban, 'if we could only rely upon King Claudas keeping quiet in the meantime. He has waged war upon us in our land for a long time, with great injustice.'

'Have no fear on that account,' said Merlin. 'For every penny you lose because of him, you will gain a hundred here.'

‘In that case,’ said King Ban, ‘consider us ready and willing to go with Arthur to Camelot, to advance his fame and prestige.’

‘By Saint John, I’m afraid there is work to do before that!’ said Merlin. ‘Eleven kings and a duke are camped not far from here, in the forest of Brekenham, and they intend to kill King Arthur and his men very shortly. He’ll need your help to fight them.’

‘Alas!’ exclaimed King Ban. ‘For Christ’s sake, we haven’t brought an army along with us!’

‘Don’t worry about that,’ Merlin reassured them.

The order went out that nobody was to move along any road or pathway within a radius of five or ten miles, upon pain of death. This was done to flush out any spies. All of the enemy scouts who were active thereabouts were soon captured by giving themselves away, and no others appeared, to eavesdrop upon King Arthur’s plans.

Merlin went to Brekenham with Ulfín and some others and had a large number of tents and pavilions erected and filled with stores and provisions, meat and salt, wine and flour, and instructed Ulfín to guard it all and to make sure that nobody saw it who could then go and inform the enemy of these preparations. And nobody did, it has to be said.

Then Merlin went to King Ban and took his royal ring from him, and took the one from King Bohort as well, then he went across the sea in a single night to Brittany. He must have made several journeys that night, in fact, for in the Brut it is written that he went to Leonce of Paerne, who was King Ban’s steward, a wise man with a grey beard, and he went also to Farién, a noble knight who was King Bohort’s steward. He showed each of them their lord’s ring and asked then to send men across to help their king. Leonce and Farién summoned a total of forty thousand warriors, fully armed and on horseback. Fifteen thousand they left behind to wage war with Claudas and to protect their lands and the rest they took with them, as we find written in the book, and the learned clerk Merlin brought these twenty-five thousand knights over the sea and lodged them in the pavilions that Ulfín was guarding over.

Merlin then went to court and asked if everyone was ready, for their enemies were near at hand.

‘For God’s sake,’ exclaimed King Ban. ‘We can’t fight them alone!’

‘We won’t have to,’ he replied.

Everybody took arms and set off that very night. When they arrived, they counted up all their forces and found there to be forty thousand all told, all of them brave and valiant warriors. King Ban was delighted, and so was his brother Bohort, for they could see twenty-five thousand of their own men, in addition to King Arthur’s fifteen thousand.

All the hostile barons and kings who had assembled in the Marches, with everyone they’d been able to recruit to their cause, had sworn to kill Arthur. But none of them

knew of the army that Arthur had assembled. And we find in the book that they had marshalled their forces and planned to surround Arthur in the forest at the first opportunity. King Clarion of Northumberland was an accessory to this treason, with seven thousand knights. King Brangores had five thousand knights, Cradelman, the king of North Wales, brought six thousand fearless knights, and the King of a Hundred Knights was there also; so-called because he never went around with fewer knights about him than this. He was a king from far in the north and on this occasion had brought four thousand knights along with him, four thousand of the best. King Lot, who ruled over Lyones and Dorkaine, brought seven thousand, King Carodas, who was a knight of the Round Table, brought seven thousand, and there were yet more: King Nanter, the king of Garlot, brought six thousand strong and valiant knights with him, King Uriens another six thousand well-horsed knights and King Yder another five thousand. And there were still more: King Aguisaunt of Scotland had six thousand brave knights and Duke Eustas another five thousand; he was the Earl of Cambernic, which was the name given to Arundel in those days.

All of these came quietly to Brekenham and pitched their tents and pavilions in the forest, attracting the least attention that they could. Arthur was waiting nearby, just as quietly, with all his men, and nobody in the opposing forces knew that he was there.

On the fourth night, Merlin urged King Arthur, King Bohort and King Ban to arm themselves, along with all their men, and to come with him to demonstrate how brave they were. So they armed themselves in iron and steel, and advanced three miles before dawn.



At this moment, in the enemy encampment, King Lot was in bed, having a dream; he was dreaming that water, wind and rain were driving into his face, into everyone's faces, and the tents were crashing down amidst thunder and lightning. He woke and recounted his dream to his companions and they asked him what he thought it might mean. He told them the truth; it seemed obvious to him that disaster was imminent. Very quickly they organised scouts to go to see if there was any danger afoot, and they soon came across Merlin and Arthur, much to their dismay. Merlin saw them and shouted at them to stay where they were, but they ran off, crying: 'Treason! Treason!'

Those in the enemy encampment heard this noise and hurriedly began to dress, but Merlin cast an enchantment and all their tents and pavilions began to collapse on top of them. The book makes it clear that most of these men were unable to see anything as a result. King Arthur, King Bohort and King Ban, along with all of their knights, began attacking them, trampling over them with their horses' feet, stabbing with spears and sharp swords, and ten thousand were killed in this way before dawn broke, unable to defend themselves. But nonetheless, the eleven kings managed to escape to a nearby hill

with a large part of their army. Loud blasts from a horn served as a signal to gather and regroup, and soon thirty thousand had assembled. Each king had three thousand men under his command, their horses properly saddled and equipped, and each made ready to launch a counterattack.

They could see seven banners below them: those of Lucan the keeper of the king's cellar, Sir Griffles, Sir Bretel, the king's steward Sir Kay and Sir Ulfin, all of them magnificent warriors and each with three thousand men under their command; and Arthur sat on horseback with iron resolve, with four thousand under his command. The other division comprised the large force of King Bohort and King Ban and although its banner was visible, the knights themselves couldn't be seen, for they were purposely concealed.

King Lot, King Nanters, King Uriens, and King Carodas, with all their men, delayed their charge and let the others go forwards. As the sun began to rise, men could see banners fluttering, horses galloping eagerly and lances levelled in the attack. Many held themselves firm in the saddle, others fell from their horses, many lances were broken, many knights were killed. Sir Kay felled King Yder but was toppled from his own horse by the King of a Hundred Knights. Kay and King Yder began to fight together on foot, but their comrades quickly came to rescue and remount them. Lucan toppled Eustas from his horse, and Eustas, who was the Duke of Arundel, fought beside King Yder and defended him well. Griffles knocked King Clarion to the ground, then the King of a Hundred Knights came and hit Griffles in the side, knocking him from his horse. Griffles got up and stood beside Sir Kay, fighting with ferocity and skill. Lucan and Sir Ulfin brought down King Cradelman, and with some others they managed to get Duke Griffles and Sir Kay back onto horses again. When they were mounted once more, they showed themselves to be mighty warriors!

Sir Kay knocked the King of a Hundred Knights off his horse, then he killed three knights in succession. Arthur, with his mighty hand, felled King Brangores and King Aguisaunt, and this made seven kings who were now on foot, without horses. Great slaughter ensued, for the kings found themselves unable to find new mounts, for all their great might!

King Lot, King Carodas, King Nanters and King Uriens saw that it was time for them to enter the battle: they spurred their horses into a gallop and came flying down the hill with twelve thousand men. They attacked Arthur's knights and knocked many from their horses. In a hard struggle they managed to get all their kings remounted, which was good news for them. Many horses were killed, and many knights. King Arthur showed how brave and valiant he was – now he was here, now he was there – but many of his men were lying dead and he had to fight like a lion himself, and lead by example, using his sword to good effect, breaking backs and cutting off heads.

The rebel kings were valiant also; they brought great sorrow upon Arthur's forces, who were only three thousand against the fourteen thousand attacking them. Lucan, Griffles, Ulfin, Bretel, Sir Antor and Arthur himself bore the brunt of the onslaught. They could

not have fought any better, but were having a hard time of it. Seeing this danger, Merlin went to King Ban and said:

‘Sir, it is time for you to bring your knights into the battle.’

King Ban ordered the advance at once. Farien commanded the first banner, Maruc the second, King Belias the third, Bleoberis the fourth and Gracien the fifth: fifteen thousand men in all. They bravely galloped forwards, and King Bohort brought up the rear with four thousand men, the finest knights in all the world. The armies clashed and many were toppled from their horses by the weight of spears. Seeing all the slaughter around them, King Lot, King Nanters and King Uriens, along with King Carodas and the King of a Hundred Knights, made a tactical retreat. Weeping for all the dead that they could see, they resolved to try to stop the carnage that King Ban and his brother were inflicting upon them. They dismounted, adjusted their horses’ girths, leapt back into the saddle without using the stirrups, selected sturdy lances and rode into the attack once more.

King Nanters, King Lot and King Carodas galloped towards King Ban and struck him all at the same time, knocking him off his horse onto the stony ground. King Uriens and the king of a Hundred Knights did the same to King Bohort, knocking both he and his steed to the ground. But King Ban got to his feet, and King Bohort did as well, and both defended themselves admirably, despite the weight of the onslaught against them. King Arthur saw that King Ban was unhorsed and frantically spurred his own steed towards a knight who was about to attack him. He struck this knight so hard on the head that he died at once; Arthur pulled the body to the ground and gave this knight’s horse to King Ban, who leapt athletically up into the saddle. When he was mounted, he fought again with great courage and strength. Arthur hit another knight with his sword, cutting from his shoulder to his navel, dragged the body to the ground and led the horse to King Bohort. When both kings were remounted, they were angry and ashamed and fought with renewed ferocity, killing all those who came within reach of them. What need is there to say any more? Arthur and Ban and their friends and companions performed so magnificently that their enemies were forced to retreat to a bridge that they had crossed earlier. Here, Morganor, a bastard son of King Uriens, and one of the finest knights ever to hold a sword, said: ‘Sirs, listen, all of you, we must make this a rallying point, for otherwise, we will be massacred and our army will be destroyed.’

The kings agreed. Morganor blew a distinctive call on his horn, and the army swiftly began to retreat towards this bridge, seeking the safety of a defensive regrouping. But the bridge soon piled up with men trying to climb over one another like sheep fleeing before a wolf, and King Arthur and King Ban killed ten thousand of them as the retreat became a rout.

Merlin then advised that the killing should stop; it was better to return to the enemy camp and divide the gold and silver and all the other valuable things that the enemy had left behind. King Arthur considered this good advice, so they let the remaining strag-

glers flee with their lives.

Arthur found great wealth in the abandoned encampment. He gave it to King Ban and King Bohort, with a request that they divide it fairly amongst their men, which they did, to their great honour, and to Arthur's.

After the division of these spoils, King Arthur went to London. King Ban, King Bohort and all their noblemen went with him, and King Arthur put on a magnificent feast there, which lasted for a fortnight. When the feast was over, Merlin took Arthur aside and said: 'There is no need to fear these rebel kings any more, they've taken things as far as they dare and will likely sue for peace very shortly. I would wager a city that they'll come to an accord with you soon and will recognise you as their lord, and this is the reason why I think this: there is coming to this land great hunger and distress. An invasion is heading our way: six hundred thousand pagans, coming to take revenge for the killing of King Angys. They'll be swarming over the whole country soon; but have no fear, masses of young men will flock to you, wanting to become knights and eager to win their spurs. They will fight for your land and achieve great things, to their great benefit and to yours. So don't worry about the rebel kings, they'll soon have their hands full with war in their own districts.

'King Ban, and King Bohort, I advise you to put all your men except for a few under the command of your steward Leonce of Paerne and send them home to your own lands, to watch over them. Arthur will stock up all his towns and cities with provisions, with meat and corn and enough fighting men to withstand a long war. And Arthur, you will then wait for me between England and Camelot, in the town of Brekenho, and stay there until I arrive.'

All that Merlin had advised was quickly done. Arthur stocked all his towns with corn meal, meat and fish, and with strong men. The duke who had been the constable of Cardoil was, on Merlin's advice, promoted to be the constable of London. Ban and Bohort quickly sent Leonce of Paerne home with an army, and also Duke Farien and Baron Gracien, to protect their own lands, as we find it written in the book. King Arthur, King Bohort and King Ban with six score of their men only, went to Brekenho as Merlin had advised, to await his reappearance – for by now he had disappeared and they had no idea where he had gone.

When they had been waiting in Brekenho for some time, they went out riding one day and came across an old man at the foot of an incline, carrying a bow and arrow. The old labourer bent his bow and shot a duck, and when he had gathered the fowl and retrieved his arrow, he used it again to hit a mallard. He gathered the two birds and approached the king. Arthur asked him if he was willing to sell the two ducks. The old man said that he would exchange them for money.

'How much,' the king asked.

'You shouldn't ask,' replied the old man. 'Generosity is a virtue, as you well know. You

should just demand them and give me twice their worth in return. That's my advice. It would seem that I am far more willing to give these two fowls to you than you are to give away a penny of your treasure which you have buried deep in the ground.'

Sir Kay took the ducks from the old man.

'Who has told you of my treasure?' asked King Arthur.

'The learned clerk Merlin,' said the old man. 'I've spoken to him very recently.'

The king said that he didn't believe him.

'I don't care if you believe me or not,' replied the old man. 'And also, you've taken the ducks from me and haven't given me anything in return yet.'

Bretel and Ulfen guessed the truth, and Ulfen said calmly to the old man: 'Sir, keep these two ducks, in God's name. You've given the king many generous gifts already, and with God's grace, there are still more to come.'

Then they all understood, by Ulfen's words, that this old man was Merlin.

Merlin then revealed his identity to the king. Arthur kissed him and showed him great honour, and so did King Ban and King Bohort and others. They were all very pleased to see him again.

A high-born maiden came to see Arthur shortly afterwards, with all her knights, to swear her allegiance to him. She did this in order to try to avoid any future harm to herself. Her name was Lianor, the daughter of Earl Siweinis, and Arthur very quickly developed a strong desire to make love to her. With Merlin's help, he did just that, and gave her a child, a boy that would later grow to be strong and valiant and a knight of the Round Table.

They remained in Brekenho all winter, until halfway through Lent. But let us leave them there for now, and tell what happened to the eleven kings who fled the battlefield.

Winter is a dreary season, the trees are bare, the birds are miserable, rain soaks the ground and maidens' complexions suffer dreadfully, although those who love them still love them, if their love is true. The kings who had been defeated rode all day and all night, fully armed, with great anger and without any food or drink, until they came to Norhant, a city with some fine defences. It was a proud city and King Uriens was its lord. The eleven kings entered this city in great distress and with great sadness for all the knights that they had lost, the fathers and uncles, sons and nephews, and they mourned their losses for two days. But then Baldemagu, who was a knight of great honour, spoke up:

'Kings, stop all this lamentation,' he implored. 'It is pitiful to see. You have friends far and wide, you should ride to them now and discuss your predicament with them, to see

how they can help you to take revenge.’

They took comfort from this on the third day. They assembled together for the first time and gave each other as much sympathy and support as they could, then relaxed a little and went to bed that night feeling a lot better. On the fourth day, however, more bad news arrived. A messenger appeared, who greeted them anxiously and told them that pagans had invaded Cornwall, put the people to the sword and almost destroyed that land with fire. The land of Dorkaine, also, was nearly destroyed. They were besieging Nambire and had done great harm to the countryside around it, sparing neither man nor child. There were so many of these invaders that their numbers were beyond counting.

When the kings heard this, their sorrows increased; they began to shiver with fear as though they had a fever. All of them cried: ‘Alas, that I was born!’

I cannot begin to describe the anguish that they felt. For fourteen days they hardly ate a thing, they just wept and moaned. Then on the fifteenth day, King Brangores came into the hall and sent for everyone to come and hear what he had to say.

‘Blessed be God,’ he cried to them all when they had assembled. ‘For all his grace and his gifts, what use is all this lamentation? We must get a grip of ourselves and go to protect our lands! We have no power to defeat King Arthur because of King Ban and King Bohort. The king is aided by the learned clerk Merlin with his enchantments and his powerful witchcraft, and we can certainly expect no help from Arthur in defending our lands from King Angys’s descendants, who have seen an opportunity, now, to kill us all, since we have weakened ourselves by siding with the devil in wanting to kill our rightful lord.

‘King Leodegan will give us no help; King Rion of Ireland has been waging war on him for more than two years, with twenty kings, by God, and he is fully occupied with that. And neither will King Pelles of Listonei, he is looking after his brother Pelleore who lies sick and infirm, and will do so until the miracle of the Grail is achieved. King Alain won’t give us any help either, he’s lying sick as well and will remain so until the coming of the best knight in the world. We’ll get no assistance from Normaga of Sorailles because he’s at war with Galaous. And neither will we from King Bremeins, King Adameins or King Clamadas, for they are all fighting King Galeus. So think, everybody! Decide what we should do, for there is great need for us to do something.’

King Cradelman, the king of North Wales, who was an intelligent man, spoke up: ‘The best advice that I can give is that each of us chooses the strongest of his cities and goes there with his own men and enough hired help to carry as much in the way of stores as possible, then each can defend the paths and lanes of his land and fight a guerrilla war, and deprive them of their sustenance through ambush and robbery. We should cause them all the harm that we can in this way.’

‘This is good advice,’ said King Lot, ‘but I imagine that when Arthur sees that we are

waging war against the pagans, he will open up a second front against us and shamefully try to destroy us.’

‘Have no fear on that score,’ said the King of a Hundred Knights, reassuringly. ‘Arthur, along with King Bohort and King Ban, are planning to aid King Leodegan against King Rion, and they have provisioned all their cities and castles and garrisoned them for a long siege, so they’ll be able to hold out for a long while against the pagans. So don’t worry about Arthur. This is the truth. My advice is that you do as King Cradelman says.’

King Cradelman’s advice was acted upon and many people were recruited – knights, freemen, men who wanted to win silver and gold for themselves – to keep watch over the marches of Galoine, the plains of Cornwall, the districts of Dorkaine and of Gorre, and the roads into Galloway.

King Yder had three thousand men remaining from the battle against Arthur, and along with an additional eight thousand newly recruited mercenaries he made his way to his city of Nante, to bolster its existing garrison of three thousand. There he was able to keep a good watch over the roads and lanes of his land, and often overcame pagans and stole their provisions, and did so well under arms that men blessed him everywhere.

The valiant King Nanters went to his wealthy city of Hussidan where, with three thousand men who had survived the battle against Arthur, seven thousand new mercenaries and five thousand brave and valiant townsfolk of fighting age, he guarded the paths and lanes and often brought grief and harm to the pagans by robbing them and killing them. King Lot, with three thousand survivors from the battle, five thousand mercenaries and four thousand townsfolk, harried the pagans from his city of Dorkaine and was so successful, and so generous with the spoils of war, that he attracted another three thousand fighting men looking to benefit from the plunder. They guarded the paths and lanes, and often brought grief to the pagans and robbed them of their possessions.

King Clarion went to Northumberland, to the city of Orlande, with three thousand from the battle with Arthur and eight thousand newly recruited mercenaries, and here he did the pagans much harm on the lanes and pathways of that region. The King of a Hundred Knights, whose name was King Aguinnes, went to the wealthy city of Malaot, a city of ladies that guarded a pass that the pagans had to use; he came with three thousand knights who had escaped from the hand of death. The lady lived on the edge of his land, so she came to his aid and provided knights of great valour, enough to protect his lands, which they did, with great strength and power.

King Cradelman went back to North Wales with three thousand knights who had escaped from the battle, seven thousand mercenaries and four thousand at home who were very, very pleased to see him, because only five miles away lived a witch called Carmile. She had a brother named Hardogabran, who was a very wealthy pagan. Carmile was adept at witchcraft and necromancy, the most accomplished in all the land with the exception of King Arthur’s sister Morgan, and Niniane, who later showed that she had the skill to beguile even Merlin. This witch Carmile had a fine castle in that country and

she made the pagans very welcome there, to the great harm and woe of King Cradelman and all his men. Nevertheless, he was able to look after the marches and the entry into his lands very successfully. And while Merlin was alive, Carmile had no power to harm England with her witchcraft.

King Brangores went to Strangore, far to the north, where there was also a witch who caused him great annoyance. He had three thousand knights from the battle with Arthur, six thousand mercenaries and five thousand from the city, and was able to harry the pagans and often brought them to harm. King Brangores had married a daughter of Emperor Ludranes, a lady who had previously been married to the King of Hungary and Blaske, and by this former marriage she had a son, a man of great valour whose name was Sagremor. He was living with his maternal grandfather and was heir to all the empire, as well as of Hungary and Blaske. You will hear later how his grandfather sent him richly provisioned and with many fine noblemen from Constantinople to Britain, so that Sagremor could become a knight with King Arthur.

King Carodas, who was a knight of the Round Table, went to his city of Galence, with three thousand from the battle with Arthur, four thousand fighting men already in the city and seven thousand well-mounted mercenaries who, with sword and lance and knife, were able to kill and rob many pagans and deprive them of their safety on the roads and lanes. King Aguisaunt went to Coranges in Scotland with five thousand knights from the battle and ten thousand new recruits, as well as many from his city and the area around it. He was only twenty miles away from Nambire that was under heavy siege, and this kept a large number of his knights busy fighting against the Saracen dogs, which they did with great enthusiasm, laying ambush on the lanes and paths and causing the pagans a great deal of harm. King Eustas went to Arundel with three thousand survivors from the battle and seven thousand new recruits, and guarded the lanes and paths well.

King Uriens remained in Norhant, in great sorrow for the departure of all his friends and comrades and for all the men who had been killed in the battle with Arthur. He had ten thousand men in all, and they caused as much annoyance to the pagans as they could, day and night.

This state of affairs in England lasted for five years. During this time no corn was sown and the kings lived entirely on what they could steal and capture from the pagan invaders, by ambush and by violence. Ordinary people lost their lives all the time, for nothing, and the country would have been lost and all would have died had it not been for Sir Gawain, who was then a very strong and courageous young bachelor knight. But before I tell you more about this, and about the pagans and the eleven kings, you should hear a noble tale about King Nanters' son Galathin. Now listen!

Regarding Ygerne, whom I told you earlier had once been Hoel's wife, King Nanters had married their daughter Blasine and King Lot had wedded their daughter Belisent,

and it is important that you know that King Nanters had given his wife Blasine a son whose name was Galathin, a fair young man who was strong and courageous. King Lot had four sons by Belisent: Gaheris, Gawain, Gaheriet and Agravain. Around this time, Galathin came to his mother Blasine and asked her if it was true what everybody was saying: 'Is King Arthur my uncle? Please tell me.'

Blasine began to weep. 'Son, may God protect me, King Arthur is my brother, we were born from the same womb. But he is Uther Pendragon's son, and your father wants him dead and was nearly killed in battle because of it, and would have deserved it if he had been.' And Blasine told her son how Arthur was conceived and all the whys and wherefores around his father's animosity towards him, and said: 'Son, if you are wise and wish to be held in the highest regard, you should work day and night, with all the intelligence that you have, to try to bring about an accord between King Arthur and your father.'

Galathin swore that he would never fight against Arthur, but rather he would gather helmet, lance and sword and be knighted by him, and be counted alongside him in peace and in war. He sent for a messenger and told him to go quickly to his cousin Gawain, to greet him courteously and invite him to come to a new castle at Brockland to speak with him, to cement their friendship.

The messenger made the journey, and Gawain gave a flippant reply, for he was just returning from hunting, with three greyhounds on leads and a group of three hunting dogs running alongside him. His mother started weeping.

'Forgive me, son,' she said, 'but you are wasting your time going hunting like this when you are old enough to be a knight. You should stop all this childishness, there is man's work to do. Think of your uncle, King Arthur, who is already a valiant and glorious knight! Why don't you try to make an accord between him and your father, King Lot?' Then she revealed to him how Arthur had been conceived and born. His brothers said that Gawain was a bad influence on them, and it was only because of him that they had not already made their way to King Arthur, to offer him their service.

Gawain, whom Christ had granted strength and valour, replied: 'Sweet madam, all of you, you are wrong to rebuke me in this way. I had no idea. But now that I do, I swear by Christ that I will only accept knighthood from the hand of King Arthur.' His three brothers echoed this.

'Madam,' Gawain continued, 'provide us with arms, and then we won't rest until we have achieved the reconciliation that you want.'

'My sons, I certainly shall. You shall have new horses, armour, everything that pertains to receiving knighthood.'

Shortly afterwards, Galathin went to Brockland and Gawain soon arrived there with his three brothers. They greeted one another with great joy and affection. But: 'My dear cousin,' said Gawain, 'if it hadn't been for this friendly invitation of yours to come here, we were going to go to King Arthur, to try to bring about a reconciliation between him

and my father, with Mary's help!

'May Christ be praised!' replied Galathin. 'That is my intention as well! This was why I sent for you. Let's go together.'

'Gladly,' said Gawain. They joyfully set a day to go.

If they hadn't, England would have been lost.

Merry is the beginning of May; the birds are joyful, maidens hum a tune to themselves, the weather is hot, the day is long, nightingales sing and the meadows are full of flowers. The lady Belisent fitted out five hundred young men on horseback in identical garb to accompany her sons and armed them in iron and steel. They were the sons of earls and barons and all clothed in the same colours, but none of them yet knighted, except for nine. She blessed Gawain, and his brothers Gaheris, Gaheriet and Agravain, and bid them farewell, in God's name.

In the same way, King Nanters' lady Blasine decked out her son Galathin with some fine attire and found two hundred companions to accompany him, twenty of them knights, the rest of them young men hoping for knighthood. Having each received his mother's blessing, Galathin and Gawain met at the place where they had agreed to meet, and then made their way together towards London, for this was where they expected to find King Arthur.

On the third day of their journey, they were quite near to that city when they saw approaching them seven hundred loaded packhorses and seven hundred carts, with five hundred wagons following behind, all laden with ale and bread, fish, meat and red wine, stolen from the countryside and destined for the enemy. The dust thrown up by this criminal convoy blocked out the sun.

Three thousand men had taken part in this robbery, so the book says, and commanding them were four kings, one called Leodebron, one called Senigram, who was a nasty piece of work by all accounts, another named King Maudelec, who revelled in crime and manslaughter, and a king named Sernagare, all of them kings of Ireland. These kings had gone looking for plunder and were so incensed that King Arthur had fortified and provisioned London so well that they had burnt all the countryside around it, thieved everything that they could and killed anyone who tried to stop them. The fires from burning fields and farmsteads could be seen from miles away. They had pity for neither man, wife nor child. The cries and screams of the country folk echoed from the clouds.

Gawain saw this convoy approaching and asked local people what it was. They told him what I have just told you. Gawain asked where King Arthur was, and the reply was that Arthur had gone to help King Leodegan in his war against King Rion, on Merlin's advice.

'By my loyalty! We're not going to stand idly by and watch this! If King Arthur is not

here to protect his lands, then we are, and we will!' cried Gawain. 'We are his men, and we will fight these pagans until the king returns.'

The people cautiously asked these youths who they were. They told them that they were the sons of King Lot and King Nanters, and along with the young sons of wealthy freemen – those who were later to serve King Arthur very well – they had come to join Arthur's forces. The people were overjoyed and thanked Jesus Christ. Many locals volunteered to join this army of youths at once. Gawain quickly had five hundred strong and courageous local men armed in iron and steel, and they swore that they would quickly take revenge for all this killing.

Gawain now had twelve hundred men and youths under his command, of which only eighty were knights, but he divided them into four groups and prepared to attack the convoy, which had three thousand men to defend it.

If it was past midday, Gawain's strength would wane a little, for the nature of his strength was this: that between evensong and night, he had the strength of one man, and this state lasted until early morning, but from early morning until midday, he had the strength of two knights. But then, from midday until afternoon, he went back to having the strength of only one knight, and from midway through the afternoon until evensong he had the strength of two again. This was the nature of Gawain's strength.

It was approaching midday when the attack on the convoy began. Gawain wielded an axe with a blade that was two feet wide and whoever he engaged in battle with it, their head was quickly sliced in two or cut off completely. He butchered men left, right and centre in this way, and soon his horse was soaked in their blood, from head to tail. Galathin fought beside him and inflicted some grievous wounds upon the pagans as well, toppling a great many from their horses. Gawain's brother Agravain performed magnificently also, killing twenty knights in all, and Gaheris thrust his horse into the thickest of the fighting and performed well. The youngest of Gawain's brothers, Gaheriet, fought better than any child of his age had ever done before, piercing armour at every stroke and sending forty Saracens quickly to hell. Others did magnificently too, and they overcame a large number of pagans in a very short time.

But certainly, no one could test themselves properly against Gawain; there was no armour made by the hand of man that could withstand a single blow from him. He scattered his adversaries like dust in the wind. They fought so manfully that in a little while Gawain and his companions had killed all three thousand of the pagans, except for twenty. Those remaining twenty fled away, and ten of them made it to where a large contingent of seven thousand were encamped.

'Help!' they cried. 'There's been a massacre! We've lost our carts and packhorses and all our men have been killed, except for us, and another ten who managed to escape to some lower ground over there. They need some help, quickly!'

All the pagans cried out in anguish: 'For Mohammed's sake, to arms!' Those who had

arms ran to get them, but some didn't have any because the weather was hot and they'd put them in the carts to be transported. The youths were already sending these carts into London; all the carts, wagons and packhorses were being taken to London in the protection of some strong and trustworthy men. But the pagans raced to confront these youths – seven thousand against one thousand, which is very unfair odds. Battle ensued at once. Gawain met King Thoas, a powerful giant from Ireland who was fourteen feet tall and very strong. Gawain swung his axe and sliced the giant down from head to chest. Galathin met with king Sanigran, another huge man, and cut off his head with his sword. Gawain's brother Agravain showed his might in the thick of the battle by cutting men down left and right.

King Guinbat gave Gaheris such a blow that he fell off his horse. But Gaheris quickly jumped to his feet and struck another Saracen hard on the head, causing him to fall from his own horse, which Gaheris then mounted. Gaheriet saw the blow that King Guinbat gave to his brother and galloped in pursuit. King Guinbat saw his pursuer and galloped away as fast as he could. When Gaheriet was made a knight, in every place and every fight, he showed nearly as much strength and valour as his brother Gawain. King Guinbat had seen the blows that Gaheriet was able to deliver and didn't want to stick around to suffer one himself!



Guinbat galloped away as swiftly as he could and Gaheriet followed, as far as the shot from a large, ground-mounted crossbow, as we find in the book, and he caught up with him in a valley, where the ten who had initially escaped from Gawain's forces had been joined by another eight thousand pagans, assembling to prepare a counterattack. Gaheriet didn't flinch at this sight but fearlessly carried on pursuing King Guinbat until he was able to strike him on the head so hard that a quarter of his helmet was sliced away, along with half of his shield, injuring his shoulder and his arm. King Guinbat fell to the ground. Gaheriet turned his horse around and tried to make his escape, but the pagans surrounded him and would have captured him had he not been able to strike out with his sword and bring many to their deaths. He was not yet twenty years old, but he was brave and skilful, and soon none dared to go near him. So they contrived a great villainy by killing his horse. Gaheriet stood on his feet and defended himself with good heart, killing so many horses and men around him that soon everybody kept themselves out of range. They threw stones at him, knives, swords, chunks of wood and spears, wounding him badly and twice getting him to fall over. Alas, that he has no help!

At last, they rushed over and seized him, and tried to pull his amour away in order to get to his neck so that they could cut off his head.

While this was happening, a noble young man came galloping towards Gawain. 'Gawain, your brother has ridden into that valley over there in pursuit of a heathen king,' he

shouted. 'He's been gone too long I think! I've heard a lot of noise and cries coming from over there.'

'Alas!' replied Gawain. 'I am slain by this news. I'd rather be killed myself than hear of Gaheriet's death.'

'Let's go then,' said Galathin. 'The more we stand around talking, the greater his chances of being killed.'

Gawain, Galathin, Gaheris and Agravain, along with a few others, broke away from the fighting and soon came in sight of the eight thousand in this valley, the force which had been led by King Guinbat – and still was, for he had recovered from his injury. And there was another king there too, a huge man named Medelan. Gawain rode into the thick of them, looking for his brother with his axe raised on high. Galathin rode close beside him, and the two of them laid in to the enemy and scattered them everywhere, cleaving shoulders and backs with their weapons, killing and hurting many. Gaheris and Agravain showed their strength as well, and many fell dead through their efforts. But they saw no greater slaughter than that around Gaheriet when they reached him; but he was lying on the ground with men trying to pull the armour from him. Gawain was so angry that he gave no thought to his own life but struck wildly to left and to right, one blow from his axe split a man from head to chest, another from shoulder to ribs, another just above the shield that took the man's head off as Gawain fought his way to Gaheriet, and his brothers as well, killing so many that I cannot begin to describe it all, until at last they reached him.

All those who were holding Gaheriet on the ground quickly fled away in terror. When Gaheriet saw Gawain, he leapt to his feet with all his strength, grabbed his armour, swiftly put it back on, then seized a sword and, still on foot, began shedding the blood of everyone who dared to come in range. Agravain seized a riderless horse and led it by the reins to Gaheriet. 'Get on this, quickly, you idiot!' he cried. 'Why on Earth did you chase someone into the midst of all this?'

Gaheriet leapt onto the steed, and they all eagerly turned and made their escape.

The Saracens unfurled their banners and advanced in pursuit, swearing by Mohammed that they would kill these youths. There were almost fifteen thousand of these pagans, and our forces amounted to little more than one thousand, but our youths fought valiantly and began to diminish the numbers of their assailants, with Christ's help.

Listen to this, everybody. The men of the countryside whom Gawain had instructed to take the wagons and packhorses into London, soon arrived safely in that city. The people happily let them in, but were astonished to see them and asked them all where they'd come from. They told them how Gawain and his companions had come across three thousand, and by strength and valour had killed them all and sent the wagons here. Then they told the constable, whose name was Sir Do, that seven thousand Saracens were now attacking them.

Sir Do went quickly to Aldgate and blew a horn, and all the aldermen of the city responded to the call.

‘Pay attention, dear friends,’ said Sir Do, when seven thousand had assembled in front of him. ‘Nearby are some gallant youths who this very day have killed the cursed pagans who have robbed the countryside of all this stuff that you see here before you. But they need our help. We would be cowards not to help these young men now! It is Gawain and Galathin, Gaheris, Gaheriet and Agravain, through the grace of Jesus Christ! These young men, I tell you, may well be able to bring peace between King Arthur and the eleven kings. So to arms, everybody! For pity’s sake, let’s hurry and lend them our support!’

Everybody armed themselves at once; the aldermen unfurled their banners, the constable Sir Do took his own banner, and of the valiant seven thousand he let two thousand remain to defend the city if need arose and chose five thousand to go with him. They quickly mounted their horses and galloped off towards the youths. But let us leave them for now, and return to the battle.

The youths now found themselves fighting against fifteen thousand, I find it written, with no more than eighty knights, five hundred valiant young squires, another twenty who were due to be knighted and three hundred country folk, both on foot and on horseback. Only nine hundred in all!

Guinbat and Medelan launched a fierce attack against these youths with eight thousand men. Guinbat galloped at Gawain with a huge lance. Gawain saw the threat and readied his shield; the blow went straight through his shield but his chainmail saved him and King Guinbat’s lance broke in two. Gawain remained firmly upright in his saddle and seizing his axe in both hands, aimed a blow at Guinbat’s head with it. The blade slid swiftly down the knight’s armour, behind his saddle and cut his horse’s back in two. Guinbat fell to the ground in a pool of his horse’s guts. If the stroke had been a foot nearer to its target, King Guinbat would certainly have been sliced in half.

When the Saracens saw what was happening, many hundreds of them converged at once to defend their lord and to kill or capture Gawain. The Saracens mounted their king on another horse and fought bitterly against Gawain, killed his horse and tried to seize him, but none dared to go within range of Gawain’s axe, so they cast spears at him instead, and threw swords.

Galathin killed many Saracens during this attack and so did Gaheris, many hundreds of them. Agravain killed many as well, and so did young Gaheriet, no man could have fought better.

Midday had come and gone and it was approaching the middle of the afternoon, when Gawain’s strength began to double again. ‘By God, you won’t take me now!’ he exclaimed. He gripped his axe in both hands and killed many with it in a very short time. He stood ankle deep in the blood of horses and men. When he saw a pagan on horse-

back attacking his brother Agravain and saw Agravain knocked down onto his horse's neck and the pagan aiming a blow intending to decapitate him, Gawain leapt twelve feet with his axe, over all who stood in the way, to help his brother. The pagan saw that he had no chance of galloping away and brought up his shield to protect himself, but Gawain swung his axe through armour, through flesh, bone and blood, pulled the body from the saddle and leapt up into it himself. 'Today, I'm paying you all back with deep wounds and death! My strength is doubled, by God above, as you'll soon see!'

Gawain kept his strokes up, to left and to right, until great heaps of slain piled up around him – I have the Brut to vouch for this.

Agravain cut off the head of Guinbat's nephew; the king saw this and went to take revenge at once. He took up a strong lance and struck Agravain with it, very nearly killing him; the blow pierced his chainmail and the leather underneath, just beneath his arm. Agravain's horse stumbled and they both fell to the ground. Gaheriet, Gaheris and Galathin thought that Agravain had been killed, so they quickly galloped over and Galathin struck Guinbat with his sword, cutting off his right arm and moments later Gaheriet, thinking to give the best blow of all, swung his sword over Guinbat's shield and cut Guinbat's head off. Galathin kicked the body out of the saddle with his foot. Agravain, now back on his feet, leapt onto the horse and flew off on it like a hawk. The four of them rode here, there and everywhere, demonstrating their prowess, but none of them had any idea, now, where Gawain was.

All of Guinbat's men rallied at once to the banner of King Medelan. Agravain caught sight of Gawain at last, and rode to him. Then all five went to rally their own forces. Suddenly, in the distance they could see Sir Do approaching. The five thousand from London quickly jumped from their horses and adjusted their saddles for battle, and soon they were joining forces with Gawain, Galathin and the others, who were very pleased to see them. They all rode in close formation towards the enemy. The pagans advanced just as assuredly, keen to avenge the death of King Guinbat. Many lances were broken, swords were thrust down with force and so much dust was soon thrown up that it was hard to see anything at all. Gawain conducted himself so magnificently that the men of London could scarcely believe that one man was capable of such prowess. So many pagans were killed in that battle that their blood filled the valley like the water in a lake.

King Medelan galloped towards Sir Do and felled him with a fearsome blow. The king tried to unlace Do's helmet, and no one could get close enough to help except Gawain, who hit the pagan king hard on the helmet with his axe; the blade sank down through Medelan's head and came to a stop deep in his chest. Seeing this, the pagans began to flee. Gawain and his brothers, his cousin and all of their companions, Sir Do and all the good men of London, pursued them for five miles and killed another thirteen thousand.

When the day drew to a close, they all went through the city gates into London. The people of that city came to greet them with a wonderful procession. Everything of value

in the carts and wagons was brought before Gawain. Sir Do invited him to divide and distribute it as he saw fit. Gawain replied:

‘Have these provisions divided according to most need.’

Gawain was highly praised for this. Everything was divided and handed out in the fairest way that people could think of. These valiant youths remained in London for a long time, and no Saracen dared to try to harm anybody there. Sir Do made them very comfortable, and they were made to feel very welcome. But we must leave them here for the moment, to turn again to King Arthur.

March is comfortable, merry and long, the cold has gone, birds sing for a mate, bare twigs sprout new growth, the meadow turns green and everyone begins to get a spring in their step. Arthur travelled from Brekenho with Merlin, King Ban, King Bohort and thirty-eight others – no more than this, just forty-two of them in all, for Merlin had hand-picked Arthur’s companions and chosen only these forty-two – and they rode together to Carohaise, where King Leodegan was holding court. King Leodegan ruled over all that land, including the city of Camelot, but he was seeking shelter in Carohaise because King Rion and fifteen other kings had recently defeated him in battle. On this particular day he was holding court in the open air, with local noblemen and with knights of the Round Table, seeking their advice on how to avoid a shameful capitulation. It was the eve of Palm Sunday, and the king stood in a street of that city with all his knights, hoping for some advice, when King Arthur and his companions suddenly entered the city.

With Arthur were King Ban and King Bohort, as well as Sir Antor and all the others, and they all came in together. All of them were young men, except for King Ban and Bohort, Ulfen, Sir Antor and Sir Bretel: these five noble knights were middle-aged but the rest of them were young men, riding on fine warhorses.

‘There is the king,’ said Merlin. ‘Get off your mounts, all of you, and make your way on foot. Give your horses to the grooms. King Ban, sir, greet King Leodegan on our behalf and tell him what we all agreed to in Brekenho.’

They all advanced towards the gathering, each knight holding the hand of another. King Arthur went at the head, leading King Ban in his right hand and King Bohort in his left, with Merlin in front of him bearing a furled banner. King Leodegan and all his assembly looked on questioningly, jostling one another to get a better look. No one recognised them at all.

King Leodegan strode forwards and greeted King Ban. ‘If you come here in peace, then welcome,’ he said.

‘By Christ, we mean you no harm nor shame,’ replied King Ban. ‘We’ve come to help you. We are warriors from a distant land and we understand that you are in need of

some fighting men. So we've come here from a far country to help you in your war and to serve you. But on this condition: we ask you, in God's name – for it will be neither to your harm nor to your shame – to grant us willingly what we shall now ask, which is that you shall not ask us our names, nor who we are, nor question any identity we may give you, and if you are happy with this, then tell us now, and if you don't wish to take us up on this offer, then we will happily go away and serve somebody else, who may be more pleased to see us.'

Leodegan took leave to go to consult with his advisors. All his barons agreed that these men seemed to be noble and strong – you could tell by the look of them. He should take them up on their offer, accept their service and on no account send them away.

King Leodegan returned and said to King Arthur and to King Ban: 'My dear fellows, I think it's a shame that you will not tell me who you are, for I can see that you have more fighting strength than I can muster. But you seem to be courteous and valiant, so you are welcome. I shall reward you for your service, if God allows me to survive all this, but first you must agree to help me in every battle, and you can tell me your names only when you are ready to do so.'

King Ban gave his word to this agreement, and King Leodegan gave his.

While all this was going on, Merlin had been procuring some fine lodgings for them. Their host was called Blair and his wife was named Leonele. They were a jovial and friendly couple; they went out to greet King Arthur and welcomed him with great honour. Arthur and his companions stayed there for seven nights, and they were often seen in the company of King Leodegan. King Leodegan sent his messengers to all his knights and noblemen, summoning them to Carohaise and to his hall, by Holy Thursday at the latest, to help him in his struggle. Anyone who refused to come would be branded a traitor.

A truce between King Leodegan and King Rion had been in effect for a while, but listen to the treason that occurred before Ascension Day. During Easter, on the Tuesday, the evening of Saint Phillip in May, four kings who were giants, allies of King Rion, went out fully armed with sixty thousand men. Their names were King Roulyons, King Clarions, King Sornigrens and King Sorhens. These men travelled out from the main army and threatened Carohaise with great arrogance, thieving and pillaging and setting fire to everything they could find. Every man and woman they came across they cut to the ground, and they carried away a thousand carts laden with spoils, filled with every sort of meat and drink imaginable. Ninety-five knights were assigned to accompany this convoy and to protect it.

The kings went right up to the gates of Carohaise intending to gain entry, but the gates were shut against them, so they beat at the wooden boards with lances and swords and tried to hack their way through. In this they failed, so they went back into the countryside to wreak new havoc, killing men, women and children. The screams could be heard for miles. Those in the city who could hear this atrocity taking place bravely cried: 'To

arms!

Everybody went to the gates on their finest warhorses and waited for King Leodegan to give his orders. Amongst their number were knights of the Round Table, which King Uther Pendragon had instigated, the most fearless knights in the world, although none of them recognised Arthur. There were two hundred and fifty of them. Harvey de Rivel and Malot the Brown were masters of their flag, as I see it written in the Brut; their banner was of silk, dyed in indigo with gold at the top, and Malot the Brown carried it. There were four thousand men from the city and their banner was carried by the king's steward, Cleodalis, who was a magnificent knight. His emblem was of azure embroidered with four boars' heads in gold. These men waited in the main street.

King Arthur, Bohort and Ban arrived with all their companions, as I see in the book, but none of them bore their own arms, and through enchantment each had assumed a completely different appearance. They were all mounted on their finest warhorses. Merlin rode at the front and urged them all to swiftly follow him, which they did expertly and without hesitation. Merlin carried their banner; on the top stood a grisly dragon that was curled into an arc. All the people in the town stared at it, for the mouth was wide open with the tongue sticking out, spitting flames into the sky, and it had a long tail with barbs on the end.

Merlin went to the gate and asked the porter to let him out. The porter said he should wait for King Leodegan to give the command. 'I tell you, I'm not waiting any longer!' cried Merlin, and he seized the gates at the base and slung them open, using all his strength. He and Arthur and all their companions went through, then Merlin slammed the gates shut again behind them and secured them with bolts and bars, hasps and mechanisms, locking them as tightly and firmly as they were before. Everybody who saw this was amazed.

Merlin urged his company to spur their horses into a gallop. They raced forwards with Merlin carrying the banner, towards two thousand Saracens who were leading wagons filled with booty, intending to take them to King Rion. Each of Merlin's company speared a pagan with his lance and then followed up with drawn sword, cutting numerous Saracens to the ground. Some were sliced through the chest, others had hands and feet cut off, or their heads parted from their body. The forty-two gave their horses full rein until they had killed all two thousand of the enemy, in little more time than it takes a man to walk a horse a mile. Then they escorted the convoy with little opposition back towards the gates of Carohaise. But before they got there, they came across an ever bigger prize: almost a thousand carts travelling as quickly as they could, accompanied by three kings with sixteen thousand men behind them.

'Follow me, my friends!' cried Merlin, enthusiastically. He galloped towards the carts, and his companions followed as fast as their horses would go. When they came near to the kings, Merlin raised himself to his full height in the saddle and cast an enchantment on the pagans, rendering them temporarily blind. None of them could see a thing. Then

our forty-two laid into them so ferociously that hundreds were killed before they knew what was happening.

Those in the city saw this and were very impressed. The gate was unbolted and Cleodalis was the first to ride out, the king's steward, and he advanced upon the pagans with five thousand men. Many lances were broken and there was noise and shouting, for the pagans were suddenly able to see again. The fighting was so fierce that it sounded like thunder.

The three heathen kings divided their forces into two: seven thousand took on the five thousand men of Cleodalis, and eight thousand men were sent to confront King Leodegan, who was advancing with the two hundred and fifty knights of the Round Table. All of these knights were fighting with King Leodegan, but the king had an additional two thousand men as well, who threw themselves at the pagans. The eight thousand attacked in response, many valiant men met in battle with spear and sharp sword, and many men lost their commanders. Blood flowed in streams, but King Leodegan, despite being heavily outnumbered, fought magnificently. He was faced with three assailants continually and cracked many a head open. The knights of the Round Table took very little time to kill a great number. Their swords performed very well, it was an extraordinary sight, ten against one. The fighting was intense.

The Saracens were incensed that so few men were able to inflict such injury upon them and cause such slaughter. They swore by Mohammed and by Dagon that none of these knights should escape with his life and they drove them backwards a long distance – may they receive Christ's curse for it! – and soon forty knights of the Round Table had come close to surrendering, but their companions were able to rescue them just in time. None of them lost their lives, although during this engagement, King Leodegan was brought down, along with a hundred of his knights. They took Leodegan and gave him some harsh treatment, many wounds, then tied him to a horse and assigned five hundred knights to lead their prisoner disgracefully to King Rion, with every humiliation they could think of. They imagined that the battle was won.

When King Leodegan saw how far he was from his own men with no hope of rescue, and the humiliating way in which he was being carried and the further ill-treatment he could expect: 'Alas, that I was born!' he cried. 'My life and my honour are both lost. My daughter Guinevere will be killed by vile pagans, my noble knights will be slain and the ladies of my land will be raped and killed.' So great was his sorrow that he passed out. By now, he was already two miles from the battlefield.

His daughter stood on the city wall and witnessed all this misfortune. She put her hands to her head and tore her hair, ripped her clothes and banged her head against the wall. She fainted many times and cried 'Alas!' realising how helpless she was. Everybody in the city knew how vulnerable they were now, and they wailed in lamentation and grief.

The knights of the Round Table, however, showed what they were made of; with their backs to the wall they quickly conversed and agreed that they would rescue King Leode-

gan or die in the attempt. So they fought beneath the city walls and cut many Saracens to the ground, bringing down men and horses, intending to break out and ride to the rescue. The people in the city who were watching this shed tears of despair. But let us leave them for a moment and speak of Arthur and his companions.

Our tale is quite clear that the battle being fought half a mile away was astonishingly hard, and where Arthur held his own with the forty-two, King Cleodalis was having a hard time of it and the cries rang out. Cleodalis with four thousand faced Sornigrens and King Sapharen, who had seven thousand with them. So many pagans were dead on the battlefield that they lay in heaps; armed men and well-muscled horses whose only reward for the day was death.

Merlin called to his companions: 'Follow me!'

On rode the forty-two, as fast as their horses could carry them, leaving Cleodalis and his forces behind. When Merlin had ridden for about two miles he said to King Arthur and King Ban: 'See over there? King Leodegan is tied up on a horse. They're leading him to King Rion and he'll suffer a horrible death if we don't rescue him. Let's gallop across and overtake them. If ten of them escape, I'll consider you all to be less than men.'

They galloped across and fought their way into the thick of them. Merlin was the first to kill one, just to wet the others' appetites. Arthur rained down blows like hail on tiles; he killed every pagan he came to, so the book says. So did King Ban and King Bohort, they killed many heathens and so did all their companions. All their swords were bathed in blood. They made such slaughter that never before had so many been killed by so few, and out of the five hundred, scarcely five escaped alive.

There, men could have captured four hundred horses for a 'thank you'; they were wandering about, trailing their reins and up to their fetlocks in blood. In this way, Arthur and his fellows rescued King Leodegan from certain death. Leodegan was astonished that so few men could defeat so many in such a short time. He could see the fire-breathing dragon on their banner and knew that it was the new warriors who had rescued him, and he thanked Jesus Christ for it!

Merlin, Sir Bretel and Sir Ulfín dismounted, released King Leodegan from the ropes that were binding him, then helped him onto a fine horse, gave him arms and armour, put a steel helmet onto his head, a long lance into his hands and gave him a strong shield to hang around his neck. They made him look like a king! – he who only a short while before had looked like a wretched criminal. He put his hands into theirs and thanked them.

Merlin, Bretel and Ulfín leapt back onto their horses. 'My knights,' cried Merlin, 'spur your horses and follow me.' They did so at once, as swiftly as an arrow from a longbow.

When Guinevere, who was standing on the city wall, saw the forty-two come riding

towards her – for she recognised their banner with the fire-breathing dragon flying into the air – and saw that her father was with them, on horseback, fully armed and rescued unharmed from his enemies, I’ve no need to describe to you the shrieks of joy she gave. Everybody who saw it wept for joy as well.

The forty-two, with King Leodegan, swept forwards like the north wind in a storm, and soon came across the knights of the Round Table, most of whom were unhorsed and defending themselves valiantly on foot. Only twenty of these knights remained on horseback. They were in desperate straits. The forty-two valiant warriors bore down so savagely onto the heathen dogs that they cut off every head that they could reach and quickly toppled many giants to the ground with their sharp swords of fine steel. Many were cut right through, some lost shield, arm and shoulder in one slice, some were cut in half, some lost a thigh and a leg with one swipe of a blade. Broken armour lay everywhere, alongside many pagans with mortal wounds, and dying horses.

King Leodegan performed magnificently as well, and took a fine revenge on his foes. Against our forty-two plus one, no armour was of any use at all, no warhorse could remain standing and no heathen knight was able to defend himself.

There was a heathen king called Canlang who was fifteen feet tall. He was one of the two strongest pagans in this battle and he did his utmost to destroy the knights of the Round Table. King Arthur engaged Canlang in battle and at first he found it difficult to deliver a blow, the giant was so strong. Arthur saw that his only chance was to get behind him and at last he managed to strike a single blow under his raised shield, through his armpit, through flesh and bone and down to his navel. The misbeliever took his last breath and lay lifeless across his horse’s back, his arms hanging over one side and his legs over the other, as the horse galloped off through the melee as best it could.

The pagans saw this blow that Canlang had received and drew back in fear. Guinevere had watched Arthur deliver that sword stroke and thanked Jesus Christ for it. ‘If only that young man who is fighting there could be my husband,’ she said.

‘Amen to that,’ said those around her. ‘We’ve never seen anything like it.’

King Ban then met Clarion, the other of the strongest pagans there. He was fourteen feet high and immensely strong. He had already killed many of our men, but King Ban confronted him without fear. The book tells us that he swung a blow at him that caught him on the ear and sliced down through cheek and shoulder as far as his waist. His ribs and shoulder fell off and his liver spilled out.

King Bohort met with Sarmedon, the standard-bearer and struck him on the shoulder, cutting off his arm. Shield and banner toppled to the ground, followed by the man himself.

‘For the love of Mary, bestir yourselves, my noble knights, and give these pagans what they deserve!’ cried King Leodegan. The knights of the Round Table captured horses for themselves and eagerly gave battle to the Saracens with renewed effort.

The pagans saw that Canlang was dead, and also Clarion and their standard-bearer Sarmedon, and suddenly didn't know what to do. They all began to run away. Two thousand townsfolk poured out of the city and fell on them without any pity at all, helping the knights of the Round Table to cut down as many as they could.

King Arthur, King Ban, King Bohort and King Leodegan, along with the other thirty-nine, dismounted, adjusted their saddles and girths and then, on Merlin's advice, galloped off again to help Cleodalis. Cleodalis was King Leodegan's steward, who was fighting against seven thousand with only four thousand men, as you know. These forty-three galloped into the seven thousand and delivered fierce and powerful blows on shields, hacking at them like carpenters with axes; which was necessary, because Cleodalis was unhorsed and fighting on foot, and so were a great many of his men. They were standing back to back, fighting for their lives. King Arthur, Bohort, Ban and King Leodegan killed pagans beyond reckoning. A thousand riderless horses were soon dragging their reins in the dirt. These forty-three fought like no warriors will ever fight again. The blood of dead knights and horses ran like a brook through the battlefield. Through the power and strength of these forty-three, the brave Cleodalis was put back onto a horse, and many other knights were as well.

The kings of these heathen men were called Sornigrens and Sapharen. Both of them were fourteen feet tall, with great strength and endurance, and both were angry and dismayed that such a small number of knights were doing them such harm. They blew a great horn to re-gather their forces. Kay, Lucan the keeper of the king's wine cellar, and Griffles each took a long lance and galloped into the thick of the Saracens. Kay hit King Sornigrens, knocked him to the ground and rode his horse over him, and would have trampled him to death in the filth had the king not been quickly rescued by his men.

Lucan speared Abadan through the heart, but by now, Sornigrens had been given a new horse to ride. A great battle ensued, for there were still five thousand pagans left and they were being driven towards the wall; there were so many of them that it was hard to see the scale of the slaughter.

King Sornigrens, badly bruised and with a broken shield, was out of his mind with shame. He urged his men to greater effort, extolling them, for the love of Apollo, to take revenge for all the harm that had been inflicted upon them. The Saracens tried to surround the Christians and pin them down, and laid into them with sword and mace, axes and spiked hammers, and did our folk much harm. But at the same time, the knights of the Round Table who were following the fleeing pagans, seeing the banner of the forty-two, galloped eagerly into the attack and brought down all that they met with sword and lance, killing every pagan they came to and fighting with such strength that they were able to force their way to where the forty-two were. Then there was so much slaughter that I cannot describe it.

On the other side of the engagement, Cleodalis was continuing to force the pagans towards the city walls. King Sapharen turned to face him with nearly a thousand in

support and gave a good account of himself. But the two thousand men who had been pursuing the other fleeing pagans turned and lent their support to Cleodalis by attacking the pagans who were surrounding him, felling a thousand of them and by the grace of God, and helping Cleodalis to hold his ground.

The forty-two valiant knights, including Merlin and King Arthur, alongside two hundred and fifty knights of the Round Table, now found themselves fighting hard against eight thousand. King Sornigrens was in command of them. He was a fearsome warrior and there would have been much to worry about had not Merlin given some needful advice: 'Gentlemen, I don't need to hide from you that our enemies are so numerous that it is hard to see how we can last out against them,' he cried. 'But listen to me: there are ten giants amongst these Saracens who are so strong that, if they were killed, the battle would soon be won.'

They asked Merlin to point them out, which he did. King Ban took his sword in his hand, spurred his horse and galloped forwards. He took no time in attacking King Sornigrens, hitting him on the side of the head; the blade cut through metal and leather, sliced away part of the giant's face, took away his shield and sliced off his left hand and arm. The Saracens gave out a great shout of despair at this sudden setback and turned to flee.

Bohort met Marganan and gave him such a blow on the top of his head that the sword cut down to the giant's teeth. King Arthur, so save me God, met with an emir whose name was Sinalaut and he hit him on the head so hard with his sword that a quarter of the giant's helmet was cut away and the blade carried on down through the giant's shoulder and cut it off, along with four of his ribs. Sinalaut fell dead from the blow.

The other giants were killed as well: by Ulfin, Bretel, Kay, Lucan, Grifles, Meragys, Gornains and Craddoc. These were the ten giants, the princes of the heathen men, and when the pagans saw that they were dead, they all raised a cry and said that it was devils they were fighting against, not men; they truly believed it, and began to run for their lives. Our folk pursued them mercilessly, cutting to the ground all that they could overtake. Three thousand were killed in this way, out of eight thousand, and the rest managed to escape to the forces of King Sapharen, swelling their number to fourteen thousand, and they began fighting against Cleodalis, who only had four thousand, with the two that came out of the city. It was a pitiful spectacle: the pagans and King Sapharen trampled down our Christian men, killing a thousand and more, and toppling the rest from their horses. Cleodalis had never been so grief-stricken! His forces were pressed against the city wall. He looked for the dragon that Merlin carried aloft but could see no sign of it, and he couldn't see any sign of the knights of the Round Table either. He thought they must all have been killed. He tried to flee, hesitated, then turned again, he was almost mad with fear and desperation. The people on the city walls saw this and gave out a cry of anguish.

Merlin, Arthur and the others were taking a rest from the battle, and so were the knights

of the Round Table; they had got off their horses to adjust their saddles and to tighten their girths. But now, in good order and in good formation, they rode back into the fray. The people on the city walls saw the dragon approaching and all the beautiful ladies called down to the steward Cleodalis: 'Noble knight, take heart! Fight harder because relief is on its way. Over there in the valley we can see the fire-breathing dragon with the new warriors behind it. King Leodegan is with them, and the knights of the Round Table! They're all rushing over to help, so hang in there!'

Cleodalis had never been happier in all his life. He and his knights made their best efforts to continue the battle, and when Arthur, Ban and King Bohort arrived with the others, three hundred pagans were quickly dispatched, Arthur struck to left and to right with Excalibur, cutting men to the ground, and much blood was spilt by him that day. King Ban also slew many heathens; he and his brother spared nobody. Iron and steel was no protection to them. The others did well also, so well that I cannot begin to describe it.

The ladies in the tower couldn't take their eyes off Arthur, though. They couldn't believe that someone so young could be exhibiting such strength and prowess.

The heathen King Sapharen was beside himself with rage, More than a few giants had been cut in half by Arthur and his companions, and he called Sortibrán to him, and also Senebant, Engredan, Molore and Frelent, and also Clariel who was a giant as well, as was Landon and Moras and the noble Randel. He could scarcely believe that so few could be massacring so many, and he urged them all to greater effort.

King Sapharen then dashed forwards, he was a hideously large man, and he knocked Harvey Rivel off his horse with one blow. Horse and man lay stunned on the ground. Sapharen took no pause but raced onwards and struck Sir Antor from his horse, leaving him badly bruised. Then Sapharen hit Griffles a blow in the side which threw him to the ground, and his lance broke in the wound.

The giant Sortibrán toppled Lucan the keeper of the king's cellar, the giant Clariel felled Meragys with a dreadful blow, the giant Engredan knocked both Gornains and Craddoc from their horses and the giant Senebant threw down Sir Bleoberis and had him pinned under his horse. Our knights were sorely aggrieved, they were being knocked down one after the other by these giants! It was humiliating; but, mercifully, none of our knights had received a mortal wound and they all jumped up and defended themselves manfully with their swords. Our other fighting men rallied to their rescue and helped them mightily.

But Sapharen made another attack. He struck King Leodegan on the shield with a very long and heavy lance. The tip broke through the shield, glanced off the king's armour and impaled his horse behind the saddle. Horse and man fell to the ground. 'Alas!' came the cry from the city wall. Everybody thought that the king had been struck, and they cried and wailed in distress. Guinevere was very upset, and so were all the other ladies, for they were sure that the king had been killed; and he would have been too, very

shortly, had not others come to his aid.

King Arthur swore that he would avenge himself on Sapharen, or die in the attempt.

‘No, let me,’ said King Ban. ‘You are too young and too light to take on such a devil.’

In the hesitation that followed, Merlin spoke some insulting words to Arthur: ‘What are you waiting for, you coward? Go after him!’

Arthur was beside himself with shame and anger. He spurred his horse and galloped towards King Sapharen. Sapharen saw him coming and gripped a strong lance, put his shield to the fore, put all his weight on his stirrup leathers pulling them taut, gave his valiant horse the spurs and turned into the attack. A devil riding against a child! King Ban was so nearly overcome with fear and apprehension that he rode after King Arthur, to help him if he needed it.

Sapharen and King Arthur met one another at full gallop. Sapharen’s lance struck through shield and armour but splintered on impact. Arthur survived the blow, sitting up straight in his saddle, and his own lance went in a straight line through Sapharen’s shield, through many links of chainmail, through the giant’s stomach and through his spine.

‘You heathen cunt!’ shouted Arthur. ‘Go to your devil Apollo!’

The pagan fell dead to the ground, and his soul was quickly seized by a hound of hell.

Guinevere sat on the city wall with all the other ladies and they were unanimous in giving Arthur the prize.

Shortly afterwards, King Ban met with the giant Sortibrán and struck him on the shoulder, cutting his entire arm away. Then Malore and Frelent caught hold of King Ban by the helmet and tried to cut his head off, but King Arthur saw what they were doing and galloped over to lend a hand; he struck Malore on the helmet and then cut off his head with his sword. Frelent then attacked Arthur; his lance went through Arthur’s coat of chainmail taking away a foot of leather underneath, but it missed his flesh. Arthur’s anger rose at this near miss and gave a blow in return with his sword that cut through helmet and padding and split the giant’s head down to his chest. The pagans shrieked and cried out in despair, for the only giant they had left was Randel, who carried their banner. All the others had been killed. The pagans suddenly doubted if they would see another day and rushed to gather around Randel. But King Ban wasn’t afraid; he galloped forwards into another attack and hit Randel on the shoulder with his sharp sword; the blade went through chainmail and leather and ended up in the giant’s stomach. Randel fell to the ground, and so did his banner.

The pagans were mortified. They started to make a stomach-churning noise, like bumble bees, or horseflies, and in a state of terror and panic they fled for their lives, in total disarray.

King Arthur didn't waste a moment, and neither did any of his companions. They galloped after the pagans and a large number were killed with the edge of the sword. Out of fourteen thousand, only five thousand made it back to King Rion in one piece, in much sorrow and distress, for they were all wounded.

King Rion was told how his forces had been badly defeated. He was very angry and upset and swiftly sent messengers into Ireland and into Denmark with letters to twenty-one kings, asking for an army of two hundred thousand to be assembled, with enough provisions and money to last them for two years; and this was quickly done.



After the battle, our men gathered together and went back as a group towards the city, driving the captured convoy of two thousand carts and wagons before them. They entered Carohaise with great joy, and the town welcomed them in festive mood. King Leodegan commanded his men quickly to take everything that was in the two thousand wagons and to give it to Arthur. Arthur took possession of it and distributed it with great fairness and honesty, with the advice of Merlin. He gave much to his host Blair – he and his wife would be able to live in comfort for the rest of their lives – but Arthur and Ban didn't have time to stay in their lodgings, for they were summoned to court at once and put in a luxurious bath. Guinevere washed King Arthur, King Ban and King Bohort, and another beautiful maiden, who was also named Guinevere, washed their noble companions. Now listen to how this other Guinevere had been born, for I would like you to know the story:

When King Leodegan married his queen, she had a lady's maid who was nobly born and very beautiful. The king's steward, the noble knight Cleodalis, saw this beautiful maiden and asked the king so courteously whether he could marry her that the king readily agreed. A year or two passed. One day, her husband Cleodalis having been sent off on the king's business, this beautiful lady was asleep in the queen's chamber while the queen went to church to hear Matins, as was her nightly custom. As the queen was listening to the service, the king villainously arose and went to the queen's chamber and through a combination of desire and violence he and the steward's wife had sex together and conceived a lovely daughter who became Guinevere the second. From that time onwards, the king made sure that this lady was separated from her husband; he had her taken far away to a place of concealment where the steward wouldn't find her. Nonetheless, Cleodalis remained loyal to his king, for he was a man of honour, and continued to serve him well, in business and in battle. This Guinevere was so like the other that they were like two pennies laid side by side, or two peas in a pod. These were the two maidens who washed the noble warriors in their bath, and then laid the tables in the hall.

King Arthur sat at the high table, flanked by King Ban and King Bohort. Then the other thirty-nine of their company were seated around them, and next to these, the knights of the Round Table. Then everybody else was seated. The service was excellent, but what need is there for me to describe it all? Guinevere took the first dishes straight to Arthur. King Leodegan was not slow to notice this, and sat so deeply in thought that his food and drink went untouched. A noble knight by the name of Harvey de Rivel could see what he was thinking and exclaimed:

‘Sir, leave off this introspection! Turn your thoughts to entertaining your guests. Men should eat and drink at the bench, and leave bedroom scheming for another time.’

The king knew what he meant and turned his attention to his guests. When Arthur looked at Guinevere he was captivated by her eyes, but he held himself in check so that no one would notice. Guinevere often went onto her knees to serve Arthur the cup.

‘May Christ let me reward you for the trouble you are going to,’ Arthur said.

‘Sir, thank you, but it is no trouble,’ Guinevere replied. ‘If there were a thousand of me it would not be enough to reward you for the help, the effort and the honour that you have given to my father today. May Jesus Christ be praised for sending you into this land.’

Guinevere stayed with Arthur throughout the evening and served him with great attention. Every knight and nobleman had pretty maidens to serve him. There were trumpets and fiddles, drums and Northumbrian pipes; everybody ate, drank and made merry, and then the boards and tablecloths were taken away and everybody washed, as was the custom.

After the meal, King Ban asked King Leodegan why his beautiful daughter Guinevere wasn’t married yet, since he had no other heirs.

‘My dear friend,’ replied King Leodegan, ‘if I’d found anybody suitable, she would have been married already. If I knew of any bachelor anywhere who was strong and brave enough, and from a good family, never mind that he may have no inheritance. I would give him my daughter and everything that is mine.’

He said all this with one eye on Arthur. But just then, Merlin appeared and beckoned Arthur and Ban and their companions away from King Leodegan, so that the king wouldn’t learn who they were. Then Merlin told King Arthur of the great victory and the slaughter that Gawain and his brave companions had achieved outside London, and he prophesied everything that would happen next.

They remained happily in that city until Ascension Day. But let us leave King Arthur here with all his companions, and hear of the misfortunes that are befalling England.

Listen everybody, in May the sun quickly burns the dew away, the day is merry and lasts well into the evening, the lark sings and damsels go into meadows to pick an armful of flowers. King Arthur remained in Carohaise with all his friends, well at ease, for every one of his cities, castles and towers was fully provisioned and he had no need to fear the pagans. Great confusion reigned, however, amongst the hostile barons, who had each returned to his own district in order to protect it as best he could. A messenger came to King Cradelman who told him, as I find it written: 'Sir, twenty thousand well-armed pagans are converging upon Arundel!'

Swiftly, King Cradelman gathered ten thousand armed men. His nephew Pollidamas, who was a good knight, took command of half of this army and the king commanded the other half, as we find in the book. They rode off at once and came upon the enemy on open ground, asleep in their tents. They surrounded them and rode into the attack, trampling over them with their horses hooves and sticking swords, spears and knives through the cloth. Many lost their lives there, for none of them had the means to defend themselves, neither with sword nor with spear. All who were able to do so, fled to the safety of a castle built high upon a rock three miles away, a castle that was held by Carmile. Bordogabron and his brother Carmile were staying there with twenty thousand others. King Cradelman killed fifteen thousand of these heathens and the other five thousand fled to this castle, pursued by our folk.

The pagans in the castle quickly saw the misfortune that had befallen their comrades and cried: 'To arms!' Fourteen thousand leapt to their horses, all of them well kitted-out, and they attacked King Cradelman with great vigour; there was much killing. Meanwhile, the townsfolk of Arundel went out of their town and did well for themselves, seizing gold and silver and purple cloth, food and drink and many other things that the pagans had been forced to abandon in what remained of their camp. Then they went back into Arundel, shut the gate, climbed high onto the wall and looked out to see what would happen to our forces. They could see at once that King Cradelman was in difficulty, so they leapt down from the wall at once, crying: 'To arms!' and five hundred of them mounted good horses and rode out to lend the king their support.

King Cradelman had already lost three thousand men out of the ten thousand he had had initially. Of fourteen thousand men, the pagans had lost four thousand, so I find. King Cradelman would have been in greater difficulty still had it not been for a lucky chance: for the King of a Hundred Knights had learned how the pagans had overrun this part of the land and he had come as unobtrusively as possible to spy them out and to try to seize back all the plunder, with ten thousand good knights, and he made a sudden appearance right now. Half his knights were under the command of his steward Morganor, and he made a sudden and unexpected dash at the Saracens; each impaled a Saracen on his spear, driving them back for half a mile or more and trampling many of them under their horses' hooves. Then each side hewed away at the other. But when the Saracens saw how many of them had fallen in this surprise attack a great cry rang out like an ap-

proaching whirlwind or a long rumble of thunder, and all who could flee did so. All our knights and noblemen gave them a proper lesson, and scarcely three thousand survived out of the initial force of fourteen thousand. There were heaps of slain everywhere, many dead horses and numerous riderless horses with bloody saddles ambling about the field of battle.

The attacks from King Cradelman and the King of a Hundred Knights had resulted in eleven thousand pagan dead, in addition to the fifteen thousand killed before, as I find it written. Therefore, many heathens were prevented from doing our folk any further harm. The forces soon recognised each other, and great joy broke out, and thanks were given to God for the help and assistance that each had been able to give the other. Then in friendship, they all went into Arundel and buried the Christian dead in the churchyard there. Then they held a great meeting, to decide how to deal with the pagans in their land.

‘I advise that we send messages to all our peers in this land, said King Aguignes, the King of a Hundred Knights, ‘and make the suggestion that we all combine together to attack the pagans as one army, and try to defeat them by virtue of our superior courage and swordsmanship.’

‘I don’t agree,’ replied King Cradelman. ‘For every one of us there are forty of them. It is better for each of us to guard his own roads, launch surprise attacks and fight a guerrilla war. Neither I nor any man of mine will be afraid to take the fight to the enemy in this way, but direct attack is hopeless.’

Having given their opinions, each said farewell to the other and set off for home. They divided the spoils so that they might conserve their strength and in the fullness of time overcome their adversaries. But let us leave them for the moment and speak of the plight of their fellow noblemen, for there had arrived from distant lands to the north ten wealthy and high-ranking kings and sultans. They made land with fifteen hundred thousand men, so I find, along with provisions that would keep them all comfortably looked after for two years. As soon as they arrived on shore, they sent off contingents of seven or eight thousand men each, to kill country folk wherever they found them.

During this stressful time, messengers came into the city of Coranges to give King Aguisaunt some awful news: ‘Sir, between this city and Lanernv are fifteen thousand Saracens who are spreading wildfire everywhere and burning men, women and children. Unless you send help quickly, they are done for!’

This was the last thing the king had wanted to hear. ‘To arms!’ he cried. Fifteen thousand men armed themselves, leapt onto good horses and rode to a high hill where they could look out over the whole countryside. From here they could see all the misfortune. They saw that the entire land was burning with fire. Men and women were running like deer from the flames, in sheer terror.

‘A curse that I should ever have lived to see this day!’ cried King Aguisaunt.

The king divided his forces into two parts, taking the larger half for himself and giving command of the other to Gaudin, a skilful and courageous knight who was later to defeat Duke Branland for the love of a maiden. These two spurred their horses and galloped off, bathing their lances in heathen blood. Then they drew their swords and cut six thousand to the ground, for no cost, as they say, for the pagans were scattered in disarray. But soon afterwards, forty thousand more appeared. Through the might of God, our men stood valiantly and faced the enemy and split the heads of many a heathen dog; they fought bravely, for they would rather die with honour than live as cowards. They gave hard blows wherever they could, and no fighting men were ever more valiant nor more courageous.

But alas! Great misfortune soon fell upon this noble contingent, for the ten sultans were upon them, with a swarm of men enveloping the whole countryside. They surrounded our little force of Christian men and made short work of them. Nine thousand were killed. Out of fifteen thousand, only six thousand escaped with their lives, and these galloped away as fast as their horses could go. None of them would have made it to safety had not Christ sent a miracle: for Uriens, the king of Shoreham, came upon the Saracens suddenly from behind, with his nephew Baldemagu, a strong and noble knight whom the king had given half of his kingdom to, in preference to his son Owain. Together they'd brought twelve thousand warriors with them, warriors who had no fear of death, and they had been told of the sorrow that had gripped the land so they had gone out at first light, hoping to bring some relief to the country folk who were suffering. These men were fine warriors and threw themselves at the enemy with strong lances, impaling all that they could reach, and some, by the grace of God and their own strength, killed four or five with one lance. Then each drew his sword, and I can tell you for certain, it was a fierce battle, for the Saracens turned and stood their ground. So much dust was thrown up by the fighting that the bright sun was completely obscured by it. The shouts, cries and insults could be heard from three miles away.

King Aguisaunt and his men were still being driven back, but he could see that help had arrived and made a stand, and fought back. It was a remarkable battle, one between valiant knights and devils. The Saracen forces and the convoy of provisions that they were protecting extended for miles. King Uriens and his knights fought at one end, King Aguisaunt and his knights at the other, and there was no way that they could join up, or even see one another, so many pagans lay between them. Our folk valiantly defended themselves with axes, swords and sharp spears, but they would have lost a lot more men than they did if nightfall hadn't come to their rescue. It finally got so dark that there was no light to see by. I swear that ten heathens were killed for every Christian man, but the pagans managed to raise their tents and pavilions for the night.

King Aguisaunt went home to his city of Coranges. He had lost nine thousand men. When the citizens learnt this, many ladies wept bitterly for their lovers, noble damsels for their fathers, sisters for brothers, wives for husbands and friends wept for their comrades.

King Uriens made his way back to his own city, but as he was travelling he came to a huge encampment of carts and wagons and tents and pavilions on an enormous green. King Uriens asked who they were and who their leader was, and he was told that it was King Brangores, a high king of Saxony, and he was besieging Wandlesbury and that all the goods and provisions that he could see had been captured from our people, to give to the descendants of King Angys.

Without wasting another moment, King Uriens and all his folk rode their horses over their heads and pulled down all the pavilions. The heathens were all eating, which didn't do them any good because the horses trampled all over them and found it easy to tread on their foul bodies. Tables, cloths, bread and wine, platters, dishes, cups and bowls were all crushed under the horses' feet. Many valuable things were destroyed. The pagans were all unarmed, and our folk attacked them with swords and axes, spears and knives, killing and cutting at them so savagely that they had no way of defending themselves. In a short while, all of them had been beaten mercilessly to the ground and stabbed and killed. Scarcely forty pagans escaped with their lives. Their king, King Oriens, was hugely dismayed that he couldn't take revenge for this immediately; but he vowed that in the morning he would burn and destroy the land for miles around. It goes badly for people when wicked men get their way.

After this battle, King Uriens and his knights seized all the goods that they had captured, the purple cloth, the gold and money, five hundred packhorses laden with all this wealth, six hundred carts full of food and drink and meat, and it was all taken into their city. Rich and poor alike benefited from it immensely! But let us leave them here for a moment and speak of King Oriens.

King Oriens was angry and full of lamentation for the eight thousand men he had lost. He arose the next morning and began a campaign of burning towns and castles and all the houses that his men could find, burning everything to the ground. Man and dog, woman and child, all were consumed in red flames; wildfire was spread all over the land and no pity was shown at all.

While this was taking place, the noble young man Sagremor was journeying from Constantinople with seven hundred friends and companions, intent upon joining King Arthur and his knights, if they could. They came upon children, women and men running and leaping as wild deer do when they are chased by hounds. Sagremor asked them why they were running and screaming, and they said they were doing it for fear of the heathens who were hunting them down like vermin. He asked where King Arthur was and they swore by Saint Saviour that he had gone to Camelot to help King Leodegan.

'Make no mistake, then,' said Sagremor. 'Either we shall die ourselves, or force these heathens, who are causing you so much suffering, to eat dirt!'

They armed themselves in iron and in steel, and five hundred local men joined them,

I believe. Then they attacked the pagans that were spread about the countryside, with great courage and desire, and in a short time had killed five hundred of them, But then, to their rear, there appeared forty thousand of King Oriens' men, and a little later, another sixty thousand made their presence known! This was not including the multitudes of others that were already infesting the whole land.

Meanwhile, an old man arrived as a messenger seeking Gawain in the city of London. The old man greeted Gawain and said: 'I have found you at last, young man! May Christ preserve your power and strength! And may he do the same for all these others that I see around you. A young nobleman named Sagremor has come from Constantinople with seven hundred companions looking for King Arthur, hoping to be knighted by him. They have arrived in Sussex, but they find themselves in peril of their lives. They have sent you these letters so that you can understand the predicament that they are in.'

Gawain read the letters and exclaimed to those around him: 'We need to gather arms! We must help Sagremor and give him aid.'

Gawain gave a horse to the old man who had brought this message, and the man offered to lead them to Sagremor and to show them the way to go; so they set off that same day and the messenger guided them swiftly and surely. He made sure that they would arrive at a great battle in good time.

Gawain had fifteen thousand valiant warriors with him, and as he rode his way towards the battle he gathered more and more along the way. We must not hinder them, however, but must turn again to Sagremor. Forty thousand were attacking him, and he was attacking them in return, twelve hundred against forty thousand! They ought to have been dispersed like smoke in the wind. I tell you, Sagremor and his men had such strength and courage that for every one of his men that fell, they killed twenty of the enemy. King Oriens, however, was approaching with another sixty thousand, and because of the annoyance and the losses he had suffered the previous day, he had instructed his army to surround Sagremor's forces and to show no mercy but to capture them all. The sixty thousand separated and dispersed and began to approach the youths from all directions. They began to encircle them, until there was nowhere for Sagremor and his companions to flee to and they were about to yield and surrender when, far in the distance, they saw a lot of banners and behind them a great army of knights on the move.

'If we began well, then our reward has not been long in coming, thanks be to Christ!' exclaimed Sagremor.

They redoubled their efforts with their swords, and with renewed vigour they cut down dead every pagan that came within reach of them.

Gawain and his companions soon arrived, and each skewered a Saracen with his lance, then they drew their swords and cut down sixteen thousand heathens. God knows, many mouths opened wide in agony and chewed at the grass. Pagans floated in their own blood. Always, Christ's strength is irresistible.

Gawain made his way to Sagremor and defended him from King Oriens. Gawain gave King Oriens such a blow on his helmet that he fell heavily to the ground and remained there inert, as though he was stone dead. Men rushed to his aid and began shouting and screaming, and then they tried to get him back onto his feet, as we find in the book.

A knight approached Gawain and asked him to go at once to Camelot with all his companions. Meanwhile, the pagans were trying to bring their sultan back into consciousness, but it took about the time that it takes to walk a horse a mile before he could move his arms and legs an inch! When he came to, he could see the sorrow and anguish on the faces of all those around him, but then he leapt to his feet with a great show of strength, and asked for new armour and a good horse, a new sword and a new lance, so that he could take revenge on his enemy for this ignominious setback. Everything he asked for was given to him, and he rode off with sixty thousand pagans, all of them spurring their horses to follow him. Gawain saw them coming and stayed with twenty others to hold them off, while the others started to make their way towards Camelot to lend their help there. Gawain stayed to protect their rear, and a fierce battle soon erupted, but Gawain and Galathin, Gaheris and Agravain, Gaheriet and Sagremor and all the others of the twenty who had stayed behind fought magnificently, and allowed their folk to get away in safety.

King Oriens came galloping at Gawain with his lance levelled, thinking to give Gawain a knockout blow, but he failed; he missed him, and Gawain in his haste hit him with the flat of his sword in the middle of his helmet and knocked him unconscious to the ground once again. Sagremor hit Orian Russell down through his shoulder with his sword so that shoulder, arm, ribs, liver and gall bladder were all sliced away. Galathin's aim was so good that Placidan's head flew from his body and the devil of hell had his soul! Agravain took a long lance and rode against a strong giant named Guinat and pierced him through the heart. Gaheris galloped his horse towards a giant called Taurus and pierced him through the stomach and back, killing him instantly. Gaheriet met Duke Faunel with a lance and impaled him through the chest with it; the giant fell dead.



They cast three others from their horses, then broke away and rode to Camelot; all except for Gawain, Galathin and Sagremor who rode back into the thick of the enemy, looking to kill King Oriens if they could. But there were many thousands who had come along with him, and although they killed them in fives and tens, eventually they broke away, themselves, and headed towards Camelot.

Gawain's brothers Gaheris, Gaheriet and Agravain arrived in Camelot and saw that Gawain wasn't with them. So they turned, just the three of them, and went back out of the gate, and hadn't retraced their steps very far when they met the old man who had

carried the letters to Gawain. He was sitting on his horse. They asked him very courteously if he had seen Gawain anywhere?

‘You useless lot!’ the old man replied. ‘Where have you crept out from? A fat lot of good you are! Your brother is battling against his enemies and you’ve gone home! Your brother may be lying dead by now. You’re worth less than a blackberry, the lot of you, I can see that!’

The three brothers were angered and ashamed to be spoken to like this. They spurred their horses and soon met with their brother and his two companions riding towards them. They greeted them and asked how it had gone.

‘Well, by the grace of God.’

They all set off back towards Camelot and soon came to where the old man’s horse was standing. Its saddle was all bloody, its back and withers were covered in gore and there was no sign of the old man.

‘Alas!’ exclaimed Gawain. ‘This is the horse I gave to that old man who brought those letters from Sagremor to me in London.’

‘Who cares?’ his brothers said, nonchalantly. They laughed and made fun of it because the old man had been disrespectful to them.

Gawain looked everywhere for the old man, but there was no sign of him. And no wonder. Merlin had changed himself, flesh and body, and become a young man again, holding a staff in his hands, going about unnoticed by them.

When Gawain had grown tired of looking for him, they went quickly to Camelot and shut the gates behind them. They pulled up the drawbridge and stayed safely inside; and then Gawain took his opportunity and greeted Sagremor properly, with joy, laughter and celebration. There were whooping shouts of welcome and thanks to Christ that each had defeated his enemy and done so well! They stayed there for many days without any trouble or interference, but saw countless pagans, these servants of hell, passing the city all day long with noise and clamour and shouting. But let us leave them resting here and speak about King Oriens.

This romance states that King Oriens had been badly wounded by young Gawain on the plain outside Camelot, and for the shame of this defeat would have tried to have taken revenge at once had it not been for the coming of night; and also that most of our folk were now safely behind walls and in chambers and out of his reach. So he and his folk retreated to a safe distance that night and pitched camp with tents and pavilions and made themselves at home with salt meat and with fresh, and in the morning they arose and went out to wreak havoc upon the countryside round about. King Oriens sent large groups of men out to do as much harm as they could. He ordered that everything should be burnt to the ground. They set fire to all that they found, and carried away everything

that was of any value. Soon there were so many carts being led away, laden with goods, that they were beyond counting. The entire countryside was burning. Men, women and children were incinerated in the flames, but some managed to escape into the land of Cambernic, where they came before Duke Eustas, the Duke of Arundel, and fell before him and cried with voices filled with horror and despair: 'Sir, for God's sake, please help us! Saracens have set the entire land on fire, town and countryside, every house is burnt to ashes, every man, woman and child they can find they put to death. Sir, help us, or we will all be killed!'

'Lord help us!' cried Duke Eustas, and wept with pity to hear of so much suffering. He selected ten thousand men, leaving the rest to defend the city, and quickly came before King Clarion; it was not a long journey and the king was very pleased to see him. Duke Eustas told King Clarion how the pagans were destroying the country and everything that was happening.

'What is your advice?' asked the king. 'What should we do? If they pass through our lands we are lost. Everything will be destroyed.'

'We should set part of our forces to defend our lands and quickly take the rest with us, some of our finest fighters, and go to Brekenham Forest. We can hide in the woodland there, and through the grace of sweet Jesus we'll be able to observe the pagans doing their theft and robbery and fall on them in ambush, without them knowing we are there, and cut them down and carry all the stolen goods back to our city.'

'God, mercy!' exclaimed King Clarion. 'What advice is this, my good friend? How can we fight against them all? I'll pledge my trust in you, and my good faith, but I think we'll be cut to pieces.'

'Sir,' replied Duke Eustas, 'we shall have God's grace on our side, and this grace is more trustworthy than any armour, or any number of fighting men. And they are widely spread throughout the whole country and we will be together as a unit, concealed and ready to pounce. Through the strength of Jesus Christ, we'll disperse them as the sun dissolves mist in the morning.'

'Well,' said King Clarion, 'I'm not going to argue against you. I'm ready to go and do battle with them, if our noblemen are in agreement.'

'Sir,' came the reply from their noblemen, 'for Saint Charity, we would rather die fighting like men than see our wives and children burn to death in wildfire.'

The king wept for pity. 'Certainly, right is on our side,' he conceded.

Then they chose, so save me God, a noble knight, the lord of Nohaut, the lord of a distressed town whose name was Brandris and a deadly knight named Brehus Sans Pit , and these three remained with a thousand valiant knights to look after the countryside and the roads, to protect them from the Saracens, while the lord of Paerne, so I see it written, took seven thousand men with him into the forest of Brekenham. He went off

with his men, and Duke Eustas and King Clarion took another route and arrived in the same forest a little further to the east.

There was an excellent expanse of meadow and grassland surrounded by woodland which was crossed by seven roads and trackways, and our men were hiding in the forest nearby, keeping a watch on the Saracen's movements and a lookout for the passage of carts, wagons and packhorses from distant places, hoping to pick a good moment to attack. As they were waiting one morning, a great convoy of carts and waggons appeared; soon they were coming from all directions, full of everything you could imagine: venison and other meats, brown ale, red and white wine, bread, brocades, purple cloth and silk, gold and silver, some of it from their own lands, much of it stolen from England. This convoy went on for miles and miles – how far exactly I couldn't say – but there were five thousand men travelling with it and protecting the carts, so we find in the book.

The lord of Paerne made the first charge with seven thousand eager men and they quickly killed all the carters who were leading the wagons and packhorses. The five thousand heathen knights who were guarding the convoy were met with swords and knives and none of them escaped alive. Our men quickly took all the carts and wagons and led them two miles into the town of Arundel where it could all be properly secured and protected, and then they returned to King Clarion. Just as they were arriving back, fifteen thousand well-armed Saracens appeared, all on good horses and with steel armour. Our knights numbered twenty thousand in all; they spurred their steeds and gave them rein, and met the pagan advance with great force.

King Clarion galloped at King Guifas, who was sixteen feet tall, and hit him with the point of his lance so hard that it ran through his shield, through chainmail and the leather beneath and knocked the giant off his horse; the giant fell and broke his neck as he landed.

Eustas, the Duke of Arundel, met a king named Mirabel: the pagan broke his lance against Eustas's side but the duke's lance hit Mirabel square in the chest; the point thrust home and impaled the heathen, whose soul went straight to the devil.

All the other knights did wondrously well also, with spears and the edges of swords. Many pagans were killed: ten thousand before the middle of the afternoon; lying with spears through them, or decapitated, or feet and hands cut off. The corpses of men and horses were strewn across the ground for more than a mile.

Only five thousand pagans escaped with their lives, and they rode towards King Oriens, pursued by our Christian men who did their utmost to cut them down mercilessly. But when our knights saw the host of King Oriens, they withdrew and took counsel with one another. They jumped down from their horses to give them a rest and to adjust their equipment, and then afterwards they made a line that circled around the entire clearing, for they had no intention of letting the pagans occupy that forest, not for anything.

King Oriens asked his folk what it was that they were so frightened of. 'Sir,' they replied,

‘facing this position are twenty thousand or more Christian men who have just massacred your knights. They came upon us suddenly, before we even knew that they were there, and if we hadn’t managed to escape them we would have been killed for sure.’

‘Ah, Mohammed!’ cried King Oriens. ‘You useless idiots! You’re about as much use to me as the Christian God will be to them! Come here, dear King Eliedus. Take forty thousand men with you and let none of them escape alive.’

‘At once,’ said the king. ‘It shall be done, by Dagon!’

They all leapt onto their horses, and found our men taking cover behind heaps of slain that they couldn’t easily get past; but both sides soon found a way of engaging one another in combat, and then many a pagan tumbled from his horse; and many a Christian also, unfortunately. but those of ours who were dead had their souls taken straight to heaven, whereas the dead Saracens went to the pains of hell instead. The Christians fought the heathens like lions battling bears, the blows fell like the hammer blows in a smithy and many valiant knights were toppled to the ground in a short space of time. The battle lasted from midday to sunset, when at last King Oriens appeared with a hundred thousand men. He expected to make short work of our forces and to kill us all, but darkness was already beginning to set in and our men made it safely back into the forest, through the grace of God, and escaped back into their city.

Duke Eustas and King Clarion divided the spoils between them, to the great benefit of them both. I see that four thousand Christians were killed in that battle, but on the heathen side more than ten thousand. King Oriens was angry that so many of his men had been killed and that the enemy had managed to get away. He put up his tents and pavilions, and in the morning his men searched forest, upland and marsh, everywhere they could get to, for Christians, but couldn’t find any, however hard they looked. King Oriens was then so angry that he called an emir to him, a man named Napin, and gave him fifteen thousand knights and told him to go about the country killing everything that he could find that was alive. And he recruited three thousand scoundrels and villains to set fire to the countryside everywhere, and he organised a convoy of five hundred carts, wagons and packhorses crammed with ale and red wine, fish and meat, wheat and bread, with clothes and armour, some stolen from the countryside and some brought over from their own lands, and assigned King Rapas to look after this convoy with ten thousand men, and King Eliteus to go behind the procession to guard its rear with fifteen thousand men, and King Oriens placed himself at the very back of this convoy, with twenty thousand Saracens.

Those renegades, those three thousand scoundrels who had been assigned to fire-raising, caused great damage to the countryside, burning and killing everything they could find. No child was allowed to live, no man and no wife. The cries of sorrow were so loud that they were heard for miles around. Duke Eustas could see what was happening and was overcome with sorrow. He took two thousand knights and galloped out of the city with them to confront the scoundrels who were setting fire to the countryside; he cut

off heads and killed all but forty of these recreants, through the might of Jesus Christ, before Napin knew what was happening. Then he returned to the city, without any hindrance.

One of the few survivors came before Napin. 'Sir, what are you waiting for?' he exclaimed. 'It's not right! Because of your delay, my companions have all been killed! We few are lucky to have escaped with our lives.'

'Hold your peace!' exclaimed Duke Napin, 'or you will be killed at once, by Apollo! Say one more word of this and you are a dead man!' for he was anxious that King Oriens wouldn't learn what had happened.

King Oriens had already crossed the country and taken his army to Clarence, where he found King Hardogabran with twenty other kings, besieging that city and ravaging the countryside mercilessly. King Oriens was enthusiastically welcomed by this force, and they were very pleased to see the stores and provisions that he had brought along with him, these wicked men. King Oriens chose to remain here with King Hardogabran; but let us leave them at this siege and turn to the war and suffering that was happening elsewhere in this land of ours. Whoever listens will now hear a very noble tale.

Summertime is a merry season, birds sing in the forest, young men go jousting and maidens dress themselves in their finest clothes. News of the victory that Gawain and his three brothers, and their youthful companions, had achieved had spread far and wide. King Uriens, who was the king of Shoreham, had married Hermesent, another of Ygerne's daughters by Hoel, a sister of Belisent and Blasine, and they had a son, a young man named Greater Yvain. He was called Greater Yvain in order to differentiate him from his half-brother who was called Bastard Yvain, for reasons that should be obvious. Uriens also had a legitimate son from another queen; his name was Morganor, a fine knight by the grace of God, and Uriens had made him sole heir of all of the lands that he ruled over, in his own right. The lands that came from his wife Hermesent, however, were Yvain's by right.

Young Greater Yvain went one day to his mother and said: 'Madam, the entire country is speaking of my cousin Gawain. Alas, it is to my shame that I'm taking no active part in this war.'

'Where would you want to go?' asked his mother, to test him.

'Madam, to seek out my uncle Arthur, to receive from him the honour of knighthood and chivalry, and to learn valour and courtesy.'

'And for what birthright would you deny service to your father in favour of service to another person?'

'Madam, my father has promised me your lands as an inheritance, but he has promised his own lands to another, my half-brother Morganor. And even if he takes it all away

from me, I would like, with your permission, to go and serve my uncle Arthur. It will be to the honour of us both.'

'Son,' she said, 'I am very pleased to hear what you are saying. King Arthur is indeed your uncle. Serve him with nobility and courtesy, and if you can, try to bring about a reconciliation between Arthur and your father.'

Yvain's mother provided a hundred knights to accompany her son, along with three hundred young men whose ambition, like his, was to be knighted. She found them armour and horses, all of it of good quality, and in the name of the King of Heaven she gave Yvain her blessing and sent him off in the name of Christ. His father knew nothing of it. Bastard Yvain went with Greater Yvain, along with the four hundred knights and noble youths already mentioned.

They travelled from Schorham to the forest of Bedingham, intending to journey onwards to Arundel in Cornwall, but they found their way blocked by eighty thousand Saracens with hairy beards who had invaded the district with King Soriandes, with the intention of destroying everything in their path. He had ten thousand scoundrels with him who were charged with setting fire to everything they could find. They were causing a lot of suffering. This was in King Yder's land and news soon reached Gawain, who was now back in London.

When Gawain heard what was going on in Cornwall, he gathered thirty thousand good men who were eager to fight alongside him. They took the way out of London and when they came to Cardoil they turned south-west through the forest towards Bedingham, and when they arrived they were enthusiastically welcomed.

King Yder heard from his men about the suffering and the burning and drowning that was taking place in his lands and tore his hair in anguish, beat himself, ripped his clothes and cursed the day that he had gone against Arthur and made him his enemy. But he was a noble and valiant knight, without any doubt, and he had fourteen thousand brave knights to call upon:

'To arms!' he shouted, and they all galloped off on good steeds.

King Soriandes, who was a sultan, had given fifteen thousand men to a king named Bilas to go on ahead of the main force. They came to a bridge over a river and when they had crossed it, they rested for a while and then set off again. King Soriandes arrived at this bridge shortly afterwards with forty thousand heathen men. He had placed the command of a rear guard into the hands of Morgalant, his steward, consisting of twenty-five thousand exceedingly good warriors. This entire army was now strung out over a length of ten miles, and between each contingent was a space of two or three miles.

The rear guard, with twenty-five thousand men, was overtaken by King Yder on a roadway beside a brook. They saw him coming and turned to face him, but as they greeted one other with sharp spears, our Christian men thrust through them and knocked many from the saddle; emirs and heathen knights were sent grovelling to the ground. In a

short while our men killed ten thousand of them.

The steward Morgalant was strong and tough, a great giant, and when he met with King Yder – that was a battle to remember! But King Soriandes, the sultan, took twenty thousand of the forty thousand men under his command and sent them back to reinforce the rear guard and to launch a surprise attack upon our forces, doing such immense damage that nearly all of King Yder's men were killed. God knows, only King Yder and a few others managed to escape with their lives, and only then because the sultan had been made aware of another army approaching, and dared not pursue King Yder for fear of this new threat, so he called his forces back.

Now the youths I spoke of before, Yvain and Yvain, and a valiant knight named Ates along with four hundred other young men, were passing through this forest south-west towards Arundel and thought themselves to be safe when they found themselves suddenly caught up in a dreadful fight! They came unexpectedly upon Soriandes' advance guard, that Bilas had been put in command of. Fifteen thousand against four hundred! This was a wondrous engagement! It took place about four miles outside Arundel. The young men had just crossed a bridge and the river was blocking any swift retreat. So they gripped their shields and took up their spears, and each of them knocked down a Saracen, then they drew their swords and took from many heathens their lives in lieu of tribute. These young men advanced for three miles killing five thousand Saracens along the way, sustaining little injury themselves.

Several miles away, King Yder was fighting at the same time as the youths were engaged in this battle, but he could hear the new engagement taking place and let King Yder get away, preferring instead to go back and seize these audacious young men. At this moment, a young page was carrying a letter for Gawain, purportedly from his cousin Yvain. Yvain knew nothing of this. Gawain took the letters from the boy and read them quickly.

'To arms, everyone!' he shouted. 'Arm yourselves well. My cousin Yvain has great need of us and unless we go at once, he is a dead man!'

Agravain, Gaheriet, Gaheris and Sagremor armed themselves with firm resolve, then leapt onto their warhorses. They took sword, lance and shield, and spurred their mounts into a gallop. They took twenty thousand along with them, leaving the others behind. Agravain took command of three thousand, Gaheris three thousand also, as did Gaheriet, Sagremor and Galathin. Gawain brought up the rear with eight thousand men. The boy showed them the way and they advanced in close formation, their silken banner fluttering in the wind, in purple and gold. Their brave and magnificent horses danced and neighed to their knight's command.

This advance was taking place as the two Yvains and the other youths were fighting a fierce battle. Out of fifteen thousand heathens, they had already killed five thousand, and were defending themselves so well with their sharp swords of good steel that they continued to drive back the ten thousand who were still attacking them. King Sorian-

des sent another sixteen thousand good fighting men ahead to capture these four hundred youths, keeping another twenty thousand in reserve. The sixteen thousand circled around to try to get behind the youths, close to the bridge, and started to attack our young men from the rear, causing many to fall with bitter wounds. The pagan knights ahead began to regain their lost ground as well. Over twenty thousand heathens were fighting against such a small number of our young men! But our youths had the power of Jesus Christ on their side. This gave them the strength and the valour to fight against the devil! When one of them fell, they were quickly lifted back into the saddle by their companions, and each of them used his shield to defend those alongside him as well as himself, as they cut the heathen dogs to the ground.

But by now they were getting tired, so tired that they were beginning to see that their situation was hopeless and were preparing to surrender.

‘No!’ cried Yvain. ‘While there are still some of us alive, we shall never surrender! Let’s spur our horses into the water meadow and see if we can find anywhere to cross the river. Then we can gallop away and flee them all.’

With redoubled effort they cleared an open space for themselves, then galloped as fast as they could into the water meadow to see if they could escape over the river. But the water was very deep, the bank very high and the water’s edge steeply shelving. Then they looked across to the opposite bank and saw King Soriandes with his army. It extended away into the distance with no end to it in sight.

‘Alas!’ cried Ates the valiant. ‘We will have to surrender. There is nowhere to run, the place is swarming with pagans!’

They were all in great dismay. But then Yvain saw banners approaching from the direction of Bedingham, with knights and horses.

‘Cheer up, everybody!’ he cried to his companions. ‘Relief is on the way! I can see the sign of the Saviour on their flags, they are Christian knights.’

‘Christ be praised!’ exclaimed lesser Yvain. ‘But if we remain here, we’ll be captured before they arrive, that’s for certain. There are only a few of us, but if we take the battle to them once again, we could fight our way through to this approaching force and make our escape that way, defending ourselves as we go.’

They were all so encouraged by this idea that they turned their horses around, then galloped back towards the sixteen thousand, meeting them as fiercely as hail crashing against roof tiles and killing three hundred in a short time. Through sheer strength and courage they broke through the Saracens’ line; however, Bilas with his ten thousand overtook them from behind and trapped a hundred of them in a meadow, giving them bitter wounds, and would have captured and bound them had they not got to their feet and fought back with great valour with their swords.

Just then, Agravain arrived with his three thousand. With their lances levelled, they part-

ed the ten thousand for a distance of a furlong or two, splitting heads and bodies, and cutting off arms. The shouts and screams on both sides reached into the sky. The sixteen thousand saw this and galloped to meet the charge, reversing the gains that Agravain had made and sending our knights back to where they had started from. Many a stomach was pierced and many a head split open. Agravain fought so well that his companions marvelled at it and took heart and encouragement from it, for he cried that he would rather die than be forced to retreat any further and would take delight in slicing to death every pagan he could reach.

Yvain and all his men sat firmly on their horses and galloped into the thick of the enemy like lions against deer, killing men and horses. Each of them fought so valiantly that no tongue can describe it; it was never less than forty against one and it was hard to spot our men within the melee. This was in May, in the middle of the morning.

Gaheris arrived, Gawain's other brother, with his three thousand, and started to fell many heathen dogs. The fighting was hard and many knights were trampled beneath the horses' feet.

Yvain thanked God for this relief and enquired who they all were.

Sir Yvain, spur your horse,' cried his companion Ates. 'Let everyone see what you are doing and earn fame and honour for yourself. You'll recognise them shortly enough by their prowess. And through your own prowess you may earn the right to be counted amongst them. Now go at the enemy and kill them all!'

Yvain and his brother, and Ates and the other knights who with them, cut into the Saracens with great strength and determination. I believe that Yvain and his brother killed over a hundred, and Gaheris and Agravain were very impressed with this display of valour. They asked Ates who these young men were.

'They are your relatives,' replied Ates. 'King Uriens' sons; Greater Yvain and Bastard Yvain, they have come to ask to be knighted by your uncle, King Arthur. All those bearing shields with white on one side and red on the other are the sons of earls and barons who have come to be knighted with them. They chanced upon these devils unexpectedly and would have been killed dishonourably had it not been for your timely intervention!'

'Christ be praised, then!' the young men cried. 'Thank God we arrived in time!' They spurred their horses and galloped over to Yvain and Yvain, welcoming them with open arms. When they all recognised one another they threw their arms around each other and were overjoyed, as the fighting went on around of them. They agreed to fight together from that moment on.

As they were speaking, new pagans made an attack against them from the direction of Bedingham; fifteen thousand of them, but Gaheriet was bearing down upon these with his three thousand. Many a lance was broken and many a life lost in the attack. Morgant the steward and King Pinogres were advancing towards the bridge with a large

number of men, more than twenty thousand, and those others on that side of the river now thought themselves safe from further conflict and decided to erect their tents and pavilions, to protect their carts and wagons and to send men to the other end of the bridge only if required. They thought the bridge would keep them safe.

Soon, King Soriandes arrived with so many thousands of pagans that no one could see the end of them. They rested beside the river, not far from Morgalant, to watch their forces deliver the final blow in this battle between Christians and Saracens. On the other side of the bridge, fierce fighting was taking place with swords, axes, halberds and spikes, and dreadful wounds inflicted and sustained. For each of our men there were twenty of the enemy, and our young men were being beaten backwards somewhat.

At this moment, Sagremor arrived with his three thousand knights and began to wreak havoc as they galloped forwards, and in this fierce attack four of the pagan kings were killed. But the Saracens were too numerous, and the loss of these kings didn't dishearten them. Galathin then came galloping in with his three thousand and attacked the heathens. Together, our young knights managed to push the Saracens back towards the bridge, where they were pinned against the river. Many pagans were drowned in the water, having nowhere else to go. Seven thousand heathens died there.

In all, our young men had done so well that out of twenty-six thousand pagans, only thirteen thousand now survived. Of our young men, less than a thousand had been killed. And every single one of these heathen criminals would have been food for maggots had not Morgalant and Pinogres brought reinforcements over the bridge, twenty thousand of them. We had fourteen thousand young men and not a hundred more than this, against more than thirty-three thousand now. Here was a memorable engagement! To see our valiant young men fighting against these heathens with swords, striking so many of them down! But Morgalant and his companions were no pushover, and would have done greater damage to our youngsters than they did, had not Gawain joined battle at last and done even better still, with eight thousand fresh young men with sharp swords. They quickly succeeded in driving the pagans back to the very entrance of the bridge.

Many thousands of pagans were forced into the water there and drowned. Gawain thrust into the melee; it was past the middle of the afternoon and his strength had begun to double. He lifted his axe and cut off Durrel's head, then swung it against King Malgar and split his head down to his chest. He swung it again at Segor, slicing him down as far as the saddle, and another swing saw King Malan's head fly off. He swung the axe to left and to right and none could withstand a blow from it; it cut through steel and iron as though through butter.

Gawain met with the giant Pinogres, who split Gawain's shield so that it fell into pieces, and Gawain gave him such a blow in return that the blade of his axe sliced him in half.

But with the exception of Gawain, I consider Yvain to have been the finest warrior there; he cut King Sesox in two, and the emir Baldras, and he cut off the heads of both

Minardes and Bilaces and gave the steward Morgalant a mortal wound. More heathen knights than I can possibly number were sent to hell by Gawain and Yvain; the names that I have given you are just those of the kings, dukes and emirs that they killed. And yet, Gawain still had no idea that it was his cousin Yvain who had been performing such astonishing deeds of valour, for he had not yet spoken to Gaheris or Agravain.

Galathin did wonderfully well. He struck the huge giant Farasan with his sword, slicing through ear, cheek and shoulder, and killed King Creon, King Beas, Darian and King Fulgin. Gaheriet did well also: he killed King Brollo, beheaded Pinnas and Donadord and split Pamadas in two. Sagremor beheaded Linodas who was fourteen feet tall, as well as Fael and Guindard; Gaheris killed Guos and Goweir; Agravain counted three kings amongst his many victories. Ates, lesser Yvain and their companions did marvellously well also, but no assailant had any chance to show what he could do against Gawain; Gawain cut through man and steel as a butcher slices butcher's meat.

At last, the light gave out, night fell and the fighting had to come to an end. Everybody retired to the company of their friends and loved-ones. Gawain and Yvain went with joy and high spirits into Bedingham with all their companions, and rested themselves there with much laughter and entertainment.

Soriandes saw that out of his eighty thousand men, only forty thousand had survived the battle. He was very dispirited and had no desire to stay in the camp that he had established, so he gathered up all his armour and wagons and moved away under cover of darkness to Wandlesbury. Here he could at last relax, with all the wealth and provisions that he had brought with him.

The next morning, Gawain went to the enemy camp and found it deserted. He took everything of value that he could find, and spent many days afterwards in peace and relaxation at Bedingham. Now listen to what happened next:

This romance says that Gawain asked Yvain about the letters which he had sent requesting assistance, and Yvain said that he hadn't sent any letters, which puzzled them both. Then news came that Saracens were causing grief to the men of Arundel, which saddened Gawain immensely, so he gathered ten thousand men, leaving the rest to defend the town, and rode with them to lend his aid to the people of Arundel. Just as this was happening, two noble young men named Kay Destran and Kehedin, the Earl of Strangore's sons, arrived in the district with twenty-seven other fine young men who were all looking to become knights and to serve King Arthur if they could. They had no idea that Arundel was being besieged, however – for surrounding the town were Bramagnes sons, Daril and King Harans, with so many thousands of heathens that I cannot find the exact number – and when these squires came unexpectedly upon the pagans a fierce battle ensued. The squires were armed and so they charged at the heathens, killing many in this first attack, but there were many thousands of pagans nearby and they soon had our young men in difficulty. They encircled them and nearly captured them.

Three hundred valiant young men in Arundel were watching this from the castle, amongst them Yvain with the white hands, Yvain of Lyonel, Yvain Desclauis and the noble Yvain of Strangore; another was Dedinet the wild, all of them relatives of Gawain. These three hundred sallied out and attacked the pagans. Each impaled a Saracen with his lance and they rode with fierce resolve until they reached Kehedin. Then together, they all fought as savagely as wild boars, killing Saracens to left and to right, but the pagans blew a horn and reinforcements soon arrived, in the shape of another twenty thousand men! They cast our men from their horses, three here, four there, and would have killed them all had not Gawain arrived in the nick of time. His knights knocked from their horses all that their lances could reach. Then they drew their swords and laid into the enemy, killing fifteen thousand of them, and helped all the other squires back onto horses.

The pagans withdrew to await further reinforcements. Meanwhile, Gawain recognised these Yvains, all four of them, and he recognised all the other young men as well, and there was great joy at this fortuitous and timely meeting.

At this moment, an old knight came galloping up, and advised Gawain that if he and his friends wanted to remain safe they should go at once into Arundel, and then they would know more. They did as this old knight advised and went into Arundel; they shut the gates and let the portcullis down, then went up onto the walls, where they saw that the entire country was swarming with heathens.

King Harans with sixty thousand pagans, and Daril behind him with forty thousand, were escorting a convoy of twelve hundred carts, wagons and packhorses, laden with stores and provisions that had been stolen from the poor men and women in the countryside round about. Behind them were twenty thousand thieves and criminals who had so robbed and burnt the country that for many days' journey in all directions the land had been laid waste; without man nor child, it had been reduced to barren wilderness and scorched desert.

Gawain and his friends stayed in Arundel for seven days. But let us leave them there for a moment and speak of some sorrowful events.

King Harans and his men advanced towards the land of Lyones and burnt to the ground everything before them. Men, women and children were burned to death, but some managed to escape to the city of Dorkaine, where they told King Lot of the great suffering that was being endured, and as soon as he was made aware of it, God knows, the king took twenty thousand knights and attacked King Daril's force, so I find it written. Five thousand of the enemy were killed by his lances during the first charge. Then they eagerly drew their swords and killed another nine thousand, stopping the pagans in their tracks, and they would have killed them all had not King Harans – may the devil take him! – appeared with his sixty thousand men and surrounded our force and fought a hard battle with them and killed so many of our noble knights that barely three thousand escaped with their lives, as the day drew to a close. They made it back into the city

of Dorkaine, but they were sorely wounded and in bad shape.

King Lot saw how badly his men had been mauled and tore his hair and cursed the day that he had made King Arthur his enemy. All his knights, those that still lived, and all the wives and children in the city, wept for husbands, fathers and friends that had been killed by these devils from hell.

King Harans laid siege to the city of Dorkaine and did his best to capture it. King Lot was desperate that Belisent, his queen and Arthur's sister, and Gawain's mother indeed, should be saved, so he took the advice of his knights and left the city one night for the well-fortified castle of Glocedoine, to install his wife there and his young son Mordred, who was only two years old, in case Dorkaine should fall. He took with him five hundred knights on good horses and went as quickly as he could to Glocedoine. But the journey didn't end happily.

As this was going on, young Gawain, with many friends and companions, and of course Yvain, were leaning over the walls of Arundel when a knight came galloping up at full tilt, fully armed and called to Gawain: 'Gawain! May Christ watch over you, and all your friends. If you dare to come along with me, I'll show you a battle the winning of which you'd give your eye teeth for!'

'Then swear that you intend us no harm,' called back Gawain.

'Gladly!' the knight replied, and made his oath.

Gawain quickly armed himself and took ten thousand along with him. This knight saw them emerging and dashed forwards, leading the way northwards. As they rode, they met a knight galloping for all he was worth and Gawain saw that he was clutching his little brother Mordred. He rode up to him and asked him why he was riding so swiftly with his little brother.

'Gawain,' came the reply, 'all this night and all this day you father has been fighting against King Taurus – three thousand against five hundred of ours! Your father is wounded, his men are all killed. I feared for Mordred's life, so I fled with him.'

'Alas!' cried Gawain. 'Alas! Who will ever trust me again if I leave my friends and relatives to die without helping them? My friend,' he said, 'conceal yourself in the undergrowth but stay here.'

Gawain spurred his horse quickly into a wood, with his knights. He heard the pitiful cries of a woman, screaming: 'Mercy!' Gawain rode out and saw a lady fall to the ground three times from a horse that King Taurus was riding. This heathen king, this wicked dog, pulled her up by the hair as she screamed: 'Saint Mary! Help me lady!' and every time she cried these words, he struck her with his fist three times and she fell off his horse again and he seized her by the hair once more, and she was dragged along barely conscious while he struck her with a riding crop and ordered her to walk, but she couldn't go a foot further for she was so distressed and hampered by her clothes, so he pulled

her off her feet by her hair again and sat her back on the horse. At last, she resisted so much that he dismounted and tied her to his horse's tail by her hair, and she was dragged along behind his horse, crying: 'Mary! Help!' but her cries were becoming weaker and weaker through sorrow and pain, her breath was failing and at last she rolled her eyes and seemed to be on the point of death.

Gawain asked the knight who was guiding him: 'Do you know who that poor lady is, who is suffering so much?'

'Gawain, her name is Belisent. She is your mother.'

Gawain's head so drained of blood that he was nearly unconscious for a moment, and when he recovered his senses the knight who had just spoken to him was nowhere to be seen. Had he searched he would have had a hard job finding him, for it was Merlin and he had vanished completely.

Gawain spurred his horse and shouted to King Taurus: 'Stop, you malicious bastard! Bitch's son! Who are you dragging along? You'll pay for this!'

King Taurus was fourteen feet high, a huge giant and a very strong one, and when he saw Gawain approaching he took up a great lance. A heathen squire dismounted and disentangled the lady's hair so that she was free of the horse's tail, then King Taurus set off quickly to meet his assailant. They both galloped at one another with savage intent. Taurus hit Gawain first and his lance shattered into pieces. Gawain's lance hit him with great force and went through shield, through coat of chainmail and through the giant's heart, casting him onto the ground, stone dead. Then all Gawain's brothers leapt into action, and of the five hundred heathens, not one escaped alive.

Gawain went and took his mother into his arms, so the book says, and wiped her face, her mouth and her eyes, and wept for her, He kissed her mouth and her eyes. His brothers saw this and came to him with great sorrow, and everybody around them began weeping as well.

With all this grief going on around her, Belisent began to open her eyes. When her sons saw this, they all cried with joy. She opened her eyes fully and thanked our Saviour Jesus Christ for sending her sons to help her! Then she told Gawain and his brothers how their father had taken on three thousand with only three hundred knights himself, and had killed all but five hundred of them: 'But out of all your father's men, not three have escaped alive, and you father had to choose between letting me be captured or condemning us both to certain death. He fought magnificently but he was covered in wounds and barely escaped with his life, making such an anguished cry that it was pitiful to hear.

'The heathens seized me and trampled me under foot, beat me and dragged me and now I've lost my lord and husband and my little son Mordred. Oh woe!' and she fell in a faint. Gawain blew into her face and said: 'Madam, I'll have your son Mordred brought to you at once.'

Gawain sent for the infant, and when his mother saw the baby, she recovered a little and was lain on a litter and carried to London, along with all the carts and packhorses that Taurus had had with him – six hundred carts in all, by God! – all laden with food and provisions.

When they arrived in London they were made suitably welcome. Earl Do put the high palace at the disposal of Gawain the courteous, to use as his own. Gawain installed his mother there and swore by Mary the Queen of Heaven that until he'd persuaded his father to seek reconciliation with King Arthur, his father wouldn't learn where she was. Then he told Earl Do all about his recent encounters with the heathen army: how he had rescued Sagremor because an old man had brought news of him, and then saved Yvain from certain death through letters in Latin that Yvain had never written, delivered by a boy he didn't know, 'and then I saved my mother's life,' he said, 'through the guidance of an unknown knight. I've no idea who any of these three were, and all three of them just vanished afterwards.'

'Oh Gawain,' said Do, 'All three were one. It was Merlin. One day you'll be friends with this good fellow.'

They marvelled at this and made a good joke of it. But let us leave them resting here, and describe how Merlin was by now relating all this to his master Blaise. He was telling him all the things that were happening in England at this time, as well as prophesies and other things, some of which have already taken place, others yet to come.

Merlin left his master Blaise shortly afterwards and travelled to where Arthur was staying, in Carohaise. He explained to Arthur and his companions all that was going on in England, how marvellously Gawain and all the other noble youths of the land were doing, and how every king was faring in his region. King Arthur was pleased with this news, and so was everybody else.

Now our romance tells us that King Leodegan sent a messenger to King Arthur, King Ban and King Bohort, asking them to come to his court and to stay with him, and that he regretted and lamented not knowing who they were, for they were obviously more powerful than he had imagined; they'd demonstrated this beyond any doubt when they had rescued him from certain death. He sent five knights to fetch them, these life-savers, and wanted them to know that, from now on, he intended to do everything according to their advice.

Without any delay, the forty-two responded to this invitation, with Merlin at their head. When they entered the hall, the king stood up, and all his knights did as well. King Leodegan welcomed them enthusiastically.

'King, do you want to know who we are?' asked Merlin.

'Yes,' replied the king. 'Above all else, I wish to know who you are.'

‘Well, as far as this man goes,’ said Merlin, pointing to Arthur, ‘we are looking to find a noble wife for him.’

‘Ah, Saint Mary!’ said Leodegan. ‘I have a daughter, a beautiful young lady, I don’t know of any girl more beautiful. She is intelligent and courteous, and she is the heir to all of my kingdom as well. I can tell you this for certain: that even if she was above all other women in the whole world and he had no land at all, I would count her very lucky indeed to be betrothed to him, so sure am I of his quality, his honour and his nobility.’

He went off at once to fetch his daughter – there was indeed none fairer in the whole world – and he offered her to King Arthur and expressed his desire to choose him as his heir. Arthur accepted her, for Merlin had told him to.

‘Now,’ said Merlin to King Leodegan, ‘would you like to know who you have just promised your daughter to?’

‘Yes!’

King Leodegan was introduced to his son-in-law-to-be, King Arthur, and then introduced to all of Arthur’s companions, one by one. They said that Arthur was their king by right and that everybody in the hall should swear their allegiance to him. Leodegan was delighted to hear this and swore his allegiance to King Arthur at once, then the knights of the Round Table did the same, and so did everybody else. Then Arthur married Guinevere and made her his queen.

King Leodegan put on a wedding feast for all those who were there, as was fitting. Every Christian was presented with a magnificent spread and the feast lasted for seven days, with nothing lacking. It would have lasted for a lot longer, too, but there was no time, for it was necessary to turn their attention quickly back to doing battle with the Saracens. Noblemen, knights and men-at-arms had been arriving from far and wide to join King Leodegan, to lend him their skill at arms in this fight.

June is a merry month, the flowers are blooming, lilies and roses, the meadows smell sweet, the rivers are clear and the hearts of knights and men are excited by pretty damsels. On the Monday of Pentecost, King Leodegan and all his knights armed themselves in leather coats and head guards, then coats of chainmail and plate armour, then they placed helmets on their heads decorated with beaten gold and silver, gems and precious stones, then donned fine surcoats in many different styles, and took up arms displaying many different emblems. Many an expensive saddle was thrown urgently onto the back of a warhorse.

Guinevere helped King Arthur to put on his armour, and as each piece was put into place, so the story says, Arthur kissed her. Merlin told Arthur to remember each kiss when he went into battle.

‘Yes, Merlin, I shall,’ Arthur replied.

King Leodegan invited Merlin to marshal all his men. 'Gladly,' he said, and he put himself in command of the first battalion comprising King Arthur, King Ban and King Bohort and all their companions, the knights of the Round Table and some other knights as well, so I find; in all they numbered seven thousand. Merlin gave Leodegan's nephew Goionar another seven thousand to lead, and a third battalion to Elinadas, who was the nephew of the wise lady of the Forest from which no Stranger Returns. Blias, lord of Bliodas was given command of a fourth, a famous knight named Andalas was given a fifth battalion, Beliche the Blond a sixth, a strong and hardy knight named Yder of Northland a seventh, Cleodalis's nephew Landon an eighth, and a ninth went to Grem-poremole, a valiant knight who sat very well on a horse but had the nose of a cat. Each of these noble knights led seven thousand.

King Leodegan brought up the rear, with ten thousand of the best. Merlin asked them all to listen:

'King Leodegan,' he said, 'don't be dismayed. King Rion will wish that he'd given you five of his towns by the end of this day, if it would have guaranteed his survival. He has many hundreds of Saracens with him who are nothing but the sons of bitches! We will kill them all, have no fear. They are rabble! We have almost eighty thousand men, and the grace of Jesus Christ to help us to cut down these heathen dogs. Think of your children and your wives. Think on your own lives. These pagans want to kill you or to send you into exile. Think of the lands that belong to you and that they want to steal from you by force and with villainy and injustice. Give them what they deserve! Spare none of them! Cut them down, for God is on your side.'

'They have filled the great forest with their numbers and built defences to the north and to the west so that no one can attack them from that direction. To the south they've placed many thousands of carts and wagons, but we can get at them from the east, I believe. We'll find them all sleeping and we shall kill them where they lie, for they were all drinking heavily last night.'

Merlin chose ten knights to go on ahead to capture the spies that they might come across. This they did; they seized two hundred of these scoundrels and in so doing, prevented any intelligence from reaching the heathen kings.

Merlin went out in front of the city and released his dragon; the fire that came from its mouth lit up the air all around. Arthur was next to him, and Ban and Bohort, then all the others, organised into battalions as I have just described. Their armour shone and their horses whinnied and neighed, but they went forwards as quietly as they could, without saying a word.

When Merlin got near to where King Rion was encamped, he cast an enchantment, causing many of the pavilions to fall down upon the heads of their occupants. Merlin and his companions were fully two miles ahead of the main body of King Leodegan's army. It was on a Tuesday, at dawn, that this magic happened. Merlin came upon them between a river and a wood and caught them completely unawares, and then he sud-

denly broke the silence:

‘Help us now, Mary, Queen of Heaven!’

Our folk fell upon the heathens and trampled them under their horses’ feet and cut them to death with their swords and spears. The heathen thieves stirred themselves, four hundred thousand and more, and rallied to King Rion’s banner, arming themselves swiftly, with the intention of killing as many of us as they could, but we killed many thousands of them before they had time even to arm themselves properly.

But when they had gathered arms: with lances, maces and battle axes, by thousands, the heathen men struck back at ours. Then began one of the greatest battles that has ever been fought, without any doubt! Dawn had passed and the hot sun was shining; there were knights riding, drums beating, trumpets sounding, there was fleeing and resisting, dragging, tugging and striking down. Many thousands of Saracens were thrust to the ground in a short time. King Rion, that vile dog, could see this and called the valiant knight Salinas to him; his nephew, a stalwart and dependable man. King Rion assigned him a hundred thousand knights and sent him to give reinforcement to his flagging knights and to take revenge for their humiliating losses.

Salinas and his huge force came against King Arthur with his forty-two, and with the Knights of the Round Table and with all the rest; seven thousand in all.

‘It’s time to bring your new love to mind,’ cried Merlin to Arthur. ‘For the love and delight of that last kiss, go and gallop amongst these heathen dogs!’

King Arthur spurred his horse at once and struck a Saracen through the shield and through many layers of chainmail and leather; the cold iron passed through the man’s heart and he fell dead to the ground. King Ban served another in the same way, and so did his brother Bohort. Nearly all of them killed a pagan in that first charge; many horses were brought down and many knights killed beneath their shields. Each knight hewed at his adversary like a carpenter at a piece of timber, and Arthur showed himself to be a courageous and deadly warrior – he sliced them, he cut them, and many learned what it was like to die at his hands.

King Jonap, who stood fifteen feet high, saw how much damage Arthur was doing to them and took a lance in anger and put his shield before him, but Arthur saw him coming and took a strong lance himself. Compared to this giant, it was like watching a child against a man! Each galloped his horse against the other and Jonap’s lance passed by Arthur’s left side, through mail and shirt and wounded him in the side, but not badly. Arthur’s lance hit its target, piercing shield and coat of mail, leather and flesh and wounded the giant in the shoulder, but the giant was so hardy and brave that this injury didn’t seem to worry him at all. The blows toppled both from their horses. Then there was great rushing on both sides, Christian and pagan, from knights eager to lend aid to their respective king. Many a sword was drawn, many knights hurt and many killed, and what with wrestling and tugging, striking and pushing, they managed to get them

both back onto their horses. Then Arthur and his forty-two, and also the knights of the Round Table, fought with such ferocity that no armour could withstand it, and they began killing so many that Salinas, and all those with him, were forced to flee.

Amongst those who did exceptionally well was Naciens (who was the cousin of Perciales on his mother's side; none was more valiant in Uther Pendragon's day nor in that of Arthur's who followed him. His mother was Haningnes, the sister of Joseph of Arimathea, whom Ebron had married; they had had seventeen sons, all of them brave and hardy knights, and all of whom served England magnificently in their day. He was the cousin of Celidoine, who was the son of Naciens of Betike (Celidoine will be the first to see the marvel of the Holy Grail). This Naciens we're talking about was brother to King Pelles of Listonei and his brothers, and will be Lancelot's guardian for almost a year, so the romance tells us in another place. Later, he will become a hermit and leave knightly things behind and become a priest and sing Masses. He will remain celibate, and through God's grace will be raised into the third heaven where he will hear the voices of angels and see the Father, Son and Holy Ghost in Holy Trinity. He will later give good advice to King Arthur when the king is in great peril of losing his lands to King Galaous, the famous giant's son, who will wage war against Arthur with the power of thirty kings.)



This Naciens, along with Adragenis the Brown, waged deadly battle with the pagans. I can tell you this with certainty, these two came close to equaling the great strength of King Arthur throughout the whole conflict and often fought alongside him, and were so far ahead of their companions that they often lost sight of them. These three: Arthur, Naciens and Adragenis, were headed by Merlin who was carrying the dragon that breathed fire into the air. These three did great harm to the pagans, cutting horses and men in two, felling knights to left and to

right, and when they came to King Rion's standard, which was carried by four elephants with castles on their backs, they were way ahead of their fellows, and their comrades, in an attempt to catch up, were cutting their way through and hewing the pagans down by twelve and by ten with fresh swords, cutting off heads, shoving with shoulders, but couldn't get any closer to their king however hard they fought; except for King Ban and King Bohort, says the book, who cut to the ground all who were within reach and sliced men down to the saddle and fought and killed so well that they cleared a way for themselves, and through sheer strength and valour managed to fight their way back to their king.

When these five were together: Arthur, Naciens, Adragenis the Brown, Ban and Bohort, they brought death to many and killed a hundred heathens in a very short time. There was fighting everywhere, great slaughter, great noise, great rescuing and resisting from

knights and barons, earls and kings and many lay headless on the ground or with deadly wounds on the grass, and some lay without feet and arms, or wounded through the intestines.

Amongst all this carnage, King Rion watched our five killing all his men. He was seventeen feet high and no man in the whole world was stronger than he was. He picked up in each hand a mace that no man should have been able to lift with two hands, or move an inch from the ground even, and at this moment, King Fansaron struck one of our knights, Curagus, an evil blow. King Bohort galloped over to avenge Curagus, separating himself by a distance of a furlong or so from his companions. He struck King Fansaron a ferocious blow that sent him grovelling on the ground; he'd meant to cut off Fansaron's head, but the blow had missed and cut off his horse's head instead, sending Fansaron tumbling onto the grass. King Bohort was preparing to kill him when King Rion appeared before them both, wielding the power of eighteen kings. He shouted to Bohort, with his mace raised high: 'Stop, you son of a whore! You'll pay for coming here! Look at my hand and see your death.'

King Bohort marvelled at the size of this giant. He was terrified. But fearing disgrace more than anything else, he made the sign of the cross and put his shield to the fore. King Rion brought the mace down hard onto his shield, so hard that it smashed it into small pieces. King Bohort returned a blow of his own onto the helmet of that huge man, so well that King Rion didn't know whether it was day or night for a moment. King Bohort seized his opportunity; he raced his horse past the stunned giant and carried on galloping until he came by chance upon a cruel giant named King Aroans who had just knocked Harvey Rivel from his horse and was gripping him by the cheek so hard that blood was coming from his mouth and nose. The giant intended to cut off his head, but King Bohort came by at that very moment and struck the giant down. Harvey saw the giant lying there on the ground and leapt up onto the now riderless horse. Then King Bohort and Harvey Rivel took the fight to the enemy; like greyhounds off the leash they raced at the pagans, they struck and parried and countered so well that no knights could have done better.

King Leodegan had reached King Rion's standard by now and was trying his best to pull it down. But King Rion came and raised his mace and killed to left and to right with it. He struck a blow at King Bohort, expecting to smash him to pieces, but he missed and hit the horse instead; the blow was so severe that the horse's back was broken. King Bohort leapt to his feet and defended himself with his sword. King Rion intended to deliver him a fatal blow and knocked him to his knees twice in succession, he almost killed him, but Harvey Rivel, seeing King Bohort in difficulty, seized a lance from a giant and spurred his horse towards King Rion, striking him in the side. King Rion was not badly hurt by this blow, but his attention was diverted and he struck Harvey so that a quarter of his shield flew away into the field. But Harvey was strong and agile and struck Rion on the shield, splitting it to the middle. King Rion struck him another blow that missed him but killed his horse.

Now Harvey Rivel stood shoulder to shoulder beside King Bohort, and both of them expected to die at any moment. But they fought on against overwhelming odds, like the valiant knights that they were.

Adragenis the Brown noticed what was happening. 'Saint Simon!' he cried, and rode against King Rion, striking him so hard that he slumped forwards unconscious over his horse's neck for a moment, completely stunned by the blow. Adragenis would have taken his head off with a following blow, had not King Rion's nephew King Salinas come to his uncle's rescue, may he hang in a thieves' noose for it! Salinas galloped at Adragenis from behind and knocked him to the ground. But Adragenis jumped to his feet and weighed in to help his companions on foot, like a deranged lion. They defended themselves so skilfully, with edges of sharp steel, that no pagan dared to come near them, so they threw spears and knives, anything they might be able to kill them with, and wounded them badly in many places. Soon, the heathens were able to get close enough to try to deliver some fatal blows, and would have done so had not Naciens seen what was going on and spurred his horse towards them, knocking down all who got in his way. He struck King Rion on the right side, knocking him clean off his horse and flat onto the ground. Naciens rode over him three times. But suddenly his own horse was killed from under him.

Now there are four of them on foot!

But Naciens, King Bohort, Harvey Rivel and Adragenis the Brown fought so well that soon they had a heap of slain around them and were wading through blood. They defended themselves so well that words cannot do it justice. King Rion did all in his power to take them, and would have done so had not Merlin galloped over to where King Arthur and King Ban were fighting and cried: 'What are you doing? King Bohort and Naciens are locked in mortal combat over there! Harvey Rivel and Adragenis the Brown are with them, but they're surrounded. Unless you help them quickly, all four of them will be killed.'

'Alas! Alas!' cried King Ban. 'Lead me there at once. If my brother was to come to any harm, I would never see joy again.'

Merlin spurred his horse and they followed him, galloping off like greyhounds towards their companions who were sending many pagans to their death, to their lord the devil, with their sharp swords. When they arrived, they dashed into the attack and every pagan they hit fell to the ground for the last time. They showed themselves to be valiant knights and quickly cleared a way to their four companions. Two giants in particular were trying to kill these four, one was named Minap and the other Malgleires. King Ban gave King Minap such a blow to the head that the blade sliced down to his teeth. Arthur struck Malgleires so hard that his head flew off. The four caught sight of their rescuers and fought their way towards them with great vigour, across great heaps of slain horses and dead men that lay in their way, and they managed to capture two riderless horses as they did so, and to extricate themselves so skilfully that they escaped without injury.

They threw themselves immediately into the fight once more.

The battle lasted all day; its noise carried into a sky that was streaked with arrows as thickly as motes in a sunbeam. Throwing-spears buzzed around like gnats and there was so much dust rising that the sun was blocked out. The trumpeting and drumming urged knights to greater effort, they broke lances into three pieces, struck and tore, and the bodies of knights and horses lay everywhere with their heads cut off and guts spilling out. Heads, feet and arms were strewn everywhere beneath the horses' hooves, as densely as sticks in a crow's nest. Bodies lay everywhere, some dead, others biting the grass as riderless horses trampled over entrails with their saddles covered in blood.

The fighting went on without respite. It was a battle of great sorrow. There was so much misery and despair that all of King Leodegan's folk had retreated back behind the walls of Danebleise, but Arthur remained fighting with his companions, and did marvellously well.

King Leodegan, resting beneath the city wall, was approached by the valiant Sadones, who said sternly to his uncle: 'Listen to me. Why are we here? What are we doing? If we flee, this land is lost, our wives and children, and all our joy will be gone. It is better to die with honour than to live a long life in shame. If we allow ourselves to be despoiled of all our possessions, then we will know ourselves to be cowards. One thing alone ought to bring us comfort: that our new lord, young King Arthur, is fighting valiantly for us. But he needs our help, by Jesus Christ! If he is overthrown in this battle he may well blame us for it! Unless we can prevent this, by Christ we'll be denounced! Our only hope is to kill these Saracens wherever we can find them!'

King Leodegan began to frame his reply, but was interrupted by Goionar: 'The young man is right!' he cried. 'Let's stop all this preaching, sir, and get back to killing these dogs!'

Everyone agreed, and they dashed off back into the thick of the battle, where they were soon met by ten thousand pagans. They brought many of them down, and the fighting began anew. Each hewed at the other with his sword, mace or axe, and many knights struck another to the ground.

Meanwhile, Merlin, so I find, took his company away from the battle to rest, to get their breath back and to see to their horses. The Saracens took the opportunity of gaining ground and thrusting the Christians backwards; but then Arthur, Bohort and Ban remounted, with all their valiant companions, and hastened back into the melee.

Merlin rode at the fore, so the book says, carrying the banner and felling all whom he met. Arthur struck King Clarel between the shoulder and the neck so savagely that his entire side was sliced away. Arthur was angry because Merlin had just taunted him for repaying Guinevere very poorly for the kisses that she had given him when she was helping him on with his armour, so he was giving his all and cutting left, right and centre. Everybody who saw this was amazed, and said that he was going to be a very fine warrior

indeed when he got older!

King Arthur knew where King Rion was by the crowns and beards that he wore all over his armour, emblematic of captured kings, and he fought his way towards him, then galloped his horse and struck King Rion so that a quarter of Rion's helmet flew away, his shield was cut in two and all his armour split down to the quilted snakeskin doublet that he wore over his shirt and which saved him from being sliced in half completely. King Rion fell from his horse as though he was dead.

Many giants were fighting alongside King Rion, and they set upon Arthur at once, knocking him from his horse to the ground. But Arthur leapt back onto his feet and defended himself from them all.

Merlin saw what was going on and called to his companions to ride as fast as they could to Arthur's rescue. King Ban was the first to arrive; he beheaded all who stood in his way and through mighty endurance came quickly to where Arthur was standing.

'Arthur,' he cried, 'it doesn't suit a man of your capability to be fighting on your feet!'

He sliced a giant down to his breastbone and gave the giant's horse to Arthur, by sheer strength and fortitude, because none of the giants could withstand a blow from him. As soon as Arthur was back on a horse, six thousand of his men arrived in support, and each of them cut off a pagan's head or sliced through his body as they attacked. King Rion was trampled down by horses' hooves, dragged and kicked like a criminal, but he defended himself well and with great suffering and discomfort he managed to scramble back onto a horse. Then he began delivering some fearsome blows with his mace, and killed many of our folk. But a few of our best warriors stuck together: Arthur and Ban and his brother Bohort, Naciens, Adragenis and Harvey Rivel, Lucan, Grifles, Ulfin, Kay and all their companions; they fought so well that day that heathen blood ran through the country like a river in flood. They fought so bravely that King Rion's standard was captured and the four elephants killed, and the banners and castles thrown down. Then Rion's men began to flee in disarray; there was nowhere for them to rally to now, and King Rion was in such dire straits that he didn't know what to do. With his sharp, bright sword he killed twenty Christians, but the men who were with him urged him to ride away with them and flee. But soon he was parted from them and went into a wood by himself, making huge cries of anguish. Such noise arose on the battlefield that even if thunder had been cracking and rumbling men wouldn't have heard it, the pagans were screaming so loudly in fear. Our men were shouting: 'Kill'em! Get'em! Over here! Over here!' at the tops of their voices, and thousands were slain in a very short while. It was like wolves attacking sheep.

King Leodegan and his steward Cleodalis pursued King Rion's nephew Goionard, who had some fierce Saracens with him. King Ban and King Bohort chased after four mighty kings: Gloiant, Minados, Calufer and Sinargos. The others, and all the knights of the Round Table, galloped in groups of five here, half a dozen there, chasing down Saracens. Naciens, Adragenis and Harvey Rivel chased after six heathen kings whose names were

Mautaile, Fernicans, Bantrines, Kehenans, Forcoars and Troimadac, looking to kill them all. King Arthur went alone in search of King Rion. He found him and chased him with his sword drawn, overtook him and cried: 'Surrender now, you cowardly traitor!'

Arthur hit King Rion on the head and the blade cut through metal and leather down to the giant's skull, but it was not a deadly wound. King Rion returned a blow and Arthur parried it with his shield; a corner of his shield flew away and a piece of his helmet, but the blow had been a glancing one and there was no great harm done. King Arthur returned another hard blow that went in under King Rion's shield and penetrated the armour about his midriff. Rion felt himself to be hurt and fled away at the gallop. King Arthur would have pursued him, but six kings attacked Arthur suddenly; you already know their names: the ones who were being chased by Harvey Rivel and his companions.

'Stay there, traitor!' they cried. 'Crossing swords with King Rion will be your downfall!'

King Arthur had to let King Rion escape as King Kehenans approached him quickly and gave him such a blow that Arthur was momentarily stunned. But Arthur was able to return a blow with full force which cut off the giant's shoulder; his arm and shield fell onto the grass. Kehenans urged his horse forwards and tried to seize King Arthur around the neck with his right arm, but Arthur was able to deliver another bitter stroke with his sword between the giant's hand and elbow and the hand on his remaining arm fell to the ground. King Kehenans' horse carried him here and there as the giant screamed as though he was mad, but then he fell dead onto the grass and his soul wafted to the devil.

The other five attacked King Arthur with murderous intent, but Arthur struck King Fernicans through to the heart and gave Forcoars a hideous wound through the ribs and down to the thigh. By now, Naciens, Adragenis and Harvey Rivel were approaching, and King Mautaile and his two remaining companions fled away.

King Arthur, Naciens and the others, dismounted and straightened their girths and their saddles.

King Bohort and King Ban, so the romance says, were meanwhile chasing King Minados and his three companions, when they suddenly came upon ten heathen knights, ten strong giants, who joined forces with those who were being pursued. They all turned and attacked King Ban and his brother, piercing shield and armour and doing them great harm. Ban, however, managed to kill King Calufer and Sinargos, and his brother killed King Gloiant. For a while, King Ban was taking on ten giants at once! He knocked Pinogras from his horse and trampled over him, then struck Sornigrens so hard on the helmet that the edge of his sword penetrated into his brain. Our two Christian kings performed wonderful feats of valour, but the sudden appearance of King Rion with his sword drawn – for he was still fleeing from King Arthur – may have put the brothers into severe difficulty had not King Arthur and Naciens, Harvey de Rivel and Adragenis

come riding up almost at once. Between them, they managed to drive all the giants away, King Rion losing his sword to Arthur before fleeing.

Meanwhile, Sir Antor, Kay and Grifles, Lucan, Meragys, Craddoc and Gornains, Belchin the Brown and Bleoberis, Galescounde and Blehartis, all of these, were chasing and killing the Saracens, pursuing them all over the place, so the book says. They came upon a company of a hundred pagans who were terrified, but angry at their shame and injury and filled with grief and vexation that their leader King Rion had seemingly abandoned them, so each side attacked the other with swords, but the pagans were so disheartened and fearful, and our men so keen and strong, that our knights drove them backwards quite easily; then Sir Antor, Kay and the others went to Danebleise and stayed outside the gates, a little apprehensively, waiting for King Arthur, or for news of him, for by now it was quite dark. They had received no advice nor instructions from Merlin, for he had gone after the mighty King Galat, the overlord of a country rich in cattle, who, along with ten thousand Saracens, were managing to escape. Merlin wanted to cast an enchantment in front of them; he made a pleasant valley look like a lake that Galat would decide that he had little chance of crossing that night. A little later you'll find out his reasons for doing this.

Now this romance tells how King Arthur came hastening with all speed, brandishing the sword Marandois in his hand which he had won off King Rion, and that was worth all the swords in England put together, and he asked God, for sweet Mary's sake, to let him prove that sword before he went to sleep. He spurred his horse onwards in search of adventures, and King Ban followed him, and so did King Bohort, and Naciens, Harvey de Rivel and Adragenis.

They soon came to where Goionar and Sadones, along with a knight of the Round Table, were battling against fifty-nine pagans. Our five, along with King Arthur, weighed in at once, like lions falling upon deer. King Arthur taught one a bitter lesson by cutting him in half, right down to the saddle. Another he beheaded, a third he sliced down to the waist. A fourth, he caught across the back with the edge of his sword and cut the man in two. King Arthur killed ten in the space of a short while with his new sword Marandois, which cut through flesh and armour without making any noise, not a single sound!

King Ban fought valiantly and cut a giant in two, he sheared off the entire side of another and cut the head off a third. Then he beheaded three others and cut a seventh in half. King Bohort cut off the thigh and arm of one, cleaved another down to the teeth and beheaded a third. Then he sent a fourth and a fifth to hell. Adragenis gave one a massive blow, killed another and cut off the head of a third. In all, he killed five, one after another. Naciens did great things with his sword of steel; two he cut in half, a third sliced down to the chest, then he cut the head off a fourth; then he killed another three. Harvey de Rivel fought hard, cutting one in half and taking the heads off two more. Our knights Goionar and Sadones, and the knight of the Round Table, saw how well their rescuers were doing and this gave them renewed strength and energy; each of them killed four as well. By this time, only nine of the pagans were left in total and these turned

and fled away as quickly as they could, crying out that it wasn't men they were fighting against but devils!

Our men pursued them vigorously until they heard a great din; the sound of metal against metal, sword against helmet.

'We could last all night out here!' said King Ban.

'I'm up for that!' exclaimed Arthur. 'Then I can fully test this sword.'

'You haven't wasted any time doing that!'

'No, that was chicken feed. I mean a proper test. And anyway, you haven't done so badly yourself!'

All the others agreed that there was no knight between Britain and Constantinople to compare with Arthur at this moment.

Now the book says that Sir Antor, and all his companions that I told you about, got tired of waiting for Arthur at Danebleise so they went off to look for him with their swords drawn and quickly come upon a hundred giants. Each set upon the other at once with swords and broadswords. Antor was brought down, and so was Gornains, Gales the Bald and Craddoc, Bleoberis and Blehartis, and they all had to defend themselves on foot, with the help of their seven companions who remained on horseback. Against a hundred giants, these were not good odds!

Sir Antor was soon in difficulty, but Arthur came riding to the rescue! He attacked where the giants were most closely gathered, as swiftly as a greyhound which has just been let off the leash. He quickly killed one, then another, then a third, he cut a fourth giant across the neck so that his head fell to the ground, then five and six, seven and eight; he dealt with them all in turn.

King Arthur extolled the virtues of his new sword to King Ban, saying that it cut so well that any knight would be delighted with it. The giants knew this already! Arthur helped lift the six back onto their horses.

King Ban turned to engage the giants afresh: he cleaved one down through the head to his heart, quickly killed another two and fought like a frenzied lion. Bohort cut off a giant's head, then struck another two and carried on killing left, right and centre. Adragenis beheaded three giants one after another, then struck others to the ground with mortal wounds. The good knight Harvey de Rivel killed so many that it was astonishing! Naciens, so the book says, took a giant's head, then sliced another's back in half and cut the shoulder off a third.

They all fought with such energy and cut off so many heads that, of the twelve knights who were originally in difficulty, none was badly injured. They'd all fought with renewed vigour since the arrival of Arthur and his companions. Each of them beheaded two or three pagans and many great feats of bravery were seen. Out of a hundred pagans, only

fourteen were left alive; the others lay dead upon the grass.

These fourteen survivors turned and fled away as fast as their horses would carry them. Our men pursued them eagerly, but came upon the clerk Merlin who invited them all to dismount, and they did so with much joy and thanks to one another.

While they rest and adjust their equipment, listen to how King Leodegan was getting on, for he was fighting beneath an oak tree, so the book says, in the company of his faithful steward Cleodalis, against twenty-seven pagans, and it was not easy! Cleodalis was on foot and King Leodegan on horseback, but it was with great difficulty that they were trying to defend themselves from the Saracens.

Colocaulnus, a huge man, gave King Leodegan such a hard blow that he fell from his horse, his nose and mouth bleeding, and for weakness and pain from his other wounds as well, he lay flat out on the grass for a moment. The Saracens came up and would have killed him, but Cleodalis was alert and stood over his lord, weeping and swinging his sword like a madman, defending his king. Cleodalis fought so fiercely that the Saracens couldn't take Leodegan. The Saracens threw knives and stones at them, and wounded them both even more.

King Leodegan recovered his senses and saw that Cleodalis was barely able to remain standing, he had fought himself nearly to the end. He recognised how faithful and loyal his steward was and his heart filled with sorrow and pity when he remembered how he and Cleodalis's wife had been lovers for a long while, with great sin and injustice.

'Cleodalis! Faithful knight, and no mistake!' he said. 'Through my sin and my bad deeds I have reached my end. Have pity on me, my noble friend. I was once your king and now I am just a knave. Have mercy on me and forgive me all the wrong that I have done to you; and may it not prevent my soul from avoiding the pains of hell.'

'Mercy!' he continued, as he sat up. 'My dear friend, take my sword. Cut my head off with it, in payment for all the wrong that I have done to you. Christ may judge my soul with greater pity and leniency if you do.'

Cleodalis wept with pity to see his lord so humbled; he took him up in his arms and forgave him, absolutely, for all the shame and harm that he had done to him, and urged him to fight on, in God's name.

So they both did; they both fought on, much to the anger of the pagans. A giant came up and knocked Cleodalis to the ground. He lay unconscious for a moment, but King Leodegan leapt over him and defended Cleodalis from that cursed gaggle of pagans, he fought until he was so weary that he could fight no longer and fell down in exhaustion. But then Cleodalis jumped up, for he wasn't badly injured, and with great strength and fortitude began to defend his lord again. This happened many times; when the one fell, the other rose and carried on the defence, with all his strength and energy. They fought like this until midnight, but they were wounded so badly at last that they knew that they couldn't continue for very much longer.

‘Look after yourself, noble fellow,’ said King Leodegan. ‘I have no strength left to lose or win this land.’

They fell down and stood up again when their strength had returned, and King Leodegan helped Cleodalis to fight as well as he could.

Meanwhile, Merlin told Arthur about the predicament that King Leodegan and his steward were in, and King Leodegan would have been taken at the very last had Arthur



not arrived with sixteen knights. They suddenly appeared and laid into the Saracens at once.

While this was happening, Merlin rode away and gathered twelve knights of the Round Table, who, with great strength and courage, came to bathe their swords in the blood of the heathens. King Arthur, King Ban and King Bohort helped King Leodegan back onto a horse, and Naciens helped Cleodalis to remount. Neither of them were badly hurt.

Merlin pointed out four giants who were intent upon keeping the fight going. Naciens rode against Ancalnus and mortally injured him, King Arthur fatally wounded King Maulas, King Ban sliced King Ridras in half and King Bohort cut King Dorilan’s head off. All the others killed a pagan as well, and the rest fled away.

Then our knights rode happily back to the city of Carohaise and relaxed with their friends and fellow-warriors. They ate a rowdy and joyous meal and then went to bed.

THE END