

united in the happiness of youth, are to grow more and more apart as life moves on.

The prologue closes with Arthur firmly established on his throne, and married to Guinevere, as the first step in that perfect life which he hopes to make real in the world. He has gathered his victorious Knights about him, bound them by the strictest vows, and organized the Order of the Round Table.

“A glorious company, the flower of men,
To serve as models for the mighty world,
And be the fair beginning of a time.”

THE COMING OF ARTHUR.



LEODOGRAN, the King of Cameliard,
Had one fair daughter, and none other child;
And she was fairest of all flesh on earth,
Guinevere, and in her his one delight.

For many a petty king ere Arthur came
Ruled in this isle, and ever waging war
Each upon other, wasted all the land;
And still from time to time the heathen host
Swarm'd overseas, and harried what was left.
And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
But man was less and less, till Arthur came.
For first Aurelius lived and fought and died,
And after him King Uther fought and died,
But either fail'd to make the kingdom one.
And after these King Arthur for a space,
And thro' the puissance of his Table Round,
Drew all their petty principedoms under him,
Their king and head, and made a realm, and reign'd.

And thus the land of Cameliard was waste,
Thick with wet woods, and many a beast therein,
And none or few to scare or chase the beast;
So that wild dog and wolf and boar and bear

Came night and day, and rooted in the fields,
 And wallow'd in the gardens of the King. 25
 And ever and anon the wolf would steal
 The children and devour, but now and then,
 Her own brood lost or dead, lent her fierce teat
 To human sucklings; and the children housed
 In her foul den, there at their meat would growl, 30
 And mock their foster-mother on four feet,
 Till, straighten'd, they grew up to wolf-like men,
 Worse than the wolves. And King Leodogran
 Groan'd for the Roman legions here again,
 And Cæsar's eagle: then his brother king, 35
 Urien, assail'd him: last a heathen horde,
 Reddening the sun with smoke and earth with blood,
 And on the spike that split the mother's heart
 Spitting the child, break on him, till, amazed,
 He knew not whither he should turn for aid. 40

But — for he heard of Arthur newly crown'd,
 Tho' not without an uproar made by those
 Who cried, "He is not Uther's son" — the King
 Sent to him, saying, "Arise, and help us thou!
 For here between the man and beast we die." 45

And Arthur yet had done no deed of arms,
 But heard the call, and came: and Guinevere
 Stood by the castle walls to watch him pass;
 But since he neither wore on helm or shield
 The golden symbol of his kinglihood, 50
 But rode a simple knight among his knights,
 And many of these in richer arms than he,
 She saw him not, or mark'd not, if she saw,
 One among many, tho' his face was bare.
 But Arthur, looking downward as he past, 55
 Felt the light of her eyes into his life

Smite on the sudden, yet rode on, and pitch'd
 His tents beside the forest. Then he drave
 The heathen; after, slew the beast, and fell'd
 The forest, letting in the sun, and made 60
 Broad pathways for the hunter and the knight,
 And so return'd.

For while he linger'd there,
 A doubt that ever smoulder'd in the hearts
 Of those great Lords and Barons of his realm
 Flash'd forth and into war: for most of these, 65
 Colleguing with a score of petty kings,
 Made head against him, crying, "Who is he
 That he should rule us? who hath proven him
 King Uther's son? for lo! we look at him,
 And find nor face nor bearing, limbs nor voice, 70
 Are like to those of Uther whom we knew.
 This is the son of Gorlois, not the King;
 This is the son of Anton, not the King."

And Arthur, passing thence to battle, felt
 Travail, and throes and agonies of the life, 75
 Desiring to be join'd with Guinevere;
 And thinking as he rode, "Her father said
 That there between the man and beast they die.
 Shall I not lift her from this land of beasts
 Up to my throne, and side by side with me?
 What happiness to reign a lonely king,
 Vext — O ye stars that shudder over me,
 O earth that soundest hollow under me,
 Vext with waste dreams? for saving I be join'd
 To her that is the fairest under heaven, 85
 I seem as nothing in the mighty world,
 And cannot will my will, nor work my work
 Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm

Victor and lord. But were I join'd with her,
 Then might we live together as one life, 90
 And reigning with one will in everything
 Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
 And power on this dead world to make it live."

Thereafter — as he speaks who tells the tale —
 When Arthur reach'd a field-of-battle bright 95
 With pitch'd pavilions of his foe, the world
 Was all so clear about him, that he saw
 The smallest rock far on the faintest hill,
 And even in high day the morning star.
 So when the King had set his banner broad, 100
 At once from either side, with trumpet-blast,
 And shouts, and clarions shrilling unto blood,
 The long-lanced battle let their horses run.
 And now the barons and the kings prevail'd,
 And now the King, as here and there that war 105
 Went swaying; but the Powers who walk the world
 Made lightnings and great thunders over him,
 And dazed all eyes, till Arthur by main might,
 And mightier of his hands with every blow,
 And leading all his knighthood threw the kings 110
 Carádos, Urien, Cradlemon of Wales,
 Claudias, and Clariance of Northumberland,
 The King Brandagoras of Latangor,
 With Anguisant of Erin, Morganore,
 And Lot of Orkney. Then, before a voice 115
 As dreadful as the shout of one who sees
 To one who sins, and deems himself alone
 And all the world asleep, they swerved and brake
 Flying, and Arthur call'd to stay the brands
 That hack'd among the flyers, "Ho! they yield!" 120
 So like a painted battle the war stood
 Silenced, the living quiet as the dead,

And in the heart of Arthur joy was lord.
 He laugh'd upon his warrior whom he loved
 And honor'd most. "Thou dost not doubt me King, 125
 So well thine arm hath wrought for me to-day."
 "Sir and my liege," he cried, "the fire of God
 Descends upon thee in the battle-field:
 I know thee for my King!" Whereat the two,
 For each had warded either in the fight, 130
 Sware on the field of death a deathless love.
 And Arthur said, "Man's word is God in man:
 Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death."

Then quickly from the foughten field he sent
 Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere, 135
 His new-made knights, to King Leodogran,
 Saying, "If I in aught have served thee well,
 Give me thy daughter Guinevere to wife."

Whom when he heard, Leodogran in heart
 Debating — "How should I that am a king, 140
 However much he help me at my need,
 Give my one daughter saving to a king,
 And a king's son?" — lifted his voice, and call'd
 A hoary man, his chamberlain, to whom
 He trusted all things, and of him required 145
 His counsel: "Knowest thou aught of Arthur's
 birth?"

Then spake the hoary chamberlain and said,
 "Sir King, there be but two old men that know:
 And each is twice as old as I; and one
 Is Merlin, the wise man that ever served 150
 King Uther thro' his magic art; and one
 Is Merlin's master (so they call him) Bleys,
 Who taught him magic; but the scholar ran

Before the master, and so far, that Bleys
Laid magic by, and sat him down, and wrote 155
All things and whatsoever Merlin did
In one great annal-book, where after-years
Will learn the secret of our Arthur's birth."

To whom the King Leodogran replied,
"O friend, had I been holpen half as well 160
By this King Arthur as by thee to-day,
Then beast and man had had their share of me :
But summon here before us yet once more
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere."

Then, when they came before him, the King said, 165
"I have seen the cuckoo chased by lesser fowl,
And reason in the chase : but wherefore now
Do these your lords stir up the heat of war,
Some calling Arthur born of Gorlois,
Others of Anton ? Tell me, ye yourselves, 170
Hold ye this Arthur for King Uther's son ?"

And Ulfius and Brastias answer'd, "Ay."
Then Bedivere, the first of all his knights
Knighted by Arthur at his crowning, spake —
For bold in heart and act and word was he, 175
Whenever slander breathed against the King —

"Sir, there be many rumors on this head :
For there be those who hate him in their hearts,
Call him baseborn, and since his ways are sweet,
And theirs are bestial, hold him less than man : 180
And there be those who deem him more than man,
And dream he dropt from heaven : but my belief
In all this matter — so ye care to learn —
Sir, for ye know that in King Uther's time

The prince and warrior Gorlois, he that held 185
Tintagil castle by the Cornish sea,
Was wedded with a winsome wife, Ygerne :
And daughters had she borne him, — one whereof,
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent,
Hath ever like a loyal sister cleaved 190
To Arthur, — but a son she had not borne.
And Uther cast upon her eyes of love :
But she, a stainless wife to Gorlois,
So loathed the bright dishonor of his love,
That Gorlois and King Uther went to war : 195
And overthrown was Gorlois and slain.
Then Uther in his wrath and heat besieged
Ygerne within Tintagil, where her men,
Seeing the mighty swarm about their walls,
Left her and fled, and Uther enter'd in, 200
And there was none to call to but himself.
So, compass'd by the power of the King,
Enforced she was to wed him in her tears,
And with a shameful swiftmess : afterward,
Not many moons, King Uther died himself, 205
Moaning and wailing for an heir to rule
After him, lest the realm should go to wrack.
And that same night, the night of the new year,
By reason of the bitterness and grief
That vext his mother, all before his time 210
Was Arthur born, and all as soon as born
Deliver'd at a secret postern-gate
To Merlin, to be holden far apart
Until his hour should come ; because the lords
Of that fierce day were as the lords of this, 215
Wild beasts, and surely would have torn the child
Piecemeal among them, had they known ; for each
But sought to rule for his own self and hand,
And many hated Uther for the sake

Of Gorlois. Wherefore Merlin took the child, 220
 And gave him to Sir Anton, an old knight
 An ancient friend of Uther; and his wife
 Nursed the young prince, and rear'd him with her own;
 And no man knew. And ever since the lords
 Have foughten like wild beasts among themselves, 225
 So that the realm has gone to wrack: but now,
 This year, when Merlin (for his hour had come)
 Brought Arthur forth, and set him in the hall,
 Proclaiming, 'Here is Uther's heir, your king,'
 A hundred voices cried, 'Away with him! 230
 No king of ours! A son of Gorlois he,
 Or else the child of Anton, and no king,
 Or else baseborn.' Yet Merlin thro' his craft,
 And while the people clamor'd for a king,
 Had Arthur crown'd; but after, the great lords 235
 Banded, and so brake out in open war."

3 Then while the King debated with himself
 If Arthur were the child of shamefulness,
 Or born the son of Gorlois, after death,
 Or Uther's son, and born before his time, 240
 Or whether there were truth in anything
 Said by these three, there came to Cameliard,
 With Gawain and young Modred, her two sons,
 Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent;
 Whom as he could, not as he would, the King 245
 Made feast for, saying, as they sat at meat:

4 "A doubtful throne is ice on summer seas.
 Ye come from Arthur's court. Victor his men
 Report him! Yea, but ye—think ye this king—
 So many those that hate him, and so strong, 250
 So few his knights, however brave they be—
 Hath body enow to hold his foemen down?"

5 "O King," she cried, "and I will tell thee: few,
 Few, but all brave, all of one mind with him;
 For I was near him when the savage yells 255
 Of Uther's peerage died and Arthur sat
 Crown'd on the daïs, and his warriors cried,
 'Be thou the king, and we will work thy will
 Who love thee.' Then the King in low deep tones,
 And simple words of great authority, 260
 Bound them by so strait vows to his own self,
 That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some
 Were pale as at the passing of a ghost,
 Some flush'd, and others dazed, as one who wakes
 Half-blinded at the coming of a light. 265

6 "But when he spake and cheer'd his Table Round
 With large, divine and comfortable words,
 Beyond my tongue to tell thee—I beheld
 From eye to eye thro' all their Order flash 270
 A momentary likeness of the King:
 And ere it left their faces, thro' the cross
 And those around it and the Crucified,
 Down from the casement over Arthur, smote
 Flame-color, vert, and azure, in three rays,
 One falling upon each of three fair queens, 275
 Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends
 Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright
 Sweet faces, who will help him at his need.

7 "And there I saw mage Merlin, whose vast wit
 And hundred winters are but as the hands 280
 Of loyal vassals toiling for their liege.

8 "And near him stood the Lady of the Lake,
 Who knows a subtler magic than his own—
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.

She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword, 285
 Whereby to drive the heathen out: a mist
 Of incense curl'd about her, and her face
 Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom;
 But there was heard among the holy hymns
 A voice as of the waters, for she dwells 290
 Down in a deep, calm, whatsoever storms
 May shake the world, and when the surface rolls,
 Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord.

There likewise I beheld Excalibur
 Before him at his crowning borne, the sword 295
 That rose from out the bosom of the lake,
 And Arthur row'd across and took it — rich
 With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt,
 Bewildering heart and eye — the blade so bright
 That men are blinded by it — on one side, 300
 Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,
 'Take me,' but turn the blade and ye shall see,
 And written in the speech ye speak yourself,
 'Cast me away!' And sad was Arthur's face
 Taking it, but old Merlin counsell'd him, 305
 'Take thou and strike! the time to cast away
 Is yet far-off.' So this great brand the king
 Took, and by this will beat his foemen down."

Thereat Leodogran rejoiced, but thought
 To sift his doubtings to the last, and ask'd, 310
 Fixing full eyes of question on her face,
 "The swallow and the swift are near akin,
 But thou art closer to this noble prince,
 Being his own dear sister;" and she said,
 "Daughter of Gorlois and Ygerne am I;" 315
 "And therefore Arthur's sister?" ask'd the King.
 She answer'd, "These be secret things," and sign'd

To those two sons to pass and let them be.
 And Gawain went, and breaking into song
 Sprang out, and follow'd by his flying hair 320
 Ran like a colt, and leapt at all he saw:
 But Modred laid his ear beside the doors,
 And there half heard; the same that afterward
 Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom.

And then the Queen made answer, "What know I? 325
 For dark my mother was in eyes and hair,
 And dark in hair and eyes am I; and dark
 Was Gorlois, yea and dark was Uther too,
 Wellnigh to blackness; but this King is fair
 Beyond the race of Britons and of men. 330
 Moreover, always in my mind I hear
 A cry from out the dawning of my life,
 A mother weeping, and I hear her say,
 'O that ye had some brother, pretty one,
 To guard thee on the rough ways of the world.'" 335

"Ay," said the King, "and hear ye such a cry?
 But when did Arthur chance upon thee first?"

"O King!" she cried, "and I will tell thee true:
 He found me first when yet a little maid:
 Beaten I had been for a little fault 340
 Whereof I was not guilty; and out I ran
 And flung myself down on a bank of heath,
 And hated this fair world and all therein,
 And wept and wish'd that I were dead; and he —
 I know not whether of himself he came, 345
 Or brought by Merlin, who, they say, can walk
 Unseen at pleasure — he was at my side,
 And spake sweet words, and comforted my heart,
 And dried my tears, being a child with me.

And many a time he came, and evermore
 As I grew greater grew with me; and sad 350
 At times he seem'd, and sad with him was I,
 Stern too at times, and then I loved him not,
 But sweet again, and then I loved him well.
 And now of late I see him less and less, 355
 But those first days had golden hours for me,
 For then I surely thought he would be king.

1 "But let me tell thee now another tale:
 For Bleys, our Merlin's master, as they say,
 Died but of late, and sent his cry to me, 360
 To hear him speak before he left his life.
 Shrunk like a fairy changeling lay the mage;
 And when I enter'd told me that himself
 And Merlin ever served about the King,
 Uther, before he died; and on the night 365
 When Uther in Tintagil past away
 Moaning and wailing for an heir, the two
 Left the still King, and passing forth to breathe,
 Then from the castle gateway by the chasm
 Descending thro' the dismal night — a night 370
 In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost —
 Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps
 It seem'd in heaven, a ship, the shape thereof
 A dragon wing'd, and all from stem to stern
 Bright with a shining people on the decks, 375
 And gone as soon as seen. And then the two
 Dropt to the cove, and watch'd the great sea fall,
 Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,
 Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
 And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged 380
 Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame:
 And down the wave and in the flame was borne
 A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,

Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried 'The King!
 Here is an heir for Uther!' And the fringe 385
 Of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand,
 Lash'd at the wizard as he spake the word,
 And all at once all round him rose in fire,
 So that the child and he were clothed in fire.
 And presently thereafter follow'd calm, 390
 Free sky and stars: 'And this same child,' he said,
 'Is he who reigns: nor could I part in peace
 Till this were told.' And saying this the seer
 Went thro' the strait and dreadful pass of death, 395
 Not ever to be question'd any more
 Save on the further side; but when I met
 Merlin, and ask'd him if these things were truth —
 The shining dragon and the naked child
 Descending in the glory of the seas —
 He laugh'd as is his wont, and answer'd me 400
 In riddling triplets of old time, and said:

1 "Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow in the sky!
 A young man will be wiser by and by;
 An old man's wit may wander ere he die.

2 "Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow on the lea!
 And truth is this to me, and that to thee;
 And truth or clothed or naked let it be. 405

3 "Rain, sun, and rain! and the free blossom blows:
 Sun, rain, and sun! and where is he who knows?
 From the great deep to the great deep he goes.' 410

4 "So Merlin riddling anger'd me; but thou
 Fear not to give this King thine only child,
 Guinevere: so great bards of him will sing
 Hereafter; and dark sayings from of old

Ranging and ringing thro' the minds of men, 415
 And echo'd by old folk beside their fires
 For comfort after their wage-work is done,
 Speak of the King; and Merlin in our time
 Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn
 Tho' men may wound him that he will not die, 420
 But pass, again to come; and then or now
 Utterly smite the heathen underfoot,
 Till these and all men hail him for their king."

¶ She spake and King Leodogran rejoiced,
 But musing "Shall I answer yea or nay?" 425
 Doubted and drowsed, nodded and slept, and saw,
 Dreaming, a slope of land that ever grew,
 Field after field, up to a height, the peak
 Haze-hidden, and thereon a phantom king,
 Now looming, and now lost: and on the slope 430
 The sword rose, the hind fell, the herd was driven,
 Fire glimpsed; and all the land from roof and rick,
 In drifts of smoke before a rolling wind,
 Stream'd to the peak, and mingled with the haze
 And made it thicker; while the phantom king 435
 Sent out at times a voice; and here or there
 Stood one who pointed toward the voice, the rest
 Slew on and burnt, crying, "No king of ours,
 No son of Uther, and no king of ours;"
 Till with a wink his dream was changed, the haze 440
 Descended, and the solid earth became
 As nothing, but the king stood out in heaven,
 Crown'd. And Leodogran awoke, and sent
 Ulfus, and Brastias, and Bedivere,
 Back to the court of Arthur answering yea. 445

¶ Then Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved
 And honor'd most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth

And bring the Queen;—and watch'd him from the
 gates;
 And Lancelot past away among the flowers,
 (For then was latter April) and return'd 450
 Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere.
 To whom arrived, by Dubric the high saint,
 Chief of the church in Britain, and before
 The stateliest of her altar-shrines, the King
 That morn was married, while in stainless white, 455
 The fair beginners of a nobler time,
 And glorying in their vows and him, his knights
 Stood round him, and rejoicing in his joy.
 Far shone the fields of May thro' open door,
 The sacred altar blossom'd white with May, 460
 The Sun of May descended on their King,
 They gazed on all earth's beauty in their Queen,
 Roll'd incense, and there past along the hymns
 A voice as of the waters, while the two
 Sware at the shrine of Christ a deathless love: 465
 And Arthur said, "Behold, thy doom is mine.
 Let chance what will, I love thee to the death!"
 To whom the Queen replied with drooping eyes,
 "King and my lord, I love thee to the death!"
 And holy Dubric spread his hands and spake, 470
 "Reign ye, and live and love, and make the world
 Other, and may thy Queen be one with thee,
 And all this Order of thy Table Round
 Fulfil the boundless purpose of their King!"

¶ So Dubric said; but when they left the shrine 475
 Great Lords from Rome before the portal stood,
 In scornful stillness gazing as they past;
 Then while they paced a city all on fire
 With sun and cloth of gold, the trumpets blew,
 And Arthur's knighthood sang before the King:— 480

- 1 8 "Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May;
Blow trumpet, the long night hath roll'd away!
Blow thro' the living world — ' Let the King reign.'
- 2 9 "Shall Rome or heathen rule in Arthur's realm?
Flash brand and lance, fall battleaxe upon helm, 485
Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign.
- 3 10 "Strike for the King and live! his knights have heard
That God hath told the King a secret word.
Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign.
- 4 11 "Blow trumpet! he will lift us from the dust. 490
Blow trumpet! live the strength and die the lust!
Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign.
- 5 12 "Strike for the King and die! and if thou diest,
The King is King, and ever wills the highest.
Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign. 495
- 6 13 "Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May!
Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day!
Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign.
- 7 14 "The King will follow Christ, and we the King,
In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing. 500
Fall battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign."
- 8 15 So sang the knighthood, moving to their hall.
There at the banquet those great Lords from Rome,
The slowly-fading mistress of the world,
Strode in, and claim'd their tribute as of yore. 505
But Arthur spake, " Behold, for these have sworn
To wage my wars, and worship me their King;
The old order changeth, yielding place to new;

- And we that fight for our fair father Christ,
Seeing that ye be grown too weak and old 510
To drive the heathen from your Roman wall,
No tribute will we pay : " so those great lords
Drew back in wrath, and Arthur strove with Rome.
- 9 16 And Arthur and his knighthood for a space
Were all one will, and thro' that strength the King 515
Drew in the petty pryncedoms under him,
Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame
The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reign'd.

E. Brackets