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OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

SIR THOMAS MALORY

Le Morte Darthur

THE WINCHESTER MANUSCRIPT

*Edited and abridged
with an Introduction and Notes by*
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THE NOBLE TALE BETWIXT KING ARTHUR AND LUCIUS THE EMPEROR OF ROME

[v.1] It befell when King Arthur had wedded Queen Guenivere and fulfilled the Round Table, and so after his marvellous knights and he had vanquished the most part of his enemies, then soon after came Sir Lancelot du Lake unto the court, and Tristram came that time also. And then so it befell that the Emperor of Rome, Lucius, sent unto Arthur messengers commanding him for to pay his truage that his ancestors have paid before him. When King Arthur wist what they meant, he looked up with his grey eyes, and angered at the messengers passing sore. Then were these messengers afraid, and kneeled still and durst not arise, they were so afraid of his grim countenance.

Then one of the knights messengers spoke aloud and said, 'Crowned king, misdo no messengers, for we be come at his commandment as servitors should.'

Then spoke the conqueror, 'Thou recreant and coward knight, why fearest thou my countenance? There be in this hall, and they were sore aggrieved, thou durst not for a dukedom of land look in their faces.'

'Sir,' said one of the senators, 'so Christ me help, I was so afraid when I looked in thy face that my heart would not serve for to say my message. But sithen it is my will for to say my errand: thee greets well Lucius, the Emperor of Rome, and commands thee, upon pain that will fall, to send him the truage of this realm that thy father Uther Pendragon paid; or else he will bereave thee all thy realms that thou wilstest.'

'Thou sayest well,' said Arthur, 'but for all thy breme words I will not be too over-hasty; and therefore thou and thy fellows shall abide here seven days. And I shall call unto me my council of my most trusty knights and dukes and regent kings and earls and barons and of my most wise doctors; and when we have taken our advisement ye shall have your answer plainly, such as I shall abide by.'

Then the noble King commanded Sir Clegis to look that these men be settled and served with the best, that there be no dainties

truage] tribute misdo] mistreat sithen?] since breme] fierce
wise doctors] learned men

spared upon them, that neither child nor horse faulted nothing—'For they are full royal people; and though they have grieved me and my court, yet we must remember on our worship.' So they were led into chambers, and served as richly of dainties that might be gotten. So the Romans had thereof great marvel.

Then the King unto counsel called his noble knights, and within a tower there they assembled, the most part of the knights of the Round Table. Then the King commanded them of their best counsel.

'Sir,' said Sir Cador of Cornwall, 'as for me, I am not heavy of this message, for we have been many days rested. Now the letters of Lucius the Emperor like me well, for now shall we have war and worship.'

'By Christ, I believe well,' said the King, 'Sir Cador, this message likes thee; but yet they may not be so answered; for their spiteous speech grieveth so my heart that truage to Rome I shall never pay. Therefore counsel me, my knights, for Christ's love of heaven. For this much have I found in the chronicles of this land, that Sir Beline and Sir Brine, of my blood elders, that born were in Britain, they have occupied the empireship eight score winters. And after, Constantine our kinsman conquered it, and dame Helena's son of England was Emperor of Rome;* and he recovered the cross that Christ died upon. And thus was the empire kept by my kind elders, and thus we have evidence enough to the empire of whole Rome.'*

So when the sevensnight was at an end, the senators besought the King [2] to have an answer.

'It is well,' said the King. 'Now say ye to your emperor that I shall in all haste make me ready with my keen knights, and by the river of Rome hold my Round Table. And I will bring with me the best people of fifteen realms, and with them ride on the mountains in the mainlands, and mine down the walls of Milan the proud, and sith ride unto Rome with my royallest knights. Now ye have your answer, hie you that ye were hence, and from this place to the port where ye shall pass over; and I shall give you seven days to pass unto Sandwich. Now speed you, I counsel you, and spare not your horses; and look ye go by Watling

neither child nor horse faulted nothing] that nothing should be wanting to either page or horse like me well] please me well spiteous] contemptuous
kind elders] natural ancestors evidence enough] a sufficient claim sith]
afterwards hie you that ye were hence] make haste to be gone

Street* and no way else. And where night falls on you, look ye there abide, be it fell or town, I take no keep; for it longeth not to no aliens for to ride on nights. And may any be found a spear-length out of the way, and that ye be in the water by the sevennight's end, there shall no gold under God pay for your ransom.'

'Sir,' said these senators, 'this is a hard conduct! We beseech you that we may pass safely.'

'Care ye not,' said the King. 'Your conduct is able.'

Thus they passed from Carlisle unto Sandwich-ward, that had but seven days for to pass through the land. And so Sir Cadōr brought them on their ways. But the senators spared for no horse, but hired them hackneys from town to town; and by the sun was set at the seven days' end they came unto Sandwich—so blithe were they never. And so the same night they took the water, and passed into Flanders, and after that over the great mountain that hight Gotthard, and so after through Lombardy and through Tuscany. And soon after they came to the Emperor Lucius, and there they showed him the letters of King Arthur, and how he was the gastfullest man that ever they looked on. When the Emperor Lucius had read the letters and understood them well of their credence, he fared as a man that were razed of his wit.

'I weened that Arthur would have obeyed you and served you unto your hands, for so he beseemed—or any king christened—for to obey any senator that is sent from my person.'

'Sir,' said the senators, 'let be such words, for that we have escaped alive, we may thank God ever; for we would not pass again to do that message for all your broad lands. And therefore, sirs, trust to our saws, ye shall find him your utter enemy. And seek ye him and ye list, for into these lands will he come, and that shall ye find within this half year; for he thinks to be emperor himself. For he saith ye have occupied the empire with great wrong, for all his true ancestors save his father Uther were emperors of Rome. And of all the sovereigns that we saw ever, he is the royallest king that liveth on earth; for we saw on New Year's Day at his Round Table nine kings, and the fairest fellowship of knights are with him that dures alive, and thereto of wisdom and of fair speech and

take no keep] do not care and that ye be in the water] unless you are at sea
hard conduct] dangerous safe-conduct able] sufficient gastfullest]
most frightening credence] message served you unto your hands]
waited on you beseemed] ought saws] words dures] exist

all royalty and riches they fail of none. Therefore, Sir, by my counsel, rear up your liege people and send kings and dukes to look unto your marches, and that the mountains of Almain be mightily kept.'

'By Easter,' said the Emperor, 'I cast me for to pass Almain, and so forth into France, and there bereave him his lands. I shall bring with me many giants of Genoa,* that one of them shall be worth a hundred of knights; and perilous passage shall be surely kept with my good knights.*'

And so Lucius came unto Cologne, and thereby besieges a castle; [3] and won it within a while, and feoffed it with Saracens. And thus Lucius within a while destroyed many fair countries that Arthur had won before of the mighty King Claudas. So this Lucius dispersed abroad his host, sixty miles large, and commanded them to meet with him in Normandy, in the country of Constantine.

'And at Barfleet, there ye me abide; for the Duchy of Brittany, I shall thoroughly destroy it.*'

Now leave we Sir Lucius; and speak we of King Arthur, that commanded all that were under his obedience after the utas of St Hilary that all should be assembled for to hold a parliament at York, within the walls. And there they concluded shortly, to arrest all the ships of this land and within fifteen days to be ready at Sandwich.

'Now, sirs,' said Arthur, 'I purpose me to pass many perilous ways, and to occupy the Empire that my elders before have claimed. Therefore I pray you, counsel me what may be best and most worship.'

The kings and knights gathered them unto counsel, and were condescended for to make two chieftains: that was Sir Baudwin of Britain, an ancient and an honourable knight, for to counsel and comfort Sir Cadōr's son of Cornwall, that was at that time called Sir Constantine, that after was king after Arthur's days.* And there in the presence of all the lords, the King resigned all the rule unto these two lords and Queen Guenivere.

And Sir Tristram at that time left with King Mark of Cornwall for love of La Belle Isode, wherefore Sir Lancelot was passing wroth.*

fail of none] are second to none Almain] Germany cast me] intend
feoffed] peopled Barfleet] Barfleur utas of St Hilary] i.e. 21 January:
the eighth day after St Hilary's Day arrest] commander conde-
scended] agreed

Then Queen Guenivere made great sorrow that the King and all the lords should so be departed, and there she fell down in a swoon; and her ladies bore her to her chamber. Then the King commended them to God and left the Queen in Sir Constantine's and Sir Baudwin's hands, and all England to rule as themselves deemed best.

And when the King was on horseback he said, in hearing of all the lords, 'If that I die in this journey, here make I thee, Sir Constantine, my true heir, for thou art next of my kin save Sir Cador thy father; and therefore, if that I die, I will that ye be crowned king.'

Right so he and his knights sought towards Sandwich, where he found before him many galliard knights; for there were the most part of all the Round Table ready on those banks for to sail when the King liked. Then in all haste that might be, they shipped their horses and harness and all manner of ordinance that falleth for the war.*

Here followeth the dream of King Arthur

[4] As the King was in his cog and lay in his cabin, he fell in a slumbering; and dreamed how a dreadful dragon did drown much of his people, and came flying on wing out of the west parts.* And his head, him seemed, was enamelled with azure, and his shoulders shone as the gold, and his womb was like mail of a marvellous hue; and his tail was full of tatters, and his feet were flourished as it were fine sable, and his claws were like clean gold. And a hideous flame of fire there flowed out of his mouth, like as the land and water had flamed all on fire.

Then him seemed there came out of the Orient a grimly bear all black, in a cloud; and his paws were as big as a post. He was all wrinkled with lowering looks, and he was the foulest beast that ever any man saw. He roamed and roared so rudely that marvel it were to tell. Then the dreadful dragon dressed him against him and came in the wind like a falcon, and freshly strikes the bear. And again the grisly bear cuts with his grisly tusks, that his breast was bloody, and the blood railed all over the sea. Then the worm winds away and flies upon high, and came down with such a sough, and touched the bear on the ridge that from the top to the tail was ten foot large. And so he rends the bear and burns

sought] made their way
cog] ship womb] belly
flowed worm] serpent
galliard] high-spirited
dressed him] prepared for combat
sough] blast of wind
falleth] is required
railed]
ridge] line of the
spine

him up clean, that all fell in powder, both the flesh and the bones; and so it fluttered abroad on the sea.

Anon the King waked of his dream; and in all haste he sent for a philosopher, and charged him to tell what signified his dream.

'Sir,' said the philosopher, 'the dragon thou dreamest of betokens thy own person, that thus here sails with thy sure knights; and the colour of his wings is thy kingdom that thou hast with thy knights won; and his tail that was all tattered signified your noble knights of the Round Table. And the bear that the dragon slew above in the clouds betokens some tyrant that torments thy people; or thou art likely to fight with some giant boldly in battle by thyself alone. Therefore of this dreadful dream dread thee but a little, and care not now, sir conqueror, but comfort thyself.'

Then within a while they had a sight of the banks of Normandy, and at the same tide the King arrived at Barfleet and found there many of his great lords, as he had himself commanded at Christmas before.

Then came there a husbandman out of the country and talked unto the King wonderful words, and said, 'Sir, here is a foul giant of Genoa that tormenteth thy people—more than five hundred, and many more of our children, that hath been his sustenance all these seven winters: Yet is the sot never ceased, but in the country of Constantine he hath killed all our knave children. And this night he hath cleight the Duchess of Brittany as she rode by a river with her rich knights, and led her unto yonder mountain to lie by her while her life lasteth. Many folks followed him, more than five hundred barons and bachelors and knights full noble; but ever she shrieked wonderly loud, that we shall never cure the sorrow of that lady. She was thy cousin's wife, Sir Howell the hend, a man that we call nigh of thy blood.* Now, as thou art our righteous king, rue on this lady and on thy liege people, and revenge us as a noble conqueror should.'

'Alas,' said King Arthur, 'this is a great mischief. I had liever than all the realms I wield unto my crown that I had been before that freke a furlong way for to have rescued that lady, and I would have done my pain. Now, fellow,' said Arthur, 'wouldst thou ken me where that carl dwells? I trow I shall treat with him before I further pass.'

the sot never ceased] the glutton never satisfied knave] boy cleight]
seized bachelors] young knights hend] noble freke] creature
pain] utmost ken] tell carl] churl

'Sir conqueror,' said the good man, 'behold yonder two fires, for there thou shalt find that carl beyond the cold strands. And treasure out of number there mayst thou surely find—more treasure, as I suppose, than is in all France after.'

The King said, 'Good man, peace, and carp to me no more. Thy sooth saws have grieved sore my heart.' Then he turned towards his tents, and carped but little.

Then the King said unto Sir Kay in counsel, and to Sir Bedivere* the bold thus said he: 'Look that ye two after evensong be surely armed, and your best horses, for I will ride on pilgrimage privily, and none but we three. And when my lords are served, we will ride to St Michael's Mount, where marvels are showed.'

Anon Sir Arthur went to his wardrobe and cast on his armour, both his jesseraunt and his basinet with his broad shield. And so he busked him to his steed that on the bent hoved; then he started up aloft and hent the bridle, and stirred him stoutly. And soon he found his two knights full cleanly arrayed; and then they trotted on stilly together over a blithe country full of many merry birds. And when they came to the foreland, Arthur and they alit on foot.

'Now fasten,' said Arthur, 'our horses, that none nigh other; for I will seek this saint by myself alone, and speak with this master man that keeps this mountain.'

Then the King yode up to the crest of the crag; and then he comforted himself with the cold wind. And then he yode forth by two well-streams, and there he found two fires flaming full high; and at the one fire he found a careful widow wringing her hands, sitting on a grave that was new marked. Then Arthur saluted her, and she him again, and asked her why she sat sorrowing.

'Alas,' she said, 'careful knight, thou carps overloud. Yonder is a warlock will destroy us both: I hold thee unhappy! What dost thou on this mountain? Though here were fifty such, ye were too feeble for to match him all at once. Whereto bears thou armour? It may thee little avail, for he needs no other weapon but his bare fist. Here is a duchess dead, the fairest that lived. He hath murdered that mild without any

carp] speak
and helmet
grass
can get near
mild] sweet lady
in counsel] privately
busked] hastened
hent] seized
careful] sorrowful
jesseraunt and his basinet] mailcoat
on the bent hoved] wandered over the
stilly] quietly
that none nigh] so that none
carps overloud] speak too loudly

mercy: he forced her by filth of himself, and so after slit her unto the navel.'

'Dame,' said the King, 'I am come from the conqueror Sir Arthur, for to treat with that tyrant for his liege people.'

'Fie on such treaties!' she said then, 'for he sets nought by the King, nor by no man else. But and thou have brought Arthur's wife, Dame Guenivere, he will be more blither of her than thou hadst given him half France. And but if thou have brought her, press him not too nigh. Look what he hath done unto fifteen kings: he hath made him a coat full of precious stones, and the borders thereof is the beards of fifteen kings, and they were of the greatest blood that dured on earth. This present was sent him this last Christmas—they sent him in faith for saving of their people. And for Arthur's wife he lodges him here, for he hath more treasure than ever had Arthur or any of his elders. And now thou shalt find him at supper with six knave children, and there he hath made pickle and powder with many precious wines, and three fair maidens that turns the broach that bide to go to his bed, for they three shall be dead within four hours or the filth is fulfilled that his flesh asks.'

'Well,' said Arthur, 'I will fulfil my message, for all your grim words.'

'Then fare thou to yonder fire that flames so high, and there thou shalt find him surely, for sooth.'

Then he passed forth to the crest of the hill, and saw where he sat at his supper alone, gnawing on a limb of a large man; and there he baked his broad loins by the bright fire, and breeches-less he seemed. And three damsels turned three broaches, and thereon were twelve children but lately born; and they were broached in manner like birds. When the King beheld that sight, his heart was nigh bleeding for sorrow. Then he hailed him with angerful words:

'Now He that all wiolds, give thee sorrow, thief, where thou sittest! For thou art the foulest freke that ever was formed, and fiendly thou feedest thee, the devil have thy soul! And by what cause, thou carl, hast thou killed these Christian children? Thou hast made many martyrs by murdering in these lands; therefore thou shalt have thy meed, through Michael that owneth this mount. And also, why hast thou

dured] existed
broach] spit
meed] reward
at supper with six knave children] supping on six boys
or the filth is fulfilled... flesh asks] before his foul sexual requirements are satisfied
baked] i.e. warmed
freke] creature

slain this fair duchess? Therefore dress thee, dog's son, for thou shalt die this day through the dint of my hands.'

Then the glutton glared, and grieved full foul. He had teeth like a greyhound; he was the foulest wight that ever man saw, and there was never such one formed on earth, for there was never devil in hell more horribly made, for he was from the head to the foot five fathom long and large. And therewith sturdily he started up on his legs, and caught a club in his hand all of clean iron. Then he swapped at the King with that kid weapon; he crushed down with the club the coronet down to the cold earth. The King covered himself with his shield and reached a box even-informed in the midst of his forehead, that the slipped blade reached unto the brain. Yet he shaped at Sir Arthur, but the King shunted a little and reached him a dint high upon the haunch, and there he swapped his genitals asunder. Then he roared and brayed, and yet angerly he struck, and failed of Sir Arthur and hit the earth, that he cut into the swarf a large sword-length and more. Then the King started up unto him and reached him a buffet and cut his belly asunder, that out went the gore that the grass and the ground was become all foul. Then he cast away the club and caught the King in his arms, and handled the King so hard that he crushed his ribs. Then the baleful maidens wrung their hands, and kneeled on the ground and called to Christ. With that the warlock writhed Arthur under, and so they weltered and tumbled over the crags and bushes, and either clenched other full fast in their arms. And other whiles King Arthur was above and other whiles under; and so they never left till they fell there as the flood marked. But ever in the weltering, Arthur hit him with a short dagger up to the hilts, and in his falling there brast of the giant's ribs three even at once; and by fortune they fell there as the two knights abode with their horses.

When Sir Kay saw the King and the giant so clenched together, 'Alas,' said Sir Kay, 'we are forfeit for ever! Yonder is our overlord, overfallen with a fiend.'

'It is not so,' said the King, 'but help me, Sir Kay, for this corsaint* have I clegged out of the yonder cloughs.'

dress thee] prepare yourself for combat wight] creature five fathom]
i.e. thirty feet (ten metres) clean] solid swapped] struck kid]
notorious reached a box even-informed] aimed a well-directed blow
slipped] moving shaped] aimed a blow shunted] dodged swarf]
earth baleful] wretched forfeit] lost overfallen with] over-
whelmed by this corsaint cloughs] I have seized this saint's body from the
ravines up there

'In faith,' said Sir Bedivere, 'this is a foul carl,' and caught the corsaint out of the King's arms; and there he said, 'I have much wonder, and Michael be of such making, that ever God would suffer him to abide in Heaven! And if saints be such that servè Jesu, I will never seek for none, by the faith of my body.'

The King then laughed at Bedivere's words and said, 'This saint have I sought nigh unto my great danger. But strike off his head and set it on a truncheon of a spear, and give it to thy servant that is swift-horsed and bear it unto Sir Howell that is in hard bonds; and bid him be merry, for his enemy is destroyed. And after, in Barfleet, let brace it on a barbican, that all the commons of this country may behold it.*'

Then the King and they started upon their horses; and so they rode from thence there as they came from. And anon the clamour was huge about all the country; and then they went with one voice before the King, and thanked God and him that their enemy was destroyed.

'All thank ye God,' said Arthur, 'and no man else.*'

Then he commanded his cousin, Sir Howell, to make a church on that same crag in the worship of St Michael.

[Arthur and his forces leave Barfleet and engage in various skirmishes with the Emperor's supporters, culminating in a great battle against Lucius himself in which Lancelot, Gawain, Kay, Cador, and many others notably distinguish themselves, Arthur himself kills Lucius in hand-to-hand combat, and a hundred thousand of their enemies are killed.]

Then the King rode straight there as the Emperor lay, and gart lift [8] him up lordly with barons full bold. And the Sultan of Syria and the King of Ethiopia, and two knights full noble of Egypt and of India, with seventeen other kings were taken up also; and also sixty senators of Rome that were honoured full noble men, and all the elders. The King let embalm all these with many good gums, and sithen let lap them in sixtyfold of sendal large, and then let lap them in lead that

let brace it on a barbican] have it set over a gate of the city gart lift him up
lordly] caused him to be carried like a lord let lap them in sixtyfold of sendal
large] had them wrapped sixty times round in broad silk

for chafing or changing they should never savour; and sithen let close them in chests full cleanly arrayed, and their banners above on their bodies and their shields turned upwards, that every man might know of what country they were.

So on the morn they found in the heath three senators of Rome. When they were brought to the King, he said these words:

'Now to save your lives I take no great force, with that ye will move on my message unto great Rome and present these corpses unto the proud Potentate, and after them my letters and my whole intent. And tell them in haste they shall see me, and I trow they will beware how they bourde with me and my knights.'

Then the Emperor himself was dressed in a chariot, and every two knights in a chariot sued after other, and the senators came after by couples in accord.

'Now say ye to the Potentate and all the lords after, that I send them the tribute that I owe to Rome; for this is the true tribute that I and mine elders have lost these ten score winters. And say them as me seems I have sent them the whole sum; and if they think it not enough, I shall amend it when that I come.'

So on the morrow these senators raked unto Rome; and within eighteen days they came to the Potentate and told him how they had brought the tax and the truage of ten score winters, both of England, Ireland, and of all the East lands. 'For King Arthur commands you, neither tribute nor tax ye never none ask, upon pain of your heads, but if your title be the truer than ever any of your elders owned. And for these causes we have fought in France, and there us is foul happed; for all is chopped to the death, both the better and the worse. Therefore I rede you, store you with stuff, for war is at hand.'*

[9] Now turn we to Arthur and his noble knights, that entered straight into Luxemburg; and so through Flanders and then to Lorraine he laught up all the lordships, and sithen he drew him into Almain and unto Lombardy the rich, and set laws in that land that endured long after; and so into Tuscany, and there destroyed the tyrants. And there

for chafing or changing] because of abrasion of the silk or corruption of the corpses
I take no great force . . . my message] I have little concern, unless you bear my
message bourde] jest sued] followed raked] went us is
foul happed] evil has befallen us laught up] seized

were captains full keen that kept Arthur's coming, and at strait passages slew much of his people. And there they victualled and garnished many good towns.*

But soon after, on a Saturday, sought unto King Arthur all the senators [12] that were alive, and of the cunningest cardinals that dwelled in the court; and prayed him of peace and proffered him full large; and besought him as a sovereign, most governor under God, for to give them licence for six weeks large that they might be assembled all, and then in the city of Syon that is called Rome to crown him there kindly with chrismed hands, with sceptre for sooth as an emperor should.

'I assent me,' said the King, 'as ye have devised, and comely by Christmas to be crowned; hereafter to reign in my estate and to keep my Round Table, with the rents of Rome to rule as me likes; and then, as I am advised, to get me over the salt sea with good men of arms, to deem for His death that for us all on the Rood died.'*

When the senators had this answer, unto Rome they turned and made ready for his crowning in the most noble wise; and at the day assigned, as the romance tells,* he was crowned Emperor by the Pope's hands, with all the royalty in the world to wield for ever. There they sojourned that season till after the time and established all the lands from Rome unto France, and gave lands and rents unto knights that had them well deserved: there was none that complained on his part, rich nor poor.

Then he commanded Sir Lancelot and Sir Bors to take keep unto their fathers' lands that King Ban and King Bors wielded, and their fathers: 'Look that ye take seisin in all your broad lands and cause your liege men to know you as for their kind lord; and suffer never your sovereignty to be alledged with your subjects, nor the sovereignty of your person and lands. Also, the mighty King Claudas I give you for to part betwixt you even,* for to maintain your kindred that be noble knights, so that ye and they to the Round Table make your repair.'

Sir Lancelot and Sir Bors de Ganis thanked the King fair, and said their hearts and service should ever be his own.* Thus the King gave

kept] resisted strait passages] narrow ways cunningest] most learned
proffered him full large] made generous offers kindly with chrismed hands]
fittingly, with hands anointed with holy oil deem for] acknowledge
Rood] Cross seisin] possession alledged with] reduced by

many lands; there was none that would ask that might complain of his part, for of riches and wealth they had all at their will.

Then the knights and lords that longed to the King called a council upon a fair morn, and said, 'Sir King, we beseech thee for to hear us all. We are under your lordship well stuffed, blessed be God, of many things, and also we have wives wedded. We will beseech your good grace to release us to sport with our wives, for, worshipped be Christ, this journey is well overcome.'

'Ye say well,' said the King, 'for enough is as good as a feast; for to tempt God overmuch, I hold it not wisdom. And therefore make you all ready, and return we into England.'

Then there was trussing of harness with carriage full noble. And the King took his leave of the Holy Father the Pope, and patriarchs and cardinals and senators full rich, and left good governance in that noble city and all the countries of Rome for to ward and to keep on pain of death, that in no wise his commandment be broken. Thus he passeth through the countries of all parts; and so King Arthur passed over the sea unto Sandwich haven.

When Queen Guenivere heard of his coming, she met with him at London, and so did all other queens and noble ladies. For there was never a solemner meeting in one city together, for all manner of riches they brought with them at the full.

Here endeth the tale of the noble King Arthur that was emperor himself through the dignity of his hands; and here followeth after many noble tales of Sir Lancelot du Lake.

Explicit the noble tale betwixt King Arthur and Lucius the Emperor of Rome.

stuffed] provided
of war-gear

trussing of harness with carriage] packing up and transport
of war-gear

A NOBLE TALE OF SIR LANCELOT DU LAKE

Soon after that King Arthur was come from Rome into England, then all the knights of the Table Round resorted unto the King and made many jousts and tournaments. And some there were, that were but knights, increased in arms and worship that passed all other of their fellows in prowess and noble deeds, and that was well proved on many. But in especial it was proved on Sir Lancelot du Lake, for in all tournaments, jousts, and deeds of arms, both for life and death, he passed all other knights; and at no time was he overcome but if it were by treason or enchantment. So this Sir Lancelot increased so marvellously in worship and honour: therefore he is the first knight that the French book maketh mention of after King Arthur came from Rome. Wherefore Queen Guenivere had him in great favour above all other knights, and so he loved the Queen again above all other ladies days of his life, and for her he did many deeds of arms, and saved her from the fire through his noble chivalry.

Thus Sir Lancelot rested him long with play and game; and then he thought to prove himself in strange adventures, and bade his nephew, Sir Lionel, for to make him ready, 'for we must go seek adventures.' So they mounted on their horses, armed at all rights, and rode into a deep forest and so into a plain.

So the weather was hot about noon, and Sir Lancelot had great lust to sleep. Then Sir Lionel espied a great apple tree that stood by a hedge, and said, 'Sir, yonder is a fair shadow; there may we rest us and our horses.'

'It is truth,' said Sir Lancelot, 'for these seven years I was not so sleepy as I am now.'

So there they alit and tied their horses unto sundry trees, and Sir Lancelot laid him down under this apple tree, and his helmet under his head. And Sir Lionel waked while he slept.

So Sir Lancelot slept passing fast; and in the meanwhile came there three knights riding, as fast fleeing as they might ride, and there followed them three but one knight. And when Sir Lionel saw him, he thought he saw never so great a knight, nor so well-faring a man and

[VI.1]

- 53 *milk my kine . . . half by force he had my maidenhood*: Andreas Capellanus, in his late-twelfth-century treatise on love, notoriously recommended the use of a modicum of force to overcome a peasant girl's modesty. The figure in such stories in French is commonly a shepherdess; that she should be a milkmaid is a distinctively English variation, which makes its first recorded appearance here. Later versions of the motif include the lyric 'Hey trolly lolly lo, maid, whither go you?'; from the court of Henry VIII, and the nursery rhyme (bowdlerized from an earlier ballad), 'Where are you going to, my pretty maid?—I'm going a milking, sir, she said.'
- 55 *bring again the white hart*: Tor and Pellinore are also given charges to recover the brachet and the lady. The adventures of Gawain that follow are framed by two further encounters omitted here. Winchester erroneously omits Gawain's release of the greyhounds at the start of chapter 7; this is supplied from Caxton.
- 57 *this endeth the adventure of Sir Gawain . . . at the marriage of Arthur*: this injunction to Gawain has little consequence in the rest of Malory's work until Arthur's vision of the dead Gawain at the very end (XXI.3), though it bears an obvious relation to the reputation of the French Gawain as a ladies' man and a less obvious relationship to the English Gawain's reputation as the exemplar of courtesy. The adventures of Tor and Pellinore, omitted here, interpose at this point between Gawain's return and the oath of knighthood.

both old and young: the oath sworn by the knights of the Round Table is closely similar to the charge given the new knights in the fifteenth-century ceremonial for creating knights of the Order of the Bath. The 'certain points that longeth unto this high and worshipful order of knighthood' there include, after injunctions to be faithful to God and the king: 'Ye shall sustain widows in their right at every time they will require you, and maidens in their virginity, and help them and soccour them with your goods . . . Also ye shall sit in no place where that any judgement should be given wrongfully against anybody to your knowledge. Also ye shall not suffer no murderers nor extortioners of the king's people in the country where ye dwell, but with your power ye shall let do take them [have them captured] and put them into the hands of justice.' (From Viscount Dillon, 'A Manuscript Collection of Ordinances of Chivalry of the Fifteenth Century', *Archaeologia*, 57:1 (1900), 27-70 (67-8).)

Of Neneve and Morgan le Fay

There is no heading in the manuscript, although this section starts a new folio after a gap of half a page; and the explicit at the end concludes the whole series of episodes so far. Caxton's summary runs, 'How Merlin was besotted, and of war made to King Arthur', which covers only the first three of his twenty-nine chapters. The present heading is editorial, based on the main events of the abbreviated narrative given here.

- 59 *he was a devil's son*: according to the story first recounted by Geoffrey of

- Monmouth in his *History of the Kings of Britain*, Merlin was the son of an incubus (a devil who copulates with mortal women in their sleep).
- 60 *rode long in a forest*: short omission.
- 65 *he drew blood on Arthur*: it is very hard to make a knight appear heroic when he has supernatural help. That Arthur is given Excalibur marks him out as special; that he should prove his heroism fighting against the magic sword with nothing but his own courage and strength proves his prowess as no magic could. The wonder that one expects to attach to the supernatural is therefore transferred to Arthur himself.
- 69 *a palfrey . . . a courser*: a palfrey is a horse used for recreational riding; a courser is a war-horse.
- 72 *now may we go where we will*: Morgan's capture of a knight named Manessen is omitted.
- 74 *Gawain and Uwain decide to go separate ways*: Malory provides a larger frame story for the episode that follows. Gawain and Uwain meet up with Sir Marhalt, and the three of them find three damosels, of 60, 30, and 15 years of age. They decide to separate to seek adventures, each accompanied by one of the damosels (Gawain, to his delight, gets the 'youngest and the fairest'), and to meet again in a year and a day. The damosels play little part in the adventures: Malory recounts Marhalt's and Uwain's adventures, which follow Gawain's, more perfunctorily than his; I give only Gawain's. [19/20]: Caxton's numbering gets confused at chapters 18/19; this chapter is accordingly numbered 19 or 20 in different editions, and so on to the end of Caxton's Book IV.
- 75 *he maketh no resistance*: a short interruption to the main narrative is omitted here.
- 80 *so it rehearseth in the book of the French*: there follow a few sentences of somewhat misleading summary of later events.
- 81 *That God send him good recovery, amen!*: this is the first mention of Malory's being a prisoner. The invitation to the reader to seek further adventures in other books suggests that Malory started with this part of the work and without any intention of continuing; but his chronological cross-referencing to Lancelot and Tristram would seem to indicate that he already had the structure of the whole work in mind, as the *Suite du Merlin* does not contain such a reference.

THE NOBLE TALE BETWIXT KING ARTHUR AND LUCIUS THE EMPEROR OF ROME

The title is taken from the colophon at the end of the section, p. 94. Malory is here using an English source, the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, composed c. 1400; his version still preserves many of the alliterating lines—see note to p. 86 below. The poem survives in a single manuscript, in which Arthur's epitaph, in the same form that Malory gives, is copied immediately following the end of the poem itself; but Malory appears to have been working from a different copy,

since his version incorporates some alliterative lines not found in the extant manuscript. The dialect in which the poem is written is both earlier and more northern than Malory's own, and it incorporates a good deal of specialist alliterative vocabulary. As Malory's rewriting preserves many of these features, this section requires heavier glossing than the rest of his text, and modernization presents particular problems. I have modernized word order on a handful of occasions where the original presents particular difficulty, and more rarely excised a phrase where the meaning is especially obscure.

Caxton's print offers a rather different version of this section, substantially shorter than the one given in the manuscript. He may himself have rewritten Malory's text; or he may have had a copy that was already substantially abbreviated, possibly even a revision made by Malory himself. The version I give here is also much abbreviated, but by cutting whole sections rather than through the sentence-by-sentence slimming that characterizes Caxton.

Although chapter numbers are given as a rough finding guide, the wide differences between the texts of the manuscript and the print make them less precisely helpful here than elsewhere.

83 *Helena's son of England was Emperor of Rome*: Geoffrey of Monmouth had popularized an earlier legend that Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine and supposed finder of the True Cross, was British by birth. The capture of Rome by Belinus and Brennius ('Sir Beline and Sir Brine') is largely Geoffrey's invention.

we have evidence enough to the empire of whole Rome: Arthur's other counselors advise him similarly (omitted here). That he consults his knights before taking action marks his rule as good kingship rather than tyranny.

83-4 *Watling Street*: the Roman road (reputedly built by Belinus) from the Channel ports to the upper Severn, much of it now the A2 and A5.

85 *many giants of Genoa*: the association of giants with Genoa probably has less to do with folklore than with the demands of alliteration, j- initial sounds being comparatively scarce in English.

with my good knights: the Emperor's assembly of his forces is omitted.

I shall thoroughly destroy it: the Emperor's further plans are omitted.

Sir Constantine, that after was king after Arthur's days: the story followed by the alliterative *Morte* is that of the historical tradition based on Geoffrey of Monmouth, in which Mordred is made regent in Arthur's absence; Malory, following the romance tradition, holds over the making of Mordred regent until the war against Lancelot. It is therefore Malory himself who substitutes Baudwin and Constantine at this point, but it is curious that he does so with what looks like a retained alliterative line: 'For to counsel and comfort Sir Cador's son of Cornwall.'

Sir Lancelot was passing wroth: this is one of the most striking of Malory's cross-referencing interpolations that offer parallel chronologies for the various stories he tells: see X. 22 (pp. 238-9).

86 *that falleth for the war*: some details of the embarkation are omitted.

flying on wing out of the west parts: compare the passage in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* on which this is based:

The king was in a grete cogge with knightes full many,
In a cabane enclosed, clenlich arrayed;
Within on a rich bed restes a little,
And with the swogh of the se in swefning he fell.
Him dremed of a dragon, dredful to behold,
Come drivand over the deep to drenchen his pople,
Even walkand out of the West landes.

87 *nigh of thy blood*: Malory follows the tradition that identifies Howell, or Hoel, as son of a sister of Uther Pendragon, therefore Arthur's cousin. Geoffrey of Monmouth describes him as Arthur's nephew.

88 *Sir Bedivere*: in this section, and occasionally elsewhere, the name is spelt 'Bedwere'; I have standardized to 'Bedivere' as that is Malory's (or the scribe's) preferred form at the end of the work, where he appears in his most famous episode of throwing Excalibur into the lake.

90 *this corsaint*: Arthur is joking that the giant is St Michael himself, patron saint of St Michael's Mount; a 'corsaint' (*corps saint*, holy body) is a saint's body or relics such as might be worshipped at a shrine.

91 *all the commons of this country may behold it*: the heads of malefactors were commonly displayed above city gates. Two short passages of further instructions relating to the giant's treasure are omitted.

thank ye God . . . and no man else: compare Henry V's instruction after the battle of Agincourt, some fifty years before Malory was writing, to give the glory to God alone.

92 *war is at hand*: a short summary of the defeat is omitted.

93 *many good towns*: an episode follows in which Gawain overcomes a pagan knight named Sir Priamus. Priamus assists Arthur's knights in a skirmish, and after being christened is made a knight of the Round Table.

that for us all on the Rood died: Arthur may be announcing his intention to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, or, more likely in view of his intention of taking 'good men of arms' with him, to go on crusade to recover the Holy Land for the Christians, as the last survivors of the Round Table do after the deaths of Arthur and Lancelot. If a 'historical' Arthur of the fifth or sixth century had gone to Palestine, however, he would have found that it was part of the Christian Byzantine Empire. The need for a crusade was an urgent issue in Malory's time, but in order to attempt to stem the Turkish advance across the Mediterranean rather than to reconquer the Holy Land.

as the romance tells: the romance in fact tells nothing of the sort: in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, as in Geoffrey of Monmouth, Arthur is recalled by the news of Mordred's usurpation before he is crowned (a sequence of events that helps to avoid the issue of why Arthur does not appear as emperor in histories of the Roman Empire). The only other text to have

Arthur crowned as emperor is John Hardyng's metrical *Chronicle*, composed just before Malory was writing and which he could possibly have known.

93 *to part betwixt you even*: i.e. they are to take possession of him as prisoner and divide equally between them the ransom paid for his release.

ever be his own: Sir Priamus is also rewarded, with the duchy of Lorraine; see the first note to p. 93 above.

A NOBLE TALE OF SIR LANCELOT DU LAKE

The title is taken from the explicit to the tale. Sir Lancelot has as yet played little part in the work, but from this point forwards he takes over from Arthur as its hero. His adventures were told at the greatest length in the *Lancelot* section of the French prose Vulgate Cycle, where it is his love for Guenivere that is the primary focus of interest. Malory here selects just three short episodes from this, and those show him in a chivalric rather than an amatory light; Lancelot's insistence that knights errant should not love *par amours* is Malory's own addition, and is typical of his shift of emphasis in his own version from sexual love to knightliness. The repeated accusations that he does indeed love Guenivere, however, both give substance to the reader's own foreknowledge of the story and foreshadow its later development.

The three episodes occur at a late point in the original, after the moment when Lancelot rides in a cart to rescue Guenivere; Malory does not recount this episode until near the end of his own work, after the Grail Quest (XIX.1-9). A few passages bear close verbal resemblances to another French romance, the non-Vulgate *Perlesvaus*.

99 *an abbey of white monks*: i.e. Cistercian monks, who wore white habits. This is the monastic order most frequently cited in the French Vulgate Cycle, especially in the *Quest of the Holy Grail*: see note to p. 321 below.

112 *lodged together in one bed*: it was normal practice to share beds in the Middle Ages; illustrations of hospitals show even the sick lying two to a bed. In fourteenth-century France a member of a sect that required him to get up in the middle of the night to pray was required by his fellow-travellers to sleep on the outside of the communal bed in the inns where they stayed, so that he would disturb them less. The richest or highest ranking might sleep alone if they chose, but the 'old gentlewoman' seems not to have the wealth to offer such a luxury.

departed and thanked his host: an encounter between Lancelot and three knights is omitted, as is their arrival at court at the end of the book (p. 118).

114 *many fair rich shields turned upside down*: the implication is that the knights have been overcome and killed, and their reputations dishonoured: displaying a shield upside down is an insult to the bearer of the arms it carries.

116 *the fair Périgord falcon*: both Winchester and Caxton read 'falcon Perigot', which suggests a resistance to the obvious easy correction 'peregrine'.

'Périgord' (the area around Périgueux, in the Dordogne) seems a reasonable guess, though it does not seem to have been particularly noted for its falcons. Perigot could be a proper name, but no other animal is given a name by Malory—not even the horses, which are often named in other romances.

118 *he had escaped that hard adventure*: there follows an incident in which Sir Lancelot fails to save a lady from her jealous husband, named Sir Pedivere.

THE TALE OF SIR GARETH OF ORKNEY

The heading is taken from the colophon. Malory's source for this section is unknown, though there are a number of analogues in both French and English; it is possible that he made it up himself on the model of these. One such analogue in French that he certainly knew, since he includes it later in his own work, is the story of the young knight nicknamed La Cote Mal Taillé, 'the ill-fitting coat', which occurs in the course of the prose *Tristan*; because of its similarity to the story of Gareth, and because it forms a largely self-contained digression within the *Tristram*, it has become one of the victims of abbreviation in this edition. An English metrical romance based on a French original, entitled *Lybeaus Desconus*—'le bel inconnu', the fair unknown—tells a somewhat similar story, this time about Gawain's son Gingalin. Another English romance, *Ipomadon*, has its unrecognized hero travel and fight in the company of a scornful damosel, and makes much of its hero's fighting in a tournament in different colours of armour. The attractive portrayal of Gawain up until the very end of the tale argues for an English source, whether a lost romance or Malory himself.

120 *the fairest hands that ever man saw*: the fair hands are an indication of his true nature, since they are a sign of someone not used to manual labour. Sir Kay nicknames the young man more truly than he knows.

121 *fostered up in some abbey . . . and hither he is come for his sustenance*: the association of monasteries with good food is a recurrent item of medieval satire; Chaucer's Monk is another example. The speech as given here summarizes an original conversation that makes reference to the similar story of La Cote Mal Taillé.

126 *set him at a side board, and set himself before him*: as distinguished visitors, Gareth and the damosel would normally be seated with their host at the high table on the dais. When the damosel objects to Beaumains' being placed above her—that is, given precedence of honour in the order of seating—the knight moves himself as well as Beaumains to one of the lower tables, so acceding to her wishes without dishonouring his other guest.

132 *the good knight Sir Lamorak*: Sir Lamorak is to be one of the key characters of the *Book of Sir Tristram*, and of the working out of the whole history of the Round Table; it is significant that the first thing that we should be told about his actions (his existence was earlier mentioned, with approval, by Merlin in I.24) is that he is a 'good knight'. His introduction here marks