

ARTHUR  
KING of BRITAIN

*History, Chronicle, Romance & Criticism*

WITH TEXTS IN MODERN ENGLISH, FROM GILDAS TO MALORY

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## GILDAS

### *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (c. 540)

Translated by the editor from the Latin text in E. K. Chambers,  
*Arthur of Britain* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd., 1927).

#### From CHAPTER 25:

And thus some of the wretched remnants [of the Britons], caught in the mountains, were slaughtered in large numbers; others, weakened by hunger, came forward and surrendered to their enemies [the Saxons] to be slaves forever, if for all that they were not immediately cut to pieces, which was the greatest kindness that remained to them; others went to lands across the sea with loud lamentation, just as if in the manner of the chief oarsman intoning in this way under the billows of the sails: "Thou hast made us like sheep for slaughter, and hast scattered us among the nations" [Psalms 44:11]; others, entrusting life always with suspicious mind to the mountainous country, overhanging hills, steep fortified places, densest forests, and sea caverns, stood firm on their native soil, although in a state of fear. Then, some time intervening, when these most cruel plunderers [Æt] had gone back home, under the leader Ambrosius Aurelianus, a moderate man, who by chance alone of the Roman nation had survived in the shock of so great a calamity—his parents, undoubtedly of royal rank, having perished in the same disaster, his progeny today having very much degenerated from the excellence of their ancestors—[the remnants of the Britons] gained strength and challenging the conquerors to battle, by God's favor the victory fell to them.

## From CHAPTER 26:

Since that period, at one time our countrymen, at another the enemy, were victorious . . . up to the year of the besieging of Mount Badon, when almost the last but not the least slaughter of these hangdogs took place, and which, as I know, begins the forty-fourth year (one month having passed already), which is also the year of my birth.<sup>[287]</sup>

## BEDE

*Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*  
(731)

Translated by the editor from the Latin text in E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd., 1927).

## From BOOK I, CHAPTER 16:

They [the Britons] had at that time for their leader Ambrosius Aurelianus, a moderate man, who by chance alone of the Roman nation had survived the previously mentioned calamity, his parents, bearing the name and insignia of kings, having perished in the same disaster. Therefore, with this leader, the Britons took up arms, and challenging the [Saxon] conquerors to battle, by God's favoring themselves attained the victory. And since that period, at one time our countrymen, at another the enemy, were

victorious, up to the year of the besieging of Mount Badon, when they gave these enemies no less slaughter, about forty-four years after their arrival in Britain.<sup>[288]</sup>

## NENNIVS

*Historia Brittonum* (c. 800)

Translated by the editor from the Latin text in E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd., 1927).

## From CHAPTER 56:

At that time the Saxons grew powerful in great numbers and increased in Britain. But now that Hengist was dead, his son Otha crossed over from the left side of Britain to the kingdom of the Kentishmen, and from him are sprung the kings of the Kentishmen. Then Arthur fought against them [the Saxons] in those days together with the kings of Britain, but he was himself the leader of battles. The first battle was [288] at the mouth of the river which is called Glein; the second, third, fourth, and fifth on another river, which is called Dubglas and is in the region of Linnuis; the sixth battle on a river which is called Bassas. The seventh was the battle in the wood of Cellidon, that is Cat Coit Cellidon. The eighth was the battle at the castle Guinnion, in which Arthur carried the image of Saint Mary, the perpetual Virgin, on his shoulders and the pagans were put to flight on that day, and there was great slaughter of them by the virtue of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and by the virtue of Saint Mary the Virgin, His Mother.

The ninth battle was fought in the city of the Legion. The tenth battle he fought on the shore of the river, which is called Tybruit. The eleventh was the battle waged on the mountain, which is called Agned. The twelfth was the battle at Mount Badon, in which on one day nine hundred and sixty men fell to the ground during one onset of Arthur; and no one overthrew them save himself alone, and in all the battles he emerged the victor. [2381]

### From CHAPTER 73:

There is another marvelous thing in the region which is called Buelt. There is at that place a pile of stones and one stone placed over and above this heap with the footprint of a dog on it. When he was hunting the boar Troynt, Cabal, who was the dog of Arthur [2391] the soldier, impressed his footprint on the stone, and Arthur afterwards gathered together a pile of stones under the one on which was the footprint of his dog, and it is called Carn Cabal. And men come and carry the stone away in their hands for the space of a day and a night, and on the next day it is found back on its pile.

There is another marvel in the region which is called Erving. There is found at that place a tomb near a fountain, which is called Licat Anir, and the name of the man who is buried in the sepulchral mound was thus designated Anir. He was the son of Arthur the soldier, and he was the one who killed him in the same place and buried him. And men come to measure the sepulchral mound, sometimes six, sometimes nine, sometimes twelve, sometimes fifteen feet in length. Whatever way you measure it in alteration, the second time you will not find its measurement the same, and I have tested it myself. [2401]

## “ANNALLES CAMBRIAE” (c. 950)

### Three entries

Translated by the editor from the Latin text in E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd., 1927).

- Year [516] The Battle of Badon, in which Arthur carried the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ on his shoulders for three days and three nights, and the Britons were victorious. . . .
- Year [537] The Battle of Camlann, in which Arthur and Medraut fell; and there was death in Britain and in Ireland. . . .
- Year [570] Gildas died. [241]

## WILLIAM OF MALMESBURY

### *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (c. 1125)

Translated by the editor from the Latin text in E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd., 1927).

### From BOOK I:

But when he [Vortimer, son of Vortigern] died, the strength of the Britons dwindled away, hopes diminishing and fleet-

ing; and indeed they would have then immediately perished had not Ambrosius—alone of the Romans<sup>[240]</sup> surviving, who reigned as king after Vortigern—overpowered the presumptuous barbarians with the distinguished service of the warlike Arthur. This is the Arthur about whom the trifles of the Britons\* rave even now, one certainly not to be dreamed of in false myths, but proclaimed in truthful histories—indeed, who for a long time held up his tottering fatherland, and kindled the broken spirits of his countrymen to war. At last, at the siege of Mount Badon, trusting in the image of our Lord's Mother which he had sewn on his armor, rising alone against nine hundred of the enemy he dashed them to the ground with incredible slaughter.<sup>[250]</sup>

### From BOOK III:

At that time [c. 1066-1087], in a province of Wales which is called Ros, was found the tomb of Walwen, who was not unworthy of Arthur—a nephew through his sister. He reigned in that part of Britain which is still called Walweitha, a soldier highly celebrated for his deeds of bravery, but who was driven from the kingdom by the brother and nephew of Hengist (of whom I have spoken in my first book), first making them pay dearly for his banishment. He deservedly shared in his uncle's praising, because he prevented the fall of his collapsing country for many years. But the tomb of Arthur is nowhere seen, whence ancient dirges still fable his coming. Yet the sepulchre of the other, as I said before, was found above the seacoast in the time of King William, fourteen feet long. There, as certain people claim, he [Walwen] was wounded by his enemies, and cast forth from a shipwreck; by others it is said that he was killed by his fellow citizens at a public feast. Therefore, knowledge of the truth falls in doubt, although neither of these stories would fail as a defense of his fame.<sup>[250]</sup>

\* Britons. The Latin text reads *Britonum*, "of the Britons," but by the twelfth century when William of Malmesbury was writing the word always meant the Britons of Armorica or Brittany in France, not the insular Roman Britons, Welsh, or Cornish. *Editor's note.*

## GIRALDUS CAMBRENSIS

### *De Principis Instructione* (c. 1195)

From *The Autobiography of Giraldus Cambrensis*, ed. and trans. H. E. Butler (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937).

Now the body of King Arthur, which legend has feigned to have been transferred at his passing, as it were in ghostly form, by spirits to a distant place and to have been exempt from death, was found in these our days at Glastonbury deep down in earth and encased in a hollow oak between two stone pyramids erected long ago in the consecrated graveyard, the site being revealed by strange and almost miraculous signs; and it was afterwards transported with honour to the Church and decently consigned to a marble tomb. Now in the grave there was found a cross of lead, placed under a stone and not above it, as is now customary, but fixed on the lower side. This cross I myself have seen; for I have felt the letters engraved thereon, which do not project or stand out, but are turned inwards toward the stone. They run as follows.

HERE LIES BURIED THE RENOWNED KING ARTHUR  
WITH GUENEVERE HIS SECOND WIFE  
IN THE ISLE OF AVALON

Now in regard to this there are many things worthy of note. For he had two wives, the last of whom was buried with him, and her bones were found together with his, but separated from them as thus; two parts of the tomb, to wit, the head, were allotted to the bones of the man, while the remaining third towards the foot contained [119] the bones of the woman in a place apart; and there

was found a yellow tress of woman's hair still retaining its colour and its freshness; but when a certain monk snatched it and lifted it with greedy hand, it straightway all of it fell into dust. Now whereas there were certain indications in their writings that the body would be found there, and others in the letters engraven upon the pyramids, though they were much defaced by their extreme age, and others again were given in visions and revelations vouchsafed to good men and religious, yet it was above all King Henry II of England that most clearly informed the monks, as he had heard from an ancient Welsh bard, a singer of the past, that they would find the body at least sixteen feet beneath the earth, not in a tomb of stone, but in a hollow oak. And this is the reason why the body was placed so deep and hidden away, to wit, that it might not by any means be discovered by the Saxons who occupied the island after his death, whom he had so often in his life defeated and almost utterly destroyed; and for the same reason those letters, witnessing to the truth, that were stamped upon the cross, were turned inwards towards the stone, that they might at that time conceal what the tomb contained, and yet in due time and place might some day reveal the truth.

Now the place which is now called Glaston, was in ancient times called the isle of Avalon. For it is as it were an isle, covered with marshes, wherefore in the British tongue it was called *Inis Avallon*, that is 'the apple-bearing isle'. Wherefore Morganis, a noble matron and the ruler and lady of those parts, who moreover was kin by blood to King Arthur, carried him away after the war of Camlan to the island that is now called Glaston that she might heal his wounds. It was also once called 'Inis gutrin' in the British tongue, that is, the glassy isle,<sup>[120]</sup> wherefore when the Saxons afterwards came thither they call that place *Glastingeburi*. For 'Glas' in their language has the same meaning as *vitrum*, while 'buri' means *castrum* or *ciuitas*.

You must also know that the bones of Arthur thus discovered were so huge that the words of the poet seemed to be fulfilled:

'And he shall marvel at huge bones

In tombs his spade has riven' (*Ving. Georg.* I, 497).

For his shank-bone, when placed against that of the tallest man in that place and planted in the earth near his foot, reached (as

the Abbot showed us) a good three inches above his knee. And the skull was so large and capacious as to be a portent or prodigy; for the eyesocket was a good palm in width. Moreover, there were ten wounds or more, all of which were scarred over, save one larger than the rest, which had made a large hole.<sup>[121]</sup>

## RALPH HIGDEN

### *Polychronicon* (c. 1327)

Translated from the Latin into Middle English by an unknown writer (c. 1440) and modernized by Richard I. Brongle from *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden*, ed. Joseph Rawson Lumby, Rolls Series, Volume V (London: Longmans & Co., 1874).

... Many men wonder about this Arthur, whom Geoffrey<sup>[122]</sup> extols so much singly, how the things that are said of him could be true, for, as Geoffrey repeats, he conquered thirty realms. If he subdued the king of France to him, and did slay Lucius the Procurator of Rome, Italy, then it is astonishing that the chronicles of Rome, of France, and of the Saxons should not have spoken of so noble a prince in their stories, which mentioned little things about men of low degree. Geoffrey says that Arthur overcame Frollo, King of France, but there is no record of such a name among men of France. Also, he says that Arthur slew Lucius Hiberius, Procurator of the city of Rome in the time of Leo the Emperor, yet according to all the stories of the Romans Lucius did not govern in that time—nor was Arthur born, nor did he live then, but in the time of Justinian, who was the fifth emperor after Leo. Geoffrey says that he has marvelled that Gildas and Bede make no mention

he was not seen. But the next day he told her himself at dinner when he served her at the table, kneeling.

"Sir squire, rise up," she said, "for you have been kneeling long enough."

He answered softly, saying that he might never deserve the favors she had done him. She asked him what bounty it was that she had given him. He replied that he could never tell her unless she assured him she would in no way reveal it to any person, nor bring about harm or blame to him. She said that it would not grieve her, and promised him she would not mind this thing. Then he told her how he had lain by her that night. The lady felt great shame and blushed deeply, but no one knew the cause. She lost her appetite completely.

Thus Arthur lay by his sister, the wife of King Lot, but it never after happened to her again. And so the lady found that she was out with child by him, and the child she had at that time was his with-a-doubt. When it was born, and also the tidings were spread abroad that the father was the son of Uther Pendragon, she loved her child so much in her heart that no man could guess it. But she dared not reveal it, for King Lot was her lord; and she was sorry for the war between him and the barons of the realm. [181]

[XXXXVI (1879)] From PART III,  
CHAPTER 26:

... then spoke King Arthur so loudly that all who were in the hall might hear it, and he said, "Now, lords, all you who have come here into my court for me to gladden and comfort, I give you graces and thanks for the honor and joy that you have done me and that you came in order to do. I want you to know that I will establish in my court these customs all the time I wear the crown: that never from henceforth shall I eat before I hear some strange tidings or else some adventure. From now on if there is some need I shall have it redressed by the knights of my court, who for hazardous undertaking and honor return here and are my friends, my fellows, and my peers.

When the knights of the Round Table heard this vow that the

king had made, they spoke together and said, "Seeing that the king has made avowal in his court, it behooves us to make our vow . . . 'that if any maiden has any need or comes to your court to seek help or succor, it may be achieved by the body of one knight or another: they will with right go into whatever country she leads them to rescue her and redress all the wrongs that have been done to her.'" [181]

## SIR THOMAS MALORY

*Le Morte D'Arthur* (c. 1469, 1485)

From *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Everyman's Library, Two Volumes  
(London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1906).

### [I] BOOK I, CHAPTER 1:

HOW Uther PENDRAGON SENT FOR THE DUKE OF CORNWALL AND IGRAINE HIS WIFE, AND OF THEIR DEPARTING SUDDENLY AGAIN

It befell in the days of Uther Pendragon, when he was king of all England, and so reigned, that there was a mighty duke in Cornwall that held war against him long time. And the duke was called the duke of Tintagel. And so by means King Uther sent for this duke, charging him to bring his wife with him, for she was called a fair lady, and a passing wise, and her name was called Igraine. So when the duke and his wife were come unto the king, by the means of great lords they were accorded both: the king liked and loved this lady well, and he made them great cheer out of measure, and desired to have lain by her. But she was a

passing good woman, and would not assent unto the king. And then she told the duke her husband, and said, I suppose that we were sent for that I should be dishonoured, wherefore, husband, I counsel you, that we depart from hence suddenly, that we may ride all night unto our own castle. And in-like wise as she said so they departed, that neither the king nor none of his council were ware of their departing. All so soon as King Uther knew of their departing so suddenly, he was wonderly wroth. Then he called to him his privy council, and told them of the sudden departing of the duke and his wife. Then they asked the king to send for the duke and his wife by a great charge; And if he will not come at your summons, then may ye do your best, then have ye cause to make mighty war upon him. So that was done, and the messengers had their answers, and that was this shortly, that neither he nor his wife would not come at him. Then was the king wonderly wroth. And then the king sent him plain word again, and bade him be ready and <sup>be</sup> stuff him and garnish him, for within forty days he would fetch him out of the biggest castle that he had. When the duke had this warning, anon he went and furnished and garnished two strong castles of his, of the which the one hight Tintagil, and the other castle hight Terrabil. So his wife Dame Igraine he put in the castle of Tintagil, and himself he put in the castle of Terrabil, the which had many issues and posterns out. Then in all haste came Uther with a great host, and laid a siege about the castle of Terrabil. And there he pyght many pavilions, and there was great war made on both parties, and much people slain. Then for pure anger and for great love of fair Igraine the King Uther fell sick. So came to the King Uther, Sir Ulfus a noble knight, and asked the king why he was sick. I shall tell thee, said the king, I am sick for anger and for love of fair Igraine that I may not be hool. Well, my lord, said Sir Ulfus, I shall seek Merlin, and he shall do you remedy, that your heart shall be pleased. So Ulfus departed, and by adventure he met Merlin in a beggar's array, and then Merlin asked Ulfus whom he sought. And he said he had little ado to tell him. Well, said Merlin, I know whom thou seekest, for thou seekest Merlin; therefore seek no farther, for I am he, and if King Uther will well reward me, and be sworn unto me to fulfil my desire, that shall be his honour and profit more than mine, for I shall cause him to have all his desire. All this

will I undertake, said Ulfus, that there shall be nothing reasonable but thou shalt have thy desire. Well, said Merlin, he shall have his entente and desire. And therefore, said Merlin, ride on your way, for I will not be long behind.

## CHAPTER 2:

HOW U<sup>THE</sup> P<sup>ENDRAGON</sup> MADE WAR ON THE DUKE OF CORNWALL, AND HOW BY THE MEANS OF MERLIN HE LAY BY THE DUCHESS AND GAT ARTHUR

Then Ulfus was glad, and rode on more than a pass till that he came to King Uther Pendragon, and told him he had met with Merlin. Where is he? said the king. Sir, said Ulfus, he will not dwell long; therewithal Ulfus was ware where Merlin stood at the porch of the pavilion's door.<sup>101</sup> And then Merlin was bound to come to the king. When King Uther saw him, he said he was welcome. Sir, said Merlin, I know all your heart every deal; so ye will be sworn unto me as ye be a true king anointed, to fulfil my desire, ye shall have your desire. Then the king was sworn upon the four Evangelists. Sir, said Merlin, this is my desire: the first night that ye shall lie by Igraine ye shall get a child on her, and when that is born, that it shall be delivered to me for to nourish there as I will have it; for it shall be your worship, and the child's avail as mickle as the child is worth. I will well, said the king, as thou wilt have it. Now make you ready, said Merlin, this night ye shall lie with Igraine in the castle of Tintagil, and ye shall be like the duke her husband, Ulfus shall be like Sir Brastias, a knight of the duke's, and I will be like a knight that hight Sir Jordans, a knight of the duke's. But wayte ye make not many questions with her nor her men, but say ye are diseased, and so hie you to bed, and rise not on the morn till I come to you, for the castle of Tintagil is but ten miles hence; so this was done as they devised. But the duke of Tintagil espied how the king rode from the siege of Terrabil, and therefore that night he issued out of the castle at a postern for to have distressed the king's host. And so, through his own issue, the duke himself was slain or ever the king came at the castle of Tintagil. So after the death of the duke, King Uther lay with Igraine more than three hours after his death,

and begat on her that night Arthur, and or day came Merlin came to the king, and bade him make him ready, and so he kissed the lady Igraine and departed in all haste. But when the lady heard tell of the duke her husband, and by all record he was dead or ever King Uther came to her; then she marvelled who that might be that lay with her in likeness of her lord; so she mourned privily and held her peace. Then all the barons by one assent prayed the king of accord betwixt the lady Igraine and him; the king gave them leave, for fain would he have been accorded with her. So the king put all the trust in Ulfus to entreat between them, so by the entreaty at the last the king and she met together. Now will we do well, said Ulfus, our king is a lusty knight and wifeless, and my lady Igraine is a passing fair lady; it were great joy unto us all, an it might please the king to make her his queen. Unto that they all well accorded and moved it to the king.<sup>171</sup> And anon, like a lusty knight, he assented thereto with good will, and so in all haste they were married in a morning with great mirth and joy. And King Lot of Lothian and of Orkney then wedded Margawse that was Gawaine's mother, and King Nentes of the land of Carlot wedded Elaine. All this was done at the request of King Uther. And the third sister Morgan le Fay was put to school in a nunnery, and there she learned so much that she was a great clerk of necromancy, and after she was wedded to King Uriens of the land of Gore, that was Sir Ewain's le Blanchemain's father.

### CHAPTER 3:

OF THE BIRTH OF KING ARTHUR AND OF HIS NURTURE

Then Queen Igraine waxed daily greater and greater, so it befell after within half a year, as King Uther lay by his queen, he asked her, by the faith she owed to him, whose was the child within her body; then was she sore abashed to give answer. Dismay you not, said the king, but tell me the truth, and I shall love you the better, by the faith of my body. Sir, said she, I shall tell you the truth. The same night that my lord was dead, the hour of his death, as his knights record, there came into my castle of Tintagil a man like my lord in speech and in countenance, and

two knights with him in likeness of his two knights Brasias and Jordans, and so I went unto bed with him as I ought to do with my lord, and the same night, as I shall answer unto God, this child was begotten upon me. That is truth, said the king, as ye say; for it was I myself that came in the likeness, and therefore dismay you not, for I am father of the child; and there he told her all the cause, how it was by Merlin's counsel. Then the queen made great joy when she knew who was the father of her child. Soon came Merlin unto the king, and said, Sir, ye must purvey you for the nourishing of your child. As thou wilt, said the king, be it. Well, said Merlin, I know a lord of yours in this land, that is a passing true man and a faithful, and he shall have the nourishing of your child, and his name is Sir Ector, and he is a lord of fair livelihood in many parts in England and Wales; and this lord, Sir Ector, let him be sent for, for to come and speak with you, and desire him yourself <sup>181</sup> as he loveth you, that he will put his own child to nourishing to another woman, and that his wife nourish yours. And when the child is born let it be delivered to me at yonder privy postern unchristened. So like as Merlin devised it was done. And when Sir Ector was come he made fyauce to the king for to nourish the child like as the king desired; and there the king granted Sir Ector great rewards. Then when the lady was delivered, the king commanded two knights and two ladies to take the child, bound in a cloth of gold, and that ye deliver him to what poor man ye meet at the postern gate of the castle. So the child was delivered unto Merlin, and so he bare it forth unto Sir Ector, and made an holy man to christen him, and named him Arthur; and so Sir Ector's wife nourished him with her own pap.

### CHAPTER 4:

OF THE DEATH OF KING Uther PENDRAGON

Then within two years King Uther fell sick of a great malady. And in the meanwhile his enemies usurped upon him, and did a great battle upon his men, and slew many of his people. Sir, said Merlin, ye may not lie so as ye do, for ye must to the field though ye ride on an horse-litter: for ye shall never have the better

of your enemies but if your person be there, and then shall ye have the victory. So it was done as Merlin had devised, and they carried the king forth in an horse-litter with a great host towards his enemies. And at St. Albans there met with the king a great host of the North. And that day Sir Ulfus and Sir Brastias did great deeds of arms, and King Uther's men overcame the Northern battle and slew many people, and put the remnant to flight. And then the king returned unto London, and made great joy of his victory. And then he fell passing sore sick, so that three days and three nights he was speechless: wherefore all the barons made great sorrow, and asked Merlin what counsel were best. There is none other remedy, said Merlin, but God will have his will. But look ye, all barons, be before King Uther to-morn, and God and I shall make him to speak. So on the morn all the barons with Merlin came before the king; then Merlin said aloud unto King Uther, Sir, shall your son Arthur be king after your days, of this realm with all the appurtenance? Then Uther Pendragon turned him, and said in hearing of them all, I give him God's blessing and mine, and bid him pray for my soul, and righteously and worshipfully that he claim the crown upon forfeiture of my blessing; and therewith he yielded up the ghost, and then was he interred as longed to a king. Wherefore the queen, fair Igraine, made great sorrow, and all the barons.

## CHAPTER 5:

HOW ARTHUR WAS CHOSEN KING, AND OF WONDERS AND MARVELS OF A SWORD  
TAKEN OUT OF A STONE BY THE SAID ARTHUR

Then stood the realm in great jeopardy long while, for every lord that was mighty of men made him strong, and many weened to have been king. Then Merlin went to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and counselled him for to send for all the lords of the realm, and all the gentlemen of arms, that they should to London come by Christmas, upon pain of cursing; and for this cause, that Jesus, that was born on that night, that he would of his great mercy show some miracle, as he was come to be king of mankind, for to show some miracle who should be rightfully king of this

realm. So the Archbishop, by the advice of Merlin, sent for all the lords and gentlemen of arms that they should come by Christmas even unto London. And many of them made them clean of their life, that their prayer might be the more acceptable unto God. So in the greatest church of London, whether it were Paul's or not the French book maketh no mention, all the estates were long or day in the church for to pray. And when mauns and the first mass was done, there was seen in the churchyard, against the high altar, a great stone four square, like unto a marble stone, and in midst thereof was like an anvil of steel a foot on high, and therein stuck a fair sword naked by the point, and letters there were written in gold about the sword that said thus:—Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil, is rightfully king born of all England. Then the people marvelled, and told it to the Archbishop. I command, said the Archbishop, that ye keep you within your church, and pray unto God still; that no man touch the sword till I see the high mass be all done. So when all masses were done all the lords went to behold the stone and the sword. And when they saw the scripture, some assayed; such as would have been king. But none might stir the sword nor move it. He is not here, said the Archbishop, that shall achieve the sword, but doubt not God will make him known. But this is my counsel, said the Archbishop, that we let purvey ten knights, men of good fame, and they to keep this sword. So it was ordained, and then there was made a cry, that every man should essay that would, for to win the sword. And upon New Year's Day the barons let make a jousts and a tournament, that all knights that would joust or tourney there might play, and all this was ordained for to keep the lords and the commons together, for the Archbishop trusted that God would make him known that should win the sword. So upon New Year's Day, when the service was done, the barons rode unto the field, some to joust and some to tourney, and so it happened that Sir Ector, that had great livelihood about London, rode unto the jousts, and with him rode Sir Kay his son, and young Arthur that was his nourished brother; and Sir Kay was made knight at All Hallowmass afore. So as they rode to the joustward, Sir Kay had lost his sword, for he had left it at his father's lodging; and so he prayed young Arthur for to ride for his sword. I will well, said Arthur, and rode fast after the sword, and when he came home, the lady and all were

out to see the jousting. Then was Arthur wroth, and said to himself, I will ride to the churchyard, and take the sword with me that sticketh in the stone, for my brother Sir Kay shall not be without a sword this day. So when he came to the churchyard, Sir Arthur alit and tied his horse to the stile, and so he went to the tent, and found no knights there, for they were at jousting; and so he handled the sword by the handles, and lightly and fiercely pulled it out of the stone, and took his horse and rode his way until he came to his brother Sir Kay, and delivered him the sword. And as soon as Sir Kay saw the sword, he wist well it was the sword of the stone, and so he rode to his father Sir Ector, and said: Sir, lo here is the sword of the stone, wherefore I must be king of this land. When Sir Ector beheld the sword, he returned again and came to the church, and there they alit all three, and went into the church. And anon he made Sir Kay to swear upon a full book how he came to that sword. Sir, said Sir Kay, by my brother Arthur, for he brought it to me. How gat ye this sword? said Sir Ector to Arthur. Sir, I will tell you. When I came home for my brother's sword, I found nobody at home to deliver me his sword, and so I thought my brother Sir Kay should not be swordless, and so I came hither eagerly and pulled it out of the stone without any pain. Found ye any knights about this sword? said Sir Ector. Nay, said Arthur. Now, said Sir Ector to Arthur, I understand ye must be king of this land. Wherefore I, said Arthur, and for what cause? Sir, said Ector, for God will have it so, for there should never man have drawn out this sword, but he that shall be rightfully king of this land. Now let me see whether ye can put the sword there as it was, and pull it out again. That is no mastery, said Arthur, and so he put it in the stone, therewithal Sir Ector essayed to pull out the sword and failed.

## CHAPTER 6:

### HOW KING ARTHUR PULLED OUT THE SWORD DIVERS TIMES

Now assay, said Sir Ector unto Sir Kay. And anon he pulled at the sword with all his might, but it would not be. Now shall ye essay, said Sir Ector to Arthur. I will well, said Arthur,

and pulled it out easily. And therewithal Sir Ector knelt down to the earth, and Sir Kay. Alas, said Arthur, my own dear father and brother, why kneel ye to me? Nay, my lord Arthur, it is not so, I was never your father nor of your blood, but I wot well ye are of an higher blood than I weened ye were. And then Sir Ector told him all, how he was bitaken him for to nourish him, and by whose commandment, and by Merlin's deliverance. Then Arthur made great doolie when he understood that Sir Ector was not his father. \*Sir, said Ector unto Arthur, will ye be my good and gracious lord when ye are king? Else were I to blame, said Arthur, for ye are the man in the world that I am most beholden to, and my good lady and mother your wife, that as well as her own hath fostered me and kept. And if ever it be God's will that I be king as ye say, ye shall desire of me what I may do, and I shall not fail you, God forbid I should fail you. Sir, said Sir Kay, I will ask no more of you, but that ye will make my son, your foster brother, Sir Kay, seneschal of all your lands. That shall be done, said Arthur, and more, by the faith of my body, that never man shall have that office but he, while he and I live. Therewithal they went unto the Archbishop, and told him how the sword was achieved, and by whom; and on Twelfth-day all the barons came thither, and to essay to take the sword, who that would essay. But there afore them all, there might none take it out but Arthur; wherefore there were many lords wroth, and said it was great shame unto them all and the realm, to be overgoverned with a boy of no high blood born, and so they fell out at that time that it was put off till Candlemas, and then all the barons should meet there again; but always the ten knights were ordained to watch the sword day and night, and so they set a pavilion over the stone and the sword, and five always watched. So at Candlemas many more great lords came thither for to have won the sword, but there might none prevail. And right as Arthur did at Christmas, he did at Candlemas, and pulled out the sword easily, whereof the barons were sore agrieved and put it off in delay till the high feast of Easter. And as Arthur sped before, so did he at Easter, yet there were some of the great lords had indignation that Arthur should be king, and put it off in a delay till the feast of Pentecost. Then the Archbishop of Canterbury by Meilyn's providence let purvey then of the best knights that they might get, and such knights as Uther Pendragon

loved best and most trusted in his days. And such knights were put about Arthur as Sir Baudwin of Britain, Sir Kay, Sir Ulfus, Sir Brastias. All these with many other, were always about Arthur, day and night, till the feast of Pentecost.

## CHAPTER 7:

HOW KING ARTHUR WAS CROWNED, AND HOW HE MADE OFFICERS

And at the feast of Pentecost all manner of men es-ayed to pull at the sword that would essay, but none might prevail but Arthur, and pulled it out afore all the lords and commons that were there, wherefore all the commons cried at once, We will have Arthur unto our king, we will put him <sup>131</sup> no more in delay, for we all see that it is God's will that he shall be our king, and who that holdeth against it, we will slay him. And therewith they all kneeled at once, both rich and poor, and cried Arthur mercy because they had delayed him so long; and Arthur forgave them, and took the sword between both his hands, and offered it upon the altar where the Archbishop was, and so was he made knight of the best man that was there. And so anon was the coronation made. And there was he sworn unto his lords and the commons for to be a true king, to stand with true justice from thenceforth the days of this life. Also then he made all lords that held of the crown to come in, and to do service as they ought to do. And many complaints were made unto Sir Arthur of great wrongs that were done since the death of King Uther, of many lands that were betrayed lords, knights, ladies, and gentlemen. Wherefore King Arthur made the lands to be given again unto them that owned them. When this was done, that the king had stablished all the countrees about London, then he let make Sir Kay seneschal of England; and Sir Baudwin of Britain was made constable; and Sir Ulfus was made chamberlain; and Sir Brastias was made warden to wait upon the north from Trent forwards, for it was that time the most part the king's enemies. But within few years after, Arthur won all the north, Scotland, and all that were under their obeissance. Also Wales, a part of it held against Arthur, but he overcame them all,

as he did the remnant, through the noble prowess of himself and his knights of the Round Table.

## CHAPTER 8:

HOW KING ARTHUR HELD IN WALES, AT A PENTECOST, A GREAT FEAST, AND WHAT KINGS AND LORDS CAME TO HIS FEAST

Then the king removed into Wales, and let cry a great feast that it should be holden at Pentecost after the incorporation of him at the city of Carlion. Unto the feast came King Lot of Lothian and of Orkney, with five hundred knights with him. Also there came to the feast King Uriens of Gore with four hundred knights with him. Also there came to that feast King Nentes of Garlo, with seven <sup>134</sup> hundred knights with him. Also there came to the feast the king of Scotland with six hundred knights with him, and he was but a young man. Also there came to the feast a king\* that was called the king with the hundred knights, but he and his men were passing well bisene at all points. Also there came the king of Carrados with five hundred knights. And King Arthur was glad of their coming, for he weened that all the kings and knights had come for great love, and to have done him worship at his feast, wherefore the king made great joy, and sent the kings and knights great presents. But the kings would none receive, but rebuked the messengers shamefully, and said they had no joy to receive no gifts of a beardless boy that was come of low blood, and sent him word they would none of his gifts, but that they were come to give him gifts with hard swords betwixt the neck and the shoulders: and therefore they came thither, so they told to the messengers plainly, for it was great shame to all them to see such a boy to have a rule of so noble a realm as this land was. With this answer the messengers departed and told to King Arthur this answer. Wherefore, by the advice of his barons, he took him to a strong tower with five hundred good men with him: and all the kings aforesaid in a manner laid a siege tofore him, but King Arthur was well victualled. And within fifteen days there came Merlin among them into the city of Carlion. Then all the kings were passing glad of Merlin, and asked him, For

what cause is that boy Arthur made your king? Sirs, said Merlin, I shall tell you the cause, for he is King Uther Pendragon's son, born in wedlock, gotten on Igraine, the duke's wife of Tintagel. Then is he a bastard, they said all. Nay, said Merlin, after the death of the duke, more than three hours, was Arthur begotten, and thirteen days after King Uther wedded Igraine; and therefore I prove him he is no bastard, and who saith nay, he shall be king and overcome all his enemies; and, or he die, he shall be long king of all England, and have under his obissance Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, and more realms than I will now rehearse. Some of the kings had marvel of Merlin's words, and deemed well that it should be as he said; and some of them laughed him to scorn, as King Lot; and more other called him a witch. But then were they accorded with Merlin, that King Arthur should come out and speak with the kings, and to come first safe and to go safe, such assurance there was made. So Merlin went unto King Arthur, and told him how he had done, and bade him fear not, but come out boldly and speak with them, and spare them not, but answer them as their king and chieftain, for ye shall overcome them all, whether they will or nill.

## CHAPTER 9:

OF THE FIRST WAR THAT KING ARTHUR HAD, AND HOW HE WON THE FIELD

Then King Arthur came out of his tower, and had under his gown a jesseraunte of double mail, and there went with him the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Sir Baudwin of Britain, and Sir Kay, and Sir Brastias: these were the men of most worship that were with him. And when they were met there was no meekness, but stout words on both sides; but always King Arthur answered them, and said he would make them to bow an he lived. Wherefore they departed with wrath, and King Arthur bade keep them well, and they bade the king keep him well. So the king returned him to the tower again and armed him and all his knights. What will ye do? said Merlin to the kings; ye were better for to synte, for ye shall not here prevail though ye were ten times so many. Be we well advised to be afeard of a dream-reader? said

King Lot. With that Merlin vanished away, and came to King Arthur, and bade him set on them fiercely; and in the meanwhile there were three hundred good men of the best that were with the kings, that went straight unto King Arthur and that comforted him greatly. Sir, said Merlin to Arthur, fight not with the sword that ye had by miracle, till that ye see ye go unto the worse, then draw it out and do your best. So forthwith King Arthur set upon them in their lodging. And Sir Baudwin, Sir Kay, and Sir Brastias slew on the right hand and on the left hand that it was marvel; and always King Arthur on horseback laid on with a sword, and did marvelous deeds of arms that many of the kings had great joy of his deeds and hardness. Then King Lot brake out on the back side, and the king with the hundred knights, and King Carados, and set on Arthur fiercely behind him. With that first Sir Arthur turned with his knights, and smote behind and before, and ever Sir Arthur was in the foremost press till his horse was slain underneath him. And therewith King Lot smote down King Arthur. With that his four knights received him and set him on horseback. Then he drew his sword Excalibur, but it was so bright in his enemies' eyes, that it gave light like thirty torches. And therewith he put them on back, and slew much people. And then the commons of Carlion arose with clubs and staves and slew many knights; but all the kings held them together with their knights that were left alive, and so fled and departed. And Merlin came unto Arthur, and counselled him to follow them no further. [171]

## CHAPTER 19:

HOW KING ARTHUR RODE TO CARLION, AND OF HIS DREAM, AND HOW HE SAW THE QUESTING BEAST

Then after the departure of King Ban and of King Bors, King Arthur rode unto Carlion. And thither came to him, King Lot's wife, of Orkney, in manner of a message, but she was sent thither to espy the court of King Arthur; and she came richly bisene, with her four sons [184] Gawaine, Gaheris, Agravine, and Gareth, with many other knights and ladies. For she was a passing

as much as thrice his strength, and that caused Sir Gawaine to win great honour. And for his sake King Arthur made an ordinance, that all manner of battles for any quarrels that should be done afore King Arthur should begin at underne; and all was done for Sir Gawaine's love, that by likelihood, if Sir Gawaine were on the one part,<sup>18751</sup> he should have the better in battle while his strength endureth three hours; but there were but few knights that time living that knew this advantage that Sir Gawaine had, but King Arthur all only. Thus Sir Launcelot fought with Sir Gawaine, and when Sir Launcelot felt his might evermore increase, Sir Launcelot wondered and dread him sore to be shamed. For as the French book saith, Sir Launcelot weened, when he felt Sir Gawaine double his strength, that he had been a fiend and none earthly man; wherefore Sir Launcelot traced and traversed, and covered himself with his shield, and kept his might and his braide during three hours; and that while Sir Gawaine gave him many sad brunts, and many sad strokes, that all the knights that beheld Sir Launcelot marvelled how that he might endure him; but full little understood they that travail that Sir Launcelot had for to endure him. And then when it was past noon Sir Gawaine had no more but his own might. When Sir Launcelot felt him so come down, then he stretched him up and stood near Sir Gawaine, and said thus: My lord Sir Gawaine, now I feel ye have done; now my lord Sir Gawaine, I must do my part, for many great and grievous strokes I have endured you this day with great pain. Then Sir Launcelot doubled his strokes and gave Sir Gawaine such a buffet on the helmet that he fell down on his side, and Sir Launcelot withdrew him from him. Why withdrewest thou thee? said Sir Gawaine; now turn again, false traitor knight, and slay me, for an thou leave me thus, when I am whole I shall do battle with thee again. I shall endure you, Sir; by God's grace, but wit thou well, Sir Gawaine, I will never smite a felled knight. And so Sir Launcelot went into the city; and Sir Gawaine was borne into King Arthur's pavilion, and leeches were brought to him, and searched and salved with soft ointments. And then Sir Launcelot said: Now have good day, my lord the king, for wit you well ye win no worship at these walls; and if I would my knights outbring, there should many a man die. Therefore, my lord Arthur, remember you of old kindness; and however I fare, Jesu be your guide in all places.<sup>18761</sup>

## CHAPTER 22:

OF THE SORROW THAT KING ARTHUR MADE FOR THE WAR, AND OF ANOTHER BATTLE WHERE ALSO SIR GAWAINE HAD THE WORSE

Alas, said the king, that ever this unhappy war was begun; for ever Sir Launcelot forbearth me in all places, and in likewise my kin, and that is seen well this day by my nephew Sir Gawaine. Then King Arthur fell sick for sorrow of Sir Gawaine, that he was so sore hurt, and by cause of the war betwixt him and Sir Launcelot. So then they on King Arthur's part kept the siege with little war withoutforth; and they withinforth kept their walls, and defended them when need was. Thus Sir Gawaine lay sick three weeks in his tents, with all manner of lecherat that might be had. And as soon as Sir Gawaine might go and ride, he armed him at all points, and start upon a courser, and gat a spear in his hand, and so he came riding afore the chief gate of Benwick; and there he cried on heigh: Where art thou, Sir Launcelot? Come forth, thou false traitor knight and recreant, for I am here, Sir Gawaine, will prove this that I say on thee. All this language Sir Launcelot heard, and then he said thus: Sir Gawaine, me repents of your foul saying, that ye will not cease of your language; for you wot well, Sir Gawaine, I know your might and all that ye may do; and well ye wot, Sir Gawaine, ye may not greatly hurt me. Come down, traitor knight, said he, and make it good the contrary with thy hands, for it mishapped me the last battle to be hurt of thy hands; therefore wit thou well I am come this day to make amends, for I ween this day to lay thee as low as thou laigest me. Jesu defend me, said Sir Launcelot, that ever I be so far in your danger as ye have been in mine, for then my days were done. But Sir Gawaine, said Sir Launcelot, ye shall not think that I tarry long, but sithen that ye so unknighly call me of treason, ye shall have both your hands full of me. And then Sir Launcelot armed him at all points, and mounted upon his horse, and gat a great spear in his hand, and rode out at the gate. And both the hosts were assembled, of them without and of them within, and stood in array full manly. And both parties were charged to hold them still, to see and behold the battle of 18771 these two noble knights. And

then they laid their spears in their rests, and they came together as thunder, and Sir Gawaine brake his spear upon Sir Launcelot in a hundred pieces unto his hand; and Sir Launcelot smote him with a greater might, that Sir Gawaine's horse's feet raised, and so the horse and he fell to the earth. Then Sir Gawaine deliverly avoided his horse, and put his shield afore him, and eagerly drew his sword, and bad Sir Launcelot: Alight, traitor knight, for if this mare's son hath failed me, wit thou well a king's son and a queen's son shall not fail thee. Then Sir Launcelot avoided his horse, and dressed his shield afore him, and drew his sword; and so stood they together and gave many sad strokes, that all men on both parties had thereof passing great wonder. But when Sir Launcelot felt Sir Gawaine's might so marvellously increase, he then withheld his courage and his wind, and kept himself wonder covert of his might; and under his shield he traced and traversed here and there, to break Sir Gawaine's strokes and his courage; and Sir Gawaine enforced himself with all his might and power to destroy Sir Launcelot; for as the French book saith, ever as Sir Gawaine's might increased, right so increased his wind and his evil will. Thus Sir Gawaine did great pain unto Sir Launcelot three hours, that he had right great pain for to defend him. And when the three hours were passed, that Sir Launcelot felt that Sir Gawaine was come to his own proper strength, then Sir Launcelot said unto Sir Gawaine: Now have I proved you twice, that ye are a full dangerous knight, and a wonderful man of your might; and many wonderful deeds have you done in your days, for by your might increasing you have deceived many a full noble and valiant knight; and, now I feel that ye have done your mighty deeds, now wit you well I must do my deeds. And then Sir Launcelot stood near Sir Gawaine, and then Sir Launcelot doubled his strokes; and Sir Gawaine defended him mightily, but nevertheless Sir Launcelot smote such a stroke upon Sir Gawaine's helm, and upon the old wound, that Sir Gawaine sinked down upon his one side in a swoon. And anon as he did awake he waved and foined at Sir Launcelot as he lay, and said: Traitor knight, wit thou well I am not yet slain, come thou near me and perform this battle unto the uttermost. I will no more do than I have done, said Sir Launcelot, for when I see you on foot I will do battle upon <sup>1878</sup>1 you all the while I see you stand on your feet; but for to smite a wounded man that may not stand, God de-

fend me from such a shame. And then he turned him and went his way toward the city. And Sir Gawaine evermore calling him traitor knight, and said: Wit thou well Sir Launcelot, when I am whole I shall do battle with thee again, for I shall never leave thee till that one of us be slain. Thus as this siege endured, and as Sir Gawaine lay sick near a month, and when he was well recovered and ready within three days to do battle again with Sir Launcelot, right so came tidings unto Arthur from England that made King Arthur and all his host to remove.

## BOOK XXI, CHAPTER I:

HOW SIR MORDRED PRESUMED AND TOOK ON HIM TO BE KING OF ENGLAND, AND WOULD HAVE MARRIED THE QUEEN, HIS UNCLE'S WIFE

As Sir Mordred was ruler of all England, he did do make letters as though that they came from beyond the sea, and the letters specified that King Arthur was slain in battle with Sir Launcelot. Wherefore Sir Mordred made a parliament, and called the lords together, and there he made them to choose him king; and so was he crowned at Canterbury, and held a feast there fifteen days; and afterward he drew him unto Winchester, and there he took the Queen Guenever, and said plainly that he would wed her which was his uncle's wife and his father's wife. And so he made ready for the feast, and a day prefixed that they should be wedded; wherefore Queen Guenever was passing heavy. But she durst not discover her heart, but spake fair, and agreed to Sir Mordred's will. Then she desired of Sir Mordred for to go to London, to buy all manner of things that longed unto the wedding. And by cause of her fair speech Sir Mordred trusted her well enough, and gave her leave to go. And so when she came to London she <sup>1879</sup>1 took the Tower of London, and suddenly in all haste possible she stuffed it with all manner of victual, and well garnished it with men, and so kept it. Then when Sir Mordred wist and understood how he was beguiled, he was passing wroth out of measure. And a short tale for to make, he went and laid a mighty siege about the Tower of London, and made many great assaults thereat, and threw many great engines unto them, and shot great guns. But all might not

prevail Sir Mordred, for Queen Guenever would never for fair speech nor for foul, would never trust to come in his hands again. Then came the Bishop of Canterbury, the which was a noble clerk and an holy man, and thus he said to Sir Mordred: Sir, what will ye do? will ye first displeas God and sithen shame yourself, and all knighthood? Is not King Arthur your uncle, no farther but your mother's brother, and on her himself King Arthur begat you upon his own sister, therefore how may you wed your father's wife? Sir, said the noble clerk, leave this opinion or I shall curse you with book and bell and candle. Do thou thy worst, said Sir Mordred, wit thou well I shall defy thee. Sir, said the Bishop, and wit you well I shall not fear me to do that me ought to do. Also where ye noise where my lord Arthur is slain, and that is not so, and therefore ye will make a foul work in this land. Peace, thou false priest, said Sir Mordred, for an thou chafe me any more I shall make strike off thy head. So the Bishop departed and did the cursing in the most argulist wise that might be done. And then Sir Mordred sought the Bishop of Canterbury, for to have slain him. Then the Bishop fled, and took part of his goods with him, and went nigh unto Glastonbury; and there he was as priest hermit in a chapel, and lived in poverty and in holy prayers, for well he understood that mischievous war was at hand. Then Sir Mordred sought on Queen Guenever by letters and sondes, and by fair means and foul means, for to have her to come out of the Tower of London; but all this availed not, for she answered him shortly, openly and privily, that she had lever slay herself than to be married with him. Then came word to Sir Mordred that King Arthur had araised the siege for Sir Launcelot, and he was coming homeward with a great host, to be avenged upon Sir Mordred; wherefore Sir Mordred made write writs to all the barony of this land, and much people drew to him. For then was the common voice among them (as) that with Arthur was none other life but war and strife, and with Sir Mordred was great joy and bliss. Thus was Sir Arthur depraved, and evil said of. And many there were that King Arthur had made up of nought, and given them lands, might not then say him a good word. Lo ye all Englishmen, see ye not what a mischief here was! for he that was the most king and knight of the world, and most loved the fellowship of noble knights, and by him they were all upholden, now might not these Englishmen hold them content with

him. Lo thus was the old custom and usage of this land; and also men say that we of this land have not yet lost nor forgotten that custom and usage. Alas, this is a great default of us Englishmen, for there may no thing please us no term. And so fared the people at that time, they were better pleased with Sir Mordred than they were with King Arthur; and much people drew unto Sir Mordred, and said they would abide with him for better and for worse. And so Sir Mordred drew with a great host to Dover, for there he heard say that Sir Arthur would arrive, and so he thought to beat his own father from his lands; and the most part of all England held with Sir Mordred, the people were so new fangle.

## CHAPTER 2:

HOW AFTER THAT KING ARTHUR HAD TIDINGS, HE RETURNED AND CAME TO DOVER, WHERE SIR MORDRED MET HIM TO LET HIS LANDING; AND OF THE DEATH OF SIR GAWAINE

And so as Sir Mordred was at Dover with his host, there came King Arthur with a great navy of ships, and galleys, and carracks. And there was Sir Mordred ready awaiting upon his landing, to let his own father to land upon the land that he was king over. Then there was launching of great boats and small, and full of noble men of arms; and there was much slaughter of gentle knights, and many a full bold baron was laid full low, on both parties. But King Arthur was so courageous that there might no manner of knights let him to land, and his knights fiercely followed him; and so they landed maugre Sir Mordred and all his power, and put Sir Mordred aback, that he fled and all his people. So when this battle was done, King Arthur let (as) bury his people that were dead. And then was noble Sir Gawaine found in a great boat, lying more than half dead. When Sir Arthur wist that Sir Gawaine was laid so low, he went unto him; and there the king made sorrow out of measure, and took Sir Gawaine in his arms, and thrice he there swooned. And then when he awakened, he said: Alas, Sir Gawaine, my sister's son, here now thou liest, the man in the world that I loved most; and now is my joy gone, for now, my nephew Sir Gawaine, I will discover me unto your person: in Sir Launcelot

and you I most had my joy, and mine affiance, and now have I lost my joy of you both; wherefore all mine earthly joy is gone from me. Mine uncle King Arthur, said Sir Gawaine, wit you well my death day is come, and all is through mine own hastiness and wilfulness; for I am smitten upon the old wound the which Sir Launcelot gave me, on the which I feel well I must die; and had Sir Launcelot been with you as he was, this unhappy war had never begun; and of all this am I causer, for Sir Launcelot and his blood, through their prowess, held all your cankered enemies in subjection and daunger. And now, said Sir Gawaine, ye shall miss Sir Launcelot. But alas, I would not accord with him, and therefore, said Sir Gawaine, I pray you, fair uncle, that I may have paper, pen, and ink, that I may write to Sir Launcelot a cedle with mine own hands. And then when paper and ink was brought, then Gawaine was set up weakly by King Arthur, for he was shriwen a little tofore; and then he wrote thus, as the French book maketh mention: Unto Sir Launcelot, flower of all noble knights that ever I heard of or saw by my days, I, Sir Gawaine, King Lot's son of Orkney, sister's son unto the noble King Arthur, send thee greeting, and let thee have knowledge that the tenth day of May I was smitten upon the old wound that thou gavest me afore the city of Benwick, and through the same wound that thou gavest me I am come to my death day. And I will that all the world wit, that I, Sir Gawaine, knight of the Table Round, sought my death, and not through thy deserving; but it was mine own seeking; wherefore I beseech thee, Sir Launcelot, to return again unto this realm, and see my tomb, and pray some prayer more or less for my soul. And this same day that I wrote this cedle, I was hurt to the death in the same wound, the which I had of thy hand, Sir Launcelot; for of a more nobler man might I not be slain. Also <sup>1381</sup> Sir Launcelot, for all the love that ever was betwixt us, make no farrying, but come over the sea in all haste, that thou mayst with thy noble knights rescue that noble king that made thee knight, that is my lord Arthur; for he is full straitly bestad with a false traitor, that is my half-brother, Sir Mordred; and he hath let crown him king, and would have wedded my lady Queen Guenever, and so had he done had she not put herself in the Tower of London. And so the tenth day of May last past, my lord Arthur and we all landed upon them at Dover; and there we put that false traitor, Sir Mordred, to flight, and there it misfortuned me

to be stricken upon thy stroke. And at the date of this letter was written, but two hours and a half afore my death, written with mine own hand, and so subscribed with part of my heart's blood. And I require thee, most famous knight of the world, that thou wilt see my tomb. And then Sir Gawaine wept, and King Arthur wept; and then they swooned both. And when they awaked both, the king made Sir Gawaine to receive his Saviour. And then Sir Gawaine prayed the king for to send for Sir Launcelot, and to cherish him above all other knights. And so at the hour of noon Sir Gawaine yielded up the spirit; and then the king let inter him in a chapel within Dover Castle; and there yet all men may see the skull of him, and the same wound is seen that Sir Launcelot gave him in battle. Then was it told the king that Sir Mordred had pyghte a new field upon Barham Down. And upon the morn the king rode thither to him, and there was a great battle betwixt them, and much people was slain on both parties; but at the last Sir Arthur's party stood best, and Sir Mordred and his party fled unto Canterbury.

### CHAPTER 3:

HOW AFTER, SIR GAWAINE'S GHOST APPEARED TO KING ARTHUR, AND WARNED HIM THAT HE SHOULD NOT FIGHT THAT DAY

And then the king let search all the towns for his knights that were slain, and interred them; and saved them with soft salves that so sore were wounded. Then much people drew unto King Arthur. And then they said that Sir Mordred warred upon King Arthur with wrong. And then <sup>1381</sup> King Arthur drew him with his host down by the seaside westward toward Salisbury; and there was a day assigned betwixt King Arthur and Sir Mordred, that they should meet upon a down beside Salisbury, and not far from the seaside; and this day was assigned on a Monday after Trinity Sunday, whereof King Arthur was passing glad, that he might be avenged upon Sir Mordred. Then Sir Mordred araised much people about London, for they of Kent, Southsex, and Surrey, Essex, and of Southfolk, and of Northfolk, held the most part with Sir Mordred; and many a full noble knight drew unto Sir Mordred

and to the king: but they loved Sir Launcelot drew unto Sir Mordred. So upon Trinity Sunday at night, King Arthur dreamed a wonderful dream, and that was this: that him seemed he sat upon a chaflet in a chair, and the chair was fast to a wheel, and thereupon sat King Arthur in the richest cloth of gold that might be made; and the king thought there was under him, far from him, an hideous deep black water, and therein were all manner of serpents, and worms, and wild beasts, foul and horrible; and suddenly the king thought the wheel turned up so down, and he fell among the serpents, and every beast took him by a limb; and then the king cried as he lay in his bed and slept: Help. And then knights, squires, and yeomen, awaked the king; and then he was so amazed that he wist not where he was; and then he fell on slumbering again, not sleeping nor thoroughly waking. So the king seemed verily that there came Sir Gawaine unto him with a number of fair ladies with him. And when King Arthur saw him, then he said: Welcome, my sister's son; I weened thou hadst been dead, and now I see thee on live, much am I beholding unto almighty Jesu. O fair nephew and my sister's son, what be these ladies that hither be come with you? Sir, said Sir Gawaine, all these be ladies for whom I have foughten when I was man living, and all these are those that I did battle for in righteous quarrel; and God hath given them that grace at their great prayer, by cause I did battle for them, that they should bring me hither unto you: thus much hath God given me leave, for to warn you of your death; for an ye fight as to-morn with Sir Mordred, as ye both have assigned, doubt ye not ye must be slain, and the most part of your people on both parties. And for the great grace and goodness that almighty Jesu hath unto you, and for pity of you, and <sup>1384</sup>many more other good men there shall be slain, God hath sent me to you of his special grace, to give you warning that in no wise ye do battle as to-morn, but that ye take a treaty for a month day; and proffer you largely, so as to-morn to be put in a delay. For within a month shall come Sir Launcelot with all his noble knights, and rescue you worshipfully, and slay Sir Mordred, and all that ever will hold with him. Then Sir Gawaine and all the ladies vanished. And anon the king called upon his knights, squires, and yeomen, and charged them wightily to fetch his noble lords and wise bishops unto him. And when they were come, the king told them his avision, what Sir Gawaine had told

him, and warned him that if he fought on the morn he should be slain. Then the king commanded Sir Lucan the Butler, and his brother Sir Bedivere, with two bishops with them, and charged them in any wise, an they might, Take a treaty for a month day with Sir Mordred, and spare not, proffer him lands and goods as much as ye think best. So then they departed, and came to Sir Mordred, where he had a grim host of an hundred thousand men. And there they entreated Sir Mordred long time; and at the last Sir Mordred was agreed for to have Cornwall and Kent, by Arthur's days: after, all England, after the days of King Arthur.

#### CHAPTER 4:

HOW BY MISADVENTURE OF AN ADDER THE BATTLE BEGAN, WHERE MORDRED WAS SLAIN, AND ARTHUR HURT TO THE DEATH

Then were they condescended that King Arthur and Sir Mordred should meet betwixt both their hosts, and every each of them should bring fourteen persons; and they came with this word unto Arthur. Then said he: I am glad that this is done: and so he went into the field. And when Arthur should depart, he warned all his host that an they see any sword drawn: Look ye come on fiercely, and slay that traitor, Sir Mordred, for I in no wise trust him. In likewise Sir Mordred warned his host that: An ye see any sword drawn, look that ye come on fiercely, and so slay all that ever before you standeth; for in no wise I will not trust for this treaty, for I know well my father will be avenged on me. And so they met as their appointment was, and so they <sup>1385</sup>were agreed and accorded thoroughly; and wine was fetched, and they drank. Right soon came an adder out of a little heath bush, and it stung a knight on the foot. And when the knight felt him stung, he looked down and saw the adder, and then he drew his sword to slay the adder, and thought of none other harm. And when the host on both parties saw that sword drawn, then they blew beamous, trumpets, and horns, and shouted grimly. And so both hosts dressed them together. And King Arthur took his horse, and said: Alas this unhappy day! and so rode to his party. And Sir Mordred in likewise. And never was there seen a more dolefuller battle in no Christian

land; for there was but rushing and riding, foining and striking, and many a grim word was there spoken either to other, and many a deadly stroke. But ever King Arthur rode throughout the battle of Sir Mordred many times, and did full nobly as a noble king should, and at all times he fainted never; and Sir Mordred that day put him in devoir, and in great peril. And thus they fought all the long day, and never stinted till the noble knights were laid to the cold earth; and ever they fought still till it was near night, and by that time was there an hundred thousand laid dead upon the down. Then was Arthur wood wroth out of measure, when he saw his people so slain from him. Then the king looked about him, and then was he ware, of all his host and of all his good knights, were left no more on live but two knights; that one was Sir Lucan the Butler, and his brother Sir Bedivere, and they were full sore wounded. Jesu mercy, said the king, where are all my noble knights become? Alas that ever I should see this doleful day, for now, said Arthur, I am come to mine end. But would to God that I wist where were that traitor Sir Mordred, that hath caused all this mischief. Then was King Arthur ware where Sir Mordred leaned upon his sword among a great heap of dead men. Now give me my spear, said Arthur unto Sir Lucan, for yonder I have espied the traitor that all this woe hath wrought. Sir, let him be, said Sir Lucan, for he is unhappy; and if ye pass this unhappy day ye shall be right well revenged upon him. Good lord, remember ye of your night's dream, and what the spirit of Sir Gawaine told you this night, yet God of his great goodness hath preserved you hitherto. Therefore, for God's sake, my lord, leave off by this, for blessed be God ye have won the field, for here we be three on live, and with <sup>1381</sup> Sir Mordred is none on live; and if ye leave off now this wicked day of destiny is past. Tide me death, beside me life, saith the king, now I see him yonder alone he shall never escape mine hands, for at a better avail shall I never have him. God speed you well, said Sir Bedivere. Then the king gat his spear in both his hands, and ran toward Sir Mordred, crying: Traitor, now is thy death day come. And when Sir Mordred heard Sir Arthur, he ran until him with his sword drawn in his hand. And there King Arthur smote Sir Mordred under the shield, with a foim of his spear, throughout the body, more than a fathom. And when Sir Mordred felt that he had his death wound he thrust himself with

the might that he had up to the bur of King Arthur's spear. And right so he smote his father Arthur, with his sword holden in both his hands, on the side of the head, that the sword pierced the helmet and the brain pan, and therewithal Sir Mordred fell stark dead to the earth; and the noble Arthur fell in a swoon to the earth, and there he swooned oftentimes. And Sir Lucan the Butler and Sir Bedivere oftentimes heave him up. And so weakly they led him betwixt them both, to a little chapel not far from the seaside. And when the king was there he thought him well eased. Then heard they people cry in the field. Now go thou, Sir Lucan, said the king, and do me to wit what betokens that noise in the field. So Sir Lucan departed, for he was grievously wounded in many places. And so as he yede, he saw and hearkened by the moonlight, how that pillers and robbers were come into the field, to pill and to rob many a full noble knight of brooches, and beads, of many a good ring, and of many a rich jewel; and who that were not dead all out, there they slew them for their harness and their riches. When Sir Lucan understood this work, he came to the king as soon as he might, and told him all what he had heard and seen. Therefore by my rede, said Sir Lucan, it is best that we bring you to some town. I would it were so, said the king, <sup>1387</sup>

## CHAPTER 5:

HOW KING ARTHUR COMMANDED TO CAST HIS SWORD EXCALIBUR INTO THE WATER, AND HOW HE WAS DELIVERED TO LADIES IN A BARGE

But I may not stand, mine head works so. Ah Sir Launcelot, said King Arthur, this day have I sore missed thee: alas, that ever I was against thee, for now have I my death, whereof Sir Gawaine me warned in my dream. Then Sir Lucan took up the king the one part, and Sir Bedivere the other part, and in the lifting the king swooned; and Sir Lucan fell in a swoon with the lift, that the part of his gus fell out of his body, and therewith the noble knight's heart brast. And when the king awoke, he beheld Sir Lucan, how he lay foaming at the mouth, and part of his gus lay at his feet. Alas, said the king, this is to me a full heavy sight, to see this noble duke so die for my sake, for he would have holpen

me, that had more need of help than I. Alas, he would not complain him, his heart was so set to help me: now Jesu have mercy upon his soul! Then Sir Bedivere wept for the death of his brother. Leave this mourning and weeping, said the king, for all this will not avail me, for wit thou well an I might live myself, the death of Sir Lucan would grieve me evermore; but my time hieth fast, said the king. Therefore, said Arthur unto Sir Bedivere, take thou Excalbur, my good sword, and go with it to yonder water side, and when thou comest there I charge thee throw my sword in that water, and come again and tell me what thou there seest. My lord, said Bedivere, your commandment shall be done, and lightly bring you word again. So Sir Bedivere departed, and by the way he beheld that noble sword, that the pommel and the haft was all of precious stones; and then he said to himself: If I throw this rich sword in the water, thereof shall never come good, but harm and loss. And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalbur under a tree. And so, as soon as he might, he came again unto the king, and said he had been at the water, and had thrown the sword in the water. What saw thou there? said the king. Sir, he said, I saw nothing but waves and winds. That is untruly said of thee, said the king, therefore go thou lightly again, and do my commandment; pass as thou art to me lief and dear, spare not, but throw it in. Then Sir Bedivere returned again, and took the sword in his hand; and then him thought sin and shame to throw away that noble sword, and so eft he hid the sword, and returned again, and told to the king that he had been at the water, and done his commandment. What saw thou there? said the king. Sir, he said, I saw nothing but the waters wappe and waves wanne. Ah, traitor untruce, said King Arthur, now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have weened that, thou that hast been to me so lief and dear? and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the richness of the sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee, I shall slay thee with mine own hands; for thou wouldst for my rich sword see me dead. Then Sir Bedivere departed, and went to the sword, and lightly took it up, and went to the water side; and there he bound the girdle about the hilts, and then he threw the sword as far into the water, as he might; and there came an arm and an hand above the

water and met it, and caught it, and so shook it thrice and branched, and then vanished away the hand with the sword in the water. So Sir Bedivere came again to the king, and told him what he saw. Alas, said the king, help me hence, for I dread me I have tarried over long. Then Sir Bedivere took the king upon his back, and so went with him to that water side. And when they were at the water side, even fast by the bank hove a little barge with many fair ladies in it, and among them all was a queen, and all they had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur. Now put me into the barge, said the king. And so he did softly; and there received him three queens with great mourning; and so they set them down, and in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head. And then that queen said: Ah, dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me? alas, this wound on your head hath caught over-much cold. And so then they rowed from the land, and Sir Bedivere beheld all those ladies go from him. Then Sir Bedivere cried: Ah my lord Arthur, what shall become of me, now ye go from me and leave me here alone among mine enemies? Comfort thyself, said the king, and do as well as thou mayest, for in me is no trust for to trust in; for I will into the vale of Avilion to heal me of my grievous wound: and if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul. But ever the queens and ladies wept and shrieked, that it was pity to hear. And as soon as Sir Bedivere had lost the sight of the barge, he wept and wailed, and so took the forest; and so he went all that night, and in the morning he was ware betwixt two holts hoar, of a chapel and an hermitage.

## CHAPTER 6:

HOW SIR BEDIVERE FOUND HIM ON THE MORROW DEAD IN AN HERMITAGE, AND HOW HE ABODE THERE WITH THE HERMIT

Then was Sir Bedivere glad, and thither he went; and when he came into the chapel, he saw where lay an hermit groveling on all four, there fast by a tomb was new graven. When the hermit saw Sir Bedivere he knew him well, for he was but little tofore Bishop of Canterbury, that Sir Morthed flemed. Sir, said Bedivere, what man is there interred that ye pray so fast for? Fair son, said the hermit, I wot not verily, but by deeming. But this

night, at midnight, here came a number of ladies, and brought hither a dead corpse, and prayed me to bury him; and here they offered an hundred tapets, and they gave me an hundred besants. Alas, said Sir Bedivere, that was my lord King Arthur, that here lieth buried in this chapel. Then Sir Bedivere swooned; and when he awoke he prayed the hermit he might abide with him still there, to live with fasting and prayers. For from hence will I never go, said Sir Bedivere, by my will, but all the days of my life here to pray for my lord Arthur. Ye are welcome to me, said the hermit, for I know ye better than ye ween that I do. Ye are the bold Bedivere, and the full noble duke, Sir Lucan the Butler, was your brother. Then Sir Bedivere told the hermit all as ye have heard tofore. So there bode Sir Bedivere with the hermit that was tofore Bishop of Canterbury, and there Sir Bedivere put upon him poor clothes, and served the hermit full lowly in fasting and in prayers. Thus of Arthur I find never more written in books that be authorised, nor more of the very certainty of his death heard I never read, but thus was he led away in a ship wherein were three queens; that one was King Arthur's sister, Queen Morgan le Fay; the other was the Queen of Northgalis; the third was the Queen of the 1390 Waste Lands. Also there was Nimue, the chief lady of the lake, that had wedded Pelleas the good knight; and this lady had done much for King Arthur, for she would never suffer Sir Pelleas to be in no place where he should be in danger of his life; and so he lived to the uttermost of his days with her in great rest. More of the death of King Arthur could I never find, but that ladies brought him to his burials; and such one was buried there, that the hermit bare witness that sometime was Bishop of Canterbury, but yet the hermit knew not in certain that he was verily the body of King Arthur: for this tale Sir Bedivere, knight of the Table Round, made it to be written.

## CHAPTER 7:

OF THE OPINION OF SOME MEN OF THE DEATH OF KING ARTHUR; AND HOW  
QUEEN GUENEVER MADE HER A NUN IN ALMESBURY

Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu into an-

other place; and men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say it shall be so, but rather I will say, here in this world he changed his life. But many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse: *Hic jacet Arthurus Rex, quondam Rex que futurus.* Thus leave I here Sir Bedivere with the hermit, that dwelled that time in a chapel beside Glastonbury, and there was his hermitage. And so they lived in their prayers, and fastings, and great abstinence. And when Queen Guenever understood that King Arthur was slain, and all the noble knights, Sir Mordred and all the remnant, then the queen stole away, and five ladies with her, and so she went to Almesbury; and there she let make herself a nun, and ware white clothes and black, and great penance she took, as ever did sinful lady in this land, and never creature could make her merry; but lived in fasting, prayers, and alms-deeds, that all manner of people marvelled how virtuously she was chaged. 1391

## WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

## "The Birth of Britain"

From *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, Volume One  
(New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1956).

Nennius . . . tells us, what Gildas omits, the name of the British soldier who won the crowning mercy of Mount Badon, and that name takes us out of the mist of dimly remembered history into the daylight of romance. There looms, large, uncertain, dim but glittering, the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Somewhere in the Island a great <sup>1581</sup> captain gathered the forces of Roman Britain and fought the barbarian invaders to the death. Around him, around his name and his deeds, shine all that romance and poetry can bestow. Twelve battles, all located in scenes untraceable, with foes unknown, except that they were heathen, are punctiliously set forth in the Latin of Nennius. Other authorities say, "No Arthur; at least, no proof of any Arthur." It was only when Geoffrey of Monmouth six hundred years later was praising the splendours of feudalism and martial aristocracy that chivalry, honour, the Christian faith, knights in steel and ladies bewitching, are enshrined in a glorious circle lit by victory. Later this would have been retold and embellished by the genius of Malloy, Spenser, and Tennyson. True or false, they have gained an immortal hold upon the thoughts of men. It is difficult to believe it was all an invention of a Welsh writer. If it was he must have been a marvellous inventor.

Modern research has not accepted the annihilation of Arthur. Timidly but resolutely the latest and best-informed writers unite to proclaim his reality. They cannot tell when in this dark period he lived, or where he held sway and fought his battles. They are

## "THE BIRTH OF BRITAIN"

ready to believe however that there was a great British warrior, who kept the light of civilisation burning against all the storms that beat, and that behind his sword there sheltered a faithful following of which the memory did not fail. All four groups of the Celtic tribes which dwell in the tilted uplands of Britain cheered themselves with the Arthurian legend, and each claimed their own region as the scene of his exploits. From Cornwall to Cumberland a search for Arthur's realm or sphere has been pursued.

The reserve of modern assertions is sometimes pushed to extremes, in which the fear of being contradicted leads the writer to strip himself of almost all sense and meaning. One specimen of this method will suffice.<sup>1591</sup>

It is reasonably certain that a petty chieftain named Arthur did exist, probably in South Wales. It is possible that he may have held some military command uniting the tribal forces of the Celtic or highland zone or part of it against raiders and invaders (not all of them necessarily Teutonic). It is also possible that he may have engaged in all or some of the battles attributed to him; on the other hand, this attribution may belong to a later date.

This is not much to show after so much toil and learning. None the less, to have established a basis of fact for the story of Arthur is a service which should be respected. In this account we prefer to believe that the story with which Geoffrey delighted the fiction-loving Europe of the twelfth century is not all fancy. If we could see exactly what happened we should find ourselves in the presence of a theme as well founded, as inspired, and as inalienable from the inheritance of mankind as the *Odyssey* or the Old Testament. It is all true, or it ought to be; and more and better besides. And wherever men are fighting against barbarism, tyranny, and massacre, for freedom, law, and honour, let them remember that the fame of their deeds, even though they themselves be exterminated, may perhaps be celebrated as long as the world rolls round. Let us then declare that King Arthur and his noble knights, guarding the Sacred Flame of Christianity and the theme of a world order, sustained by valour, physical strength, and good horses and armour, slaughtered innumerable hosts of foul barbarians and set decent folk an example for all time.

We are told he was Dux Bellorum. What could be more <sup>1601</sup>

natural or more necessary than that a commander-in-chief should be accepted—a new Count of Britain, such as the Britons had appealed to Ætius to give them fifty years before? Once Arthur is recognised as the commander of a mobile field army, moving from one part of the country to another and uniting with local forces in each district, the disputes about the scenes of his actions explain themselves. Moreover the fourth century witnessed the rise of cavalry to the dominant position in the battlefield. The day of infantry had passed for a time, and the day of the legion had passed for ever. The Saxon invaders were infantry, fighting with sword and spear, and having little armour. Against such an enemy a small force of ordinary Roman cavalry might well prove invincible. If a chief like Arthur had gathered a band of mail-clad cavalry he could have moved freely about Britain, everywhere heading the local resistance to the invader and gaining repeated victories. The memory of Arthur carried with it the hope that a deliverer would return one day. The legend lived upon the increasing tribulations of the age. Arthur has been described as the last of the Romans. He understood Roman ideas, and used them for the good of the British people. "The heritage of Rome," Professor Collingwood says, "lives on in many shapes, but of the men who created that heritage Arthur was the last, and the story of Roman Britain ends with him."

Arthur's "twelfth battle," says Nennius, "was on Mount Badon, in which there fell in one day nine hundred and sixty men from the onslaught of Arthur only, and no one laid them low save he alone. And in all his battles he was victor. But they, when in all these battles they had been overthrown, sought help from Germany and increased without intermission."

All efforts to fix the battlefield of Mount Badon have failed. A hundred learned investigations have brought no results, but (1) if, as seems most probable, it was fought in the Debatable Land to check the advance from the East, then the best claimant to the title is Liddington Camp, which looks down on Badbury, near Swindon. On the other hand, we are able to fix the date with unusual accuracy. Gildas speaks of it as having occurred forty-three years and a month from the date when he was writing, and he says that he remembers the date because it was that of his own birth. Now we know from his book that the King of North Wales, Maelgwyn, was

still alive when he wrote, and the annals of Cambria tell us that he died of the plague in 547. Gildas thus wrote at the latest in this year, and the Battle of Mount Badon, forty-three years earlier, would have been fought in 503. We have also a cross-check in the Irish annals, which state that Gildas died in 569 or 570. His birth is therefore improbable before 490, and thus the date of the battle seems to be fixed between 490 and 503.<sup>1821</sup>

## JOHN J. PARRY AND ROBERT A. CALDWELL

### "Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*"

From *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1959).

Geoffrey's two chief contributions to the book are the stories of Merlin and Arthur. There were previous Welsh legends about Myrddin . . . , but at this time Geoffrey seems to have known little about them. Apart from the form and something of the content of the prophecies . . . , he perhaps got from oral tradition the remarkable account of the transference of the Giants' Dance from Ireland to Salisbury Plain . . . . But he took from Nennius the tale of Vortigern and his tower, the dragons in the drained pool, and the marvellous boy without a father—Nennius's Ambrosius, whom Geoffrey adopted by the simple expedient of saying that Merlin was also called Ambrosius. The rest of the Merlin story seems to have been the child of his own fertile brain.

Regarding the treatment of Arthur, much remains uncertain, but a few of the most plausible conjectures may be set down. As to Uther Pendragon, whom Geoffrey credits with the begetting of Arthur, opinion is divided as to whether there was a tradition about him or whether his name grew out of a misunderstanding of the Welsh *uŷŷr*, 'terrible'. For the story of Arthur's begetting there are many parallels. Faral pointed to the classical myth of Jupiter and Alcmena. Nutt preferred the Irish tale of *The Birth of Mongan*, while Gruffydd took the combined evidence of this tale and of the *mabinogi* of *Pwyll* to argue the existence of a Celtic tradition of a wonder child begotten by a god who visited the mother in the shape of a king, her husband.<sup>1881</sup> But if these stories came to Geoffrey in anything like the form in which we have them, he used his imagination freely upon them.

Nennius is the obvious source of Arthur's battles with the Saxons and of the natural marvels connected with *stagnum Linnonoi* (Loch Lomond) and Lindiguan, although the possibility that Geoffrey used other traditions cannot be excluded. At any rate, from Nennius's list of battle sites he took over three. The river Dubglas, which Nennius placed in the region of Linnuis, wherever that may be, Geoffrey placed south of York, perhaps under the impression that Linnuis was Lindsey (north Lincolnshire). After interposing a siege of York and a battle at Lincoln, for which Nennius furnished no warrant, Geoffrey carried the war into Scotland and placed Arthur's next victory at the wood of Celidon, which he found in Nennius. The great historic battle of Mons Badonis, which is the climax of Nennius's list, Geoffrey arbitrarily located at Bath, and with characteristic ingenuity explained how the Saxons turned up at a place so far from their late defeat in the wood of Celidon by telling how they broke their promise to return to Germany, sailed round to Totnes, and advanced on Bath from the south.

The shield Prydwen, the sword Caliburnus, and the lance Ron which Arthur bore in the battle of Bath were derived more or less directly from Welsh sources, for in *Culhwch and Olwen* Arthur mentions his sword Caledfwch and his spear Rhongomyriad, and both in *Culhwch* and the *Spoils of Annwn* he voyages in a ship called Prydwen. From Welsh tradition also Geoffrey took over the concept of Arthur as a king at whose court assembled the notable

men of his time, for this concept had been anticipated in *Culhwch*. But, as always, he was not content merely to adopt without change the materials provided. He made of Arthur's court a glorification of the courts he knew. Instead of the fantastic warriors named and described in the Welsh tale, Geoffrey surrounded Arthur with nobles and barons assembled from many parts of Western Europe, and added others whose names he picked at random from old Welsh pedigrees.

According to the *Historia*, Arthur's victories over the Saxons were followed by his subjugation of Scotland, Ireland, Norway, and Denmark, and one may guess that this career of conquest was inspired by even wilder flights of the Welsh imagination about the military exploits of Arthur, such as one 1881 finds in the speech of Glewlwyd in *Culhwch*. But these triumphs only prepared the way for greater. Frolo, tribune of Gaul, felt the weight of Caliburnus and perished in single combat; thus all Gaul was added to Arthur's dominions. The great climax, which Geoffrey carefully prepared, was the humiliation of Lucius Hibernus, Emperor of Rome. . . .

A hero as great as Arthur could not be conceived as falling except by treachery, and so Geoffrey introduced Modred. It is possible that there was a story about him, for the *Annales Cambriae*, we know, have the entry 'Battle of Camlann, in which Arthur and Medraut fell'. There is no indication whether the two were friends or enemies, but the triads and *Rhombwy's Dream* refer to the battle in terms which show no dependence on Geoffrey's narrative.

For Geoffrey's contemporaries this story of Arthur seems to have been the high point of the book, as it is for moderns, and Geoffrey clearly intended it to be. Some of the interest in the Arthurian section was no doubt the result of the tremendous vogue of current stories, but much is also the result of the author's artistry. As Tatlock says: 'It is hard to think of a single medieval work of any extent with such foresighted, indeed classical symmetry; it recalls the structure of good tragedy.' Here, as in the work as a whole, Geoffrey employed a plain style with few deviations from classical Latin, though he could be pompous and rhetorical, as in the dedications, when the occasion seemed to demand ornament. The verses he introduced into Book I were so good that John Milton, no mean Latinist himself, could hardly believe 1881 that they were authentic . . . .

Geoffrey's avowed purpose in composing his *magnum opus* was to provide the descendants of the Britons with a history of their race from the earliest times. The French, the Normans, and the Saxons had theirs, but the Welsh and Bretons had only the meagre scraps provided by Nennius and the hostile narratives of the Anglo-Saxons and the Romans, before whom there was only a blank. Here was an opportunity which a man with Geoffrey's gifts—and lack of historical conscience—could hardly miss. If the account was not true, something like it was—or should have been.

The various dedications, it is obvious, were designed to gain the more personal end of securing the favour of patrons. The complimentary portrait of Eldol, Earl of Gloucester, was surely intended to please the living Earl Robert, and the pictures of good and highly capable queens were probably written to prepare the way for rule by Matilda, whom Henry I had first designated as his heir in 1127.

Geoffrey seems also to have desired to help the English kings in their effort to assert their independence of the kings of France. As dukes of Normandy they were vassals of the French kings, who ruled as heirs of Charlemagne. But if Brutus, ravaging nearly all of Aquitaine and building Tours, had defeated the kings and peers of Gaul, if Belinus and Brennius had reduced 'the whole kingdom to submission', and if Arthur had again conquered France, all before Charlemagne's time, then the French kings should be subject to those of England. Another point brought out by the book was that all the king's subjects, no matter what their race—Geoffrey conveniently ignores the Anglo-Saxons—were kindred, for both Celts and French were descended from Trojan exiles. This would apply equally well to the subjects of Henry I or Matilda or Stephen, and when Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine came to the throne, its application was far broader than Geoffrey could have imagined when he first thought of the idea. . . . 1891

The history proved to be a great success, even if a serious chronicler like William of Newburgh denounced its patent falsehoods, and Giraldus Cambrensis, with more humour, showed that he recognized Geoffrey's fantastic narrative for what it was. According to Giraldus, in his *Itinerarium Cambriae* . . . , there lived in the neighbourhood of Caerleon a certain Metlerius, a familiar of evil spirits, through whose aid he could predict the future, distin-

guish truth from falsehood, and, even though he was illiterate, pick out the 1871 false passages in a book. 'It happened once, when he was being abused beyond measure by foul spirits, that the Gospel of John was placed on his breast; the spirits vanished completely, at once flying away like birds. When it was later removed and the *History of the Britons* by Geoffrey Arthur substituted for it, by way of experiment, they settled down again, not only on his entire body, but also on the book itself, for a longer time than they were accustomed to, in greater numbers, and more loathsomely.' But Giraldus could also on occasion cite the *Historia*, and for the most part it was accepted as both authoritative history and interesting reading.

The number of manuscripts (about 200) that have come down to us is exceedingly large for a work of this period, and there are few medieval historians after 1150 who do not show extensive traces of Geoffrey's influence. Even before his death Alfred of Beverley based his own history upon it, and Henry of Huntingdon, the early form of whose work Geoffrey had probably used, drew from it in the later recensions of his own *Historia Anglorum*. Prince Ilywelyn ap Gruffydd justified his title to Wales by pointing out his lineal descent from Camber, to whom Brutus had given all the land west of the Severn. King Edward I, in his dispute with Pope Boniface VIII over the sovereignty of Scotland, cited, with the approval of his barons, Geoffrey's narrative as proof of his claim. A monk of St. Albans, when he came to describe the wedding feast of this King Edward and Princess Margaret of France, copied almost verbatim Geoffrey's account of Arthur's Pentecostal feast. . . . 1891

. . . In conclusion, one may say of Geoffrey of Monmouth that he was a scholar with a very wide range of reading; a stylist of high competence in both prose and verse; a bold and imaginative writer of fiction in the guise of history. With such talents it needed no Merlin to prophesy that he would be read for generations to come. But even Merlin himself could hardly have foreseen that Geoffrey's work would affect the politics of Great Britain for five centuries, and that the greatest poets of England would drink from his fountain. 1891