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The Hobbit: An Illustrated Edition*

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The Complete Guide to Middle-earth*

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SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT PEARL

and

SIR ORFEO

PONTIFICIA UNIVERSIDAD CATOLICA DE CHILE
SISTEMAS DE BIBLIOTECAS
Translated by

J. R. R. TOLKIEN



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SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

I

When the siege and the assault had ceased at Troy,
and the fortress fell in flame to firebrands and ashes,
the traitor who the contrivance of treason there fashioned
was tried for his treachery, the most true upon earth—
it was Æneas the noble and his renowned kindred
who then laid under them lands, and lords became
of well-nigh all the wealth in the Western Isles.
When royal Romulus to Rome his road had taken,
in great pomp and pride he peopled it first,
and named it with his own name that yet now it bears;
Tirius went to Tuscany and towns founded,
Langaberde in Lombardy uplifted halls,
and far over the French flood Felix Brutus
on many a broad bank and brae Britain established
full fair,
where strange things, strife and sadness,
at whiles in the land did fare,

and each other grief and gladness
oft fast have followed there.

2

And when fair Britain was founded by this famous lord,
bold men were bred there who in battle rejoiced,
and many a time that betid they troubles aroused.
In this domain more marvels have by men been seen
than in any other that I know of since that olden time;
but of all that here abode in Britain as kings
ever was Arthur most honoured, as I have heard men tell.
Wherefore a marvel among men I mean to recall,
a sight strange to see some men have held it,
one of the wildest adventures of the wonders of Arthur.
If you will listen to this lay but a little while now,
I will tell it at once as in town I have heard

it told,

as it is fixed and fettered
in story brave and bold,
thus linked and truly lettered,
as was loved in this land of old.

3

This king lay at Camelot at Christmas-tide
with many a lovely lord, lieges most noble,
indeed of the Table Round all those tried brethren,
amid merriment unmatched and mirth without care.
There tourneyed many a time the trusty knights,
and jousted full joyously these gentle lords;

then to the court they came at carols to play.
For there the feast was unfailing full fifteen days,
with all meats and all mirth that men could devise,
such gladness and gaiety as was glorious to hear,
din of voices by day, and dancing by night;
all happiness at the highest in halls and in bowers
had the lords and the ladies, such as they loved most dearly.
With all the bliss of this world they abode together,
the knights most renowned after the name of Christ,
and the ladies most lovely that ever life enjoyed,
and he, king most courteous, who that court possessed.
For all that folk so fair did in their first estate

abide,

Under heaven the first in fame,
their king most high in pride;
it would now be hard to name
a troop in war so tried.

4

While New Year was yet young that yestereve had arrived,
that day double dainties on the dais were served,
when the king was there come with his courtiers to the hall,
and the chanting of the choir in the chapel had ended.
With loud clamour and cries both clerks and laymen
Noel announced anew, and named it full often;
then nobles ran anon with New Year gifts,
Handsels, handsels they shouted, and handed them out,
Competed for those presents in playful debate;
ladies laughed loudly, though they lost the game,

and he that won was not woeful, as may well be believed.
 All this merriment they made, till their meat was served;
 then they washed, and mannerly went to their seats,
 ever the highest for the worthiest, as was held to be best.
 Queen Guinevere the gay was with grace in the midst
 of the adorned dais set. Dearly was it arrayed:
 finest sendal at her sides, a ceiling above her
 of true tissue of Tolouse, and tapestries of Tharsia
 that were embroidered and bound with the brightest gems
 one might prove and appraise to purchase for coin
 any day.

That loveliest lady there
 on them glanced with eyes of grey;
 that he found ever one more fair
 in sooth might no man say.

5

But Arthur would not eat until all were served;
 his youth made him so merry with the moods of a boy,
 he liked lighthearted life, so loved he the less
 either long to be lying or long to be seated:
 so worked on him his young blood and wayward brain.
 And another rule moreover was his reason besides
 that in pride he had appointed: it pleased him not to eat
 upon festival so fair, ere he first were apprised
 of some strange story or stirring adventure,
 or some moving marvel that he might believe in
 of noble men, knighthood, or new adventures;
 or a challenger should come a champion seeking

to join with him in jousting, in jeopardy to set
 his life against life, each allowing the other
 the favour of fortune, were she fairer to him.
 This was the king's custom, wherever his court was holden,
 at each famous feast among his fair company
 in hall.

So his face doth proud appear,
 and he stands up stout and tall,
 all young in the New Year;
 much mirth he makes with all.

6

Thus there stands up straight the stern king himself,
 talking before the high table of trifles courtly.
 There good Gawain was set at Guinevere's side,
 with Agravain a la Dure Main on the other side seated,
 both their lord's sister-sons, loyal-hearted knights.
 Bishop Baldwin had the honour of the board's service,
 and Iwain Urien's son ate beside him.
 These dined on the dais and daintily fared,
 and many a loyal lord below at the long tables.
 Then forth came the first course with fanfare of trumpets,
 on which many bright banners bravely were hanging;
 noise of drums then anew and the noble pipes,
 warbling wild and keen, wakened their music,
 so that many hearts rose high hearing their playing.
 Then forth was brought a feast, fare of the noblest,
 multitude of fresh meats on so many dishes
 that free places were few in front of the people

to set the silver things full of soups on cloth
so white.

Each lord of his liking there
without lack took with delight:
twelve plates to every pair,
good beer and wine all bright.

7

Now of their service I will say nothing more,
for you are all well aware that no want would there be.
Another noise that was new drew near on a sudden,
so that their lord might have leave at last to take food.
For hardly had the music but a moment ended,
and the first course in the court as was custom been served,
when there passed through the portals a perilous horseman,
the mightiest on middle-earth in measure of height,
from his gorge to his girdle so great and so square,
and his loins and his limbs so long and so huge,
that half a troll upon earth I trow that he was,
but the largest man alive at least I declare him;
and yet the seemliest for his size that could sit on a horse,
for though in back and in breast his body was grim,
both his paunch and his waist were properly slight,
and all his features followed his fashion so gay
in mode:

for at the hue men gaped aghast
in his face and form that showed;
as a fay-man fell he passed,
and green all over glowed.

8

All of green were they made, both garments and man:
a coat tight and close that clung to his sides;
a rich robe above it all arrayed within
with fur finely trimmed, shewing fair fringes
of handsome ermine gay, as his hood was also,
that was lifted from his locks and laid on his shoulders;
and trim hose tight-drawn of tincture alike
that clung to his calves; and clear spurs below
of bright gold on silk broideries banded most richly,
though unshod were his shanks, for shoeless he rode.
And verily all this vesture was of verdure clear,
both the bars on his belt, and bright stones besides
that were richly arranged in his array so fair,
set on himself and on his saddle upon silk fabrics:
it would be too hard to rehearse one half of the trifles
that were embroidered upon them, what with birds and with
flies
in a gay glory of green, and ever gold in the midst.
The pendants of his poitrel, his proud crupper,
his molains, and all the metal to say more, were enamelled,
even the stirrups that he stood in were stained of the same;
and his saddlebows in suit, and their sumptuous skirts,
which ever glimmered and glinted all with green jewels;
even the horse that upheld him in hue was the same,

I tell:

a green horse great and thick,
a stallion stiff to quell,

in broidered bridle quick:
he matched his master well.

9

Very gay was this great man guised all in green,
and the hair of his head with his horse's accorded:
fair flapping locks enfolding his shoulders,
a big beard like a bush over his breast hanging
that with the handsome hair from his head falling
was sharp shorn to an edge just short of his elbows,
so that half his arms under it were hid, as it were
in a king's capadoce that encloses his neck.
The mane of that mighty horse was of much the same sort,
well curled and all combed, with many curious knots
woven in with gold wire about the wondrous green,
ever a strand of the hair and a string of the gold;
the tail and the top-lock were twined all to match
and both bound with a band of a brilliant green:
with dear jewels bedight to the dock's ending,
and twisted then on top was a tight-knitted knot
on which many burnished bells of bright gold jingled.
Such a mount on middle-earth, or man to ride him,
was never beheld in that hall with eyes ere that time;

for there

his glance was as lightning bright,
so did all that saw him swear;
no man would have the might,
they thought, his blows to bear.

10

And yet he had not a helm, nor a hauberk either,
not a pisane, not a plate that was proper to arms;
not a shield, not a shaft, for shock or for blow,
but in his one hand he held a holly-bundle,
that is greatest in greenery when groves are leafless,
and an axe in the other, ugly and monstrous,
a ruthless weapon aright for one in rhyme to describe:
the head was as large and as long as an ellwand,
a branch of green steel and of beaten gold;
the bit, burnished bright and broad at the edge,
as well shaped for shearing as sharp razors;
the stem was a stout staff, by which sternly he gripped it,
all bound with iron about to the base of the handle,
and engraven in green in graceful patterns,
lapped round with a lanyard that was lashed to the head
and down the length of the haft was looped many times;
and tassels of price were tied there in plenty
to bosses of the bright green, braided most richly.
Such was he that now hastened in, the hall entering,
pressing forward to the dais—no peril he feared.
To none gave he greeting, gazing above them,
and the first word that he winged: 'Now where is', he said,
'the governor of this gathering? For gladly I would
on the same set my sight, and with himself now talk
in town.'

On the courtiers he cast his eye,
and rolled it up and down;

he stopped, and stared to espy
who there had most renown.

11

Then they looked for a long while, on that lord gazing;
for every man marvelled what it could mean indeed
that horseman and horse such a hue should come by
as to grow green as the grass, and greener it seemed,
than green enamel on gold glowing far brighter.
All stared that stood there and stole up nearer,
watching him and wondering what in the world he would do.
For many marvels they had seen, but to match this nothing;
wherefore a phantom and fay-magic folk there thought it,
and so to answer little eager was any of those knights,
and astounded at his stern voice stone-still they sat there
in a swooning silence through that solemn chamber,
as if all had dropped into a dream, so died their voices
away.

Not only, I deem, for dread;
but of some 'twas their courtly way
to allow their lord and head
to the guest his word to say.

12

Then Arthur before the high dais beheld this wonder,
and freely with fair words, for fearless was he ever,
saluted him, saying: 'Lord, to this lodging thou'rt welcome!
The head of this household Arthur my name is.
Alight, as thou lovest me, and linger, I pray thee;

and what may thy wish be in a while we shall learn.'
'Nay, so help me,' quoth the horseman, 'He that on high is
throned,

to pass any time in this place was no part of my errand.
But since thy praises, prince, so proud are uplifted,
and thy castle and courtiers are accounted the best,
the stoutest in steel-gear that on steeds may ride,
most eager and honourable of the earth's people,
valiant to vie with in other virtuous sports,
and here is knighthood renowned, as is noised in my ears:
'tis that has fetched me hither, by my faith, at this time.
You may believe by this branch that I am bearing here
that I pass as one in peace, no peril seeking.
For had I set forth to fight in fashion of war,
I have a hauberk at home, and a helm also,
a shield, and a sharp spear shining brightly,
and other weapons to wield too, as well I believe;
but since I crave for no combat, my clothes are softer.
Yet if thou be so bold, as abroad is published,
thou wilt grant of thy goodness the game that I ask for
by right.'

Then Arthur answered there,
and said: 'Sir, noble knight,
if battle thou seek thus bare,
thou'lt fail not here to fight.'
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13

'Nay, I wish for no warfare, on my word I tell thee!
Here about on these benches are but beardless children.

Were I hasped in armour on a high charger,
 there is no man here to match me—their might is so feeble.
 And so I crave in this court only a Christmas pastime,
 since it is Yule and New Year, and you are young here and
 merry.

If any so hardy in this house here holds that he is,
 if so bold be his blood or his brain be so wild,
 that he stoutly dare strike one stroke for another,
 then I will give him as my gift this guisarm costly,
 this axe—'tis heavy enough—to handle as he pleases;
 and I will abide the first brunt, here bare as I sit.
 If any fellow be so fierce as my faith to test,
 hither let him haste to me and lay hold of this weapon—
 I hand it over for ever, he can have it as his own—
 and I will stand a stroke from him, stock-still on this floor,
 provided thou'lt lay down this law: that I may deliver him
 another.

Claim I!

And yet a respite I'll allow,
 till a year and a day go by.
 Come quick, and let's see now
 if any here dare reply!

14

If he astounded them at first, yet stiller were then
 all the household in the hall, both high men and low.
 The man on his mount moved in his saddle,
 and rudely his red eyes he rolled then about,
 bent his bristling brows all brilliantly green,

and swept round his beard to see who would rise.
 When none in converse would accost him, he coughed then
 loudly,
 stretched himself haughtily and straightway exclaimed:
 'What! Is this Arthur's house,' said he thereupon,
 'the rumour of which runs through realms unnumbered?
 Where now is your haughtiness, and your high conquests,
 your fierceness and fell mood, and your fine boasting?
 Now are the revels and the royalty of the Round Table
 overwhelmed by a word by one man spoken,
 for all blench now abashed ere a blow is offered!'
 With that he laughed so loud that their lord was angered,
 the blood shot for shame into his shining cheeks

and face;

as wroth as wind he grew,
 so all did in that place.

Then near to the stout man drew
 the king of fearless race,

15

And said: 'Marry! Good man, 'tis madness thou askest,
 and since folly thou hast sought, thou deservest to find it.
 I know no lord that is alarmed by thy loud words here.
 Give me now thy guisarm, in God's name, sir,
 and I will bring thee the blessing thou hast begged to
 receive.'

Quick then he came to him and caught it from his hand.
 Then the lordly man loftily alighted on foot.
 Now Arthur holds his axe, and the haft grasping

sternly he stirs it about, his stroke considering.
 The stout man before him there stood his full height,
 higher than any in that house by a head and yet more.
 With stern face as he stood he stroked at his beard,
 and with expression impassive he pulled down his coat,
 no more disturbed or distressed at the strength of his blows
 than if someone as he sat had served him a drink
 of wine.

From beside the queen Gawain
 to the king did then incline:
 'I implore with prayer plain
 that this match should now be mine.'

16

'Would you, my worthy lord,' said Wawain to the king,
 'bid me abandon this bench and stand by you there,
 so that I without discourtesy might be excused from the
 table,
 and my liege lady were not loth to permit me,
 I would come to your counsel before your courtiers fair.
 For I find it unfitting, as in fact it is held,
 when a challenge in your chamber makes choice so exalted,
 though you yourself be desirous to accept it in person,
 while many bold men about you on bench are seated:
 on earth there are, I hold, none more honest of purpose,
 no figures fairer on field where fighting is waged.
 I am the weakest, I am aware, and in wit feeblest,
 and the least loss, if I live not, if one would learn the truth.
 Only because you are my uncle is honour given me:

save your blood in my body I boast of no virtue;
 and since this affair is so foolish that it nowise befits you,
 and I have requested it first, accord it then to me!
 If my claim is uncalled-for without cavil shall judge
 this court.'

To consult the knights draw near,
 and this plan they all support;
 the king with crown to clear,
 and give Gawain the sport.

17

The king then commanded that he quickly should rise,
 and he readily uprose and directly approached,
 kneeling humbly before his highness, and laying hand on the
 weapon;
 and he lovingly relinquished it, and lifting his hand
 gave him God's blessing, and graciously enjoined him
 that his hand and his heart should be hardy alike.
 'Take care, cousin,' quoth the king, 'one cut to address,
 and if thou learnest him his lesson, I believe very well
 that thou wilt bear any blow that he gives back later.'
 Gawain goes to the great man with guisarm in hand,
 and he boldly abides there—he blenched not at all.
 Then next said to Gawain the knight all in green:
 'Let's tell again our agreement, ere we go any further.
 I'd know first, sir knight, thy name; I entreat thee
 to tell it me truly, that I may trust in thy word.'
 'In good faith,' quoth the good knight, 'I Gawain am called
 who bring thee this buffet, let be what may follow;

and at this time a twelvemonth in thy turn have another
with whatever weapon thou wilt, and in the world with
none else

but me.'

The other man answered again:

'I am passing pleased,' said he,

'upon my life, Sir Gawain,

that this stroke should be struck by thee.'

18

'Begad,' said the green knight, 'Sir Gawain, I am pleased
to find from thy fist the favour I asked for!

And thou hast promptly repeated and plainly hast stated
without abatement the bargain I begged of the king here;
save that thou must assure me, sir, on thy honour
that thou'lt seek me thyself, search where thou thinkest
I may be found near or far, and fetch thee such payment
as thou deliverest me today before these lordly people.'

'Where should I light on thee,' quoth Gawain, 'where look
for thy place?

I have never learned where thou livest, by the Lord that
made me,

and I know thee not, knight, thy name nor thy court.

But teach me the true way, and tell what men call thee,

and I will apply all my purpose the path to discover;

and that I swear thee for certain and solemnly promise.'

'That is enough in New Year, there is need of no more!'

said the great man in green to Gawain the courtly.

'If I tell thee the truth of it, when I have taken the knock,

and thou handily hast hit me, if in haste I announce then
my house and my home and mine own title,
then thou canst call and enquire and keep the agreement;
and if I waste not a word, thou'lt win better fortune,
for thou mayst linger in thy land and look no further—

but stay!

To thy grim tool now take heed, sir!

Let us try thy knocks today!'

'Gladly', said he, 'indeed, sir!'

and his axe he stroked in play.

19

The Green Knight on the ground now gets himself ready,
leaning a little with the head he lays bare the flesh,
and his locks long and lovely he lifts over his crown,
letting the naked neck as was needed appear.
His left foot on the floor before him placing,
Gawain gripped on his axe, gathered and raised it,
from aloft let it swiftly land where 'twas naked,
so that the sharp of his blade shivered the bones,
and sank clean through the clear fat and clove it asunder,
and the blade of the bright steel then bit into the ground.
The fair head to the floor fell from the shoulders,
and folk fended it with their feet as forth it went rolling;
the blood burst from the body, bright on the greenness,
and yet neither faltered nor fell the fierce man at all,
but stoutly he strode forth, still strong on his shanks,
and roughly he reached out among the rows that stood there,
caught up his comely head and quickly upraised it,

and then hastened to his horse, laid hold of the bridle,
stepped into stirrup-iron, and strode up aloft,
his head by the hair in his hand holding;
and he settled himself then in the saddle as firmly
as if unharmed by mishap, though in the hall he might wear
no head.

His trunk he twisted round,
that gruesome body that bled,
and many fear then found,
as soon as his speech was sped.

20

For the head in his hand he held it up straight,
towards the fairest at the table he twisted the face,
and it lifted up its eyelids and looked at them broadly,
and made such words with its mouth as may be recounted.
'See thou get ready, Gawain, to go as thou vowedst,
and as faithfully seek till thou find me, good sir,
as thou hast promised in this place in the presence of these
knights.

To the Green Chapel go thou, and get thee, I charge thee,
such a dint as thou hast dealt—indeed thou hast earned
a nimble knock in return on New Year's morning!
The Knight of the Green Chapel I am known to many,
so if to find me thou endeavour, thou'lt fail not to do so.
Therefore come! Or to be called a craven thou deservest.
With a rude roar and rush his reins he turned then,
and hastened out through the hall-door with his head in
his hand.

and fire of the flint flew from the feet of his charger. To what country he came in that court no man knew, no more than they had learned from what land he had journeyed.

Meanwhile,
the king and Sir Gawain
at the Green Man laugh and smile;
yet to men had appeared, 'twas plain,
a marvel beyond denial.

21

Though Arthur the high king in his heart marvelled,
he let no sign of it be seen, but said then aloud
to the queen so comely with courteous words:
‘Dear Lady, today be not downcast at all!
Such cunning play well becomes the Christmas tide,
interludes, and the like, and laughter and singing,
amid these noble dances of knights and of dames.
Nonetheless to my food I may fairly betake me,
for a marvel I have met, and I may not deny it.’
He glanced at Sir Gawain and with good point he said:
‘Come, hang up thine axe, sir! It has hewn now enough.’
And over the table they hung it on the tapestry behind,
where all men might remark it, a marvel to see,
and by its true token might tell of that adventure.
Then to a table they turned, those two lords together,
the king and his good kinsman, and courtly men served them
with all dainties double, the dearest there might be,
with all manner of meats and with minstrelsy too.

With delight that day they led, till to the land came the night
again.

Sir Gawain, now take heed
lest fear make thee refrain
from daring the dangerous deed
that thou in hand hast ta'en!

II

With this earnest of high deeds thus Arthur began
the young year, for brave vows he yearned to hear
made.

Though such words were wanting when they went to table,
now of fell work to full grasp filled were their hands.
Gawain was gay as he began those games in the hall,
but if the end be unhappy, hold it no wonder!
For though men be merry of mood when they have mightily
drunk,
a year slips by swiftly, never the same returning;
the outset to the ending is equal but seldom.
And so this Yule passed over and the year after,
and severally the seasons ensued in their turn:
after Christmas there came the crabbed Lenten
that with fish tries the flesh and with food more meagre;
but then the weather in the world makes war on the winter,
cold creeps into the earth, clouds are uplifted,
shining rain is shed in showers that all warm
fall on the fair turf, flowers there open,

of grounds and of groves green is the raiment,
birds are busy a-building and bravely are singing
for sweetness of the soft summer that will soon be on
the way;
and blossoms burgeon and blow
in hedgerows bright and gay;
then glorious musics go
through the woods in proud array.

23

After the season of summer with its soft breezes,
when Zephyr goes sighing through seeds and herbs,
right glad is the grass that grows in the open,
when the damp dewdrops are dripping from the leaves,
to greet a gay glance of the glistening sun.
But then Harvest hurries in, and hardens it quickly,
warns it before winter to wax to ripeness.
He drives with his drought the dust, till it rises
from the face of the land and flies up aloft;
wild wind in the welkin makes war on the sun,
the leaves loosed from the linden alight on the ground,
and all grey is the grass that green was before:
all things ripen and rot that rose up at first,
and so the year runs away in yesterdays many,
and here winter wends again, as by the way of the world
it ought,
until the Michaelmas moon
has winter's boding brought;

Sir Gawain then full soon
of his grievous journey thought.

24

And yet till All Hallows with Arthur he lingered,
who furnished on that festival a feast for the knight
with much royal revelry of the Round Table.
The knights of renown and noble ladies
all for the love of that lord had longing at heart,
but nevertheless the more lightly of laughter they spoke:
many were joyless who jested for his gentle sake.
For after their meal mournfully he reminded his uncle
that his departure was near, and plainly he said:
'Now liege-lord of my life, for leave I beg you.
You know the quest and the compact; I care not further
to trouble you with tale of it, save a trifling point:
I must set forth to my fate without fail in the morning,
as God will me guide, the Green Man to seek.'
Those most accounted in the castle came then together,
Iwain and Erric and others not a few,
Sir Doddinel le Savage, the Duke of Clarence,
Lancelot, and Lionel, and Lucan the Good,
Sir Bors and Sir Bedivere that were both men of might,
and many others of mark with Mador de la Porte.
All this company of the court the king now approached
to comfort the knight with care in their hearts.
Much mournful lament was made in the hall
that one so worthy as Wawain should wend on that errand,

to endure a deadly dint and deal no more
with blade.

The knight ever made good cheer,
saying, 'Why should I be dismayed?
Of doom the fair or drear
by a man must be assayed.'

25

He remained there that day, and in the morning got ready,
asked early for his arms, and they all were brought him.
First a carpet of red silk was arrayed on the floor,
and the gilded gear in plenty there glittered upon it.
The stern man stepped thereon and the steel things handled,
dressed in a doublet of damask of Tharsia,
and over it a cunning capadoce that was closed at the throat
and with fair ermine was furred all within.
Then sabatons first they set on his feet,
his legs lapped in steel in his lordly greaves,
on which the polains they placed, polished and shining
and knit upon his knees with knots all of gold;
then the comely cuisses that cunningly clasped
the thick thews of his thighs they with thongs on him tied;
and next the byrnie, woven of bright steel rings
upon costly quilting, enclosed him about;
and armlets well burnished upon both of his arms,
with gay elbow-pieces and gloves of plate,
and all the goodly gear to guard him whatever
betide;

coat-armour richly made,
gold spurs on heel in pride;
girt with a trusty blade,
silk belt about his side.

26

When he was hasped in his armour his harness was splendid:
the least latchet or loop was all lit with gold.

Thus harnessed as he was he heard now his Mass,
that was offered and honoured at the high altar;
and then he came to the king and his court-companions,
and with love he took leave of lords and of ladies;
and they kissed him and escorted him, and to Christ him
commended.

And now Gringolet stood groomed, and girt with a saddle
gleaming right gaily with many gold fringes,
and all newly for the nonce nailed at all points;
adorned with bars was the bridle, with bright gold banded;
the apparelling proud of poitreil and of skirts,
and the crupper and caparison accorded with the saddlebows:
all was arrayed in red with rich gold studded,
so that it glittered and glinted as a gleam of the sun.
Then he in hand took the helm and in haste kissed it:
strongly was it stapled and stuffed within;
it sat high upon his head and was hasped at the back,
and a light kerchief was laid o'er the beaver,
all braided and bound with the brightest gems
upon broad silken broidery, with birds on the seams
like popinjays depainted, here preening and there,

turtles and true-loves, entwined as thickly
as if many sempstresses had the sewing full seven winters
in hand.

A circlet of greater price
his crown about did band;
The diamonds point-device
there blazing bright did stand.

27

Then they brought him his blazon that was of brilliant gules
with the pentangle depicted in pure hue of gold.
By the baldric he caught it and about his neck cast it:
right well and worthily it went with the knight.
And why the pentangle is proper to that prince so noble
I intend now to tell you, though it may tarry my story.
It is a sign that Solomon once set on a time
to betoken Troth, as it is entitled to do;
for it is a figure that in it five points holdeth,
and each line overlaps and is linked with another,
and every way it is endless; and the English, I hear,
everywhere name it the Endless Knot.
So it suits well this knight and his unsullied arms;
for ever faithful in five points, and five times under each,
Gawain as good was acknowledged and as gold refined,
devoid of every vice and with virtues adorned.

So there
the pentangle painted new
he on shield and coat did wear,

as one of word most true
and knight of bearing fair.

28

First faultless was he found in his five senses,
and next in his five fingers he failed at no time,
and firmly on the Five Wounds all his faith was set
that Christ received on the cross, as the Creed tells us;
and wherever the brave man into battle was come,
on this beyond all things was his earnest thought:
that ever from the Five Joys all his valour he gained
that to Heaven's courteous Queen once came from her Child.
For which cause the knight had in comely wise
on the inner side of his shield her image depainted,
that when he cast his eyes thither his courage never failed.
The fifth five that was used, as I find, by this knight
was free-giving and friendliness first before all,
and chastity and chivalry ever changeless and straight,
and piety surpassing all points: these perfect five
were hasped upon him harder than on any man else.
Now these five series, in sooth, were fastened on this knight,
and each was knit with another and had no ending,
but were fixed at five points that failed not at all,
coincided in no line nor sundered either,
not ending in any angle anywhere, as I discover,
wherever the process was put in play or passed to an end.
Therefore on his shining shield was shaped now this knot,
royally with red gules upon red gold set:

this is the pure pentangle as people of learning
have taught.

Now Gawain in brave array
his lance at last hath caught.
He gave them all good day,
for evermore as he thought.

29

He spurred his steed with the spurs and sprang on his way
so fiercely that the flint-sparks flashed out behind him.
All who beheld him so honourable in their hearts were sighing,
and assenting in sooth one said to another,
grieving for that good man: 'Before God, 'tis a shame
that thou, lord, must be lost, who art in life so noble!
To meet his match among men, Marry, 'tis not easy!
To behave with more heed would have behoved one of sense,
and that dear lord duly a duke to have made,
illustrious leader of liegemen in this land as befits him;
and that would better have been than to be butchered to death,
beheaded by an elvish man for an arrogant vaunt.
Who can recall any king that such a course ever took
as knights quibbling at court at their Christmas games!'
Many warm tears outwelling there watered their eyes,
when that lord so beloved left the castle
that day.

No longer he abode,
but swiftly went his way;
bewildering ways he rode,
as the book I heard doth say.

30

Now he rides thus arrayed through the realm of Logres,
 Sir Gawain in God's care, though no game now he found it.
 Oft forlorn and alone he lodged of a night
 where he found not afforded him such fare as pleased him.
 He had no friend but his horse in the forests and hills,
 no man on his march to commune with but God,
 till anon he drew near unto Northern Wales.
 All the isles of Anglesey he held on his left,
 and over the fords he fared by the flats near the sea,
 and then over by the Holy Head to high land again
 in the wilderness of Wirral: there wandered but few
 who with good will regarded either God or mortal.
 And ever he asked as he went on of all whom he met
 if they had heard any news of a knight that was green
 in any ground thereabouts, or of the Green Chapel.
 And all denied it, saying nay, and that never in their lives
 a single man had they seen that of such a colour
 could be.

The knight took pathways strange
 by many a lonesome lea,
 and oft his view did change
 that chapel ere he could see.

31

Many a cliff he climbed o'er in countries unknown,
 far fled from his friends without fellowship he rode.
 At every wading or water on the way that he passed
 he found a foe before him, save at few for a wonder;

and so foul were they and fell that fight he must needs.
 So many a marvel in the mountains he met in those lands
 that 'twould be tedious the tenth part to tell you thereof.
 At whiles with worms he wars, and with wolves also,
 at whiles with wood-trolls that wandered in the crags,
 and with bulls and with bears and boars, too, at times;
 and with orges that hounded him from the heights of the
 fells.

Had he not been stalwart and staunch and steadfast in God,
 he doubtless would have died and death had met often;
 for though war wearied him much, the winter was worse,
 when the cold clear water from the clouds spilling
 froze ere it had fallen upon the faded earth.
 Well-nigh slain by the sleet he slept ironclad
 more nights than enow in the naked rocks,
 where clattering from the crest the cold brook tumbled,
 and hung high o'er his head in hard icicles.
 Thus in peril and pain and in passes grievous
 till Christmas-eve that country he crossed all alone
 in need.

The knight did at that tide
 his plaint to Mary plead,
 her rider's road to guide
 and to some lodging lead.

32

By a mount in the morning merrily he was riding
 into a forest that was deep and fearsomely wild,
 with high hills at each hand, and hoar woods beneath

of huge aged oaks by the hundred together;
 the hazel and the hawthorn were huddled and tangled
 with rough ragged moss around them trailing,
 with many birds bleakly on the bare twigs sitting
 that piteously piped there for pain of the cold.
 The good man on Gringolet goes now beneath them
 through many marshes and mires, a man all alone,
 troubled lest a truant at that time he should prove
 from the service of the sweet Lord, who on that selfsame
 night
 of a maid became man our mourning to conquer.
 And therefore sighing he said: 'I beseech thee, O Lord,
 and Mary, who is the mildest mother most dear,
 for some harbour where with honour I might hear the Mass
 and thy Matins tomorrow. This meekly I ask,
 and thereto promptly I pray with Pater and Ave
 and Creed.'

In prayer he now did ride,
 lamenting his misdeed;
 he blessed him oft and cried,
 'The Cross of Christ me speed!'

33

The sign on himself he had set but thrice,
 ere a mansion he marked within a moat in the forest,
 on a low mound above a lawn, laced under the branches
 of many a burly bole round about by the ditches:
 the castle most comely that ever a king possessed
 placed amid a pleasaunce with a park all about it,

within a palisade of pointed pales set closely
 that took its turn round the trees for two miles or more.
 Gawain from the one side gazed on the stronghold
 as it shimmered and shone through the shining oaks,
 and then humbly he offered his helm, and with honour he
 thanked

Jesus and Saint Julian, who generous are both,
 who had courtesy accorded him and to his cry harkened.
 'Now bon hostel,' quoth the knight, 'I beg of you still!'
 Then he goaded Gringolet with his gilded heels,
 and he chose by good chance the chief pathway
 and brought his master bravely to the bridge's end
 at last.

That brave bridge was up-hauled,
 the gates were bolted fast;
 the castle was strongly walled,
 it feared no wind or blast.

34

Then he stayed his steed that on the steep bank halted
 above the deep double ditch that was drawn round the place.
 The wall waded in the water wondrous deeply,
 and up again to a huge height in the air it mounted,
 all of hard hewn stone to the high cornice,
 fortified under the battlement in the best fashion
 and topped with fair turrets set by turns about
 that had many graceful loopholes with a good outlook:
 that knight a better barbican had never seen built.
 And inwards he beheld the hall uprising,

tall towers set in turns, and as tines clustering
 the fair finials, joined featly, so fine and so long,
 their capstones all carven with cunning and skill.
 Many chalk-white chimneys he chanced to espy
 upon the roofs of towers all radiant white;
 so many a painted pinnacle was peppered about,
 among the crenelles of the castle clustered so thickly
 that all pared out of paper it appeared to have been.
 The gallant knight on his great horse good enough thought it,
 if he could come by any course that enclosure to enter,
 to harbour in that hostel while the holy day lasted
 with delight.

He called, and there came with speed
 a porter blithe and bright;
 on the wall he learned his need,
 and hailed the errant knight.

35

'Good sir,' quoth Gawain, 'will you go with my message
 to the high lord of this house for harbour to pray?'
 'Yes, by Peter!' quoth the porter, 'and I promise indeed
 that you will, sir, be welcome while you wish to stay here.'
 Then quickly the man went and came again soon,
 servants bringing civilly to receive there the knight.
 They drew down the great drawbridge, and duly came forth,
 and on the cold earth on their knees in courtesy knelt
 to welcome this wayfarer with such worship as they knew.
 They delivered him the broad gates and laid them wide open,

and he readily bade them rise and rode o'er the bridge.
 Several servants then seized the saddle as he alighted,
 and many stout men his steed to a stable then led,
 while knights and esquires anon descended
 to guide there in gladness this guest to the hall.
 When he raised up his helm many ran there in haste
 to have it from his hand, his highness to serve;
 his blade and his blazon both they took charge of.
 Then he greeted graciously those good men all,
 and many were proud to approach him, that prince to honour.
 All hasped in his harness to hall they brought him,
 where a fair blaze in the fireplace fiercely was burning.
 Then the lord of that land leaving his chamber
 Came mannerly to meet the man on the floor.
 He said: 'You are welcome at your wish to dwell here.
 What is here, all is your own, to have in your rule
 any sway.'

'Gramercy!' quoth Gawain,
 'May Christ you this repay!'
 As men that to meet were fain
 they both embraced that day.

36

Gawain gazed at the good man who had greeted him kindly,
 and he thought bold and big was the baron of the castle,
 very large and long, and his life at the prime:
 broad and bright was his beard, and all beaver-hued,
 stern, strong in his stance upon stalwart legs,

his face fell as fire, and frank in his speech;
 and well it suited him, in sooth, as it seemed to the knight,
 a lordship to lead untroubled over lieges trusty.
 To a chamber the lord drew him, and charged men at once
 to assign him an esquire to serve and obey him;
 and there to wait on his word many worthy men were,
 who brought him to a bright bower where the bedding was
 splendid:

there were curtains of costly silk with clear-golden hems,
 and coverlets cunning-wrought with quilts most lovely
 of bright ermine above, embroidered at the sides,
 hangings running on ropes with red-gold rings,
 carpets of costly damask that covered the walls
 and the floor under foot fairly to match them.
 There they despoiled him, speaking to him gaily,
 his byrnie doing off and his bright armour.
 Rich robes then readily men ran to bring him,
 for him to change, and to clothe him, having chosen the best.
 As soon as he had donned one and dressed was therein,
 as it sat on him seemly with its sailing skirts,
 then verily in his visage a vision of Spring
 to each man there appeared, and in marvellous hues
 bright and beautiful was all his body beneath.
 That knight more noble was never made by Christ
 they thought.

He came none knew from where,
 but it seemed to them he ought
 to be a prince beyond compare
 in the field where fell men fought.

37

A chair before the chimney where charcoal was burning
 was made ready in his room, all arrayed and covered
 with cushions upon quilted cloths that were cunningly made.
 Then a comely cloak was cast about him
 of bright silk brocade, embroidered most richly
 and furred fairly within with fells of the choicest
 and all edged with ermine, and its hood was to match;
 and he sat in that seat seemly and noble
 and warmed himself with a will, and then his woes were
 amended.

Soon up on good trestles a table was raised
 and clad with a clean cloth clear white to look on;
 there was surnape, salt-cellar, and silvern spoons.
 He then washed as he would and went to his food,
 and many worthy men with worship waited upon him;
 soups they served of many sorts, seasoned most choicely,
 in double helpings, as was due, and divers sorts of fish;
 some baked in bread, some broiled on the coals,
 some seethed, some in gravy savoured with spices,
 and all with condiments so cunning that it caused him
 delight.

A fair feast he called it frankly and often,
 graciously, when all the good men together there pressed him:

'Now pray,
 this penance deign to take;
 'twill improve another day!'
 The man much mirth did make,
 for wine to his head made way.

38

Then inquiry and question were carefully put
 touching personal points to that prince himself,
 till he courteously declared that to the court he belonged
 that high Arthur in honour held in his sway,
 who was the right royal King of the Round Table,
 and 'twas Gawain himself that as their guest now sat
 and had come for that Christmas, as the case had turned out.
 When the lord had learned whom luck had brought him,
 loud laughed he thereat, so delighted he was,
 and they made very merry, all the men in that castle,
 and to appear in the presence were pressing and eager
 of one who all profit and prowess and perfect manners
 comprised in his person, and praise ever gained;
 of all men on middle-earth he most was admired.
 Softly each said then in secret to his friend:
 'Now fairly shall we mark the fine points of manners,
 and the perfect expressions of polished converse.
 How speech is well spent will be expounded unasked,
 since we have found here this fine father of breeding.
 God has given us of His goodness His grace now indeed,
 Who such a guest as Gawain has granted us to have!
 When blissful men at board for His birth sing blithe

at heart,
 what manners high may mean
 this knight will now impart.
 Who hears him will, I ween,
 of love-speech learn some art.'

39

When his dinner was done and he duly had risen,
 it now to the night-time very near had drawn.
 The chaplains then took to the chapel their way
 and rang the bells richly, as rightly they should,
 for the solemn evensong of the high season.
 The lord leads the way, and his lady with him;
 into a goodly oratory gracefully she enters.
 Gawain follows gladly, and goes there at once
 and the lord seizes him by the sleeve and to a seat leads him,
 kindly acknowledges him and calls him by his name,
 saying that most welcome he was of all guests in the world.
 And he grateful thanks gave him, and each greeted the other,
 and they sat together soberly while the service lasted.
 Then the lady longed to look at this knight;
 and from her closet she came with many comely maidens.
 She was fairer in face, in her flesh and her skin,
 her proportions, her complexion, and her port than all others,
 and more lovely than Guinevere to Gawain she looked.
 He came through the chancel to pay court to her grace;
 leading her by the left hand another lady was there
 who was older than she, indeed ancient she seemed,
 and held in high honour by all men about her.
 But unlike in their looks those ladies appeared,
 for if the younger was youthful, yellow was the elder;
 with rose-hue the one face was richly mantled,
 rough wrinkled cheeks rolled on the other;
 on the kerchiefs of the one many clear pearls were,

her breast and bright throat were bare displayed,
 fairer than white snow that falls on the hills;
 the other was clad with a cloth that enclosed all her neck,
 enveloped was her black chin with chalk-white veils,
 her forehead folded in silk, and so fumbled all up,
 so topped up and trinketed and with trifles bedecked
 that naught was bare of that beldame but her brows all black,
 her two eyes and her nose and her naked lips,
 and those were hideous to behold and horribly bleared;
 that a worthy dame she was may well, fore God,

be said!

short body and thick waist,
 with bulging buttocks spread;
 more delicious to the taste
 was the one she by her led.

40

When Gawain glimpsed that gay lady that so gracious
 looked,
 with leave sought of the lord towards the ladies he went;
 the elder he saluted, low to her bowing,
 about the lovelier he laid then lightly his arms
 and kissed her in courtly wise with courtesy speaking.
 His acquaintance they requested, and quickly he begged
 to be their servant in sooth, if so they desired.
 They took him between them, and talking they led him
 to a fireside in a fair room, and first of all called
 for spices, which men sped without sparing to bring them,

and ever wine therewith well to their liking.
 The lord for their delight leaped up full often,
 many times merry games being minded to make;
 his hood he doffed, and on high he hung it on a spear,
 and offered it as an honour for any to win
 who the most fun could devise at that Christmas feast—
 'And I shall try, by my troth, to contend with the best
 ere I forfeit this hood, with the help of my friends!'
 Thus with laughter and jollity the lord made his jests
 to gladden Sir Gawain with games that night

in hall,

until the time was due
 that the lord for lights should call;
 Sir Gawain with leave withdrew
 and went to bed withal.

41

On the morn when every man remembers the time
 that our dear Lord for our doom to die was born,
 in every home wakes happiness on earth for His sake.
 So did it there on that day with the dearest delights:
 at each meal and at dinner marvellous dishes
 men set on the dais, the daintiest meats.
 The old ancient woman was highest at table,
 meetly to her side the master he took him;
 Gawain and the gay lady together were seated
 in the centre, where as was seemly the service began,
 and so on through the hall as honour directed.

When each good man in his degree without grudge had been
 served,
 there was food, there was festival, there was fullness of joy;
 and to tell all the tale of it I should tedious find,
 though pains I might take every point to detail.
 Yet I ween that Wawain and that lady so fair
 in companionship took such pleasure together
 in sweet society soft words speaking,
 their courteous converse clean and clear of all evil,
 that with their pleasant pastime no prince's sport
 compares.

Drums beat, and trumps men wind,
 many pipers play their airs;
 each man his needs did mind,
 and they two minded theirs.

42

With much feasting they fared the first and the next day,
 and as heartily the third came hastening after:
 the gaiety of Saint John's day was glorious to hear;
 [with cheer of the choicest Childermas followed,]
 and that finished their revels, as folk there intended,
 for there were guests who must go in the grey morning.
 So a wondrous wake they held, and the wine they drank,
 and they danced and danced on, and dearly they carolled.
 At last when it was late their leave then they sought
 to wend on their ways, each worthy stranger.
 Good-day then said Gawain, but the good man stayed him,
 and led him to his own chamber to the chimney-corner,

and there he delayed him, and lovingly thanked him,
 for the pride and pleasure his presence had brought,
 for so honouring his house at that high season
 and deigning his dwelling to adorn with his favour.
 'Believe me, sir, while I live my luck I shall bless
 that Gawain was my guest at God's own feast.'
 'Gramercy, sir,' said Gawain, 'but the goodness is yours,
 all the honour is your own—may the High King repay you!
 And I am under your orders what you ask to perform,
 as I am bound now to be, for better or worse,
 by right.'

Him longer to retain
 the lord then pressed the knight;
 to him replied Gawain
 that he by no means might.

43

Then with courteous question he enquired of Gawain
 what dire need had driven him on that festal date
 with such keenness from the king's court, to come forth
 alone
 ere wholly the holidays from men's homes had departed.
 'In sooth, sir,' he said, 'you say but the truth:
 a high errand and a hasty from that house brought me;
 for I am summoned myself to seek for a place,
 though I wonder where in the world I must wander to find it.
 I would not miss coming nigh it on New Year's morning
 for all the land in Logres, so our Lord help me!
 And so, sir, this question I enquire of you here:

can you tell me in truth if you tale ever heard
 of the Green Chapel, on what ground it may stand,
 and of the great knight that guards it, all green in his colour?
 For the terms of a tryst were between us established
 to meet that man at that mark, if I remained alive,
 and the named New Year is now nearly upon me,
 and I would look on that lord, if God will allow me,
 more gladly, by God's son, than gain any treasure.
 So indeed, if you please, depart now I must.
 For my business I have now but barely three days,
 and I would fainer fall dead than fail in my errand,
 Then laughing said the lord: 'Now linger you must;
 for when 'tis time to that tryst I will teach you the road.
 On what ground is the Green Chapel—let it grieve you
 no more!

In your bed you shall be, sir, till broad is the day,
 without fret, and then fare on the first of the year,
 and come to the mark at midmorn, there to make what play
 you know.

Remain till New Year's day,
 then rise and riding go!
 We'll set you on your way,
 'tis but two miles or so.'

44

Then was Gawain delighted, and in gladness he laughed:
 'Now I thank you a thousand times for this beyond all!
 Now my quest is accomplished, as you crave it, I will
 dwell a few days here, and else do what you order.'

The lord then seized him and set him in a seat beside him,
 and let the ladies be sent for to delight them the more,
 for their sweet pleasure there in peace by themselves.
 For love of him that lord was as loud in his mirth
 as one near out of his mind who scarce knew what he meant.
 Then he called to the knight, crying out loudly:
 'You have promised to do whatever deed I propose.
 Will you hold this behest here, at this moment?'
 'Yes, certainly, sir,' then said the true knight,
 'while I remain in your mansion, your command I'll obey.'
 'Well,' returned he, 'you have travelled and toiled from afar,
 and then I've kept you awake: you're not well yet, not cured;
 both sustenance and sleep 'tis certain you need.
 Upstairs you shall stay, sir, and stop there in comfort
 tomorrow till Mass-time, and to a meal then go
 when you wish with my wife, who with you shall sit
 and comfort you with her company, till to court I return.

You stay,
 and I shall early rouse,
 and a-hunting wend my way.'
 Gawain gracefully bows:
 'Your wishes I will obey.'

45

'One thing more,' said the master, 'we'll make an agreement:
 whatever I win in the wood at once shall be yours,
 and whatever gain you may get you shall give in exchange.
 Shall we swap thus, sweet man—come, say what you
 think!—

whether one's luck be light, or one's lot be better?'
 'By God,' quoth good Gawain, 'I agree to it all,
 and whatever play you propose seems pleasant to me.'
 'Done! 'Tis a bargain! Who'll bring us the drink?'
 So said the lord of that land. They laughed one and all;
 they drank and they dallied, and they did as they pleased,
 these lords and ladies, as long as they wished,
 and then with customs of France and many courtly phrases
 they stood in sweet debate and soft words bandied,
 and lovingly they kissed, their leave taking.
 With trusty attendants and torches gleaming
 they were brought at the last to their beds so soft,
 one and all.

Yet ere to bed they came,
 he the bargain did oft recall;
 he knew how to play a game
 the old governor of that hall.

III

Before the first daylight the folk uprose:
 the guests that were to go for their grooms they called;
 and they hurried up in haste horses to saddle,
 to stow all their stuff and strap up their bags.
 The men of rank arrayed them, for riding got ready,
 to saddle leaped swiftly, seized then their bridles,
 and went off on their ways where their wish was to go.
 The liege-lord of the land was not last of them all

to be ready to ride with a rout of his men;
 he ate a hurried mouthful after the hearing of Mass,
 and with horn to the hunting-field he hastened at once.
 When daylight was opened yet dimly on earth
 he and his huntsmen were up on their high horses.
 Then the leaders of the hounds leashed them in couples,
 unclosed the kennel-door and cried to them 'out!'
 and blew boldly on bugles three blasts full long.
 Beagles bayed thereat, a brave noise making;
 and they whipped and wheeled in those that wandered on a
 scent;
 a hundred hunting-dogs, I have heard, of the best
 were they.

To their stations keepers passed;
 the leashes were cast away,
 and many a rousing blast
 woke din in the woods that day.

47

At the first burst of the baying all beasts trembled;
 deer dashed through the dale by dread bewildered,
 and hastened to the heights, but they hotly were greeted,
 and turned back by the beaters, who boldly shouted.
 They let the hearts go past with their high antlers,
 and the brave bucks also with their branching palms;
 for the lord of the castle had decreed in the close season
 that no man should molest the male of the deer.
 The hinds were held back with hey! and ware!,
 the does driven with great din to the deep valleys:

there could be seen let slip a sleet of arrows;
 at each turn under the trees went a twanging shaft
 that into brown hides bit hard with barbed head.
 Lo! they brayed, and they bled, and on the banks they died;
 and ever the hounds in haste hotly pursued them,
 and hunters with high horns hurried behind them
 with such a clamour and cry as if cliffs had been riven.
 If any beast broke away from bowmen there shooting,
 it was snatched down and slain at the receiving-station;
 when they had been harried from the height and hustled to
 the waters,
 the men were so wise in their craft at the watches below,
 and their greyhounds were so great that they got them
 at once,
 and flung them down in a flash, as fast as men could see
 with sight.

The lord then wild for joy
 did oft spur and oft alight,
 and thus in bliss employ
 that day till dark of night.

48

Thus in his game the lord goes under greenwood eaves,
 and Gawain the bold lies in goodly bed,
 lazing, till the walls are lit by the light of day,
 under costly coverlet with curtains about him.
 And as in slumber he strayed, he heard stealthily come
 a soft sound at his door as it secretly opened;
 and from under the clothes he craned then his head,

a corner of the curtain he caught up a little,
 and looked that way warily to learn what it was.
 It was the lady herself, most lovely to see,
 that cautiously closed the door quietly behind her,
 and drew near to his bed. Then abashed was the knight,
 and lay down swiftly to look as if he slept;
 and she stepped silently and stole to his bed,
 cast back the curtain, and crept then within,
 and sat her down softly on the side of the bed,
 and there lingered very long to look for his waking.
 He lay there lurking a long while and wondered,
 and mused in his mind how the matter would go,
 to what point it might pass—to some surprise, he fancied.
 Yet he said to himself: 'More seemly 'twould be
 in due course with question to enquire what she wishes.'
 Then rousing he rolled over, and round to her turning
 he lifted his eyelids with a look as of wonder,
 and signed him with the cross, thus safer to be kept
 aright.

With chin and cheeks so sweet
 of blended red and white,
 with grace then him did greet
 small lips with laughter bright.

49

'Good morning, Sir Gawain!' said that gracious lady.
 'You are a careless sleeper, if one can creep on you so!
 Now quickly you are caught! If we come not to terms,
 I shall bind you in your bed, you may be assured.'

With laughter the lady thus lightly jested.
 'Good morning to your grace!' said Gawain gaily.
 'You shall work on me your will, and well I am pleased;
 for I submit immediately, and for mercy I cry,
 and that is best, as I deem, for I am obliged to do so.'
 Thus he jested in return with much gentle laughter:
 'But if you would, lady gracious, then leave grant me,
 and release your prisoner and pray him to rise,
 I would abandon this bed and better array me;
 the more pleasant would it prove then to parley with you.'
 'Nay, for sooth, fair sir,' said the sweet lady,
 'you shall not go from your bed! I will govern you better:
 here fast shall I enfold you, on the far side also,
 and then talk with my true knight that I have taken so.
 For I wot well indeed that Sir Wawain you are,
 to whom all men pay homage wherever you ride;
 your honour, your courtesy, by the courteous is praised,
 by lords, by ladies, by all living people.
 And right here you now are, and we all by ourselves;
 my husband and his huntsmen far hence have ridden,
 other men are abed, and my maids also,
 the door closed and caught with a clasp that is strong;
 and since I have in this house one that all delight in,
 my time to account I will turn, while for talk I chance
 have still.

To my body will you welcome be
 of delight to take your fill;
 for need constraineth me
 to serve you, and I will.'

50

'Upon my word,' said Gawain, 'that is well, I guess;
 though I am not now he of whom you are speaking—
 to attain to such honour as here you tell of
 I am a knight unworthy, as well indeed I know—
 by God, I would be glad, if good to you seemed
 whatever I could say, or in service could offer
 to the pleasure of your excellence—it would be pure
 delight.'

'In good faith, Sir Gawain,' said the gracious lady,
 'the prowess and the excellence that all others approve,
 if I scorned or decried them, it were scant courtesy.
 But there are ladies in number who liever would now
 have thee in their hold, sir, as I have thee here,
 pleasantly to play with in polished converse,
 their solace to seek and their sorrows to soothe,
 than great part of the goods or gold that they own.
 But I thank Him who on high of Heaven is Lord
 that I have here wholly in my hand what all desire,
 by grace.'

She was an urgent wooer,
 that lady fair of face;
 the knight with speeches pure
 replied in every case.

51

'Madam,' said he merrily, 'Mary reward you!
 For I have enjoyed, in good faith, your generous favour,
 and much honour have had else from others' kind deeds;

but as for the courtesy they accord me, since my claim is not
equal,

the honour is your own, who are ever well-meaning.'

'Nay, Mary!' the lady demurred, 'as for me, I deny it.

For were I worth all the legion of women alive,

and all the wealth in the world at my will possessed,

if I should exchange at my choice and choose me a

husband,

for the noble nature I know, Sir Knight, in thee here,

in beauty and bounty and bearing so gay—

of which earlier I have heard, and hold it now true—

then no lord alive would I elect before you.'

'In truth, lady,' he returned, 'you took one far better.

But I am proud of the praise you are pleased to give me,

and as your servant in earnest my sovereign I hold you,

and your knight I become, and may Christ reward you.'

Thus of many matters they spoke till midmorn was passed,

and ever the lady demeaned her as one that loved him

much,

and he fenced with her featly, ever flawless in manner.

'Though I were lady most lovely,' thought the lady to

herself,

'the less love would he bring here,' since he looked for

his bane,

that blow

that him so soon should grieve,

and needs it must be so.

Then the lady asked for leave

and at once he let her go.

52

Then she gave him 'good day', and with a glance she

laughed,

and as she stood she astonished him with the strength of her

words:

'Now He that prospers all speech for this disport repay you!

But that you should be Gawain, it gives me much thought.'

'Why so?', then eagerly the knight asked her,

afraid that he had failed in the form of his converse.

But 'God bless you! For this reason', blithely she answered,

'that one so good as Gawain the gracious is held,

who all the compass of courtesy includes in his person,

so long with a lady could hardly have lingered

without craving a kiss, as a courteous knight,

by some tactful turn that their talk led to.'

Then said Wawain, 'Very well, as you wish be it done.

I will kiss at your command, as becometh a knight,

and more, lest he displease you, so plead it no longer.'

She came near thereupon and caught him in her arms,

and down daintily bending dearly she kissed him.

They courteously commended each other to Christ.

Without more ado through the door she withdrew and

departed,

and he to rise up in haste made ready at once.

He calls to his chamberlain, and chooses his clothes,

and goes forth when garbed all gladly to Mass.

Then he went to a meal that meetly awaited him,

and made merry all day, till the moon arose

o'er earth.

Ne'er was knight so gaily engaged
 between two dames of worth,
 the youthful and the aged:
 together they made much mirth.

53

And ever the lord of the land in his delight was abroad,
 hunting by holt and heath after hinds that were barren.
 When the sun began to slope he had slain such a number
 of does and other deer one might doubt it were true.
 Then the fell folk at last came flocking all in,
 and quickly of the kill they a quarry assembled.
 Thither the master hastened with a host of his men,
 gathered together those greatest in fat
 and had them riven open rightly, as the rules require.
 At the assay they were searched by some that were there,
 and two fingers' breadth of fat they found in the leanest.
 Next they slit the eslot, seized on the arber,
 shaved it with a sharp knife and shore away the grease;
 next ripped the four limbs and rent off the hide.
 Then they broke open the belly, the bowels they removed
 (flinging them nimbly afar) and the flesh of the knot;
 they grasped then the gorge, disengaging with skill
 the weasand from the windpipe, and did away with the guts.
 Then they shore out the shoulders with their sharpened
 knives
 (drawing the sinews through a small cut) the sides to keep
 whole;
 next they burst open the breast, and broke it apart,

and again at the gorge one begins thereupon,
 cuts all up quickly till he comes to the fork,
 and fetches forth the fore-numbles; and following after
 all the tissues along the ribs they tear away quickly.
 Thus by the bones of the back they broke off with skill,
 down even to the haunch, all that hung there together,
 and hoisted it up all whole and hewed it off there:
 and that they took for the numbles, as I trow is their name
 in kind.

Along the fork of every thigh
 the flaps they fold behind;
 to hew it in two they hie,
 down the back all to unbind.

54

Both the head and the neck they hew off after,
 and next swiftly they sunder the sides from the chine,
 and the bone for the crow they cast in the boughs.
 Then they thrust through both thick sides with a thong by
 the rib,
 and then by the hocks of the legs they hang them both up:
 all the folk earn the fees that fall to their lot.
 Upon the fell of the fair beast they fed their hounds then
 on the liver and the lights and the leather of the paunches
 with bread bathed in blood blended amongst them.
 Boldly they blew the prise, amid the barking of dogs,
 and then bearing up their venison bent their way homeward,
 striking up strongly many a stout horn-call.
 When daylight was done they all duly were come

into the noble castle, where quietly the knight
abode

in bliss by bright fire set.
Thither the lord now strode;
when Gawain with him met,
then free all pleasure flowed.

55

Then the master commanded his men to meet in that hall,
and both dames to come down with their damsels also;
before all the folk on that floor fair men he ordered
to fetch there forthwith his venison before him,
and all gracious in game to Gawain he called,
announced the number by tally of the nimble beasts,
and showed him the shining fat all shorn on the ribs.
'How does this play please you? Have I praise deserved?
Have I earned by mine art the heartiest thanks?'
'Yea verily,' the other averred, 'here is venison the fairest
that I've seen in seven years in the season of winter!'
'And I give it you all, Gawain,' said the good man at once,
'for as our covenant accorded you may claim it as your own.'
'That is true,' he returned, 'and I tell you the same:
what of worth within these walls I have won also
with as good will, I warrant, 'tis awarded to you.'
His fair neck he enfolded then fast in his arms,
and kissed him with all the kindness that his courtesy knew.
'There take you my gains, sir! I got nothing more.
I would give it up gladly even if greater it were.'

‘That is a good one!’ quoth the good man. ‘Greatly I thank you.

'Tis such, maybe, that you had better briefly now tell me where you won this same wealth by the wits you possess.' 'That was not the covenant,' quoth he. 'Do not question me more!

For you've drawn what is due to you, no doubt can you have
'tis true.'

They laugh, and with voices fair
their merriment pursue,
and to supper soon repair
with many dainties new.

56

Later by the chimney in chamber they were seated,
abundant wine of the best was brought to them oft,
and again as a game they agreed on the morrow
to abide by the same bond as they had bargained before:
chance what might chance, to exchange all their trade,
whatever new thing they got, when they gathered at night.
They concluded this compact before the courtiers all;
the drink for the bargain was brought forth in jest;
then their leave at the last they lovingly took,
and away then at once each went to his bed.
When the cock had crowed and cackled but thrice,
the lord had leaped from his bed, and his lieges each one;
so that their meal had been made, and the Mass was over,
and folk bound for the forest, ere the first daybreak,
to chase.

Loud with hunters and horns
o'er plains they passed apace,
and loosed there among the thorns
the running dogs to race.

57

Soon these cried for a quest in a covert by a marsh;
the huntsman hailed the hound that first heeded the scent,
stirring words he spoke to him with a strident voice.
The hounds then that heard it hastened thither swiftly,
and fell fast on the line, some forty at once.
Then such a baying and babel of bloodhounds together
arose that the rock-wall rang all about them.
Hunters enheartened them with horn and with mouth,
and then all in a rout rushed on together
between a fen-pool in that forest and a frowning crag.
In a tangle under a tall cliff at the tarn's edges,
where the rough rock ruggedly in ruin was fallen,
they fared to the find, followed by hunters
who made a cast round the crag and the clutter of stones,
till well they were aware that it waited within:
the very beast that the baying bloodhounds had spoken.
Then they beat on the bushes and bade him uprise,
and forth he came to their peril against folk in his path.
'Twas a boar without rival that burst out upon them;
long the herd he had left, that lone beast aged,
for savage was he, of all swine the hugest,
grim indeed when he grunted. Then aghast were many;
for three at the first thrust he threw to the ground,

and sprang off with great speed, sparing the others;
and they hallooed on high, and ha! ha! shouted,
and held horn to mouth, blowing hard the rally.
Many were the wild mouthings of men and of dogs,
as they bounded after this boar, him with blare and with din
to quell.

Many times he turns to bay,
and maims the pack pell-mell;
he hurts many hounds, and they
grievously yowl and yell.

58

Hunters then hurried up eager to shoot him,
aimed at him their arrows, often they hit him;
but poor at core proved the points that pitched on his
shields,
and the barbs on his brows would bite not at all;
though the shaven shaft shivered in pieces,
back the head came hopping, wherever it hit him.
But when the hurts went home of their heavier strokes,
then with brain wild for battle he burst out upon them,
ruthless he rent them as he rushed forward,
and many quailed at his coming and quickly withdrew.
But the lord on a light horse went leaping after him;
as bold man on battle-field with his bugle he blew
the rally-call as he rode through the rough thickets,
pursuing this wild swine till the sunbeams slanted.
This day in such doings thus duly they passed,
while our brave knight beloved there lies in his bed

at home in good hap, in housings so costly
and gay.

The lady did not forget:
she came to bid good day;
early she on him set,
his will to wear away.

59

She passed to the curtain and peeped at the knight.
Sir Wawain graciously then welcomed her first,
and she answered him alike, eagerly speaking,
and sat her softly by his side; and suddenly she laughed,
and with a look full of love delivered these words:
'Sir, if you are Wawain, a wonder I think it
that a man so well-meaning, ever mindful of good,
yet cannot comprehend the customs of the gentle;
and if one acquaints you therewith, you do not keep them
in mind:
thou hast forgot altogether what a day ago I taught
by the plainest points I could put into words!'
'What is that?' he said at once. 'I am not aware of it at all.
But if you are telling the truth, I must take all the blame.'
'And yet as to kisses', she quoth, 'this counsel I gave you:
wherever favour is found, defer not to claim them:
that becomes all who care for courteous manners.'
'Take back', said the true knight, 'that teaching, my dear!
For that I dared not do, for dread of refusal.
Were I rebuffed, I should be to blame for so bold an offer.'
'Ma fay!' said the fair lady, 'you may not be refused;

you are stout enough to constrain one by strength, if you like,
if any were so ill bred as to answer you nay.'
'Indeed, by God', quoth Gawain, 'you graciously speak;
but force finds no favour among the folk where I dwell,
and any gift not given gladly and freely.
I am at your call and command to kiss when you please.
You may receive as you desire, and cease as you think
in place.'

Then down the lady bent,
and sweetly kissed his face.
Much speech then there they spent
of lovers' grief and grace.

60

'I would learn from you, lord,' the lady then said,
'if you would not mind my asking, what is the meaning of this:
that one so young as are you in years, and so gay,
by renown so well known for knighthood and breeding,
while of all chivalry the choice, the chief thing to praise,
is the loyal practice of love: very lore of knighthood—
for, talking of the toils that these true knights suffer,
it is the title and contents and text of their works:
how lovers for their true love their lives have imperilled,
have endured for their dear one dolorous trials,
until avenged by their valour, their adversity passed,
they have brought bliss into her bower by their own brave
virtues—
and you are the knight of most noble renown in our age,
and your fame and fair name afar is published,

and I have sat by your very self now for the second time,
 yet your mouth has never made any remark I have heard
 that ever belonged to love-making, lesser or greater.
 Surely, you that are so accomplished and so courtly in
 your vows

should be prompt to expound to a young pupil
 by signs and examples the science of lovers.

Why? Are you ignorant who all honour enjoy?

Or else you esteem me too stupid to understand your
 courtship?

But nay!

Here single I come and sit,
 a pupil for your play;
 come, teach me of your wit,
 while my lord is far away.'

61

'In good faith', said Gawain, 'may God reward you!
 Great delight I gain, and am glad beyond measure
 that one so worthy as you should be willing to come here
 and take pains with so poor a man: as for playing with your
 knight,

showing favour in any form, it fills me with joy.
 But for me to take up the task on true love to lecture,
 to comment on the text and tales of knighthood
 to you, who I am certain possess far more skill
 in that art by the half than a hundred of such
 as I am, or shall ever be while on earth I remain,

it would be folly manifold, in faith, my lady!

All your will I would wish to work, as I am able,
 being so beholden in honour, and, so help me the Lord,
 desiring ever the servant of yourself to remain.'

Thus she tested and tried him, tempting him often,
 so as to allure him to love-making, whatever lay in her
 heart.

But his defence was so fair that no fault could be seen,
 nor any evil upon either side, nor aught but joy
 they wist.

They laughed and long they played;
 at last she him then kissed,
 with grace adieu him bade,
 and went whereso she list.

62

Then rousing from his rest he rose to hear Mass,
 and then their dinner was laid and daintily served.
 The livelong day with the ladies in delight he spent,
 but the lord o'er the lands leaped to and fro,
 pursuing his fell swine that o'er the slopes hurtled
 and bit asunder the backs of the best of his hounds,
 wherever to bay he was brought, until bowmen dislodged him,
 and made him, maugre his teeth, move again onward,
 so fast the shafts flew when the folk were assembled.
 And yet the stoutest of them still he made start there aside,
 till at last he was so spent he could speed no further,
 but in such haste as he might he made for a hollow

on a reef beside a rock where the river was flowing.
He put the bank at his back, began then to paw;
fearfully the froth of his mouth foamed from the corners;
he whetted his white tusks. Then weary were all
the brave men so bold as by him to stand
of plaguing him from afar, yet for peril they dared not
come nigher.

He had hurt so many before,
that none had now desire
to be torn with the tusks once more
of a beast both mad and dire.

63

Till the knight himself came, his courser spurring,
and saw him brought there to bay, and all about him his men.
Nothing loth he alighted, and leaving his horse,
brandished a bright blade and boldly advanced,
striding stoutly through the ford to where stood the felon.
The wild beast was aware of him with his weapon in hand,
and high raised his hair; with such hate he snorted
that folk feared for the knight, lest his foe should worst him.
Out came the swine and set on him at once,
and the boar and the brave man were both in a mellay
in the wildest of the water. The worse had the beast,
for the man marked him well, and as they met he at once
struck steadily his point straight in the neck-slot,
and hit him up to the hilts, so that his heart was riven,
and with a snarl he succumbed, and was swept down the water
straightway.

A hundred hounds him caught,
and fiercely bit their prey;
the men to the bank him brought,
and dogs him dead did lay.

64

There men blew for the prise in many a blaring horn,
and high and loud hallooed all the hunters that could;
bloodhounds bayed for the beast, as bade the masters,
who of that hard-run chase were the chief huntsmen.
Then one that was well learned in woodmen's lore
with pretty cunning began to carve up this boar.
First he hewed off his head and on high set it,
then he rent him roughly down the ridge of the back,
brought out the bowels, burned them on gledes,
and with them, blended with blood, the bloodhounds
rewarded.

Next he broke up the boar-flesh in broad slabs of brawn,
and haled forth the hastlets in order all duly,
and yet all whole he fastened the halves together,
and strongly on a stout pole he strung them then up.
Now with this swine homeward swiftly they hastened,
and the boar's head was borne before the brave knight
himself

who felled him in the ford by force of his hand
so great.

Until he saw Sir Gawain
in the hall he could hardly wait.

He called, and his pay to gain
the other came there straight.

65

The lord with his loud voice and laughter merry
gaily he greeted him when Gawain he saw.
The fair ladies were fetched and the folk all assembled,
and he showed them the shorn slabs, and shaped his report
of the width and wondrous length, and the wickedness also
in war, of the wild swine, as in the woods he had fled.
With fair words his friend the feat then applauded,
and praised the great prowess he had proved in his deeds;
for such brawn on a beast, the brave knight declared,
or such sides on a swine he had never seen before.
They then handled the huge head, and highly he praised it,
showing horror at the hideous thing to honour the lord.
'Now, Gawain,' said the good man, 'this game is your own
by close covenant we concluded, as clearly you know.'
'That is true,' he returned, 'and as truly I assure you
all my winnings, I warrant, I shall award you in exchange.'
He clasped his neck, and courteously a kiss he then
gave him
and swiftly with a second he served him on the spot.
'Now we are quits,' he quoth, 'and clear for this evening
of all covenants we accorded, since I came to this house,
as is due.'

The lord said: 'By Saint Gile,
your match I never knew!

You'll be wealthy in a while,
such trade if you pursue.'

66

Then on top of the trestles the tables they laid,
cast the cloths thereon, and clear light then
wakened along the walls; waxen torches
men set there, and servants went swift about the hall.
Much gladness and gaiety began then to spring
round the fire on the hearth, and freely and oft
at supper and later: many songs of delight,
such as canticles of Christmas, and new carol-dances,
amid all the mannerly mirth that men can tell of;
and ever our noble knight was next to the lady.
Such glances she gave him of her gracious favour,
secretly stealing sweet looks that strong man to charm,
that he was passing perplexed, and ill-pleased at heart.
Yet he would fain not of his courtesy coldly refuse her,
but graciously engaged her, however against the grain
the play.

When mirth they had made in hall
as long as they wished to stay,
to a room did the lord them call
and to the ingle they made their way.

67

There amid merry words and wine they had a mind
once more
to harp on the same note on New Year's Eve.

But said Gawain: 'Grant me leave to go on the morrow!
 For the appointment approaches that I pledged myself to.'
 The lord was loth to allow it, and longer would keep him,
 and said: 'As I am a true man I swear on my troth
 the Green Chapel thou shalt gain, and go to your business
 in the dawn of New Year, sir, ere daytime begins.
 So still lie upstairs and stay at thine ease,
 and I shall hunt in the holt here, and hold to my terms
 with thee truly, when I return, to trade all our gains.
 For I have tested thee twice, and trusty I find thee.
 Now 'third time pays for all', bethink thee tomorrow!
 Make we merry while we may and be mindful of joy,
 for the woe one may win whenever one wishes!'
 This was graciously agreed, and Gawain would linger.
 Then gaily drink is given them and they go to their beds
 with light.

Sir Gawain lies and sleeps
 soft and sound all night;
 his host to his hunting keeps,
 and is early arrayed aright.

68

After Mass of a morsel he and his men partook.
 Merry was the morning. For his mount then he called.
 All the huntsmen that on horse behind him should follow
 were ready mounted to ride arrayed at the gates.
 Wondrous fair were the fields, for the frost clung there;
 in red rose-hued o'er the wrack arises the sun,
 sailing clear along the coasts of the cloudy heavens.

The hunters loosed hounds by a holt-border;
 the rocks rang in the wood to the roar of their horns.
 Some fell on the line to where the fox was lying,
 crossing and re-crossing it in the cunning of their craft.
 A hound then gives tongue, the huntsman names him,
 round him press his companions in a pack all snuffling,
 running forth in a rabble then right in his path.
 The fox flits before them. They find him at once,
 and when they see him by sight they pursue him hotly,
 decrying him full clearly with a clamour of wrath.
 He dodges and ever doubles through many a dense coppice,
 and looping of the lurks and listens under fences.
 At last at a little ditch he leaps o'er a thorn-hedge,
 sneaks out secretly by the side of a thicket,
 weens he is out of the wood and away by his wiles from the
 hounds.

Thus he went unawares to a watch that was posted,
 where fierce on him fell three foes at once
 all grey.

He swerves then swift again,
 and dauntless darts astray;
 in grief and in great pain
 to the wood he turns away.

69

Then to hark to the hounds it was heart's delight,
 when all the pack came upon him, there pressing together.
 Such a curse at the view they called down on him
 that the clustering cliffs might have clattered in ruin.

Here he was hallooed when hunters came on him,
 yonder was he assailed with snarling tongues;
 there he was threatened and oft thief was he called,
 with ever the trailers at his tail so that tarry he could not.
 Oft was he run at, if he rushed outwards;
 oft he swerved in again, so subtle was Reynard.
 Yea! he led the lord and his hunt as laggards behind him
 thus by mount and by hill till mid-afternoon.

Meanwhile the courteous knight in the castle in comfort
 slumbered

behind the comely curtains in the cold morning.
 But the lady in love-making had no liking to sleep
 nor to disappoint the purpose she had planned in her heart;
 but rising up swiftly his room now she sought
 in a gay mantle that to the ground was measured
 and was fur-lined most fairly with fells well trimmed,
 with no comely coif on her head, only the clear jewels
 that were twined in her treasure by twenties in clusters;
 her noble face and her neck all naked were laid,
 her breast bare in front and at the back also.
 She came through the chamber-door and closed it
 behind her,
 wide set a window, and to wake him she called,
 thus greeting him gaily with her gracious words
 of cheer:

'Ah! man, how canst thou sleep,
 the morning is so clear!'
 He lay in darkness deep,
 but her call he then could hear.

70

In heavy darkness drowsing he dream-words muttered,
 as a man whose mind was bemused with many mournful
 thoughts,
 how destiny should his doom on that day bring him
 when he at the Green Chapel the great man would meet,
 and be obliged his blow to abide without debate at all.
 But when so comely she came, he recalled then his wits,
 swept aside his slumbers, and swiftly made answer.
 The lady in lovely guise came laughing sweetly,
 bent down o'er his dear face, and deftly kissed him.
 He greeted her graciously with a glad welcome,
 seeing her so glorious and gaily attired,
 so faultless in her features and so fine in her hues
 that at once joy up-welling went warm to his heart.
 With smiles sweet and soft they turned swiftly to mirth,
 and only brightness and bliss was broached there
 between them

so gay.

They spoke then speeches good,
 much pleasure was in that play;
 great peril between them stood,
 unless Mary for her knight should pray.

71

For she, queenly and peerless, pressed him so closely,
 led him so near the line, that at last he must needs
 either refuse her with offence or her favours there take.
 He cared for his courtesy, lest a caitiff he proved,

yet more for his sad case, if he should sin commit
 and to the owner of the house, to his host, be a traitor.
 'God help me!' said he. 'Happen that shall not!'
 Smiling sweetly aside from himself then he turned
 all the fond words of favour that fell from her lips.
 Said she to the knight then: 'Now shame you deserve,
 if you love not one that lies alone here beside you,
 who beyond all women in the world is wounded in heart,
 unless you have a lemman, more beloved, whom you like
 better,
 and have affianced faith to that fair one so fast and so true
 that your release you desire not—and so I believe now;
 and to tell me if that be so truly, I beg you.
 For all sakes that men swear by conceal not the truth
 in guile.'

The knight said: 'By Saint John,'
 and softly gave a smile,
 'Nay! lover have I none,
 and none will have meanwhile.'

72

'Those words', said the woman, 'are the worst that could be.
 But I am answered indeed, and 'tis hard to endure.
 Kiss me now kindly, and I will quickly depart.
 I may but mourn while I live as one that much is in love.'
 Sighing she sank down, and sweetly she kissed him;
 then soon she left his side, and said as she stood there:
 'Now, my dear, at this parting do me this pleasure,
 give me something as thy gift, thy glove it might be,

that I may remember thee, dear man, my mourning to
 lessen.'

'Now on my word,' then said he, 'I wish I had here
 the loveliest thing for thy delight that in my land I possess;
 for worthily have you earned wondrously often
 more reward by rights than within my reach would now be,
 save to allot you as love-token thing of little value.
 Beneath your honour it is to have here and now
 a glove for a guerdon as the gift of Sir Gawain:
 and I am here on an errand in unknown lands,
 and have no bearers with baggage and beautiful things
 (unluckily, dear lady) for your delight at this time.
 A man must do as he is placed; be not pained nor aggrieved,'

 said he.

Said she so comely clad:
 'Nay, noble knight and free,
 though naught of yours I had,
 you should get a gift from me.'

73

A rich ring she offered him of red gold fashioned,
 with a stone like a star standing up clear
 that bore brilliant beams as bright as the sun:
 I warrant you it was worth wealth beyond measure.
 But the knight said nay to it, and announced then at once:
 'I will have no gifts, fore God, of your grace at this time.
 I have none to return you, and naught will I take.'
 She proffered it and pressed him, and he her pleading
 refused,

and swore swiftly upon his word that accept it he would not.
 And she, sorry that he refused, said to him further:
 'If to my ring you say nay, since too rich it appears,
 and you would not so deeply be indebted to me,
 I shall give you my girdle, less gain will that be.'
 She unbound a belt swiftly that embracing her sides
 was clasped above her kirtle under her comely mantle.
 Fashioned it was of green silk, and with gold finished,
 though only braided round about, embroidered by hand;
 and this she would give to Gawain, and gladly besought him,
 of no worth though it were, to be willing to take it.
 And he said nay, he would not, he would never receive
 either gold or jewelry, ere God the grace sent him
 to accomplish the quest on which he had come thither.
 'And therefore I pray you, please be not angry,
 and cease to insist on it, for your suit I will ever
 say no.

I am deeply in debt to you
 for the favour that you show,
 to be your servant true
 for ever in weal or woe.'

74

'Do you refuse now this silk,' said the fair lady,
 'because in itself it is poor? And so it appears.
 See how small 'tis in size, and smaller in value!
 But one who knew of the nature that is knit therewithin
 would appraise it probably at a price far higher.
 For whoever goes girdled with this green riband,

while he keeps it well clasped closely about him,
 there is none so hardy under heaven that to hew him
 were able;
 for he could not be killed by any cunning of hand.'
 The knight then took note, and thought now in his heart,
 'twould be a prize in that peril that was appointed to him.
 When he gained the Green Chapel to get there his sentence,
 if by some sleight he were not slain, 'twould be a sovereign
 device.
 Then he bore with her rebuke, and debated not her words;
 and she pressed on him the belt, and proffered it in earnest;
 and he agreed, and she gave it very gladly indeed,
 and prayed him for her sake to part with it never,
 but on his honour hide it from her husband; and he then
 agreed
 that no one ever should know, nay, none in the world
 but they.

With earnest heart and mood
 great thanks he oft did say.
 She then the knight so good
 a third time kissed that day.

75

Then she left him alone, her leave taking,
 for amusement from the man no more could she get.
 When she was gone Sir Gawain got him soon ready,
 arose and robed himself in raiment noble.
 He laid up the love-lace that the lady had given,
 hiding it heedfully where he after might find it.

Then first of all he chose to fare to the chapel,
privately approached a priest, and prayed that he there
would uplift his life, that he might learn better
how his soul should be saved, when he was sent from the
world.

There he cleanly confessed him and declared his misdeeds,
both the more and the less, and for mercy he begged,
to absolve him of them all he besought the good man;
and he assoiled him and made him as safe and as clean
as for Doom's Day indeed, were it due on the morrow.
Thereafter more merry he made among the fair ladies,
with carol-dances gentle and all kinds of rejoicing,
then ever he did ere that day, till the darkness of night,
in bliss.

Each man there said: 'I vow
a delight to all he is!
Since hither he came till now,
he was ne'er so gay as this.'

76

Now indoors let him dwell and have dearest delight,
while the free lord yet fares afield in his sports!
At last the fox he has felled that he followed so long;
for, as he spurred through a spinney to espy there the villain,
where the hounds he had heard that hard on him pressed,
Reynard on his road came through a rough thicket,
and all the rabble in a rush were right on his heels.
The man is aware of the wild thing, and watchful awaits him,

brings out his bright brand and at the beast hurls it;
and he blenched at the blade, and would have backed if he
could.

A hound hastened up, and had him ere he could;
and right before the horse's feet they fell on him all,
and worried there the wily one with a wild clamour.
The lord quickly alights and lifts him at once,
snatching him swiftly from their slaving mouths,
holds him high o'er his head, hallooing loudly;
and there bay at him fiercely many furious hounds.
Huntsmen hurried thither, with horns full many
ever sounding the assembly, till they saw the master.
When together had come his company noble,
all that ever bore bugle were blowing at once,
and all the others hallooed that had not a horn:
it was the merriest music that ever men harkened,
the resounding song there raised that for Reynard's soul
awoke.

To hounds they pay their fees,
their heads they fondly stroke,
and Reynard then they seize,
and off they skin his cloak.

77

And then homeward they hastened, for at hand was now
night,
making strong music on their mighty horns.
The lord alighted at last at his beloved abode,

found a fire in the hall, and fair by the hearth
 Sir Gawain the good, and gay was he too,
 among the ladies in delight his lot was most joyful.
 He was clad in a blue cloak that came to the ground;
 his surcoat well beseemed him with its soft lining,
 and its hood of like hue that hung on his shoulder:
 all fringed with white fur very finely were both.
 He met indeed the master in the midst of the floor,
 and in gaiety greeted him, and graciously said:
 'In this case I will first our covenant fulfil
 that to our good we agreed, when ungrudged went the
 drink.'

He clasps then the knight and kisses him thrice,
 as long and deliciously as he could lay them upon him.
 'By Christ!' the other quoth, 'you've come by a fortune
 in winning such wares, were they worth what you paid.'
 'Indeed, the price was not important,' promptly he
 answered,

'whereas plainly is paid now the profit I gained.'
 'Marry!' said the other man, 'mine is not up to't;
 for I have hunted all this day, and naught else have I got
 but this foul fox-fell—the Fiend have the goods!—
 and that is price very poor to pay for such treasures
 as these you have thrust upon me, three such kisses
 so good.'

' 'Tis enough,' then said Gawain.
 'I thank you, by the Rood,'
 and how the fox was slain
 he told him as they stood.

78

With mirth and minstrelsy and meats at their pleasure
 as merry they made as any men could be;
 amid the laughter of ladies and light words of jest
 both Gawain and the good man could no gayer have proved,
 unless they had doted indeed or else drunken had been.
 Both the host and his household went on with their games,
 till the hour had approached when part must they all;
 to bed were now bound the brave folk at last.
 Bowing low his leave of the lord there first
 the good knight then took, and graciously thanked him:
 'For such a wondrous welcome as within these walls I
 have had,

for your honour at this high feast the High King reward you!
 In your service I set myself, your servant, if you will.
 For I must needs make a move tomorrow, as you know,
 if you give me some good man to go, as you promised,
 and guide me to the Green Chapel, as God may permit me
 to face on New Year's day such doom as befalls me.'
 'On my word,' said his host, 'with hearty good will
 to all that ever I promised I promptly shall hold.'
 Then a servant he assigns him to set him on the road,
 and by the downs to conduct him, that without doubt or delay
 he might through wild and through wood ways most straight
 pursue.

Said Gawain, 'My thanks receive,
 such a favour you will do!'
 The knight then took his leave
 of those noble ladies two.

79

Sadly he kissed them and said his farewells,
and pressed oft upon them in plenty his thanks,
and they promptly the same again repaid him;
to God's keeping they gave him, grievously sighing.
Then from the people of the castle he with courtesy parted;
all the men that he met he remembered with thanks
for their care for his comfort and their kind service,
and the trouble each had taken in attendance upon him;
and every one was as woeful to wish him adieu
as had they lived all their lives with his lordship in honour.
Then with link-men and lights he was led to his chamber
and brought sweetly to bed, there to be at his rest.
That soundly he slept then assert will I not,
for he had many matters in the morning to mind, if he would,
in thought.

There let him lie in peace,
near now is the tryst he sought.
If a while you will hold your peace,
I will tell the deeds they wrought!

IV

Now New Year draws near and the night passes,
day comes driving the dark, as ordained by God;
but wild weathers of the world awake in the land,
clouds cast keenly the cold upon earth
with bitter breath from the North biting the naked.

Snow comes shivering sharp to shrivel the wild things,
the whistling wind whirls from the heights
and drives every dale full of drifts very deep.
Long the knight listens as he lies in his bed;
though he lays down his eyelids, very little he sleeps:
at the crow of every cock he recalls well his tryst.
Briskly he rose from his bed ere the break of day,
for there was light from a lamp that illumined his chamber.
He called to his chamberlain, who quickly him answered,
and he bade him bring his byrnie and his beast saddle.
The man got him up and his gear fetched him,
and garbed then Sir Gawain in great array;
first he clad him in his clothes to keep out the cold,
and after that in his harness that with heed had been tended,
both his pauncer and his plates polished all brightly,
the rings rid of the rust on his rich byrnie:
all was neat as if new, and the knight him thanked
with delight.

He put on every piece
all burnished well and bright;
most gallant from here to Greece
for his courser called the knight.

81

While the proudest of his apparel he put on himself:
his coat-armour, with the cognisance of the clear symbol
upon velvet environed with virtuous gems
all bound and braided about it, with brodered seams
and with fine furs lined wondrous fairly within,

yet he overlooked not the lace that the lady had given him;
 that Gawain forgot not, of his own good thinking;
 when he had belted his brand upon his buxom haunches,
 he twined the love-token twice then about him,
 and swiftly he swathed it sweetly about his waist,
 that girdle of green silk, and gallant it looked
 upon the royal red cloth that was rich to behold.
 But he wore not for worth nor for wealth this girdle,
 not for pride in the pendants, though polished they were,
 not though the glittering gold there gleamed at the ends,
 but so that himself he might save when suffer he must,
 must abide bane without debating it with blade or with brand
 of war.

When arrayed the knight so bold
 came out before the door,
 to all that high household
 great thanks he gave once more.

82

Now Gringolet was groomed, the great horse and high,
 who had been lodged to his liking and loyally tended:
 fain to gallop was that gallant horse for his good fettle.
 His master to him came and marked well his coat,
 and said: 'Now solemnly myself I swear on my troth
 there is a company in this castle that is careful of honour!
 Their lord that them leads, may his lot be joyful!
 Their beloved lady in life may delight befall her!
 If they out of charity thus cherish a guest,
 upholding their house in honour, may He them reward

that upholds heaven on high, and all of you too!
 And if life a little longer I might lead upon earth,
 I would give you some guerdon gladly, were I able.'
 Then he steps in the stirrup and strides on his horse;
 his shield his man showed him, and on shoulder he slung it,
 Gringolet he goaded with his gilded heels,
 and he plunged forth on the pavement, and prancing no more
 stood there.

Ready now was his squire to ride
 that his helm and lance would bear.
 'Christ keep this castle!' he cried
 and wished it fortune fair.

83

The bridge was brought down and the broad gates then
 unbarred and swung back upon both hinges.
 The brave man blessed himself, and the boards crossing,
 bade the porter up rise, who before the prince kneeling
 gave him 'Good day, Sir Gawain!' and 'God save you!'
 Then he went on his way with the one man only
 to guide him as he goes to that grievous place
 where he is due to endure the dolorous blow.
 They go by banks and by braes where branches are bare,
 they climb along cliffs where clingeth the cold;
 the heavens are lifted high, but under them evilly
 mist hangs moist on the moor, melts on the mountains;
 every hill has a hat, a mist-mantle huge.
 Brooks break and boil on braes all about,

bright bubbling on their banks where they bustle
downwards.

Very wild through the wood is the way they must take,
until soon comes the season when the sun rises
that day.

On a high hill they abode,
white snow beside them lay;
the man that by him rode
there bade his master stay.

84

'For so far I have taken you, sir, at this time,
and now you are near to that noted place
that you have enquired and questioned so curiously after.
But I will announce now the truth, since you are known
to me,
and you are a lord in this life that I love greatly,
if you would follow my advice you would fare better.
The place that you pass to, men perilous hold it,
the worst wight in the world in that waste dwelleth;
for he is stout and stern, and to strike he delights,
and he mightier than any man upon middle-earth is;
and his body is bigger than the four best men
that are in Arthur's house, either Hestor or others.
All goes as he chooses at the Green Chapel;
no one passes by that place so proud in his arms
that he hews not to death by dint of his hand.
For he is a man monstrous, and mercy he knows not;
for be it a churl or a chaplain that by the Chapel rideth,

a monk or a mass-priest or any man besides,
he would as soon have him slain as himself go alive.
And so I say to you, as sure as you sit in your saddle,
if you come there, you'll be killed, if the carl has his way.
Trust me, that is true, though you had twenty lives
to yield.

He here has dwelt now long
and stirred much strife on field;
against his strokes so strong
yourself you cannot shield.

85

And so, good Sir Gawain, now go another way,
and let the man alone, for the love of God, sir!
Come to some other country, and there may Christ keep you!
And I shall haste me home again, and on my honour I
promise
that I swear will by God and all His gracious saints,
so help me God and the Halidom, and other oaths a plenty,
that I will safe keep your secret, and say not a word
that ever you fain were to flee for any foe that I knew of.'
'Gramercy!' quoth Gawain, and regretfully answered:
'Well, man, I wish thee, who wishest my good,
and keep safe my secret, I am certain thou wouldst.
But however heedfully thou hid it, if I here departed,
fain in fear now to flee, in the fashion thou speakest,
I should a knight coward be, I could not be excused.
Noy, I'll fare to the Chapel, whatever chance may befall,
and have such words with that wild man as my wish is to say,

come fair or come foul, as fate will allot
me there.

He may be a fearsome knave
to tame, and club may bear;
but His servants true to save
the Lord can well prepare.'

86

'Marry!' quoth the other man, 'now thou makest it so clear
that thou wishest thine own bane to bring on thyself,
and to lose thy life hast a liking, to delay thee I care not!
Have here thy helm on thy head, thy spear in thy hand,
and ride down by yon rock-side where runs this same track,
till thou art brought to the bottom of the baleful valley.
A little to thy left hand then look o'er the green,
and thou wilt see on the slope the selfsame chapel,
and the great man and grim on ground that it keeps.
Now farewell in God's name, Gawain the noble!
For all the gold in the world I would not go with thee,
nor bear thee fellowship through this forest one foot further!'
With that his bridle towards the wood back the man turneth,
hits his horse with his heels as hard as he can,
gallops on the greenway, and the good knight there leaves
alone.

Quoth Gawain: 'By God on high
I will neither grieve nor groan.
With God's will I comply.
Whose protection I do own.'

87

Then he put spurs to Gringolet, and espying the track,
thrust in along a bank by a thicket's border,
rode down the rough brae right to the valley;
and then he gazed all about: a grim place he thought it,
and saw no sign of shelter on any side at all,
only high hillsides sheer upon either hand,
and notched knuckled crags with gnarled boulders;
the very skies by the peaks were scraped, it appeared.
Then he halted and held in his horse for the time,
and changed oft his front the Chapel to find.
Such on no side he saw, as seemed to him strange,
save a mound as it might be near the marge of a green,
a worn barrow on a brae by the brink of a water,
beside falls in a flood that was flowing down;
the burn bubbled therein, as if boiling it were.
He urged on his horse then, and came up to the mound,
there lightly alit, and lashed to a tree
his reins, with a rough branch rightly secured them.
Then he went to the barrow and about it he walked,
debating in his mind what might the thing be.
It had a hole at the end and at either side,
and with grass in green patches was grown all over,
and was all hollow within: nought but an old cavern,
or a cleft in an old crag; he could not it name
aright.

'Can this be the Chapel Green,
O Lord?' said the gentle knight.

'Here the Devil might say, I ween,
his matins about midnight!'

88

'On my word,' quoth Wawain, ' 'tis a wilderness here!
This oratory looks evil. With herbs overgrown
it fits well that fellow transformed into green
to follow here his devotions in the Devil's fashion.
Now I feel in my five wits the Fiend 'tis himself
that has trapped me with the tryst to destroy me here.
This is a chapel of mischance, the church most accursed
that ever I entered. Evil betide it!'
With high helm on his head, his lance in his hand,
he roams up to the roof of that rough dwelling.
Then he heard from the high hill, in a hard rock-wall
beyond the stream on a steep, a sudden startling noise.
How it clattered in the cliff, as if to cleave it asunder,
as if one upon a grindstone were grinding a scythe!
How it whirred and it rasped as water in a mill-race!
How it rushed, and it rang, rueful to harken!
Then 'By God,' quoth Gawain, 'I guess this ado
is meant for my honour, meetly to hail me

as knight!

As God wills! Waylaway!
That helps me not a mite.
My life though down I lay,
no noise can me affright.'

89

Then clearly the knight there called out aloud:
'Who is master in this place to meet me at tryst?
For now 'tis good Gawain on ground that here walks.
If any aught hath to ask, let him hasten to me,
either now or else never, his needs to further!'
'Stay!' said one standing above on the steep o'er his head,
'and thou shalt get in good time what to give thee I vowed.'
Still with that rasping and racket he rushed on a while,
and went back to his whetting, till he wished to descend.
And then he climbed past a crag, and came from a hole,
hurtling out of a hid nook with a horrible weapon:
a Danish axe newly dressed the dint to return,
with cruel cutting-edge curved along the handle—
filed on a whetstone, and four feet in width,
'twas no less—along its lace of luminous hue;
and the great man in green still guised as before,
his locks and long beard, his legs and his face,
save that firm on his feet he fared on the ground,
steadied the haft on the stones and stalked beside it.
When he walked to the water, where he wade would not,
he hopped over on his axe and haughtily strode,
fierce and fell on a field where far all about
lay snow.

Sir Gawain the man met there,
neither bent nor bowed he low.
The other said: 'Now, sirrah fair,
I true at tryst thee know!'

90

'Gawain,' said that green man, 'may God keep thee!
 On my word, sir, I welcome thee with a will to my place,
 and thou hast timed thy travels as trusty man should,
 and thou hast forgot not the engagement agreed on
 between us:
 at this time gone a twelvemonth thou took'st thy allowance,
 and I should now this New Year nimbly repay thee.
 And we are in this valley now verily on our own,
 there are no people to part us—we can play as we like.
 Have thy helm off thy head, and have here thy pay!
 Bandy me no more debate than I brought before thee
 when thou didst sweep off my head with one swipe only!'

'Nay,' quoth Gawain, 'by God that gave me my soul,
 I shall grudge thee not a grain any grief that follows.
 Only restrain thee to one stroke, and still shall I stand
 and offer thee no hindrance to act as thou likest
 right here.'

With a nod of his neck he bowed,
 let bare the flesh appear;
 he would not by dread be cowed,
 no sign he gave of fear.

91

Then the great man in green gladly prepared him,
 gathered up his grim tool there Gawain to smite;
 with all the lust in his limbs aloft he heaved it,
 shaped as mighty a stroke as if he meant to destroy him.
 Had it driving come down as dour as he aimed it,

under his dint would have died the most doughty man ever.
 But Gawain on that guisarm then glanced to one side,
 as down it came gliding on the green there to end him,
 and he shrank a little with his shoulders at the sharp iron.
 With a jolt the other man jerked back the blade,
 and reproved then the prince, proudly him taunting.
 'Thou'rt not Gawain,' said the green man, 'who is so good
 reported,
 who never flinched from any foes on fell or in dale;
 and now thou fleest in fear, ere thou feelest a hurt!
 Of such cowardice that knight I ne'er heard accused.
 Neither blenched I nor backed, when thy blow, sir, thou
 aimedst,
 nor uttered any cavil in the court of King Arthur.
 My head flew to my feet, and yet fled I never;
 but thou, ere thou hast any hurt, in thy heart quaillest,
 and so the nobler knight to be named I deserve
 therefore.'

'I blenched once,' Gawain said,
 'and I will do so no more.
 But if on floor now falls my head,
 I cannot it restore.'

92

But get busy, I beg, sir, and bring me to the point.
 Deal me my destiny, and do it out of hand!
 For I shall stand from thee a stroke and stir not again
 till thine axe hath hit me, have here my word on't!
 'Have at thee then!' said the other, and heaved it aloft,

and watched him as wrathfully as if he were wild with rage.
 He made at him a mighty aim, but the man he touched not,
 holding back hastily his hand, ere hurt it might do.
 Gawain warily awaited it, and winced with no limb,
 but stood as still as a stone or the stump of a tree
 that with a hundred ravelled roots in rocks is embedded.
 This time merrily remarked then the man in the green:
 'So, now thou hast thy heart whole, a hit I must make.
 May the high order now keep thee that Arthur gave thee,
 and guard thy gullet at this go, if it can gain thee that.'
 Angrily with ire then answered Sir Gawain:

BoA. 'Why! lash away, thou lusty man! Too long dost thou
 threaten.

'Tis thy heart methinks in thee that now quaiileth!
 'In faith,' said the fellow, 'so fiercely thou speakest,
 I no longer will linger delaying thy errand
 right now.'

Then to strike he took his stance
 and grimaced with lip and brow.
 He that of rescue saw no chance
 was little pleased, I trow.

93

Lightly his weapon he lifted, and let it down neatly
 with the bent horn of the blade towards the neck that was
 bare;
 though he hewed with a hammer-swung, he hurt him no
 more
 than to snick him on one side and sever the skin.

Through the fair fat sank the edge, and the flesh entered,
 so that the shining blood o'er his shoulders was shed on the
 earth;
 and when the good knight saw the gore that gleamed on the
 snow,

he sprang out with spurning feet a spear's length and more,
 in haste caught his helm and on his head cast it,
 under his fair shield he shot with a shake of his shoulders,
 brandished his bright sword, and boldly he spake—
 never since he as manchild of his mother was born
 was he ever on this earth half so happy a man:

Tox 'Have done, sir, with thy dints! Now deal me no more!
 I have stood from thee a stroke without strife on this spot,
 and if thou offerest me others, I shall answer thee promptly,
 and give as good again, and as grim, be assured,
 shall pay.

But one stroke here's my due,
 as the covenant clear did say
 that in Arthur's halls we drew.
 And so, good sir, now stay!

94

From him the other stood off, and on his axe rested,
 held the haft to the ground, and on the head leaning,
 gazed at the good knight as on the green he there strode.
 To see him standing so stout, so stern there and fearless,
 armed and unafraid, his heart it well pleased.
 Then merrily he spoke with a mighty voice,
 and loudly it rang, as to that lord he said:

'Fearless knight on this field, so fierce do not be!
 No man here unmannerly hath thee maltreated,
 nor aught given thee not granted by agreement at court.
 A hack I thee vowed, and thou'st had it, so hold thee
 content;
 I remit thee the remnant of all rights I might claim.
 If I brisker had been, a buffet, it may be,
 I could have handed thee more harshly, and harm could have
 done thee.
 First I menaced thee in play with no more than a trial,
 and clove thee with no cleft: I had a claim to the feint,
 for the fast pact we affirmed on the first evening,
 and thou fairly and unfailing didst faith with me keep,
 all thy gains thou me gavest, as good man ought.
 The other trial for the morning, man, I thee tendered
 when thou kissedst my comely wife, and the kisses didst
 render.
 For the two here I offered only two harmless feints
 to make.
 The true shall truly repay,
 for no peril then need he quake.
 Thou didst fail on the third day,
 and so that tap now take!

95

For it is my weed that thou wearest, that very woven girdle:
 my own wife it awarded thee, I wot well indeed.
 Now I am aware of thy kisses, and thy courteous ways,
 and of thy wooing by my wife: I worked that myself!

I sent her to test thee, and thou seem'st to me truly
 the fair knight most faultless that e'er foot set on earth!
 As a pearl than white pease is prized more highly,
 so is Gawain, in good faith, than other gallant knights.
 But in this you lacked, sir, a little, and of loyalty came short.
 But that was for no artful wickedness, not for wooing either,
 but because you loved your own life: the less do I blame
 you.'

The other stern knight in a study then stood a long while,
 in such grief and disgust he had a grue in his heart;
 all the blood from his breast in his blush mingled,
 and he shrank into himself with shame at that speech.
 The first words on that field that he found then to say
 were: 'Cursed be ye, Coveting, and Cowardice also!
 In you is vileness, and vice that virtue destroyeth.'
 He took then the treacherous thing, and untying the knot
 fiercely flung he the belt at the feet of the knight:
 'See there the falsifier, and foul be its fate!
 Through care for thy blow Cowardice brought me
 to consent to Coveting, my true kind to forsake,
 which is free-hand and faithful word that are fitting to
 knights.
 Now I am faulty and false, who afraid have been ever
 of treachery and troth-breach: the two now my curse
 may bear!

I confess, sir, here to you
 all faulty has been my fare.
 Let me gain your grace anew,
 and after I will beware.'

96

Then the other man laughed and lightly answered:
 'I hold it healed beyond doubt, the harm that I had.
 Thou hast confessed thee so clean and acknowledged thine
 errors,
 and hast the penance plain to see from the point of my blade,
 that I hold thee purged of that debt, made as pure and as
 clean
 as hadst thou done no ill deed since the day thou wert born.
 And I give thee, sir, the girdle with gold at its hems,
 for it is green like my gown. So, Sir Gawain, you may think
 of this our contest when in the throng thou walkest
 among princes of high praise; 'twill be a plain reminder
 of the chance of the Green Chapel between chivalrous
 knights.
 And now you shall in this New Year come anon to my house,
 and in our revels the rest of this rich season
 shall go.'

The lord pressed him hard to wend,
 and said, 'My wife, I know,
 we soon shall make your friend,
 who was your bitter foe.'

97

'Nay forsooth!' the knight said, and seized then his helm,
 and duly it doffed, and the doughty man thanked:
 'I have lingered too long! May your life now be blest,
 and He promptly repay you Who apportions all honours!
 And give my regards to her grace, your goodly consort,

both to her and to the other, to mine honoured ladies,
 who thus their servant with their designs have subtly
 beguiled.

But no marvel it is if mad be a fool,
 and by the wiles of women to woe be brought.
 For even so Adam by one on earth was beguiled,
 and Solomon by several, and to Samson moreover
 his doom by Delilah was dealt; and David was after
 blinded by Bathsheba, and he bitterly suffered.
 Now if these came to grief through their guile, a gain 'twould
 be vast
 to love them well and believe them not, if it lay in man's
 power!

Since these were aforetime the fairest, by fortune most blest,
 eminent among all the others who under heaven bemused

 were too,
 and all of them were betrayed
 by women that they knew,
 though a fool I now am made,
 some excuse I think my due.'

98

'But for your girdle,' quoth Gawain, 'may God you repay!
 That I will gain with good will, not for the gold so joyous
 of the cincture, nor the silk, nor the swinging pendants,
 nor for wealth, nor for worth, nor for workmanship fine;
 but as a token of my trespass I shall turn to it often
 when I ride in renown, ruefully recalling
 the failure and the frailty of the flesh so perverse,

so tender, so ready to take taints of defilement.
 And thus, when pride my heart pricks for prowess in arms,
 one look at this love-lace shall lowlier make it.
 But one thing I would pray you, if it displeaseth you not,
 since you are the lord of yonder land, where I lodged for a
 while
 in your house and in honour—may He you reward
 Who upholdeth the heavens and on high sitteth!—
 how do you announce your true name? And then nothing
 further.'

'That I will tell thee truly,' then returned the other.
 'Bertilak de Hautdesert hereabouts I am called,
 [who thus have been enchanted and changed in my hue]
 by the might of Morgan le Fay that in my mansion dwelleth,
 and by cunning of lore and crafts well learned.
 The magic arts of Merlin she many hath mastered;
 for deeply in dear love she dealt on a time
 with that accomplished clerk, as at Camelot runs
 the fame;
 and Morgan the Goddess
 is therefore now her name.
 None power and pride possess
 too high for her to tame.

99

She made me go in this guise to your goodly court
 to put its pride to the proof, if the report were true
 that runs of the great renown of the Round Table.
 She put this magic upon me to deprive you of your wits,

in hope Guinevere to hurt, that she in horror might die
 aghast at that glamour that gruesomely spake
 with its head in its hand before the high table.
 She it is that is at home, that ancient lady;
 she is indeed thine own aunt, Arthur's half-sister,
 daughter of the Duchess of Tintagel on whom doughty Sir
 Uther

after begat Arthur, who in honour is now.
 Therefore I urge thee in earnest, sir, to thine aunt return!
 In my hall make merry! My household thee loveth,
 and I wish thee as well, upon my word, sir knight,
 as any that go under God, for thy great loyalty.'
 But he denied him with a 'Nay! by no means I will!'
 They clasp then and kiss and to the care give each other
 of the Prince of Paradise; and they part on that field
 so cold.

To the king's court on courser keen
 then hastened Gawain the bold,
 and the knight in the glittering green
 to ways of his own did hold.

100

Wild ways in the world Wawain now rideth
 on Gringolet: by the grace of God he still lived.
 Oft in house he was harboured and lay oft in the open,
 oft vanquished his foe in adventures as he fared
 which I intend not this time in my tale to recount.
 The hurt was healed that he had in his neck,
 and the bright-hued belt he bore now about it

obliquely like a baldric bound at his side,
 under his left arm with a knot that lace was fastened
 to betoken he had been detected in the taint of a fault;
 'and so at last he came to the Court again safely.
 Delight there was awakened, when the lords were aware
 that good Gawain had returned: glad news they thought it.
 The king kissed the knight, and the queen also,
 and then in turn many a true knight that attended to greet
 him.

About his quest they enquire, and he recounts all the
 marvels,
 declares all the hardships and care that he had,
 what chanced at the Chapel, what cheer made the knight,
 the love of the lady, and the lace at the last.
 The notch in his neck naked he showed them
 that he had for his dishonesty from the hands of the knight
 in blame.

It was torment to tell the truth:
 in his face the blood did flame;
 he groaned for grief and ruth
 when he showed it, to his shame.

101

'Lo! Lord,' he said at last, and the lace handled,
 'this is the band! For this a rebuke I bear in my neck!
 'this is the grief and disgrace I have got for myself
 from the covetousness and cowardice that o'ercame me
 there!
 This is the token of the troth-breach that I am detected in,

and needs must I wear it while in the world I remain;
 for a man may cover his blemish, but unbind it he cannot,
 for where once 'tis applied, thence part will it never.'
 The king comforted the knight, and all the Court also
 laughed loudly thereat, and this law made in mirth
 the lords and the ladies that whoso belonged to the Table,
 every knight of the Brotherhood, a baldric should have,
 a band of bright green obliquely about him,
 and this for love of that knight as a livery should wear.
 For that was reckoned the distinction of the Round Table,
 and honour was his that had it evermore after,
 as it is written in the best of the books of romance.
 Thus in Arthur his days happened this marvel,
 as the Book of the Brut beareth us witness;
 since Brutus the bold knight to Britain came first,
 after the siege and the assault had ceased at Troy,

I trow,
 many a marvel such before,
 has happened here ere now.
 To His bliss us bring Who bore
 the Crown of Thorns on brow! AMEN

HONY SOYT QUI MAL PENCE

