

66 Sir Galahad and the Holy Grail

At the vigil of Pentecost, when all the fellowship of the Round Table had come to Camelot, V VI.1; C XIII.1 after the hearing of mass all the tables were set up for the feast. At this moment a fair gentlewoman entered the hall on horseback; she had clearly ridden hard, for her horse was covered in sweat. She dismounted, came before the king and saluted him.

He said, "Damsel, God bless you!"

"Sir," she said, "for God's sake, tell me where Sir Lancelot is."

"He is yonder, you can see him there," said the king.

Then she went to Sir Lancelot and said, "Sir Lancelot, I greet you on King Pelles' behalf and ask you to come with me into the forest nearby."

Then Sir Lancelot asked her with whom she dwelled.

"I dwell," she said, "with King Pelles."

"What do you want with me?" asked Sir Lancelot.

"You shall know," she said, "when you come thither."

"Well," he said, "I will gladly go with you."

So Sir Lancelot bade his squire saddle his horse and quickly bring him his armor. The squire did as he commanded.

Then the queen came to Sir Lancelot and said, "Are you leaving us now during the high feast?"

"Madame," said the gentlewoman, "know well that he shall be with you again tomorrow at dinner time."

"If I thought," said the queen, "that he should not be here with us by tomorrow, he would not go with you with my goodwill."

So Sir Lancelot departed and rode until he came into a forest and then into a great valley where there was an abbey of nuns. A squire was waiting for them and opened the gates. They entered and dismounted their horses. Then a fair fellowship of people came and welcomed Sir Lancelot and then led him into the abbess' chamber where they helped him unarm.

He then became aware that lying on beds in the room were two of his cousins, Sir Bors and Sir Lionel. He immediately wakened them, and when they saw him they were very happy. "Sir," said Sir Bors to Sir Lancelot, "what adventure has brought you hither? We thought to find you tomorrow at Camelot."

"So help me God," said Sir Lancelot, "a gentlewoman brought me hither, although I do not know the reason."

In the meanwhile, as they were talking together, twelve nuns came into the room bringing with them Galahad, who was very handsome and well-made—so much so that it was not possible to find his equal in all the world. And all the ladies wept.

"Sir," they all said, "we bring you this child whom we have raised. We ask you to make him a knight, for he could not receive the order of knighthood from the hand of a more worthy man."

Sir Lancelot looked at this young squire and saw that he was seemly and demure as a dove, with handsome features, and he thought he had never seen a young man of his age so fair in form. Then Sir Lancelot said, "Does this desire come from himself?"

"Yes," said Galahad and all the ladies.

"Then he shall," said Sir Lancelot, "receive the order of knighthood out of respect for the occasion of the high feast." That night Sir Lancelot enjoyed good hospitality and cheer, and in the morning, at the hour of prime and according to Galahad's desire, he dubbed him a knight, saying, "God make you a good man, for your beauty is beyond that of anyone who is now living."

C XIII.2

"Now fair sir," said Sir Lancelot, "will you come with me to the court of King Arthur?"

"Nay," he said. "I will not go with you at this time." Then Sir Lancelot departed, taking his two cousins with him.

So they came to Camelot by midmorning on Whitsunday. At that time the King and Queen had gone to the cathedral to hear the church service. They were very glad of the return of Sir Bors and Sir Lionel, as was all the fellowship.

When the king and all the knights returned from hearing mass, the barons saw that all the seats of the Round Table had gold letters on them that said, "Here he ought to sit," and "He ought to sit here." They kept going from seat to seat until they came to the Seat Perilous, where they found letters of gold which said "Four hundred and fifty-four years after the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, this seat should be filled."

Then they all said, "This is a marvelous thing and a great adventure!"

"In the name of God!" said Sir Lancelot. Then he calculated the date given in the writing, figuring from the birth of Our Lord up until that time, and said, "It seems to me that this seat ought to be filled this same day! For this is the Pentecost after the four hundred and fifty-fourth year. If it please everyone here, I would prefer that none of these letters be seen this day until he who should achieve this adventure should come." Then they had a cloth of silk brought to cover the letters in the Seat Perilous, and the king ordered that dinner be served with all haste.

"Sir," said Sir Kay the Seneschal, "if you dine now, you shall break the usual custom of the court; for you usually do not sit down to dine until you have seen some marvel."

"You speak the truth," said the king, "but I had such great joy at the return of Sir Lancelot and his cousins, who have come back to court whole and sound, that I forgot my usual custom."

As they stood there speaking, a squire came in and said to the king, "Sir, I bring you marvelous tidings."

"What are they?" asked the king.

"Sir, down at the river there is a great stone that I saw floating on the water, and therein I saw sticking a sword."

Then the king said, "I will see that marvel." All the knights went with him. When they came to the river they found there a floating stone that looked as if it were made of red marble, and therein was stuck a fair, rich sword; the pommel was wrought with precious stones and on them were letters of gold.

The barons read the letters which said, "Never shall any man take me hence except he by whose side I ought to hang, and he shall be the best knight of the world."

When the king had seen the letters he said to Sir Lancelot, "Fair sir, this sword ought to be yours, for I am certain that you are the best knight of the world."

Then Sir Lancelot answered very seriously, "Sir, that is not my sword. Also, I have no desire to set my hand on that sword, for it is not meant to hang by my side. And whoever tries to take that sword and fails, he shall receive a wound from that same sword that will seriously injure him. I would have you understand that this same day, the adventure of the Holy Grail, which is a sacred vessel, shall begin."

"Now, fair nephew," said the king to Sir Gawain, "attempt to draw the sword for love of me."

"Sir," he said, "if it please your grace, I shall not do that."

"Sir," said the king, "attempt to take the sword for love of me and at my commandment."

"Sir, your commandment I will obey." And then Sir Gawain took the sword by the handle, but he was unable to move it.

"I thank you," said the king.

"My lord Sir Gawain," said Sir Lancelot, "now you should know that this sword will wound you so seriously that you will wish you had never set your hand on it, and you would trade the best castle of the realm if you could take back that action."

"Sir," he said, "I could not deny my uncle's will."

When the king heard this he was very sorry, and he said to Sir Perceval, "Sir, will you try, for love of me?"

He gladly tried in order to show his fellowship with Sir Gawain. He set his hand on the sword and pulled hard at it, but he could not move it. Then there were no others who dared to be brave enough to try their hands.

"Now you can go to your dinner," said Sir Kay to the king, "for you have seen a marvelous adventure."

So the king and everyone else went into the court. Every knight found his own place and sat there; young men who were also good knights served them.

C XIII.3

So when they had all been served and all the seats filled—except for the Seat Perilous—a marvelous thing happened: all the doors and windows of the palace shut on their own. The chamber was very dark, and they were all astonished.

Then King Arthur spoke first and said, "By God, fair fellows and lords, we have seen marvels this day! Before night comes, I expect we shall see even greater marvels."

In the meantime, an ancient man, clothed all in white, entered the room, but no knight knew from whence he came. He brought with him a young knight in red armor, without sword or shield and with only an empty scabbard hanging by his side; they were both on foot. The old man said, "Peace be with you, fair lords!"

Then the old man said to King Arthur, "Sir, I bring you here a good knight who comes from the lineage of kings and who is of the kindred of Joseph of Arimathea. He shall travel to strange realms and bring to a conclusion all the marvels that you have seen in the court."

C XIII.4

The king was glad to hear these words and said to the good man, "Sir, you are very welcome, and the young knight with you."

Then the old man had the young man remove his armor. He was wearing a shirt of red silk and bore a mantle across his shoulders that was trimmed with ermine; he removed that.

Then the old knight said to the young knight, "Sir, come with me." Then he led him to the Seat Perilous, beside which Sir Lancelot was sitting. The old man lifted up the cloth and found there letters that said, "This is the seat of Sir Galahad."

"Sir," said the old knight, "know well that this place is yours." Then Sir Galahad sat down confidently in that seat.

Then he said to the old man, "Now, sir, you may go your way, for you have done well that which you were commanded to do. Commend me to my grandfather, King Pelles, and to my lord King Pecheur, and say to them on my behalf that I shall come and see them as soon as I am able."

So the good man departed. He was met outside the castle by twenty noble squires; they mounted their horses and went on their way.

Then all the knights of the Round Table marveled greatly that Sir Galahad dared to sit in that seat when he was of such young age; they did not know from whence he had come, but only that he must have been blessed by God.

They all said, "This is he who will achieve the Holy Grail, for he is the only one who has ever sat there who never came to any harm."

Then Sir Lancelot beheld his son and felt great joy at the sight of him. Sir Bors told his fellows, "I swear upon my life that this young knight shall win great honor."

There was much talk in the court about Sir Galahad, and soon this news came to the queen. She marveled at what knight could dare to sit in the Seat Perilous.

Then there were some in the court who said that he very much resembled Sir Lancelot. "I may well believe," said the queen, "that Sir Lancelot conceived him on King Pelles' daughter who caused him to lie by her by means of enchantment. His name is Sir Galahad. I would

like to see him," said the queen, "for he must certainly be a noble man; the father who begat him is. I shall go to the Round Table."

When the feast was over the king and all the others rose; the king went to the Seat Perilous, lifted up the cloth, and found there the name of Sir Galahad. He showed this to Sir Gawain and said, "Fair nephew, now we have Sir Galahad among us, a fair knight who shall bring honor to all of us. I would swear on my life that he shall achieve the Holy Grail, just as Sir Lancelot has given us to understand."

Then King Arthur came up to Sir Galahad and said, "Sir, you are very welcome, for you shall inspire many knights to take up the quest for the Holy Grail. You shall achieve that which many other knights have never been able to complete." Then the king took him by the hand and led him down from the palace to show Galahad the marvel of the stone.

Then the queen heard of this and came after with many ladies who showed her the stone as it floated on the water.

"Sir," said the king to Sir Galahad, "here is as great a marvel as I have ever seen; very good knights have tried and failed."

"Sir," said Sir Galahad, "that is no wonder, for this adventure is not theirs but mine. Because this sword is surely meant to be mine, I brought no sword with me; but here by my side hangs the scabbard." Then he put his hand on the sword and easily drew it out of the stone. He put it in the sheath and said to the king, "Now things go better than they did before!"

"Sir," said the king, "may God send you a shield."

"Now I have the sword that once belonged to the good knight Balin le Savage. He was a very good knight, skilled with his hands, and with this sword he slew his brother Balan; that was a great pity, for he was a good knight. Each slew the other because of the Dolorous Stroke that Balan gave to King Pelles, who is still not whole—nor will he be, until I heal him."

At that moment the king saw riding quickly along the river toward them a lady on a white palfrey. She greeted the king and queen and asked if Sir Lancelot were there. He himself answered and said, "I am here, my fair lady."

Then weeping she said, "Ah, Sir Lancelot! How your great reputation is changed this day from what it was in the morning!"

"Damsel, why do you say so?"

"Sir, I tell you the truth," said the damsel. "This day, in the morning, you were the best knight of the world; but if anyone should say so now, he would be a liar, for there is now one better than you. It has been proved by the adventure of the sword, to which you dared not set your hand. That is what has changed your reputation and circumstance. Therefore, I tell you that from here on you shall know that you are not the best knight of the world."

"As far as that goes," said Sir Lancelot, "I know well that I was never the best."

"Yes," said the damsel, "that you were, and are yet, among sinful men of the world. And sir king, Nacien the hermit sends you word that you will have the greatest honor that ever a king in Britain had, and I will tell you why: this day the Holy Grail appeared in your house

C XIII.5

and fed you and all your fellowship of the Round Table." Then she departed the same way that she had come.

C XIII.6

"Now," said the king, "I am sure that all the Round Table will depart on the quest for the Holy Grail, and never shall I see you all gathered together again. Therefore, one last time I will see you wholly together in the meadow of Camelot, where you will joust and tourney, so that after your deaths men may speak of what good knights were here, gathered all together, on such a day as this."

They agreed with the king's counsel and request and donned their armor for jousting. All of this the king had done with the intent to see Galahad proven, for the king knew that he most likely would not come back to court again after his departure.

So people of all ranks assembled in the meadow. Sir Galahad, at the request of the king and queen, put on a noble light coat of armor and also put on his helm; but he would not accept a shield, no matter how the king asked him to. Then Sir Gawain and the other knights asked him to take up a spear, and so he did.

The queen was in a tower with all her ladies to behold the tournament. Sir Galahad positioned himself in the middle of the meadow and began to break the spears of others marvelously, and all men had great wonder at him, for there he surpassed all other knights; within a while he defeated many good knights of the Round Table, saving only two—Sir Lancelot and Sir Perceval.

C XIII.7

Then at the request of the queen the king had Sir Galahad dismount and unlace his helm so that the queen might see his face. When she looked him in the face she said, "I daresay that in truth Sir Lancelot begat him, for never have two men resembled one another more in likeness. Therefore it is no marvel that he has such great prowess."

A lady who stood by the queen said, "Madame, for God's sake, ought he by rights to be such a good knight?"

"Yes, truly," said the queen, "for he is in every respect descended from the best knights of the world and from the highest lineage, for Sir Lancelot is descended in the eighth degree from Our Lord Jesus Christ, and this Sir Galahad is nine degrees from Our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, I daresay that they are the greatest gentlemen in the world."

Then the king and all the people went home to Camelot, and at evensong they went into the monastery church and then after to supper. Every knight sat in his own place, as they had beforehand. Then they heard a great cracking and noise, like thunder, and it was so great they thought the palace should be destroyed.

In the midst of all this noise a sunbeam shone into the chamber, seven times brighter than any they had ever seen, and they were all illuminated with the grace of the Holy Ghost. Then the knights looked at one another and it seemed to each that the others were fairer to behold than ever they had been before. For a great while, the knights were unable to speak; they looked at one another as if they had been struck dumb.

Then the Holy Grail entered the hall covered in white samite; no one could see the Grail clearly, nor the person who bore it. The hall became filled with wonderful odors, and each knight was fed with such meat and drink as he loved best in all the world. When the Holy

Grail had been borne throughout the hall, it departed suddenly, and no one knew where it had gone. Then they were able to speak again, and the king gave thanks to God for the good grace that he had sent them.

"Surely," said the king, "we ought to thank greatly Our Lord Jesus Christ for what we have seen this day on the occasion of the high feast of Pentecost."

"Now," said Sir Gawain, "we have all been served today all manner of food and drink that we thought of, but one thing eluded us—we could not see the Holy Grail for it was covered by such a precious cloth. Therefore, I wish to make a vow that tomorrow, without any delay, I shall set off on a quest for the Holy Grail, and I will pursue it for a year and a day, or more if need be. I shall not return to court again until I have seen it more clearly than it was displayed here today. If I do not succeed I shall return again according to God's will."

When the other fellows of the Round Table heard Sir Gawain say this, they rose up as one and made vows similar to that which Sir Gawain had made. As soon as King Arthur heard this, he was greatly displeased, for he knew he could not make them gainsay their vows.

"Alas," said King Arthur to Sir Gawain, "you have nearly slain me with the vow that you have made, for through this you have bereft me of the fairest and truest knights who have ever been seen together in this world; I am sure many will die in the quest. So I am not a little sorry, for I have loved them as I love my life; thus, the departure of this fellowship will grieve me sorely, for I have been accustomed to having them in company with me." At that, the tears fell from his eyes and he said, "Ah, Gawain! Gawain! You have given me great sorrow, for I doubt that my true fellowship will ever meet here again."

C XIII.8

"Ah, sir," said Sir Lancelot, "comfort yourself, for this shall be a great honor for us, much more than if we died in another pursuit—for it is certain that eventually we will die."

"Ah, Lancelot," said the king, "the great love that I have had for you all the days of my life is what causes me to say such doleful words. There was never a Christian king who had such worthy men at his table as I have had this day at the Round Table. That is my great sorrow."

When the queen, ladies, and other gentlewomen learned this news, they had such sorrow and heaviness of heart that no tongue could speak of it, for those knights had honored and respected them. Queen Guenevere made great sorrow, more than anyone else. "I marvel," she said, "that my lord will allow them to part from him."

Then all the court was troubled on account of the departure of all the knights. Many of those ladies who loved knights would have gone with their loves. They would have done so except that an old knight, wearing religious clothing, came among them and said in a loud voice, "Fair lords who have vowed to follow the quest of the Holy Grail: Nacien the hermit sends you word that no one on this quest should bring a lady or gentlewoman with him, for such a thing should not be done when one is on such a sacred quest. I warn you plainly, he that has not confessed his sins shall not see the mysteries of Our Lord Jesus Christ." Because of this, they left the ladies and gentlewomen behind.

After this happened the queen came to Sir Galahad and asked from whence he came and the name of his country. He told her from whence he had come. "And are you Sir Lancelot's son?" He did not say yes or no to that question. "So help me God!" said the queen. "You should not be ashamed of it, for he is the best knight and is descended from the best men of the world—from kings on both sides of his family. Therefore it would be expected that you would be a very good man when it comes to feats of knightly prowess. And certainly," she said, "you very much resemble him."

Then Sir Galahad was a little ashamed and said, "Madame, since you are so certain, why do you ask me? He that is my father will be openly known in a short while."

Then the knights went to rest. In honor of his high status, Sir Galahad was led into King Arthur's own chamber, and there he rested in the king's own bed. As soon as it was day the king arose; he had had no sleep all that night because of his great sorrow.

Then the king went to Sir Gawain and Sir Lancelot, who had arisen to hear mass, and he said again, "Ah, Gawain, Gawain! You have betrayed me! My court will never be whole because of you. But you will never be as sorry for me as I am for you." At that the tears began to run down his face. Then the king said, "Ah, courteous knight, Sir Lancelot, I ask that you advise me, for I would have this quest ended if it could be."

"Sir," said Sir Lancelot, "you saw yesterday how many worthy knights were sworn to follow this quest; they cannot leave it for any reason."

"That I well know," said the king, "but their departure shall make me so sad that I do not think there will be anything that can bring me joy." Then the king and queen went into the church.

Very soon Sir Lancelot and Sir Gawain commanded their men to bring them their arms; when they were all armed—except for their shields and helms—then they came to their fellowship, who were similarly fitted out, and they went to the church to hear mass.

After the service the king wished to know how many had chosen to undertake the quest for the Holy Grail; he learned that one hundred and fifty—all the knights of the Round Table—had chosen to do so. Then the knights donned their helms and departed, commending themselves to the king and queen. There was weeping and great sorrow; the queen went to her chamber and remained there so that no one should see how sorrowful she was.

When Sir Lancelot could not find the queen he went to her chamber. When she saw him she cried aloud and said, "Ah, Sir Lancelot! Lancelot! You have betrayed me and brought me to my death to leave my lord thus!"

"Ah, madame, I ask you not to be displeased, for I shall return again as soon as I honorably may."

"Alas," she said, "that ever I saw you! But may He who suffered death upon the cross for all mankind provide you with safe conduct, and the whole fellowship as well."

Then Sir Lancelot departed and found the fellowship that waited for him. They mounted their horses and rode through the streets of Camelot; there was much weeping among people both rich and poor, and the king had to turn away because he could not speak due to his weeping.

Within a while they rode together until they came to a city and a castle that were both called Vagon. They entered the castle, and the lord therein was an old and honorable man; he opened the gates and provided them all the hospitality that he could. In the morning they all agreed that they should part from one another, and so they did, with much weeping, and every knight took the way that seemed best to him.

67 The Adventures of Sir Galahad

V VI.2; C XIII.9 Now Galahad rode off without a shield, and he went four days without any adventure. On the fourth day, in the evening, he came to an abbey of Cistercian monks. He was received there with great reverence and led into a chamber where he was unarmed. Then he became aware of two Round Table knights—one was King Bagdemagus and the other was Sir Uwain. When they saw him they went up to him and welcomed him gladly; then they went into supper.

"Sirs," said Sir Galahad, "what adventure has brought you hither?"

"Sir," they said, "we have been told that there is a shield in this place, and no man is able to bear it about his neck without encountering some serious mischief—within three days he will be either dead or maimed forever."

"But sir," said King Bagdemagus, "tomorrow I shall bear this shield to test this marvel."

"In the name of God!" said Sir Galahad.

"Sir," said King Bagdemagus, "if I do not succeed in the adventure of the shield, you must assay, for I am sure that you shall not fail."

"Sir, I agree to do this, as I have no shield."

So in the morning they rose and heard mass. Then King Bagdemagus asked where the adventurous shield was. A monk led him behind an altar where the shield was hanging; it was as white as snow with a red cross in the center. "Sirs," said the monk, "this shield should not be borne by any knight unless he is the worthiest knight of the world. Therefore, I advise you knights to beware."

"Well," said King Bagdemagus, "I know well that I am not the best knight, but I shall try to bear it." So he took it and bore it out of the church. Then he said to Sir Galahad, "If it please you, will you wait here until you see how I fare?"

"Sir, I shall wait for you," said Sir Galahad. Then King Bagdemagus took a good squire with him who would return to tell Sir Galahad how he had fared. They rode two miles and came to a fair valley wherein there was a hermitage. They saw a knight coming from that direction, and he and his horse and armor were all entirely white. He came as fast as his horse could run with his spear poised to strike.

Then King Bagdemagus raised his spear in response and broke it upon the white knight. The other knight struck him so hard that he broke apart his coat of mail and wounded him

with a spear thrust into the right shoulder, which the shield was not covering at that time, and knocked him off his horse.

Then that knight dismounted and took the shield from King Bagdemagus, saying, "Knight, you have done something very foolish, for this shield ought not to be borne except by he who has no living peer." Then he came to King Bagdemagus' squire and bade him "bear this shield to the good knight Sir Galahad, whom you left at the abbey, and greet him well for me."

"Sir," said the squire, "what is your name?"

"Do not concern yourself with my name," said the knight, "for it is not for you or any other man of the world to know."

"Now, fair sir," said the squire, "in honor of Jesus Christ, tell me why those who bear this shield will encounter some mischief."

"Since you have constrained me to do so," said the knight, "I will tell you that this shield belongs to no man except Sir Galahad." Then the squire went to King Bagdemagus and asked him whether he were seriously wounded or not.

"Yes, truly," he said. "I shall barely escape with my life." Then the squire fetched his horse and led King Bagdemagus, suffering great pain, until they came to the abbey. He was gently lifted down off his horse, unarmed, and laid in his bed where his wounds were attended to. As the book says, he lay there a long while and barely survived.

"Sir Galahad," said the squire, "the knight that wounded King Bagdemagus sends you greetings, and he told me that you should bear this shield, and through it great adventures shall befall you."

C XIII.10

"Now blessed be my good fortune!" said Sir Galahad. Then he asked for his armor and mounted his horse; he hung the white shield about his neck and commended them to God. Sir Uwain said he would bear him fellowship if he would like.

"Sir," said Sir Galahad, "you may not do that, for I must go alone, except for this squire who shall bear me fellowship." So Sir Uwain departed.

Then within a while Sir Galahad came to where the white knight lived, near the hermitage, and each courteously greeted the other. "Sir," said Sir Galahad, "have there been many marvels because of this shield?"

"Sir," said the knight, "it happened that thirty-two years after the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ that Joseph of Arimathea, the noble knight who took Our Lord down from the Holy Cross, departed from Jerusalem along with a large number of his kin. They traveled until they came to a city which is called Sarras. In the same hour that Joseph came to Sarras, there was a knight called Evelake who was engaged in a great war against the Saracens, and especially against one Saracen in particular, who was King Evelake's cousin; he was a rich and mighty king and he was near to that land. His name was Tholomé la Feintis. So one day, these two met to do battle.

"Then Joseph, the son of Joseph of Arimathea, went to King Evelake and told him that he should be distressed and killed unless he gave up his belief in the old law and chose to

follow the new law of Jesus Christ. Then Joseph explained the truth of the Holy Trinity, and Evelake agreed to follow this with all his heart.

"Then this shield was made for King Evelake in the name of him who died on the Cross. Because of his belief in the new law he defeated King Tholomé. When they were in battle, a cloth was used to cover the shield, and when King Evelake was in the greatest peril, he took the cloth away. Then his enemies saw on the shield the image of a man on the cross, which frightened them very much.

"It happened that one of King Evelake's men had had his hand struck off, and he was carrying that hand in his other hand. Joseph called that man to him and told him to humbly touch the cross; as soon as he had touched the cross with his hand, it was healed and just as it had been before. Soon after this there was another marvel—the cross on the shield vanished, and no one knew what had happened to it. Then King Evelake was baptized, as were most of the people in that city.

"Soon after this, Joseph wished to depart, and King Evelake wanted to go with him whether or not Joseph wished to have his company. By chance they came into this land, which at that time was called Great Britain. There they met with an evil pagan who put Joseph into prison. By chance this news came to a worthy man, who was called Mondrames, and he gathered all his people together, for he had heard many great things about Joseph. He came into the land of Great Britain and confiscated all the goods and property of this evil pagan and then delivered Joseph out of prison. After that, all the people turned to the Christian faith.

C XIII.11

"Not long after this, Joseph was on his deathbed. When King Evelake saw this, he had great sorrow and said, 'For love of you I left my country, and since you will depart from me and go out of this world, leave me some token by which to remember you.' Then Joseph said, 'I will do that very gladly. Now bring me the shield that I gave you when you went into battle against King Tholomé.'

"Then Joseph's nose began to bleed heavily, and by no means could it be staunched. Upon that shield he drew a cross with his own blood and said, 'Now you can see a memento of how I love you, for you will never be able to see this shield without thinking of me; and it shall always be as fresh as it is now. Any man who bears this shield around his neck will be sorry, up until the time that Galahad, the good knight, bears it about his neck. He is the last of my line and shall do many marvelous deeds.'

"Now," said King Evelake, "where shall I put this shield so that this worthy knight might have it?"

"Sir, you shall leave it here and Nacien the hermit will arrange for it—after he dies—to be put a certain place where that good knight shall come on the fifteenth day after he receives the order of knighthood.' That day that they named is this day, when he has his shield. And in that same abbey lies Nacien the hermit." Then the white knight vanished.

As soon as the squire had heard these words, he dismounted from his hackney and kneeled down at Galahad's feet; he asked him if he might accompany him until such time as he was made a knight.

"If I wished to have fellowship, I would not refuse you."

"Then will you make me a knight?" asked the squire. "By the grace of God, I will behave in keeping with such a high honor should it be given to me."

So Sir Galahad granted him his request, and they turned back to the abbey from whence they had come. Everyone made great joy at Sir Galahad's return.

As soon as he had dismounted, a monk brought him to a tomb in the church-yard, "where there is such a noise that whoever hears it is almost driven mad or, at least, loses his strength; and sir, we believe it is a demon."

"Now lead me thither," said Sir Galahad. So they did, and he went fully armed, except for his helmet.

C XIII.12

"Now," said the good man, "go to the tomb and lift up the slab." He did so and heard a great noise.

A voice said sadly, so that all men could hear, "Sir Galahad, you servant of Jesus Christ, do not come near me, for you shall make me return again to where I once was for so long."

But Sir Galahad was not afraid and heaved up the stone; a foul smoke came out, and after that he saw a foul-looking shape, in the form of a man, that leapt out of the tomb; and it was the foulest looking thing he had ever seen. He crossed himself, well knowing that it was a demon.

Then he heard a voice say, "Sir Galahad, I see so many angels about you that my power cannot harm you!"

Sir Galahad looked down and saw a fully-armed body lying in the tomb, and beside it was a sword. "Now, fair brother," said Sir Galahad, "let us remove this body, for he is not worthy to lie within this church-yard; he must have been a false Christian." Then they departed and returned to the abbey.

As soon as he had unarmed, a good man came and sat down by him and said, "Sir, I shall tell you the meaning of what you saw in the tomb. That which covered the body signifies the difficulty of the world and the great sin that Our Lord found in the world. There was such wretchedness that a father did not love his son, nor a son his father. That was one of the reasons why Our Lord took form in the flesh and blood of a pure maiden. Our sins at that time were so great that almost all the world was full of wickedness."

"Truly," said Sir Galahad, "I believe you right well."

So Sir Galahad rested there that night, and in the morning he made the squire a knight, and asked him his name and who his kin were. "Sir," he said, "men call me Melias de Lisle, and I am son of the King of Denmark."

"Now fair sir," said Sir Galahad, "since you are descended from kings and queens, see that you honor the office of knighthood that has been given to you, for you must be a mirror of all chivalry."

"Sir," said Sir Melias, "you speak the truth. But sir, since you have made me a knight, you must by rights grant me my first desire, as long as it is reasonable."

"You speak the truth," said Sir Galahad, "I will grant you what you ask."

"Many thanks, my own lord," he said. "Will you allow me to ride with you in the quest for the Holy Grail until some chance should part us?"

"I will grant your request, sir."

Then men brought Sir Melias his armor, spear, and horse, and he and Sir Galahad rode forth for a week before they encountered any adventure. Then on a Monday, in the morning, just after they had left an abbey, they came to a fork in the road which went in two directions. There was a cross at this fork, and on it were letters that said, "Now you knights-errant who go to seek knightly adventures, see that there are here two ways to go. It is forbidden that you go one way, for he that goes that way shall not return unless he is a good man and a worthy knight. If you take the way on the left, you shall not easily win honor, for you will soon be challenged on that path."

"Sir," said Melias to Sir Galahad, "if you would allow me to take the way to the left, tell me, for I would go this way to prove my strength."

"It would be better," said Sir Galahad, "if you did not ride that way, for I believe that I should fare better along that path than you."

"Nay, my lord; I pray you, let me have that adventure."

"Take it in God's name," said Sir Galahad.

68 The Adventures of Sir Melias de Lisle, Sir Galahad, and Sir Gawain

C XIII.13

Now the tale turns to Sir Melias de Lisle.

Sir Melias rode into an old forest, and he rode through it for more than two days. He came to a fair meadow, where there was a lodging of tree boughs. He saw inside that lodging a chair wherein there was a crown of gold, rich and subtly wrought. There were cloths set upon the ground, and many delicious kinds of food set on the cloths.

Sir Melias beheld this and thought it marvelous. He was not hungry, but he very much desired to have the crown of gold, so he stooped down, picked it up, and rode on his way with it. Very soon he saw a knight come riding after him, saying, "Knight, set down that crown which is not yours! Defend yourself!"

Then Sir Melias crossed himself and said, "Fair Lord of Heaven, help and save your new-made knight." Then they let their horses run at each other as fast as they could and struck at one another. The other knight smote Sir Melias clean through the armor on his left side so that he fell to the earth, nearly dead. Then the other knight took the crown and rode on his way; Sir Melias lay still, with no strength to move.

In the meantime, by chance Sir Galahad came along and found him there, dangerously close to death. Then he said, "Sir Melias, who has wounded you? It would have been better if you had ridden the other way."

When Sir Melias heard him speak he said, "Sir, for the love of God, do not let me die in this forest; bring me to the abbey that is nearby so that I may be confessed and receive last rites."

"It shall be done," said Sir Galahad. "But where is the knight who has wounded you?"

No sooner had he said that than Sir Galahad heard a cry through the leaves of the trees, "Knight, defend yourself from me!"

"Ah, sir!" said Sir Melias. "Beware, for that is he who has slain me."

Sir Galahad answered and said, "Sir knight, come at your peril!" Then each faced the other and rode at each other as fast as they could. Sir Galahad smote him so that his spear went through the other knight's shoulder, and he knocked him off his horse; in the falling, Sir Galahad's spear broke.

Then another knight emerged from the trees and broke his spear upon Sir Galahad before the other could even turn to face him.

Then Sir Galahad drew his sword and smote that knight's left arm off so that it fell to the earth. Then that knight fled, and Sir Galahad chased after him; but in a short while he turned back to Sir Melias. He dismounted and then lifted the other knight gently up onto the horse in front of him; the shaft of the spear was in his body.

Sir Galahad mounted behind him and, holding him in his arms, brought him to the abbey. There he removed his armor and brought him to his chamber. Sir Melias asked for the last sacraments, and when he had received them, he said to Sir Galahad, "Sir, let Death come when it pleases him." Then he pulled the spear-shaft from his body and swooned.

Then an old monk, who had once been a knight, came in and saw Sir Melias. He examined his wounds and then said to Sir Galahad, "I shall heal him of his wounds, by the Grace of God, within seven weeks."

Then Sir Galahad was glad; he unarmed himself and said he would stay there that night. He stayed there three days and then asked Sir Melias how things went with him.

He said he had begun to recover, "Thanks be to God!"

C XIII.14

"Now I will depart," said Sir Galahad, "for I have much to do. Many knights are already busy in the same quest that this knight and I were in, the Quest for the Holy Grail."

"Sir," said a good man, "Sir Melias was wounded because of his sin. I marvel," said the good man to Sir Melias, "how you dared take upon you such a noble thing as the high order of knighthood without a full confession. It was because of that that you were so seriously wounded—the way on the right hand side betokened the highway of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the way of him who lives truly. The other way betokened the way of sinners and misbelievers; when the devil saw your pride and your presumption that you brought to the quest for the Holy Grail, that caused you to be overthrown, for it may not be achieved but by him who lives virtuously.

"Also, the writing on the cross signified heavenly deeds, and knightly deeds in the service of God; it did not mean knightly deeds in worldly works. Pride is the head of every sin, and that is what caused this knight to depart from Sir Galahad. When you took the crown of gold you did so with covetousness, and so it was an act of theft. These were not knightly deeds. In his fight with the two knights Sir Galahad, the holy knight, symbolically fought against the two sins that were in this knight, Sir Melias. They could not withstand Sir Galahad, for he is without sin."

Then Sir Galahad commended them all to God and prepared to depart thence.

Then Sir Melias said, "My lord Sir Galahad, as soon as I am able I shall ride to seek you."

"May God send you health," said Sir Galahad. So he mounted his horse and departed, and rode on many journeys, to and fro. One day he left a place called Abblasour where he had been unable to hear mass.

Then Sir Galahad came to a mountain on which he found a very old chapel; there was nobody therein—the whole place was desolate. Then he kneeled down before the altar and asked God for help.

As he prayed, he heard a voice that said, "Go now, you adventuring knight, to the Castle of Maidens, and put an end to the wicked customs there."

When Sir Galahad heard this, he thanked God and mounted his horse. He had not ridden very far when he saw in a valley below him a strong castle, surrounded by deep ditches, with a fair river running beside it, which was called the Severn. He met there a very old man, and each greeted the other. Sir Galahad asked him the name of the castle.

C XIII.15

"Fair sir," he said, "it is the Castle of Maidens; it is a cursed castle, and all those who live therein are under its spell. All care and pity has been driven out, so only cruelty and mischief remain there. Therefore, I advise you, sir knight, to turn back again."

Sir Galahad said, "Know well that I shall not turn back." Then Sir Galahad examined his arms and armor to see that all was in proper order, and he raised his shield.

Very soon he met with seven fair maidens, who said to him, "Sir knight, you ride here in great folly, for you have to cross over this water."

"Why should I not be able to cross the water?" asked Sir Galahad.

He rode away from them and then met with a squire who said, "Knight, those knights in the castle defy you and warn you to go no further until they learn what it is you want."

"Fair sir," said Sir Galahad, "I have come to destroy the wicked custom of this castle."

"Sir, if you try to do that, you will have more than enough to do!"

"Go now," said Sir Galahad, "and help to hasten the completion of my task."

Then the squire entered the castle, and soon after seven knights came out of the castle, who were all brothers. When they saw Sir Galahad they cried, "Knight, defend yourself, for we assure you that you will have nothing but death!"

"Why?" asked Sir Galahad. "Will all of you fight me at once?"

"Yes," they said, "you can be sure of that."

Then Galahad raised his spear and smote the first brother to the earth, nearly breaking his neck. At that, the other six delivered harsh blows onto Sir Galahad's shield so that their spears broke.

Then Sir Galahad drew his sword and set upon them so fiercely it was a marvel to see. With his great might he caused them to flee the field. Sir Galahad chased them until they entered the castle, and he entered the castle at another gate.

Then an old man, clothed in religious garb, met Sir Galahad and said, "Sir, here—have the keys to this castle." Then Sir Galahad opened the gates and saw so many people in the streets that he could not number them.

They all said, "Sir, you are welcome, for long we have waited here, with no deliverance."

Then a gentlewoman came up to him and said, "Sir, the knights have fled, but they will come again tonight to take up their evil custom again."

"What would you have me do?" said Sir Galahad.

"Sir," said the gentlewoman, "send for the knights who hold their lands of this castle, and make them all swear to follow the customs that were practiced here in former times."

"I will do that gladly," said Sir Galahad.

She then brought him a horn of ivory, richly decorated with gold, and said, "Sir, blow this horn; it may be heard two miles away." After Sir Galahad had blown the horn, he lay down upon a bed.

Then a priest came to Sir Galahad and said, "Sir, it has been seven years since these seven brothers came into this castle and took lodging with the lord who lived here. He was called Duke Lianoure, and he was lord of all this country. When these brothers saw the duke's daughter—who was a very beautiful woman—they entered into a false and treacherous quarrel among themselves over her. The duke, who was a good man, wanted them to leave, and they slew him and his eldest son.

"Then they took the maiden and all the treasure of the castle, and by force they held all the knights of the land in servitude to them. One day, the duke's daughter said to them, 'You have done great wrong in slaying my father and my brother and to hold our lands thus. Despite all this,' she said, 'you shall not hold this castle for many years, for you shall all be defeated by a single knight.'

"Thus she prophesied seven years ago. 'Well,' said the seven knights, 'because you have said this, there shall never be a lady or knight who passes by this castle who will not be forced to stay here against his or her will or else be killed. We will continue this custom until the knight comes by whom you have said we will lose this castle.' For this reason it is called the Castle of Maidens, for they have destroyed many maidens."

"Now," said Sir Galahad, "is she for whom this castle was lost, the duke's daughter, here?"

"Nay, sir," said the priest, "she was dead three nights after they forced themselves upon her. Since that time they have kept her younger sister, who endures great pain, along with many other ladies."

By this time all the knights of the land had arrived, and Sir Galahad had them do homage and fealty to the duke's daughter, which greatly eased their hearts and gave them hope.

In the morning, a messenger came and told Sir Galahad that Sir Gawain, Sir Gareth, and Sir Uwain had slain the seven brothers. "I am not surprised," said Sir Galahad. Then he armed himself, mounted his horse, and commended all the people to God.

Now our tale turns away from Sir Galahad, and speaks of Sir Gawain.

C XIII.16 Now the story goes that after Sir Gawain departed, he rode on many journeys, to and fro, throughout the land. Finally he came to the abbey where Sir Galahad had received the white shield. There he learned what direction Sir Galahad had gone so that he could follow after him. He rode until he came to the abbey where Sir Melias was lying, injured, and Sir Melias told Sir Gawain of the marvelous feats that Sir Galahad had performed.

"Indeed," said Sir Gawain, "I am unhappy that I did not go the way he did. If I meet with him, I shall only part from him reluctantly because of all the marvelous adventures he has achieved."

"Sir," said one of the monks, "he will not want your fellowship."

"Why is that?" asked Sir Gawain.

"Sir," said the monk, "it is because you are wicked and sinful, and he is truly blessed."

As they were talking thus, Sir Gareth came riding in, and each knight made great joy over the other. In the morning they heard mass and then departed. As they went on their way, they met with Sir Uwain, and Sir Uwain told Sir Gawain that he had not had any adventures since he had left court.

"Neither have we," said Sir Gawain. Each of those three knights then promised the others that they would not part from one another while they were engaged in the quest unless some chance circumstance caused it.

They departed and rode until by chance, they came to the Castle of Maidens. The seven brothers saw the three knights and said, "Since we have been driven from this castle by one knight, we shall destroy all the knights of King Arthur's court that we are able to overcome, on account of Sir Galahad." With that, the seven knights set upon the three knights. By fortune Sir Gawain slew one of those brothers, and each of the fellows overthrew another, and then they slew all who were left.

They then took the path leading by the castle, but they lost the trail of Sir Galahad. Then each parted from the others, and Sir Gawain rode until he came to a hermitage. There he found a good man performing the evening church service. Sir Gawain asked him if he would charitably provide him with lodging, and the good man granted it gladly. Then the good man asked him who he was.

"Sir," he said, "I am a knight of King Arthur, and I am on the quest for the Holy Grail; my name is Sir Gawain."

"Sir," said the good man, "I would like to know how things stand between you and God."

"Sir," said Sir Gawain, "I will gladly make my confession to you, if you would like." Then he told the hermit how one of the monks of the abbey "called me a wicked knight."

"He might very well say that," said the hermit, "for when you were first made knight, you should have taken up knightly deeds and virtuous living, but you have done the contrary. You have lived shamefully for many years. Sir Galahad is a virgin who has never sinned, and that is why wherever he goes he shall attain what others such as yourself—and those in your fellowship—never shall, for you have lived the most untrue life that I have ever heard of a knight living. It is certain that if you had not been as wicked as you are, you and your fellows would never have slain the seven brothers."

"Sir Galahad is a virgin who never sinned, and that is why he shall attain wherever he goes what you and all others shall never attain, and neither will any in your fellowship. You have lived the most untrue life that I have ever heard of a knight living. For certain, if you had not been as wicked as you are, those seven brothers would never have been slain by you and your two fellows. Sir Galahad alone defeated all seven the day before, but his life is such that he will slay no man without a very good cause. Also, I should tell you that the Castle of Maidens signifies the good souls that were in hell before the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ."

"The seven knights represent the seven deadly sins that at one time were dominant throughout the world. I would liken the good knight Galahad to the Son of the High Father

that descended into a maiden and then brought so many souls out of hell; just so did Sir Galahad deliver all the maidens from that terrible castle. Now, Sir Gawain," said the good man, "you must do penance for your sin."

"Sir, what penance shall I do?"

"Such as I give you," said the good man.

"Nay," said Sir Gawain, "I may not do penance, for we adventuring knights often times must endure great woe and pain."

"Well," said the good man; and then he stayed silent.

In the morning Sir Gawain departed from the hermit and commended him to God. By chance he met with Sir Agglovale and Sir Grifflet, two Round Table knights, and they rode together for four days without encountering any adventures. On the fifth day they parted from one another, and each attended to whatever might befall him by chance.

69 Sir Lancelot on the Grail Quest

Here the tale leaves Sir Gawain and his fellows and speaks of Sir Galahad.

When Sir Galahad had left the Castle of Maidens he rode until he came to a desolate forest, and there he met with Sir Lancelot and Sir Perceval, but they did not recognize him because he was newly disguised.

When they encountered one another, his father, Sir Lancelot, raised his spear and then broke it upon Sir Galahad. Sir Galahad smote him in return so that Sir Lancelot was borne down to the ground, horse and man. Then Sir Galahad drew his sword and faced Sir Perceval; he smote him so hard on the top of his helm that it stuck to the steel of the sword; if the sword had not swerved, Sir Perceval would have been slain. At that stroke, he fell out of his saddle.

This joust occurred in front of a hermitage wherein dwelled a recluse. When she saw Sir Galahad ride she said, "God be with you, best knight of the world! Indeed," she said aloud, so that Sir Lancelot and Sir Perceval might hear, "if yonder two knights had known you as well as I do, they would not have challenged you."

When Sir Galahad heard her say this, he feared that he would be recognized, so he spurred his horse and rode away from them some distance. Then they both realized it was Sir Galahad; they mounted their horses and rode quickly after him, but within a short time he was out of their sight. Then they turned back with heavy hearts and Sir Perceval said, "Let us learn some news from yonder recluse."

"Do as you like," said Sir Lancelot. So Sir Perceval went up to the recluse, who knew both him and Sir Lancelot very well.

But Sir Lancelot rode the length and breadth of a wild forest, following no clear path but that which chance might show him. At length he came to a stone cross where the road parted in two directions through the wasteland. By the cross there was a stone with an inscription, but it was so dark that Sir Lancelot could not read what it said.

Sir Lancelot looked around and saw an old chapel; he went to see if there were any people there. He tied his horse to a tree and then removed his shield and hung it from the same tree. He went to the chapel door and found it twisted and broken; inside he found a fair altar, richly arrayed with clean silk cloth, and there were standing six clean, beautiful, silver candlesticks, with large candles standing in them.

When Sir Lancelot saw this light, he had a great desire to enter the chapel, but could not find a way to get in. Then he was heavy of heart and greatly dismayed, and so returned to

C XIII.17

his horse. He removed his saddle and bridle and put him out to pasture, then he removed his own helm, ungirt his sword, and laid himself down to sleep upon his shield in front of the cross.

C XIII.18

He fell asleep. And half-waking half-sleeping, he saw two palfreys coming toward him, both fair and white. They bore a litter between them, and therein a sick knight was lying. When they came near to the cross, they stopped and waited. All this Sir Lancelot saw—for he was not truly sleeping—and he heard the sick knight say, "Ah, sweet Lord, when shall this sorrow leave me? When shall the holy vessel come to me by which I may be healed? I have endured much for so long because of a small sin." The knight lamented thus for some time, and Sir Lancelot heard all of it.

Then Sir Lancelot saw how the candlestick with the six tapers came before the cross, but it seemed that no one brought it. Also, a table of silver appeared; on it was the vessel of the Holy Grail, which Sir Lancelot had previously seen in the house of King Pelles, grandson of King Pecheur. Then the sick knight sat up, raised both his hands and said, "Fair sweet Lord, who is present in this holy vessel, take heed of me, so that I may be healed of this malady." He then went down on his hands and knees so that he touched the holy vessel, and he kissed it and was immediately healed. Then he said, "Lord God, I thank You, for I am healed of this sickness."

When the holy vessel had been there a great while, it went back into the chapel with the candlesticks and candles so that Sir Lancelot did not know what had become of it. He was overcome with sin, and had no power to raise himself in the presence of the holy vessel. Because of that, afterward many men said shameful things about him, but he repented and did penance.

Then the sick knight rose up and kissed the cross, after which his squire brought him his armor and asked his lord how he did.

"Indeed," he said, "thanks be to God I am very well. I have been healed by the holy vessel. But I marvel at this sleeping knight who had no power to awake when the holy vessel was brought hither."

"I daresay," said the squire, "that he dwells in some deadly sin which he has never confessed."

"By my faith," said the knight, "whoever he is, he is unhappy, for I believe that he is of the fellowship of the Round Table, which is engaged in the quest for the Holy Grail."

"Sir," said the squire, "I have brought you here all your armor, except your helm and sword. Therefore, I would be in agreement with your actions if you were to take this knight's helm and sword." And so he did. When he was fully armed, he also took Sir Lancelot's horse, which was better than his own, and then they departed from the cross.

C XIII.19

Then Sir Lancelot awoke, sat up, and thought about what he had seen there, wondering if it had been a dream or not. Then he heard a voice say, "Sir Lancelot! You are harder than a seed, more bitter than wood, and more naked than the leaf of the fig tree. Therefore, go from here! Withdraw from this holy place!"

When Sir Lancelot heard this, he was very unhappy and did not know what to do. He departed weeping hard and cursing the day that he was born, for he believed at that time

that he would never have honor again. The words that the voice had said pierced him to the heart, and he wished to know why it had said such things about him.

Then Sir Lancelot went to the cross and found that his helm, sword and horse were gone. He called himself a wretch, the most unhappy of all knights, and then he said, "My sin and wickedness have brought me great dishonor. When I sought worldly adventures because of worldly desires, I always succeeded and was the best wherever I went. I was never shamed in any quarrel, whether I was in the right or the wrong. Now I have taken it upon myself to seek holy things, and I see and understand that my old sin hinders and shames me—that is why I had no power to move or speak when the holy vessel appeared before me."

So he sorrowed thus until it was day and he heard the birds singing; and that comforted him somewhat.

But when he could not find his horse and armor, he knew well that God was displeased with him. So he departed from the cross on foot and went into a fair forest. By late morning he came to a high hill on which he found a hermitage, and a hermit therein who was going to mass. Then Sir Lancelot kneeled down and cried to Our Lord for mercy for his wicked deeds.

When the mass was over Sir Lancelot called to the hermit and asked him, out of charity, to hear his confession. "Gladly," said the good man, and asked him if he was one of King Arthur's knights and a member of the Round Table.

"Yes, truly, sir, and my name is Sir Lancelot du Lake, who has been very well-spoken of, but now my good fortune is changed and I am the greatest wretch in all the world." The hermit beheld him and marveled that he looked so abashed.

"Sir," said the hermit, "you ought to thank God more than any knight now living, for he has caused you to have more worldly honor than any knight who is now alive. It was your presumption in taking on this spiritual quest while you are still living in deadly sin—your audacity in being in the same place where His flesh and blood was—that caused you to be unable to see the Holy Grail with your earthly eyes. The Grail will not appear where such sinners are, unless to do so would be to them a great hurt or shame.

"There is no knight living who ought to offer up thanks to God such as you should, for he has given you beauty, wealth, nobility and great strength, above all other knights. Therefore, you more than any other man should love and dread God, for your strength and manhood will be of little use to you if God is against you."

Then Sir Lancelot wept with a heavy heart and said, "I know that what you say is the truth."

"Sir," said the good man, "do not hide any old sin from me."

"Truly," said Sir Lancelot, "I am loath to reveal it, because for the last fourteen years I have never revealed one thing that I have done—and I now know that is the source of my shame and misadventure." Then he told the good man all of his life, and how he had loved a queen immeasurably and unrestrainedly for a very long time. "And all my great deeds of arms have, for the most part, been done for the sake of the queen; for her sake I would do battle whether it was right or wrong, and I never did a battle for God's sake only. I fought

to win honor and to cause myself to be the better beloved, and very seldom or never did I thank God." Then Sir Lancelot said, "Sir, I ask you to advise me."

"Sir, I will advise you," said the hermit, "if you will promise me on your knighthood that you will no longer go into that queen's company as much as is possible." Then Sir Lancelot promised him, on the faith of his body, that he would not. "Sir, see that your heart and your mouth are in agreement," said the good man, "and I can assure you that you will have more honor than you ever had before."

"Holy father," said Sir Lancelot, "I wonder about the voice that said such marvelous words to me, as I told you before."

"Do not wonder," said the good man, "for it seems that God loves you. For men may understand that a seed is hard by its nature, and some are harder than others. You are a seed, Sir Lancelot, for you will not leave your sin, despite all the goodness that God has sent you. Therefore, you are harder than any seed, for you cannot be made soft by either water or fire; it is the heat of the Holy Ghost that is unable to enter into you."

"Now take heed: in all the world men shall not find another knight to whom Our Lord has given such grace as He has shown you, for He has given you fairness and handsomeness, as well as the knowledge and discretion to know good from bad. He has also given you prowess and hardiness, and given you tasks in which you almost always will succeed, so that you have been in the better position all the days of your life, wherever you have gone. Now Our Lord will not allow you to do this any longer unless you come to know Him, whether you wish it or not. The reason that the voice said that you were bitterer than wood is because wherever sin lives, there is little sweetness. Therefore, you are like an old rotten tree."

"I have shown you why you are harder than a seed and bitterer than a tree; I will now show you why you are more naked and barer than the fig tree. It happened that Our Lord, on Palm Sunday, preached in Jerusalem, and there He found that the people all harbored unkindness within themselves, and not one person in the town would lodge Him. So He went out of the town and found a fig tree that was very fair, with many leaves, but no fruit. Then Our Lord cursed the tree that bore no fruit and likened the fig tree to Jerusalem, which had leaves but no fruit. So you, Sir Lancelot, when the Holy Grail was brought before you, Our Lord found in you no fruit—no good thought or good will—but only that you were befouled by lechery."

"Indeed," said Sir Lancelot, "all that you have said is true, and henceforth, I intend, by the grace of God, never to be as wicked as I have been while I have followed the code of knighthood and done feats of arms."

Then the good man assigned Sir Lancelot such penance as he was able to do and told him to continue to follow the code of knighthood. So he absolved him and asked him to remain with him that day.

"I will do that gladly," said Sir Lancelot, "for I have neither helm nor horse nor sword."

"As for that," said the good man, "I shall provide for you a horse and everything else you need by tomorrow evening."

Then Sir Lancelot repented greatly of his misdeeds.