

ARTHURIAN  
CHRONICLES  
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Roman house. Cador had nourished this lady long and richly in his earldom of Cornwall. The maiden was the earl's near cousin, for by his mother he, too, was of Roman blood. Marvelously dainty was the maiden in person and vesture; right queenly of bearing; passing sweet and ready of tongue. Arthur cherished her dearly, for his love was wonderfully set upon the damsel, yet never had they a child together, nor betwixt them might get an heir.

As soon as winter was gone, and the warm days were come when it was good to wend upon the sea, Arthur made ready his ships to cross the straits to Ireland and conquer the land. Arthur made no long tarrying. He brought together the most lusty warriors of his realm, both poor and rich, all of the people who were most vigorous and apt in war. With these he passed into Ireland, and sent about the country seeking provand for his host. So the sergeants took seisin of cows and oxen, and brought to the camp in droves all that was desirable for meat. Guillomer, the king of that realm, heard that Arthur had fastened this quarrel upon him. He hearkened to the cries and the tidings, the complaints and the burdens, raised by those villeins whose granges and fields were pillaged for the sustenance of his foes. Guillomer went forth to give battle to Arthur, but in an ill hour he drew to the field. His men were naked to their adversaries, having neither helmets nor coats of leather nor shields. They knew nothing of archery, and were ignorant of catapults and slings. The Britons were mighty bowmen. They shot their shafts thickly amongst their enemies, so that the Irish dared not show their bodies, and might find no shelter. The Irish could endure the arrows no longer. They fled from the fight, taking refuge where they were able. They hid in woods and thickets, in towns and in houses, seeking refuge from the stour. Right grievous was their discomfiture. Guillomer, their king, sought shelter within a forest, but his fate was upon him, and he might not conceal him from his foes. Arthur searched him out so diligently, following so hotly on his track, that at the last he was taken captive. Guillomer did very wisely. He paid fealty and homage to Arthur, and owned that of him he held his heritage. Moreover he put hostages within Arthur's power, for surety that he would render a yearly tribute to the king. When Arthur had subdued Ireland, he went further and came even so far as Iceland. He brought the land in subjection to himself, so that the folk thereof owned themselves his men, and granted him the lordship. Now three

princes; by name Gonfal, King of the Orkneys, Doldamer, King of Gothland, and Romarec, King of Finland, heard the rumour of these deeds. They sent spies to Iceland, and learned from their messengers that Arthur was making ready his host to pass the sea, and despoil them of their realms. In all the world—said these messengers—there was no such champion, nor so crafty a captain in the ordering of war. These three kings feared mightily in case Arthur should descend upon them, and waste their land. Lest a worse thing should befall them, with no compulsion and of their own free wills, they set forth for Iceland and came humbly before the king. They gave of their substance rich gifts and offerings, and kneeling before Arthur did him fealty, putting their countries between his hands, and proclaiming themselves his men. They owned that of grace they held their inheritance; they swore to render tribute to his treasury, and gave hostages for assurance of their covenant. So they departed in peace to their own place. For his part Arthur came again to his ships. He returned to England, where he was welcomed of his people with marvellous joy. Twelve years he abode in his realm in peace and content, since none was so bold as to do him a mischief, and he did mischief to none. Arthur held high state in a very splendid fashion. He ordained the courtesies of courts, and bore himself with so rich and noble a bearing, that neither the emperor's court at Rome, nor any other bragged of by man, was accounted as aught besides that of the king. Arthur never heard speak of a knight in praise, but he caused him to be numbered of his household. So that he might he took him to himself, for help in time of need. Because of these noble lords about his hall, of whom each knight pained himself to be the hardiest champion, and none would count him the least praiseworthy, Arthur made the Round Table, so reputed of the Britons. This Round Table was ordained of Arthur that when his fair fellowship sat to meat their chairs should be high alike, their service equal, and none before or after his comrade. Thus no man could boast that he was exalted above his fellow, for all alike were gathered round the board, and none was alien at the breaking of Arthur's bread. At this table sat Britons, Frenchmen, Normans, Angevins, Flemings, Burgundians, and Loherins. Knights had their place who held land of the king, from the furthest marches of the west even unto the Hill of St. Bernard. A most discourteous lord would he be deemed who sojourned not awhile in the king's hall; who came not with the countenance, the harness, and the

vesture that were the garb and usage of those who served Arthur about his court. From all the lands there voyaged to this court such knights as were in quest either of gain or worship. Of these lords some drew near to hear tell of Arthur's courtesies; others to marvel at the pride of his state; these to have speech with the knights of his chivalry; and some to receive of his largeness costly gifts. For this Arthur in his day was loved right well of the poor, and honoured meetly by the rich. Only the kings of the world bore him malice and envy, since they doubted and feared exceedingly lest he should set his foot upon them every one, and spoil them of their heritage.

I know not if you have heard tell the marvellous gestes and errant deeds related so often of King Arthur. They have been noised about this mighty realm for so great a space that the truth has turned to fable and an idle song. Such rhymes are neither sheer bare lies, nor gospel truths. They should not be considered either an idiot's tale, or given by inspiration. The minstrel has sung his ballad, the storyteller told over his story so frequently, little by little he has decked and painted, till by reason of his embellishment the truth stands hid in the trappings of a tale. Thus to make a delectable tune to your ear, history goes masking as fable. Hear then how, because of his valour, the counsel of his barons, and in the strength of that mighty chivalry he had cherished and made splendid, Arthur purposed to cross the sea and conquer the land of France. But first he deemed to sail to Norway, since he would make Lot, his sister's lord, its king. Sichelin, the King of Norway, was newly dead, leaving neither son nor daughter of his body. In the days of his health, as alike when he fell on death, Sichelin had appointed Lot to succeed him in his realm and fief. The crown was Lot's by right, even as Sichelin proclaimed, since Lot was the king's nephew, and there was no other heir. When the folk of Norway learned that Sichelin had bequeathed his realm to Lot, they held his command and ordinance in derision. They would have no alien for their lord, nor suffer a stranger to meddle in their business, lest he should deem them an ancient and feeble people, and give to outland folk what was due to the dwellers in the realm. The Norwegians resolved to make king one of their own house, that he might cherish them and their children; and for this reason they chose from amongst them a certain lord named Ridulph to be their king.

When Lot perceived that his right was despised, save that he took his heritage by force, he sought help of Arthur, his lord.

Arthur agreed to aid him in his quarrel, promising to render him his own, and to avenge him bitterly on Ridulph. Arthur gathered together many ships and a mighty host. He entered into Norway with this great company, wasting the land, seizing on the manors, and spoiling the towns. Ridulph was no trembler, and had no thought to leave the country to its fate. He assembled his people, and prepared to give battle to the king. Since however his carles were not many, and his friends but few, Ridulph was defeated in the fight and slain. The greater part of his fellowship perished with him, so that no large number remained. In this manner Lot the King of Lyones destroyed the Norwegians from the land. Having delivered Norway from itself Arthur granted the kingdom to Lot, so only that he did Arthur homage as his lord. Amongst the barons who rode in this adventure was Gawain, the hardy and famous knight, who had freshly come from St. Sulpicius the Apostle, whose soul may God give rest and glory. The knight wore harness bestowed on him by the Apostle, and wondrously was he praised. This Gawain was a courteous champion, circumspect in word and deed, having no pride nor blemish in him. He did more than his boast, and gave more largely than he promised. His father had sent him to Rome, that he might be schooled the more meetly. Gawain was dubbed knight in the same day as Wavain, and counted himself of Arthur's household. Mightily he strove to do his devoir in the field, for the fairer service and honour of his lord.

After Arthur had conquered Norway, and firmly established his justice in the land, he chose of his host those men who were the most valiant and ready in battle, and assembled them by the sea. He brought to the same haven many ships and barges, together with such mariners as were needful for his purpose. When a quiet time was come, with a fortunate wind, Arthur crossed the sea into Denmark; for the realm was very greatly to his desire. Acil, the Danish king, considered the Britons and the folk from Norway. He considered Arthur, who had prevailed against so many kings. Acil knew and was persuaded that Arthur was mightier than he. He had no mind to suffer hurt himself, or to see his goodly heritage spoiled in a useless quarrel. What did it profit to waste wealth and honour alike, to behold slain friends and ruined towers? Acil wrought well and speedily. He sought peace, and ensued it. He gave costly gifts, and made promises which were larger still; till by reason of his words, his prayers, and supplications, concord was estab-

shall not do wrong to thee, unless he pay for it with his bare back!" Thus it said Arthur, noblest of kings. Then had he all Ireland all together in his own hand; and the king became his man, and delivered him his three sons.

Then spake Arthur to his good knights: "Go we to Iceland, and take we it in our hand." The host there marched, and to Iceland came. The king was named Ælcus, high man of the land; he heard the tiding of Arthur the king; he did all as a wiseman, and marched against him anon; anon forth-right, with sixteen knights; he bare in his hand a mickle wand (sceptre) of gold. So soon as he saw Arthur, he bent him on his knees, and quoth these words to him—the king was afraid:—"Welcome, sir Arthur! welcome, lord! Here I deliver thee in hand all together Iceland; thou shalt be my high king, and I will be thy underling. I will obey thee, as man shall do his master, and I will become here thy man, and deliver thee my dear son, who is named Escol; and thou shalt him honour (or reward), and dub him to knight, as thine own man. His mother I have to wife, the king's choice daughter of Russia. And eke each year I will give thee money, seven thousand pounds of silver and gold; and in every counsel be ready at thy need. This I will swear to thee, upon my sword; the relique is in the hilt, the noblest of this land; like as me shall like, will I never be false to thee!"

Arthur heard this noblest of kings. Arthur was winsome where he had his will, and he was exceeding stern with his enemies. Arthur heard the mild words of the monarch; he granted him all that he yearned; hostages and oaths, and all his proffers. Then heard say sooth words the King of Orkney, exceeding keen, who was named Gonwais, a heathen warrior, that Arthur the king would come to his land; with a mickle fleet sail to his country. Gonwais proceeded towards him, with his wise thanes, and set to Arthur in hand all Orkney's land, and two-and-thirty islands, that thither in lieth, and his homage, with much reverence. And he had (made) to him in covenant, before all his people, each year to wit, full sixty ships at his own cost to bring them to London, filled truly with good sea-fish. This covenant he confirmed, and hostages he found; and oaths he swore good, that he would not deceive. And afterwards he took leave, and forth he gan wend:—"Lord, have well good day! I will come when I may; for now thou art my lord, dearest of all kings."

When Arthur had done this, the yet he would more undertake;

he took his good writs, and sent to Gutlond; and greeted the King Doldanim, and bade him soon come to him, and himself become his man, and bring with him his two sons.—“ And if thou wilt not that, do what thou wilt, and I will send thee sixteen thousand noble warriors, to thy mickle harm, who shall waste thy land, and slay thy people, and set the land as to them best seemeth, and thyself bind, and to me bring.” The king heard this, the threat of the kaiser, and he speedily took his fair weeds, hounds and hawks, and his good horses; much silver, much gold; his two sons in his hand. And forth he gan wend to Arthur the king; and said these words Doldanim the good: “ Hail be thou, Arthur, noblest of kings! Here I bring twain, my sons both; their mother is of king’s race, she is mine own queen; I won her with spoil, out of Russia. Here I deliver thee my dear sons, and myself I will become thy man. And I will send thee tribute of my land; every year as thing bestowed, I will send thee into London seven thousand pounds. That I will swear, that I will never be false, but here I will become thy man—thy honour is the greater—so long as is ever, I will deceive thee never!”

Arthur took his messengers, and sent to Winetland, to Rumareth the king, and bade him know in haste, that he had in his hand Britain and Scotland, Gutland and Ireland, Orcany and Iceland. He ordered Rumareth to come, and bring him his eldest son; and if he would not do that, he would drive him from land; and if he might him capture, he would slay him or hang, and destroy all his land; his people exterminate. Rumareth heard this, the rich King of Winet; greatly he was afraid, all as the others were ere; loath to him were the tidings from Arthur the king. Nevertheless the King Rumareth hearkened counsels; he took his eldest son, and twelve good earls, and proceeded to Arthur the noble king, and sate at his feet, and gan him fair greet: “ Hail be thou, Arthur, noblest of Britons! I hight Rumareth, the King of Winetland; enow I have heard declared of thy valour; that thou art wide known, keenest of all kings. Thou hast won many kingdom all to thine own hand; there is no king in land that may thee withstand, king nor kaiser, in ever any combat; of all that thou beginnest, thou dost thy will. Here am I to thee come, and brought thee my eldest son; here I set thee in hand myself and my kingdom, and my dear son, and all my people, my wife and my weeds, and all my possessions, on condition that thou give me protection against thy fierce attacks. And be thou my

high king, and I will be thy underling, and send thee to hand five hundred pounds of gold; these gifts I will thee find, every year."

Arthur granted him all that the king yearned, and afterwards he held communing with his good thanes, and said that he would return again into this land, and see Wenhaver, the comely queen of the country. Trumpets he caused to be blown, and his army to assemble; and to ship marched the thanes wondrous blithe. The wind still stood them at will; weather as they would; blithe they were all therefore; up they came to Grimesby. That heard soon the highest of this land, and to the queen came tiding of Arthur the king, that he was come in safety, and his folk in prosperity. Then were in Britain joys enow! Here was fiddling and song, here was harping among; pipes and trumps sang there merrily. Poets there sung of Arthur the king, and of the great honour, that he had won. Folk came in concourse of many kind of land; wide and far the folk was in prosperity. All that Arthur saw, all it submitted to him, rich men and poor, as the hail that falleth; was there no Briton so wretched, that he was not enriched!

Here man may tell of Arthur the king, how he afterwards dwelt here twelve years, in peace and in amity, in all fairness. No man fought with him, nor made he any strife; might never any man bethink of bliss that were greater in any country than in this; might never man know any so mickle joy, as was with Arthur, and with his folk here!

I may say how it happened, wondrous though it seem. It was on a yule-day, that Arthur lay in London; then were come to him men of all his kingdoms, of Britain, of Scotland, of Ireland, of Iceland, and of all the lands that Arthur had in hand; and all the highest thanes, with horses and with swains. There were come seven kings' sons, with seven hundred knights; without the folk that obeyed Arthur. Each had in heart proud thoughts, and esteemed that he were better than his companion. The folk was of many a land; there was mickle envy; for the one accounted himself high, the other much higher. Then blew men the trumpets, and spread the tables; water men brought on floor, with golden bowls; next soft clothes, all of white silk. Then sate Arthur down, and by him Wenhaver the queen; next sate the earls, and thereafter the barons; next the knights, all as men them disposed. And the high-born men bare the meat even forth-right then to the knights; then toward the thanes, then toward the swains, then toward the porters, forth at the

board. The people became angered, and blows there were rife; at first they threw the loaves, the while that they lasted, and the silver bowls, filled with wine, and afterwards with the fists approached to necks. Then leapt there forth a young man, who came out of Winetland; he was given to Arthur to hold as hostage; he was Rumareth's son, the King of Winet. Thus said the knight there to Arthur the king: "Lord Arthur, go quickly into thy chamber, and thy queen with thee, and thy known relatives, and we shall decide this combat against these foreign warriors." Even with the words he leapt to the board where lay the knives before the sovereign; three knives he grasped, and with the one he smote the knight in the neck, that first began the same fight, so that his head on the floor fell to the ground. Soon he slew another, this same thane's brother; ere the swords came, seven he felled. There was fight exceeding great; each man smote other; there was much blood shed, mischief was among the folk!

Then approached the king out of his chamber; with him an hundred nobles, with helms and with burnies; each bare in his right hand a white steel brand. Then called Arthur, noblest of kings: "Sit ye, sit ye quickly, each man on his life! And whoso will not that do, he shall be put to death. Take ye me the same man, that this fight first began, and put withy on his neck, and draw him to a moor, and put him in a low fen; there he shall lie. And take ye all his dearest kin, that ye may find, and strike off the heads of them with your broad swords; the women that ye may find of his nearest kindred, carve ye off their noses, and let their beauty go to destruction; and so I will all destroy the race that he of came. And if I evermore subsequently hear, that any of my folk, of high or of low, eft arear strife on account of this same slaughter, there shall ransom him neither gold nor any treasure, fine horse nor war-garment, that he should not be dead, or with horses drawn in pieces—that is of each traitor the law! Bring ye the reliques, and I will swear thereon; and so, knights, shall ye, that were at this fight, earls and barons, that ye will not it break." First swore Arthur, noblest of kings; then swore earls, then swore barons; then swore thanes, then swore swains, that they nevermore the strife would arear. Men took all the dead, and carried them to burial-place. Afterwards men blew the trumpets, with noise exceeding merry; were he lief, were he loath, each there took water and cloth, and then sate down reconciled to the board, all for Arthur's dread, noblest of kings. Cupbearers there thronged, gleemen there sung;

harps gan resound, the people was in joy. Thus full seven nights was all the folk treated.

Afterwards it saith in the tale, that the king went to Cornwall; there came to him anon one that was a crafty workman, and met the king, and fair him greeted:—"Hail be thou, Arthur, noblest of kings! I am thine own man; through many land I have gone; I know of tree-works (carpentry) wondrous many crafts. I heard say beyond the sea new tidings, that thy knights gan to fight at thy board; on a midwinter's day many there fell; for their mickle mood wrought murderous play, and for their high lineage each would be within. But I will thee work a board exceeding fair, that thereat may sit sixteen hundred and more, all turn about, so that none be without; without and within, man against man. And when thou wilt ride, with thee thou mightest it carry, and set it where thou wilt, after thy will; and then thou needest never fear, to the world's end, that ever any moody knight at thy board may make fight, for there shall the high be even with the low." Timber was caused to be brought, and the board to be begun; in four weeks' time the work was completed.

At a high day the folk was assembled, and Arthur himself approached soon to the board, and ordered all his knights to the board forth-right. When all were seated, knights to their meat, then spake each with other, as if it were his brother; all they sate about; was there none without. Every sort of knight was there exceeding well disposed; all they were one by one (seated), the high and the low; might none there boast of other kind of drink other than his comrades, that were at the board. This was the same board that Britons boast of, and say many sorts of leasing, respecting Arthur the king. So doth every man, that another can love; if he is to him too dear, then will he lie, and say of him more honour than he is worth; no man is he so wicked, that his friend will not act well to him. Eft if among folk enmity areareth, in ever any time between two men, men can say leasing of the hateful one, though he were the best man that ever ate at board; the man that to him were loath, he can him last find! It is not all sooth nor all falsehood that minstrels sing; but this is the sooth respecting Arthur the king. Was never ere such king, so doughty through all things! For the sooth stands in the writings how it is befallen, from beginning to the end, of Arthur the king, no more nor less but as his laws (or acts) were.

But Britons loved him greatly, and oft of him lie, and say