

**Yvain, ou le chevalier au lion by Chrétien de Troyes, c. 1180**  
**transl. W.W. Comfort; Everyman's Library, London, 1914**

Arthur, the good King of Britain, whose prowess teaches us that we, too, should be brave and courteous, held a rich and royal court upon that precious feast-day which is always known by the name of Pentecost. The court was at Carduel in Wales. When the meal was finished, the knights betook themselves whither they were summoned by the ladies, damsels, and maidens. Some told stories; others spoke of love, of the trials and sorrows, as well as of the great blessings, which often fall to the members of its order, which was rich and flourishing in those days of old. But now its followers are few, having deserted it almost to a man, so that love is much abased. For lovers used to deserve to be considered courteous, brave, generous, and honourable. But now love is a laughing-stock, for those who have no intelligence of it assert that they love, and in that they lie. Thus they utter a mockery and lie by boasting where they have no right. But let us leave those who are still alive, to speak of those of former time. For, I take it, a courteous man, though dead, is worth more than a living knave. So it is my pleasure to relate a matter quite worthy of heed concerning the King whose fame was such that men still speak of him far and near; and I agree with the opinion of the Bretons that his name will live on for evermore. And in connection with him we call to mind those goodly chosen knights who spent themselves for honour's sake.

My lord Yvain mounts at once, intending to avenge, if possible, his cousin's disgrace before he returns. The squire ran for the arms and steed; he mounted at once without delay, since he was already equipped with shoes and nails. Then he followed his master's track until he saw him standing mounted, waiting to one side of the road in a place apart. He brought him his harness and equipment, and then accoutred him. My lord Yvain made no delay after putting on his arms, but hastily made his way each day over the mountains and through the valleys, through the forests long and wide, through strange and wild country, passing through many gruesome spots, many a danger and many a strait, until he came directly to the path, which was full of brambles and dark enough; then he felt he was safe at last, and could not now lose his way. Whoever may have to pay the cost, he will not stop until he sees the pine which shades the spring and stone, and the tempest of hail and rain and thunder and wind. That night, you may be sure, he had such lodging as he desired, for he found the vavasor to be even more polite and courteous than he had been told, and in the damsel he perceived a hundred times more sense and beauty than Calogrenant had spoken of, for one cannot rehearse the sum of a lady's or a good man's qualities. The moment such a man devotes himself to virtue, his story cannot be summed up or told, for no tongue could estimate the honourable deeds of such a gentleman. My lord Yvain was well content with the excellent lodging he had that night, and when he entered the clearing the next day, he met the bulls and the rustic boor who showed him the way to take. But more than a hundred times he crossed himself at sight of the monster before him — how Nature had ever been able to form such a hideous, ugly creature. Then to the spring he made his way, and found there all that he wished to see. Without hesitation and without sitting down he poured the basin full of water upon the stone, when straightway it began to blow and rain, and such a storm was caused as had been foretold. And when God had appeased the storm, the birds came to perch upon the pine, and sang their joyous songs up above the perilous spring. But before their jubilee had ceased there came the knight, more blazing with wrath than a burning log, and making as much noise as if he were chasing a lusty stag. As soon as they espied each other they rushed together and displayed the mortal hate they bore. Each one carried a stiff, stout lance, with which they dealt such mighty blows that they pierced the shields about their necks, and cut the meshes of their hauberks; their lances are splintered and sprung, while the fragments are cast high in air. Then each attacks the other with his sword, and in the strife they cut the straps of the shields away, and cut the shields all to bits from end to end, so that the shreds hang down, no longer serving as covering or defence; for they have so split them up that they bring down the gleaming blades upon their sides, their arms, and hips. Fierce, indeed, is their assault; yet they do not budge from their standing-place any more than would two blocks of stone. Never were there two knights so intent upon each other's death. They are careful not to waste their blows, but lay them on as best they may; they strike and bend their helmets, and they send the meshes of their hauberks flying so, that they draw not a little blood, for the hauberks are so hot with their body's heat that they hardly

serve as more protection than a coat. As they drive the sword-point at the face, it is marvellous that so fierce and bitter a strife should last so long. But both are possessed of such courage that one would not for aught retreat a foot before his adversary until he had wounded him to death. Yet, in this respect they were very honourable in not trying or deigning to strike or harm their steeds in any way; but they sat astride their steeds without putting foot to earth, which made the fight more elegant. At last my lord Yvain crushed the helmet of the knight, whom the blow stunned and made so faint that he swooned away, never having received such a cruel blow before. Beneath his kerchief his head was split to the very brains, so that the meshes of his bright hauberk were stained with the brains and blood, all of which caused him such intense pain that his heart almost ceased to beat. He had good reason then to flee, for he felt that he had a mortal wound, and that further resistance would not avail. With this thought in mind he quickly made his escape toward his town, where the bridge was lowered and the gate quickly opened for him; meanwhile my lord Yvain at once spurs after him at topmost speed. As a gervalcon swoops upon a crane when he sees him rising from afar, and then draws so near to him that he is about to seize him, yet misses him, so flees the knight, with Yvain pressing him so close that he can almost throw his arm about him, and yet cannot quite come up with him, though he is so close that he can hear him groan for the pain he feels. While the one exerts himself in flight the other strives in pursuit of him, fearing to have wasted his effort unless he takes him alive or dead; for he still recalls the mocking words which my lord Kay had addressed to him. He had not yet carried out the pledge which he had given to his cousin; nor will they believe his word unless he returns with the evidence. The knight led him a rapid chase to the gate of his town, where they entered in; but finding no man or woman in the streets through which they passed, they both rode swiftly on till they came to the palace-gate.

The gate was very high and wide, yet it had such a narrow entrance-way that two men or two horses could scarcely enter abreast or pass without interference or great difficulty; for it was constructed just like a trap which is set for the rat on mischief bent, and which has a blade above ready to fall and strike and catch, and which is suddenly released whenever anything, however gently, comes in contact with the spring. In like fashion, beneath the gate there were two springs connected with a portcullis up above, edged with iron and very sharp. If anything stepped upon this contrivance the gate descended from above, and whoever below was struck by the gate was caught and mangled. Precisely in the middle the passage lay as narrow as if it were a beaten track. Straight through it exactly the knight rushed on, with my lord Yvain madly following him apace, and so close to him that he held him by the saddle-bow behind. It was well for him that he was stretched forward, for had it not been for this piece of luck he would have been cut quite through; for his horse stepped upon the wooden spring which kept the portcullis in place. Like a hellish devil the gate dropped down, catching the saddle and the horse's haunches, which it cut off clean. But, thank God, my lord Yvain was only slightly touched when it grazed his back so closely that it cut both his spurs off even with his heels. And while he thus fell in dismay, the other with his mortal wound escaped him, as you now shall see. Farther on there was another gate just like the one they had just passed; through this the knight made his escape, and the gate descended behind him. Thus my lord Yvain was caught, very much concerned and discomfited as he finds himself shut in this hallway, which was all studded with gilded nails, and whose walls were cunningly decorated with precious paints. <sup>[1]</sup> But about nothing was he so worried as not to know what had become of the knight. While he was in this narrow place, he heard open the door of a little adjoining room, and there came forth alone a fair and charming maiden who closed the door again after her. When she found my lord Yvain, at first she was sore dismayed. <sup>[2]</sup> "Surely, sir knight," she says, "I fear you have come in an evil hour. If you are seen here, you will be all cut to pieces. For my lord is mortally wounded, and I know it is you who have been the death of him. My lady is in such a state of grief, and her people about her are crying so that they are ready to die with rage; and, moreover, they know you to be inside. But as yet their grief is such that they are unable to attend to you. The moment they come to attack you, they cannot fail to kill or capture you, as they may choose." And my lord Yvain replies to her: "If God will they shall never kill me, nor shall I fall into their hands." "No," she says, "for I shall do my utmost to assist you. It is not manly to cherish fear. So I hold you to be a man of courage, when you are not dismayed. And rest assured that if I could I would help you and treat you honourably, as you in turn would do for me. Once my lady sent me on an errand to the King's court, and I suppose I was not so experienced or courteous or so well behaved as a maiden ought to be; at any rate, there was not a knight there who deigned to say a word to me except you alone who stand here now; but you, in your kindness, honoured and aided me. For the

honour you did me then I shall now reward you. I know full well what your name is, and I recognised you at once: your name is my lord Yvain. You may be sure and certain that if you take my advice you will never be caught or treated ill. Please take this little ring of mine, which you will return when I shall have delivered you." <sup>[3]</sup> Then she handed him the little ring and told him that its effect was like that of the bark which covers the wood so that it cannot be seen; but it must be worn so that the stone is within the palm; then he who wears the ring upon his finger need have no concern for anything; for no one, however sharp his eyes may be, will be able to see him any more than the wood which is covered by the outside bark. All this is pleasing to my lord Yvain. And when she had told him this, she led him to a seat upon a couch covered with a quilt so rich that the Duke of Austria had none such, and she told him that if he cared for something to eat she would fetch it for him; and he replied that he would gladly do so. Running quickly into the chamber, she presently returned, bringing a roasted fowl and a cake, a cloth, a full pot of good grape-wine covered with a white drinking-cup; all this she offered to him to eat. And he, who stood in need of food, very gladly ate and drank.

By the time he had finished his meal the knights were astir inside looking for him and eager to avenge their lord, who was already stretched upon his bier. Then the damsel said to Yvain: "Friend, do you hear them all seeking you? There is a great noise and uproar brewing. But whoever may come or go, do not stir for any noise of theirs, for they can never discover you if you do not move from this couch. Presently you will see this room all full of ill-disposed and hostile people, who will think to find you here; and I make no doubt that they will bring the body here before interment, and they will begin to search for you under the seats and the beds. It will be amusing for a man who is not afraid when he sees people searching so fruitlessly, for they will all be so blind, so undone, and so misguided that they will be beside themselves with rage. I cannot tell you more just now, for I dare no longer tarry here. But I may thank God for giving me the chance and the opportunity to do some service to please you, as I yearned to do." Then she turned away, and when she was gone all the crowd with one accord had come from both sides to the gates, armed with clubs and swords. There was a mighty crowd and press of hostile people surging about, when they espied in front of the gate the half of the horse which had been cut down. Then they felt very sure that when the gates were opened they would find inside him whose life they wished to take. Then they caused to be drawn up those gates which had been the death of many men. But since no spring or trap was laid for their passage they all came through abreast. Then they found at the threshold the other half of the horse that had been killed; but none of them had sharp enough eyes to see my lord Yvain, whom they would gladly have killed; and he saw them beside themselves with rage and fury, as they said: "How can this be? For there is no door or window here through which anything could escape, unless it be a bird, a squirrel, or marmot, or some other even smaller animal; for the windows are barred, and the gates were closed as soon as my lord passed through. The body is in here, dead or alive, since there is no sign of it outside there; we can see more than half of the saddle in here, but of him we see nothing, except the spurs which fell down severed from his feet. Now let us cease this idle talk, and search in all these comers, for he is surely in here still, or else we are all enchanted, or the evil spirits have filched him away from us." Thus they all, aflame with rage, sought him about the room, beating upon the walls, and beds, and seats. But the couch upon which he lay was spared and missed the blows, so that he was not struck or touched. But all about they thrashed enough, and raised an uproar in the room with their clubs, like a blind man who pounds as he goes about his search. While they were poking about under the beds and the stools, there entered one of the most beautiful ladies that any earthly creature ever saw. Word or mention was never made of such a fair Christian dame, and yet she was so crazed with grief that she was on the point of taking her life. All at once she cried out at the top of her voice, and then fell prostrate in a swoon. And when she had been picked up she began to claw herself and tear her hair, like a woman who had lost her mind. She tears her hair and rips her dress, and faints at every step she takes; nor can anything comfort her when she sees her husband borne along lifeless in the bier; for her happiness is at an end, and so she made her loud lament. The holy water and the cross and the tapers were borne in advance by the nuns from a convent; then came missals and censers and the priests, who pronounce the final absolution required for the wretched soul.

My lord Yvain heard the cries and the grief that can never be described, for no one could describe it, nor was such ever set down in a book. The procession passed, but in the middle of the room a great crowd gathered about the bier, for the fresh warm blood trickled out again from the dead man's wound, and this betokened certainly that the man was still surely present who had fought the battle and had killed and defeated him.

Then they sought and searched everywhere, and turned and stirred up everything, until they were all in a sweat with the trouble and the press which had been caused by the sight of the trickling crimson blood. Then my lord Yvain was well struck and beaten where he lay, but not for that did he stir at all. And the people became more and more distraught because of the wounds which burst open, and they marvelled why they bled, without knowing whose fault it was. <sup>[4]</sup> And each one to his neighbour said: "The murderer is among us here, and yet we do not see him, which is passing strange and mysterious." At this the lady showed such grief that she made an attempt upon her life, and cried as if beside herself: "All God, then will the murderer not be found, the traitor who took my good lord's life? Good? Aye, the best of the good, indeed! True God, Thine will be the fault if Thou dost let him thus escape. No other man than Thou should I blame for it who dost hide him from my sight. Such a wonder was never seen, nor such injustice, as Thou dost to me in not allowing me even to see the man who must be so close to me. When I cannot see him, I may well say that some demon or spirit has interposed himself between us, so that I am under a spell. Or else he is a coward and is afraid of me: he must be a craven to stand in awe of me, and it is an act of cowardice not to show himself before me. Ah, thou spirit, craven thing! Why art thou so in fear of me, when before my lord thou weft so brave? O empty and elusive thing, why cannot I have thee in my power? Why cannot I lay hands upon thee now? But how could it ever come about that thou didst kill my lord, unless it was done by treachery? Surely my lord would never have met defeat at thy hands had he seen thee face to face. For neither God nor man ever knew of his like, nor is there any like him now. Surely, hadst thou been a mortal man, thou wouldst never have dared to withstand my lord, for no one could compare with him." Thus the lady struggles with herself, and thus she contends and exhausts herself. And her people with her, for their part, show the greatest possible grief as they carry off the body to burial. After their long efforts and search they are completely exhausted by the quest, and give it up from weariness, inasmuch as they can find no one who is in any way guilty. The nuns and priests, having already finished the service, had returned from the church and were gone to the burial. But to all this the damsel in her chamber paid no heed. Her thoughts are with my lord Yvain, and, coming quickly, she said to him: "Fair sir, these people have been seeking you in force. They have raised a great tumult here, and have poked about in all the corners more diligently than a hunting-dog goes ferreting a partridge or a quail. Doubtless you have been afraid." "Upon my word, you are right," says he: "I never thought to be so afraid. And yet, if it were possible I should gladly look out through some window or aperture at the procession and the corpse." Yet he had no interest in either the corpse or the procession, for he would gladly have seen them all burned, even had it cost him a thousand marks. A thousand marks? Three thousand, verily, upon my word. But he said it because of the lady of the town, of whom he wished to catch a glimpse. So the damsel placed him at a little window, and repaid him as well as she could for the honour which he had done her. From this window my lord Yvain espies the fair lady, as she says: "Sire, may God have mercy upon your soul! For never, I verily believe, did any knight ever sit in saddle who was your equal in any respect. No other knight, my fair sweet lord, ever possessed your honour or courtesy. Generosity was your friend and boldness your companion. May your soul rest among the saints, my fair dear lord." Then she strikes and tears whatever she can lay her hands upon. Whatever the outcome may be, it is hard for my lord Yvain to restrain himself from running forward to seize her hands. But the damsel begs and advises him, and even urgently commands him, though with courtesy and graciousness, not to commit any rash deed, saying: "You are well off here. Do not stir for any cause until this grief shall be assuaged; let these people all depart, as they will do presently. If you act as I advise, in accordance with my views, great advantage may come to you. It will be best for you to remain seated here, and watch the people inside and out as they pass along the way without their seeing you. But take care not to speak violently, for I hold that man to be rather imprudent than brave who goes too far and loses his self-restraint and commits some deed of violence the moment he has the time and chance. So if you cherish some rash thought be careful not to utter it. The wise man conceals his imprudent thought and works out righteousness if he can. So wisely take good care not to risk your head, for which they would accept no ransom. Be considerate of yourself and remember my advice. Rest assured until I return, for I dare not stay longer now. I might stay so long, I fear, that they would suspect me when they did not see me in the crowd, and then I should suffer for it."

Then she goes off, and he remains, not knowing how to comport himself. He is loath to see them bury the corpse without his securing anything to take back as evidence that he has defeated and killed him. If he has

no proof or evidence he will be held in contempt, for Kay is so mean and obstinate, so given to mockery, and so annoying, that he could never succeed in convincing him. He would go about for ever insulting him, flinging his mockery and taunts as he did the other day. These taunts are still fresh and rankling in his heart. But with her sugar and honey a new Love now softened him; he had been to hunt upon his lands and had gathered in his prey. His enemy carries off his heart, and he loves the creature who hates him most. The lady, all unaware, has well avenged her lord's death. She has secured greater revenge than she could ever have done unless she had been aided by Love, who attacks him so gently that he wounds his heart through his eyes. And this wound is more enduring than any inflicted by lance or sword. A sword-blow is cured and healed at once as soon as a doctor attends to it, but the wound of love is worst when it is nearest to its physician. This is the wound of my lord Yvain, from which he will never more recover, for Love has installed himself with him. He deserts and goes away from the places he was wont to frequent. He cares for no lodging or landlord save this one, and he is very wise in leaving a poor lodging-place in order to betake himself to him. In order to devote himself completely to him, he will have no other lodging-place, though often he is wont to seek out lowly hostelries. It is a shame that Love should ever so basely conduct himself as to select the meanest lodging-place quite as readily as the best. But now he has come where he is welcome, and where he will be treated honourably, and where he will do well to stay. This is the way Love ought to act, being such a noble creature that it is marvellous how he dares shamefully to descend to such low estate. He is like him who spreads his balm upon the ashes and dust, who mingles sugar with gall, and suet with honey. However, he did not act so this time, but rather lodged in a noble place, for which no one can reproach him. When the dead man had been buried, all the people dispersed, leaving no clerks or knights or ladies, excepting only her who makes no secret of her grief. She alone remains behind, often clutching at her throat, wringing her hands, and beating her palms, as she reads her psalms in her gilt lettered psalter. All this while my lord Yvain is at the window gazing at her, and the more he looks at her the more he loves her and is enthralled by her. He would have wished that she should cease her weeping and reading, and that she should feel inclined to converse with him. Love, who caught him at the window, filled him with this desire. But he despairs of realising his wish, for he cannot imagine or believe that his desire can be gratified. So he says: "I may consider myself a fool to wish for what I cannot have. Her lord it was whom I wounded mortally, and yet do I think I can be reconciled with her? Upon my word, such thoughts are folly, for at present she has good reason to hate me more bitterly than anything. I am right in saying 'at present', for a woman has more than one mind. That mind in which she is just now I trust she will soon change; indeed, she will change it certainly, and I am mad thus to despair. God grant that she change it soon! For I am doomed to be her slave, since such is the will of Love. Whoever does not welcome Love gladly, when he comes to him, commits treason and a felony. I admit (and let whosoever will, heed what I say) that such an one deserves no happiness or joy. But if I lose, it will not be for such a reason; rather will I love my enemy. For I ought not to feel any hate for her unless I wish to betray Love. I must love in accordance with Love's desire. And ought she to regard me as a friend? Yes, surely, since it is she whom I love. And I call her my enemy, for she hates me, though with good reason, for I killed the object of her love. So, then, am I her enemy? Surely no, but her true friend, for I never so loved any one before. I grieve for her fair tresses, surpassing gold in their radiance; I feel the pangs of anguish and torment when I see her tear and cut them, nor can her tears e'er be dried which I see falling from her eyes; by all these things I am distressed. Although they are full of ceaseless, ever-flowing tears, yet never were there such lovely eyes. The sight of her weeping causes me agony, but nothing pains me so much as the sight of her face, which she lacerates without its having merited such treatment. I never saw such a face so perfectly formed, nor so fresh and delicately coloured. And then it has pierced my heart to see her clutch her throat. Surely, it is all too true that she is doing the worst she can. And yet no crystal nor any mirror is so bright and smooth. God! why is she thus possessed, and why does she not spare herself? Why does she wring her lovely hands and beat and tear her breast? Would she not be marvellously fair to look upon when in happy mood, seeing that she is so fair in her displeasure? Surely yes, I can take my oath on that. Never before in a work of beauty was Nature thus able to outdo herself, for I am sure she has gone beyond the limits of any previous attempt. How could it ever have happened then? Whence came beauty so marvellous? God must have made her with His naked hand that Nature might rest from further toil. If she should try to make a replica, she might spend her time in vain without succeeding in her task. Even God Himself, were He to try, could not succeed, I guess, in ever making such another, whatever effort He might put forth."

Thus my lord Yvain considers her who is broken with her grief, and I suppose it would never happen again that any man in prison, like my lord Yvain in fear for his life, would ever be so madly in love as to make no request on his own behalf, when perhaps no one else will speak for him. He stayed at the window until he saw the lady go away, and both the portcullises were lowered again. Another might have grieved at this, who would prefer a free escape to tarrying longer where he was. But to him it is quite indifferent whether they be shut or opened. If they were open he surely would not go away, no, even were the lady to give him leave and pardon him freely for the death of her lord. For he is detained by Love and Shame which rise up before him on either hand: he is ashamed to go away, for no one would believe in the success of his exploit; on the other hand, he has such a strong desire to see the lady at least, if he cannot obtain any other favour, that he feels little concern about his imprisonment. He would rather die than go away. And now the damsel returns, wishing to bear him company with her solace and gaiety, and to go and fetch for him whatever he may desire. But she found him pensive and quite worn out with the love which had laid hold of him; whereupon she addressed him thus: "My lord Yvain, what sort of a time have you had to-day?" "I have been pleasantly occupied," was his reply. "Pleasantly? In God's name, is that the truth? What? How can one enjoy himself seeing that he is hunted to death, unless he courts and wishes it?" "Of a truth," he says, "my gentle friend, I should by no means wish to die; and yet, as God beholds me, I was pleased, am pleased now, and always shall be pleased by what I saw." "Well, let us say no more of that," she makes reply, "for I can understand well enough what is the meaning of such words. I am not so foolish or inexperienced that I cannot understand such words as those; but come now after me, for I shall find some speedy means to release you from your confinement. I shall surely set you free to-night or to-morrow, if you please. Come now, I will lead you away." And he thus makes reply: "You may be sure that I will never escape secretly and like a thief. When the people are all gathered out there in the streets, I can go forth more honourably than if I did so surreptitiously." Then he followed her into the little room. The damsel, who was kind, secured and bestowed upon him all that he desired. And when the opportunity arose, she remembered what he had said to her how he had been pleased by what he saw when they were seeking him in the room with intent to kill him.

The damsel stood in such favour with her lady that she had no fear of telling her anything, regardless of the consequences, for she was her confidante and companion. Then, why should she be backward in comforting her lady and in giving her advice which should redound to her honour? The first time she said to her privily: "My lady, I greatly marvel to see you act so extravagantly. Do you think you can recover your lord by giving away thus to your grief?" "Nay, rather, if I had my wish," says she, "I would now be dead of grief." "And why?" "In order to follow after him." "After him? God forbid, and give you again as good a lord, as is consistent with His might." "Thou didst never speak such a lie as that, for He could never give me so good a lord again." "He will give you a better one, if you will accept him, and I can prove it." "Begone! Peace! I shall never find such a one." "Indeed you shall, my lady, if you will consent. Just tell me, if you will, who is going to defend your land when King Arthur comes next week to the margin of the spring? You have already been apprised of this by letters sent you by the Dameisele Sauvage. Alas, what a kind service she did for you! you ought to be considering how you will defend your spring, and yet you cease not to weep! If it please you, my dear lady, you ought not to delay. For surely, all the knights you have are not worth, as you well know, so much as a single chamber-maid. Neither shield nor lance will ever be taken in hand by the best of them. You have plenty of craven servants, but there is not one of them brave enough to dare to mount a steed. And the King is coming with such a host that his victory will be inevitable." The lady, upon reflection, knows very well that she is giving her sincere advice, but she is unreasonable in one respect, as also are other women who are, almost without exception, guilty of their own folly, and refuse to accept what they really wish. "Begone," she says; "leave me alone. If I ever hear thee speak of this again it will go hard with thee, unless thou flee. Thou weariest me with thy idle words." "Very well, my lady," she says; "that you are a woman is evident, for woman will grow irate when she hears any one give her good advice."

Then she went away and left her alone. And the lady reflected that she had been in the wrong. She would have been very glad to know how the damsel could ever prove that it would be possible to find a better knight than her lord had ever been. She would be very glad to hear her speak, but now she has forbidden her. With this desire in mind, she waited until she returned. But the warning was of no avail, for she began to say to her at once: "My lady, is it seemly that you should thus torment yourself with grief? For God's sake now control yourself, and for shame, at least, cease your lament. It is not fitting that so great a lady should keep

up her grief so long. Remember your honourable estate and your very gentle birth! Think you that all virtue ceased with the death of your lord? There are in the world a hundred as good or better men." "May God confound me, if thou dost not lie! Just name to me a single one who is reputed to be so excellent as my lord was all his life." "If I did so you would be angry with me, and would fly into a passion and you would esteem me less." "No, I will not, I assure thee." "Then may it all be for your future welfare if you would but consent, and may God so incline your will! I see no reason for holding my peace, for no one hears or heeds what we say. Doubtless you will think I am impudent, but I shall freely speak my mind. When two knights have met in an affray of arms and when one has beaten the other, which of the two do you think is the better? For my part I award the prize to the victor. Now what do you think?" "It seems to me you are laying a trap for me and intend to catch me in my words." "Upon my faith, you may rest assured that I am in the right, and I can irrefutably prove to you that he who defeated your lord is better than he was himself. He beat him and pursued him valiantly until he imprisoned him in his house." "Now," she replies, "I hear the greatest nonsense that was ever uttered. Begone, thou spirit charged with evil! Begone, thou foolish and tiresome girl! Never again utter such idle words, and never come again into my presence to speak a word on his behalf!" "Indeed, my lady, I knew full well that I should receive no thanks from you, and I said so before I spoke. But you promised me you would not be displeased, and that you would not be angry with me for it. But you have failed to keep your promise, and now, as it has turned out, you have discharged your wrath on me, and I have lost by not holding my peace."

Thereupon she goes back to the room where my lord Yvain is waiting, comfortably guarded by her vigilance. But he is ill at ease when he cannot see the lady, and he pays no attention, and hears no word of the report which the damsel brings to him. The lady, too, is in great perplexity all night, being worried about how she should defend the spring; and she begins to repent of her action to the damsel, whom she had blamed and insulted and treated with contempt. She feels very sure and certain that not for any reward or bribe, nor for any affection which she may bear him, would the maiden ever have mentioned him; and that she must love her more than him, and that she would never give her advice which would bring her shame or embarrassment: the maid is too loyal a friend for that. Thus, lo! the lady is completely changed: she fears now that she to whom she had spoken harshly will never love her again devotedly; and him whom she had repulsed, she now loyally and with good reason pardons, seeing that he had done her no wrong. So she argues as if he were in her presence there, and thus she begins her argument: "Come," she says, "canst thou deny that my lord was killed by thee?" "That," says he, "I cannot deny. Indeed, I fully admit it." "Tell me, then, the reason of thy deed. Didst thou do it to injure me, prompted by hatred or by spite?" "May death not spare me now, if I did it to injure you." "In that case, thou hast done me no wrong, nor art thou guilty of aught toward him. For he would have killed thee, if he could. So it seems to me that I have decided well and righteously." Thus, by her own arguments she succeeds in discovering justice, reason, and common sense, how that there is no cause for hating him; thus she frames the matter to conform with her desire, and by her own efforts she kindles her love, as a bush which only smokes with the flame beneath, until some one blows it or stirs it up. If the damsel should come in now, she would win the quarrel for which she had been so reproached, and by which she had been so hurt. And next morning, in fact, she appeared again, taking the subject up where she had let it drop. Meanwhile, the lady bowed her head, knowing she had done wrong in attacking her. But now she is anxious to make amends, and to inquire concerning the name, character, and lineage of the knight: so she wisely humbles herself, and says: "I wish to beg your pardon for the insulting words of pride which in my rage I spoke to you: I will follow your advice. So tell me now, if possible, about the knight of whom you have spoken so much to me: what sort of a man is he, and of what parentage? If he is suited to become my mate, and provided he be so disposed, I promise you to make him my husband and lord of my domain. But he will have to act in such a way that no one can reproach me by saying: 'This is she who took him who killed her lord.'" "In God's name, lady, so shall it be. You will have the gentlest, noblest, and fairest lord who ever belonged to Abel's line." "What is his name?" "My lord Yvain." "Upon my word, if he is King Urien's son he is of no mean birth, but very noble, as I well know." "Indeed, my lady, you say the truth." "And when shall we be able to see him?" "In five days' time." "That would be too long; for I wish he were already come. Let him come to-night, or to-morrow, at the latest." "My lady, I think no one could fly so far in one day. But I shall send one of my squires who can run fast, and who will reach King Arthur's court at least by to-morrow night, I think; that is the place we must seek for him." "That is a very long time. The days

are long. But tell him that to-morrow night he must be back here, and that he must make greater haste than usual. If he will only do his best, he can do two days' journey in one. Moreover, to-night the moon will shine; so let him turn night into day. And when he returns I will give him whatever he wishes me to give." "Leave all care of that to me; for you shall have him in your hands the day after to-morrow at the very latest. Meanwhile you shall summon your men and confer with them about the approaching visit of the King. In order to make the customary defence of your spring it behoves you to consult with them. None of them will be so hardy as to dare to boast that he will present himself. In that case you will have a good excuse for saving that it behoves you to marry again. A certain knight, highly qualified, seeks your hand; but you do not presume to accept him without their unanimous consent. And I warrant what the outcome will be: I know them all to be such cowards that in order to put on some one else the burden which would be too heavy for them, they will fall at your feet and speak their gratitude; for thus their responsibility will be at an end. For, whoever is afraid of his own shadow willingly avoids, if possible, any meeting with lance or spear; for such games a coward has no use." "Upon my word," the lady replies, "so I would have it, and so I consent, having already conceived the plan which you have expressed; so that is what we shall do. But why do you tarry here? Go, without delay, and take measures to bring him here, while I shall summon my liege-men." Thus concluded their conference. And the damsel pretends to send to search for my lord Yvain in his country; while every day she has him bathed, and washed, and groomed. And besides this she prepares for him a robe of red scarlet stuff, brand new and lined with spotted fur. There is nothing necessary for his equipment which she does not lend to him: a golden buckle for his neck, ornamented with precious stones which make people look well, a girdle, and a wallet made of rich gold brocade. She fitted him out perfectly, then informed her lady that the messenger had returned, having done his errand well. "How is that?" she says, "is he here? Then let him come at once, secretly and privily, while no one is here with me. See to it that no one else come in, for I should hate to see a fourth person here." At this the damsel went away, and returned to her guest again. However, her face did not reveal the joy that was in her heart; indeed, she said that her lady knew that she had been sheltering him, and was very much incensed at her. "Further concealment is useless now. The news about you has been so divulged that my lady knows the whole story and is very angry with me, heaping me with blame and reproaches. But she has given me her word that I may take you into her presence without any harm or danger. I take it that you will have no objection to this, except for one condition (for I must not disguise the truth, or I should be unjust to you): she wishes to have you in her control, and she desires such complete possession of your body that even your heart shall not be at large." "Certainly," he said, "I readily consent to what will be no hardship to me. I am willing to be her prisoner." "So shall you be: I swear it by this right hand laid upon you!. Now come and, upon my advice, demean yourself so humbly in her presence that your imprisonment may not be grievous. Otherwise feel no concern. I do not think that your restraint will be irksome." Then the damsel leads him off, now alarming, now reassuring him, and speaking to him mysteriously about the confinement in which he is to find himself; for every lover is a prisoner. She is right in calling him a prisoner; for surely any one who loves is no longer free.

Taking my lord Yvain by the hand, the damsel leads him where he will be dearly loved; but expecting to be ill received, it is not strange if he is afraid. They found the lady seated upon a red cushion. I assure you my lord Yvain was terrified upon entering the room, where he found the lady who spoke not a word to him. At this he was still more afraid, being overcome with fear at the thought that he had been betrayed. He stood there to one side so long that the damsel at last spoke up and said: "Five hundred curses upon the head of him who takes into a fair lady's chamber a knight who will not draw near, and who has neither tongue nor mouth nor sense to introduce himself." Thereupon, taking him by the arm, she thrust him forward with the words: "Come, step forward, knight, and have no fear that my lady is going to snap at you; but seek her good-will and give her yours. I will join you in your prayer that she pardon you for the death of her lord, Esclados the Red." Then my lord Yvain clasped his hands, and falling upon his knees, spoke like a lover with these words: "I will not crave your pardon, lady, but rather thank you for any treatment you may inflict on me, knowing that no act of yours could ever be distasteful to me." "Is that so, sir? And what if I think to kill you now?" "My lady, if it please you, you will never hear me speak otherwise." "I never heard of such a thing as this: that you put yourself voluntarily and absolutely within my power, without the coercion of any one." "My lady, there is no force so strong, in truth, as that which commands me to conform absolutely to your desire. I do not fear to carry out any order you may be pleased to give. And if I could atone for the death, which came

through no fault of mine, I would do so cheerfully." "What?" says she, "come tell me now and be forgiven, if you did no wrong in killing my lord?" "Lady," he says, "if I may say it, when your lord attacked me, why was I wrong to defend myself? When a man in self-defence kills another who is trying to kill or capture him, tell me if in any way he is to blame." "No, if one looks at it aright. And I suppose it would have been no use, if I had had you put to death. But I should be glad to learn whence you derive the force that bids you to consent unquestioningly to whatever my will may dictate. I pardon you all your misdeeds and crimes. But be seated, and tell us now what is the cause of your docility?" "My lady," he says, "the impelling force comes from my heart, which is inclined toward you. My heart has fixed me in this desire." "And what prompted your heart, my fair sweet friend?" "Lady, my eyes." "And what the eyes?" "The great beauty that I see in you." "And where is beauty's fault in that?" "Lady, in this: that it makes me love." "Love? And whom?" "You, my lady dear." "I?" "Yes, truly." "Really? And how is that?" "To such an extent that my heart will not stir from you, nor is it elsewhere to be found; to such an extent that I cannot think of anything else, and I surrender myself altogether to you, whom I love more than I love myself, and for whom, if you will, I am equally ready to die or live." "And would you dare to undertake the defence of my spring for love of me?" "Yes, my lady, against the world." "Then you may know that our peace is made."

Thus they are quickly reconciled. And the lady, having previously consulted her lords, says: "We shall proceed from here to the hall where my men are assembled, who, in view of the evident need, have advised and counselled me to take a husband at their request. And I shall do so, in view of the urgent need: here and now I give myself to you; for I should not refuse to accept as lord, such a good knight and a king's son."

Now the damsel has brought about exactly what she had desired. And my lord Yvain's mastery is more complete than could be told or described; for the lady leads him away to the hall, which was full of her knights and men-at-arms. And my lord Yvain was so handsome that they all marvelled to look at him, and all, rising to their feet, salute and bow to my lord Yvain, guessing well as they did so: "This is he whom my lady will select. Cursed be he who opposes him! For he seems a wonderfully fine man. Surely, the empress of Rome would be well married with such a man. Would now that he had given his word to her, and she to him, with clasped hand, and that the wedding might take place to-day or tomorrow." Thus they spoke among themselves. At the end of the hall there was a seat, and there in the sight of all the lady took her place. And my lord Yvain made as if he intended to seat himself at her feet; but she raised him up, and ordered the seneschal to speak aloud, so that his speech might be heard by all. Then the seneschal began, being neither stubborn nor slow of speech: "My lords," he said, "we are confronted by war. Every day the King is preparing with all the haste he can command to come to ravage our lands. Before a fortnight shall have passed, all will have been laid waste, unless some valiant defender shall appear. When my lady married first, not quite seven years ago, she did it on your advice. Now her husband is dead, and she is grieved. Six feet of earth is all he has, who formerly owned all this land, and who was indeed its ornament. <sup>[1]</sup> It is a pity he lived so short a while. A woman cannot bear a shield, nor does she know how to fight with lance. It would exalt and dignify her again if she should marry some worthy lord. Never was there greater need than now; do all of you recommend that she take a spouse, before the custom shall lapse which has been observed in this town for more than the past sixty years." At this, all at once proclaim that it seems to them the right thing to do, and they all throw themselves at her feet. They strengthen her desire by their consent; yet she hesitates to assert her wishes until, as if against her will, she finally speaks to the same intent as she would have done, indeed, if every one had opposed her wish: "My lords, since it is your wish, this knight who is seated beside me has wooed me and ardently sought my hand. He wishes to engage himself in the defence of my rights and in my service, for which I thank him heartily, as you do also. It is true I have never known him in person, but I have often heard his name. Know that he is no less a man than the son of King Urien. Beside his illustrious lineage, he is so brave, courteous, and wise that no one has cause to disparage him. You have all already heard, I suppose, of my lord Yvain, and it is he who seeks my hand. When the marriage is consummated, I shall have a more noble lord than I deserve." They all say: "If you are prudent, this very day shall not go by without the marriage being solemnised. For it is folly to postpone for a single hour an advantageous act." They beseech her so insistently that she consents to what she would have done in any case. For Love bids her do that for which she asks counsel and advice; but there is more honour for him in being accepted with the approval of her men. To her their prayers are not unwelcome; rather do they stir and incite her heart to have its way. The horse, already under speed, goes faster yet when it is spurred. In the presence of all her lords,

the lady gives herself to my lord Yvain. From the hand of her chaplain he received the lady, Laudine de Landuc, daughter of Duke Laudunet, of whom they sing a lay. That very day without delay he married her, and the wedding was celebrated. There were plenty of mitres and croziers there, for the lady had summoned her bishops and abbots. Great was the joy and rejoicing, there were many people, and much wealth was displayed — more than I could tell you of, were I to devote much thought to it. It is better to keep silent than to be inadequate. So my lord Yvain is master now, and the dead man is quite forgot. He who killed him is now married to his wife, and they enjoy the marriage rights. The people love and esteem their living lord more than they ever did the dead. They served him well at his marriage-feast, until the eve before the day when the King came to visit the marvellous spring and its stone, bringing with him upon this expedition his companions and all those of his household; not one was left behind. And my lord Kay remarked: "Ah, what now has become of Yvain, who after his dinner made the boast that he would avenge his cousin's shame? Evidently he spoke in his cups. I believe that he has run away. He would not dare to come back for anything. He was very presumptuous to make such a boast. He is a bold man who dares to boast of what no one would praise him for, and who has no proof of his great feats except the words of some false flatterer. There is a great difference between a coward and a hero; for the coward seated beside the fire talks loudly about himself, holding all the rest as fools, and thinking that no one knows his real character. A hero would be distressed at hearing his prowess related by some one else. And yet I maintain that the coward is not wrong to praise and vaunt himself, for he will find no one else to lie for him. If he does not boast of his deeds, who will? All pass over him in silence, even the heralds, who proclaim the brave, but discard the cowards." When my lord Kay had spoken thus, my lord Gawain made this reply: "My lord Kay, have some mercy now! Since my lord Yvain is not here, you do not know what business occupies him. Indeed, he never so debased himself as to speak any ill of you compared with the gracious things he has said." "Sire," says Kay, "I'll hold my peace. I'll not say another word to-day, since I see you are offended by my speech." Then the King, in order to see the rain, poured a whole basin full of water upon the stone beneath the pine, and at once the rain began to pour. It was not long before my lord Yvain without delay entered the forest fully armed, tiding faster than a gallop on a large, sleek steed, strong, intrepid, and fleet of foot. And it was my lord Kay's desire to request the first encounter. For, whatever the outcome might be, he always wished to begin the fight and joust the first, or else he would be much incensed. Before all the rest, he requested the King to allow him to do battle first. The King says: "Kay, since it is your wish, and since you are the first to make the request, the favour ought not to be denied." Kay thanks him first, then mounts his steed. If now my lord Yvain can inflict a mild disgrace upon him, he will be very glad to do so; for he recognises him by his arms. <sup>[2]</sup> Each grasping his shield by the straps, they rush together. Spurring their steeds, they lower the lances, which they hold tightly gripped. Then they thrust them forward a little, so that they grasped them by the leather-wrapped handles, and so that when they came together they were able to deal such cruel blows that both lances broke in splinters clear to the handle of the shaft. My lord Yvain gave him such a mighty blow that Kay took a summersault from out of his saddle and struck with his helmet on the ground. My lord Yvain has no desire to inflict upon him further harm, but simply dismounts and takes his horse. This pleased them all, and many said: "Ah, ah, see how you prostrate lie, who but now held others up to scorn! And yet it is only right to pardon you this time; for it never happened to you before." Thereupon my lord Yvain approached the King, leading the horse in his hand by the bridle, and wishing to make it over to him. "Sire," says he, "now take this steed, for I should do wrong to keep back anything of yours." "And who are you?" the King replies; "I should never know you, unless I heard your name, or saw you without your arms." Then my lord told him who he was, and Kay was overcome with shame, mortified, humbled, and discomfited, for having said that he had run away. But the others were greatly pleased, and made much of the honour he had won. Even the King was greatly gratified, and my lord Gawain a hundred times more than any one else. For he loved his company more than that of any other knight he knew. And the King requested him urgently to tell him, if it be his will, how he had fared; for he was very curious to learn all about his adventure; so the King begs him to tell the truth. And he soon told him all about the service and kindness of the damsel, not passing over a single word, not forgetting to mention anything.