

Title

**Stories Of  
KING ARTHUR  
And  
HIS KNIGHTS**

**Retold from Malory`s “Morte Darthur”**

**By**

**Uriel Waldo Cutler**

PeBook, 2013

*The goodliest fellowship of famous knights*

...

*Whereof this world holds record.*

Tennyson

***About this eBook***

“Stories of King Arthur and his Knights”; Uriel Waldo Cutler; Retold from Malory’s “Morte Darthur”

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**Quoted from *Wieland* by Goethe in his Autobiography**

"We have from the kind Creator a variety of mental powers, to which we must not neglect giving their proper culture in our earliest years, and which cannot be cultivated either by logic or metaphysics, Latin or Greek. We have an imagination, before which, since it should not seize upon the very first conceptions that chance to present themselves, we ought to place the fittest and most beautiful images, and thus accustom and practise the mind to recognise and love the beautiful everywhere."

**Introduction**

Among the best liked stories of five or six hundred years ago were those which told of chivalrous deeds - of joust and tourney and knightly adventure. To be sure, these stories were not set forth in printed books, for there were no printed books as early as the times of the first three King Edwards, and few people could have read them if there had been any. But children and grown people alike were eager to hear these old-time tales read or recited by the minstrels, and the interest in them has continued in some measure through all the changing years and tastes. We now, in the times of the seventh King Edward, still find them far more worth our while than many modern stories. For us they have a special interest, because of home setting and Christian basis, and they may well share in our attention with the legends of Greece and Rome.

In these early romances of chivalry, Arthur and his knights of the Round Table are by far the most popular heroes, and the finding of the Holy Grail is the highest achievement of knightly valour. The material for the Arthur stories came from many countries and from many different periods of history. Much of it is wholly fanciful, but the writers connected all the incidents directly or indirectly with the old Briton king of the fifth century, who was the model of knighthood, "without fear and without reproach."

Perhaps there was a real King Arthur, who led the Britons against the Saxon invaders of their land, who was killed by his traitor nephew, and who was buried at Glastonbury,—the valley of Avilion of the legends; perhaps there was a slight historical nucleus around which all the romantic material was crystallising through the centuries, but the Arthur of romance came largely from the imagination of the early writers.

And yet, though our "own ideal knight" may never have trod the soil of Britain or Roman or Saxon England, his chivalrous character and the knightly deeds of his followers are real to us, if we read them rightly, for "the poet's ideal was the truest truth." Though the sacred vessel - the Holy Grail - of the Christ's last supper with His disciples has not been borne about the earth in material form, to be seen only by those of stainless life and character, it is eternally true that the "pure in heart" are "blessed," "for they shall see God." This is what the Quest of the Holy Grail means, and there is still many a true Sir Galahad, who can say, as he did,

*"My strength is as the strength of ten,  
Because my heart is pure,"*

and who attains the highest glory of knighthood, as before his clear vision

*"down dark tides the glory glides,  
And starlike mingles with the stars."*

We call these beautiful stories of long ago Stories of Chivalry, for, in the Middle Ages, chivalry influenced all that people did and said and thought. It began in the times of Charlemagne, a hundred years before our own King Alfred, and only very gradually it made its way through all the social order. Charlemagne was really a very great man, and because he was so, he left Western Europe a far better place to live in than he found it. Into the social life of his time he brought something like order and justice and peace, and so he greatly helped the Christian Church to do its work of teaching the rough and warlike Franks and Saxons and Normans the gentle ways of thrift and helpfulness.

Charlemagne's "heerban," or call to arms, required that certain of his men should attend him on horseback, and this mounted service was the beginning of what is known as chivalry. The lesser nobles of each feudal chief served their overlords on horseback, à cheval, in times of war; they were called knights, which originally meant servants, - German knechte; and the system of knighthood, its rules, customs, and duties, was called chivalry, - French chevalerie.

Chivalry belongs chiefly to the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, - to about the time between King Richard of the Lion Heart and Prince Hal. There is no trace of ideas peculiar to it in the writings of the old Anglo-Saxons or in the Nibelungen Lied of Germany. Geoffrey of Monmouth, who died, it is said, in the year 1154, is about the earliest writer who mentions customs that belong especially to chivalry. The Crusades, of Geoffrey's century and of the one following, gave much opportunity for its growth and practice; but in the fifteenth century chivalrous fashions and fancies began to seem absurd, and later, perhaps partly through the ridicule of that old-time book "Don Quixote," chivalry was finally laughed quite out of existence.

The order of knighthood was given only after years of training and discipline. From his seventh year to his fourteenth the nobleman's son was a page at the court or in the castle of his patron, learning the principles of religion, obedience, and gallantry. At fourteen, as a squire, the boy began a severer course of training, in order to become skilled in horsemanship, and to gain strength and courage, as well as the refinements and graces necessary in the company of knights and ladies.

Finally, at twenty-one, his training was complete, and with elaborate and solemn formality the squire was made a knight. Then, after a strict oath to be loyal, courteous, and brave, the armour was buckled on, and the proud young chevalier rode out into the world, strong for good or ill in limb, strong in impenetrable armour, strong in a social custom that lifted him above the common people about him.

When rightly exercised chivalry was a great blessing to the people of its time. It offered high ideals of pure-minded, warm-hearted, courtly, courageous Christian manhood. It did much to arouse thought, to quicken sympathy, to purify morals, to make men truly brave and loyal. Of course this ideal of character was not in the days of chivalry - ideals are not often now - very fully realised. The Mediaeval, like the Modern, abused his power of muscle, of sword, of rank. His liberty as a knight-errant sometimes descended into the licence of a highwayman; his pride in the opportunity for helpfulness grew to be the braggadocio of a bully; his freedom of personal choice became the insolence of lawlessness; his pretended purity and justice proved wanton selfishness.

Because of these abuses that crept into the system, it is well for the world that gunpowder at last came, to break through the knight's coat of mail, to teach the nobility respect for common men, roughly to end this age of so much superficial politeness and savage bravery, and to bring in a more democratic social order.

The books of any age are for us a record of how the people of that age thought, how they lived, and what kind of men and women they tried to be. The old romances of chivalry give us clear pictures of the knights and ladies of the Middle Ages, and we shall lose the delight and the profit they may give us, if we think only of the defects of chivalry, and close our eyes to the really worthy motives of those far-off times, and so miss seeing what chivalry was able to do, while it lasted, to make men and women better and happier.

Before reading the Arthur stories themselves it is well to know something about the way they have been built up, as one writer after another has taken the material left by predecessors, and has worked into it fresh conceptions of things brave and true. First there was the old Latin chronicle of Nennius, the earliest trace of Arthurian fact or fancy, with a single paragraph given to Arthur and his twelve great battles. This chronicle itself may have been based on yet earlier Welsh stories, which had been passed on, perhaps for centuries, by oral tradition from father to son, and gradually woven together into some legendary history of Oldest England in the local language of Brittany, across the English Channel. This original book is referred to by later writers, but was long ago lost. Geoffrey of Monmouth says it was the source of his material for his "Historia Britonum." Geoffrey's history, in Latin prose, written some time about the middle of the twelfth century, remains as the earliest definite record of the legends connected with King Arthur.

Only a little later Geoffrey's Latin history was translated by Wace and others into Norman French, and here the Arthur material first appeared in verse form. Then, still later in the twelfth century, Walter Map worked the same stories over into French prose, and at the same time put so much of his own knowledge and imagination with them, that we may almost say that he was the maker of the Arthur romances.

Soon after the year twelve hundred, - a half century after Geoffrey of Monmouth first set our English ancestors to thinking about the legendary old hero of the times of the Anglo-Saxon conquest - Layamon, parish priest of Ernly, in Worcestershire, gave to the English language (as distinct from the earlier Anglo-Saxon) his poem "Brut." This was a translation and enlargement of Wace's old French poem having Arthur as hero. So these stories of King Arthur, of Welsh or Celtic origin, came through the Latin, and then through French verse and prose, into our own speech, and so began their career down the centuries of our more modern history.

After giving ideas to generation after generation of romance writers of many countries and in many languages, these same romantic stories were, in the fifteenth century, skilfully brought together into one connected prose narrative, - one of the choicest of the older English classics, "Le Morte Darthur," by Sir Thomas Malory. Those were troublous times when Sir Thomas, perhaps after having himself fought and suffered in the Wars of the Roses then in progress, found some quiet spot in Warwickshire in which to put together in lasting form the fine old stories that already in his day were classics.

Malory finished his book in 1470, and its permanence for all time was assured fifteen years later, when Caxton, after the "symple connyng" that God had sent him (to use the

quaint forms of expression then common), "under the favour and correctyon of al noble lordes and gentylnen empryed to emprynte a book of the noble hystories of the sayd Kynge Arthur and of certeyn of his knyghtes after a cople unto him delyuerd whyche cople Syr Thomas Malorye dyd take oute of certeyn bookes of Frensche and reduced it in to Englysche." This hard-headed business man, - this fifteenth-century publisher, - was rather doubtful about the Briton king of a thousand years before his day, and to those urging upon him the venture of printing Malory's book he answered: "Dyuers men holde oppynyon that there was no suche Arthur and that alle suche bookes as been maad of hym ben fayned and fables by cause that somme cronycles make of him no mencyon ne remember him noo thyng ne of his knyghtes."

But the arguments of those in favour of the undertaking prevailed, greatly to the advantage of the four centuries that have followed, during which "Le Morte Darthur" has been a constant source of poetic inspiration. Generation after generation of readers and of writers have drawn life from its chapters, and the new delight in Tennyson's "Idylls of the King," almost of our own time, shows that the fountain has not yet been drained dry.

Malory's "Morte Darthur" is a long book, and its really great interest is partly hidden from us by forms of expression that belong only to the time when it was first written. Besides this, the ideas of what was right and proper in conduct and speech - moral standards - were far lower in Malory's day than they are now.

The purpose of this new little volume is to bring the old tales freshly to the attention of young people of the present time. It keeps, as far as may be, the exact language and the spirit of the original, chooses such stories as best represent the whole, and modifies these only in order to remove what could possibly hide the thought, or be so crude in taste and morals as to seem unworthy of the really high-minded author of five hundred years ago. It aims also so to condense the book that, in this age of hurry, readers may not be repelled from the tales merely because of their length.

Chivalry of just King Arthur's kind was given up long ago, but that for which it stood - human fellowship in noble purpose - is far older than the institution of knighthood or than even the traditions of the energetic, brave, true, helpful King Arthur himself. It links us with all the past and all the future. The knights of the twentieth century do not set out in chain-armor to right the wrongs of the oppressed by force of arms, but the best influences of chivalry have been preserved for the quickening of a broader and a nobler world than was ever in the dreams of knight-errant of old. Modern heroes of the genuine type owe more than they know to those of Arthur's court who swore:

*"To reverence the King, as if he were  
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,  
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,  
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,  
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,  
To honour his own word as if his God's,  
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,  
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,  
And worship her by years of noble deeds,  
Until they won her."*

"Antiquity produced heroes, but not gentlemen," someone has said. In the days of

Charlemagne and Alfred began the training which, continued in the days of Chaucer and Sir Thomas Malory and many, many more, has given to this our age that highest type of manhood, the Christian gentleman.

U. W. C.

## ***Stories of King Arthur***

### **I. Of the Birth of King Arthur**

It befell in the days of Uther Pendragon, when he was king of all England, that there was a mighty duke in Cornwall that held war against him a long time. And the duke was named the Duke of Tintagil. Ten miles away from his castle, called Terrabil, there was, in the castle Tintagil, Igraine of Cornwall, that King Uther liked and loved well, for she was a good and fair lady, and passing wise. He made her great cheer out of measure, and desired to have her love in return; but she would not assent unto him, and for pure anger and for great love of fair Igraine King Uther fell sick.

At that time there lived a powerful magician named Merlin, who could appear in any place he chose, could change his looks as he liked, and at will could do wonderful things to help or to harm knights and ladies. So to King Uther came Sir Ulfius, a noble knight, and said, "I will seek Merlin, and he shall do you remedy so that your heart shall be pleased." So Ulfius departed, and by adventure met Merlin in beggar's array, and made him promise to be not long behind in riding to Uther's pavilion.

Soon Merlin stood by the king's side and said: "I know all your heart, and promise ye shall have your desire, if ye will be sworn to fulfil my wish." This the king solemnly agreed to do, and then Merlin said: "After ye shall win Igraine as wife, a child shall be born to you that is to be given unto me to be brought up as I will; this shall be for your honour and the child's avail."

That night King Uther met in battle the Duke of Tintagil, who had protected Igraine in her castle, and overcame him. Then Igraine welcomed Uther as her true lover, for Merlin had given him the appearance of one dear to her, and, the barons being all well accorded, the two were married on a morning with great mirth and joy.

When the time came that Igraine should bear a son, Merlin came again unto the King to claim his promise, and he said: "I know a lord of yours in this land, a passing true man and a faithful, named Sir Ector, and he shall have the nourishing of your child. Let the young Prince be delivered to me at yonder privy postern, when I come for him."

So the babe, Arthur Pendragon, bound in a cloth of gold, was taken by two knights and two ladies to the postern gate of the castle and delivered unto Merlin, disguised as a poor man, and by him was carried forth to Sir Ector, whose wife nourished him as her own child.

Then within two years King Uther fell sick of a great malady. Wherefore all the barons made great sorrow, and asked Merlin what counsel were best, for few of them had ever seen or heard of the young child, Arthur. On the morn all by Merlin's counsel came before the

King, and Merlin said: "Sir, shall your son Arthur be king, after your days, of this realm with all the appurtenance?"

Then Uther Pendragon turned him and said in hearing of them all, "I give him God's blessing and mine, and bid him righteously and honourably to claim the crown upon forfeiture of my blessing."

Therewith he died, and he was buried as befitted a king, and the Queen, fair Igraine, and all the barons made great sorrow.

## **II. Uther`s son, rightwise King of all England**

Then stood the kingdom in great jeopardy a long while, for every lord strengthened himself, and many a one thought to be king rather than be ruled by a child that they had never known. All this confusion Merlin had foreseen, and he had taken the young prince away, to keep him safe from the jealous barons until he should be old enough to rule wisely for himself. Even Sir Ector did not know that the boy growing up with his own son Kay was the King's child, and heir to the realm.

When now young Arthur had grown into a tall youth, well trained in all the exercises of honourable knighthood, Merlin went to the Archbishop of Canterbury and counselled him to send to all the lords of the realm and all the gentlemen of arms, that they should come to London at Christmas time, since God of His great mercy would at that time show by miracle who should be rightwise king of the realm. The Archbishop did as Merlin advised, and all the great knights made them clean of their life so that their prayer might be the more acceptable unto God, and when Christmas came they went unto London, each one thinking that perchance his wish to be made king should be granted. So in the greatest church of the city (whether it was St Paul's or not the old chronicle maketh no mention) all were at their prayers long ere day.

When matins were done and they came out of the church, there was seen in the churchyard a great square stone, in the midst of which was an anvil of steel, a foot high, with a fair sword naked at the point sticking through it. Written in gold about the sword were letters that read thus: "Whoso pulleth out this sword from this stone and anvil is rightwise king born of all England."

### *The Dedication*

All the people marvelled at the stone and the inscription, and some assayed - such as would be king - to draw out the sword. But none might stir it, and the Archbishop said: "He is not here that shall achieve this sword, but doubt not God will make him known. This now is my counsel, that we cause to be chosen ten knights, men of good fame, to guard this sword until the rightful possessor shall appear."

So it was ordained, and it was proclaimed that every man should assay that would, to win the sword. And upon New Year's Day the barons held jousts and a tournament for all knights that would engage. All this was ordained for to keep the lords and the commons together, for the Archbishop trusted that God would soon make him known that should win the sword. So upon New Year's Day the barons rode to the field, some to joust and some to tourney; and it happened that Sir Ector rode also, and with him Sir Kay, his son, that had just been made

knight, and young Arthur that was his foster-brother.

As they rode to the joust-ward Sir Kay suddenly missed his sword, which he had left at his father's lodging, and he begged young Arthur to ride and fetch it. "I will gladly," said Arthur, and he hastened off home. But the lady and all the household were out to see the jousting, and he found nobody at home to deliver him the sword. Then was Arthur troubled, and said to himself, "I will ride to the churchyard and take the sword that sticketh in the stone, for my brother Sir Kay shall not be without a sword this day."

So when he came to the great stone Arthur alighted, and tied his horse to the stile. He then went straight to the tent of the guards, but found no knights there, for they were at the jousting. So he took the sword by the handles, and lightly and fiercely pulled it out of the anvil; then he mounted his horse and rode his way till he came to his brother Sir Kay, and delivered him the sword.

As soon as Sir Kay saw the sword, he knew well it was that one of the stone, and so he rode away to his father, Sir Ector, and said: "Sir, lo here is the sword of the stone; wherefore I must be king of this land."

When Sir Ector beheld the sword, all three returned to the church and entered it. Anon Sir Ector made Sir Kay to swear upon a book how he came by that sword. And Sir Kay answered that Arthur had brought it to him. "And how gat ye the sword?" said he to Arthur; and when Sir Ector heard how it had been pulled from the anvil, he said to Arthur: "Now I understand ye must be king of this land."

"Wherefore I?" said Arthur, "and for what cause?"

"Sir," said Ector, "for God will have it so; for there should never man have drawn out this sword but he that shall be rightwise king. Now let me see whether ye can put the sword there as it was, and pull it out again."

"That is no mastery," said Arthur, and so he put it into the stone. Therewith Sir Ector assayed to pull out the sword, and failed. Then Sir Kay pulled at it with all his might, but it would not yield.

"Now shall ye assay again," said Sir Ector to Arthur.

"I will well," said Arthur, and pulled it out easily a second time.

Now was Sir Ector sure that Arthur was of higher blood than had been thought, and that the rightful king had been made known. And he told his foster-son all, how he was not his father, but had taken him to nourish at Merlin's request. Arthur was grieved indeed when he understood that Sir Ector was not his father, and that the good lady that had fostered and kept him as her own son was not his true mother, and he said to Sir Ector, "If ever it be God's will that I be king, as ye say, ye shall desire of me what I may do, and I shall not fail you."

Therewithal they went unto the Archbishop and told him how the sword was achieved, and by whom. And all the barons came thither, that whoever would might assay to take the sword. But there before them all none might take it out but Arthur. Now many lords became wroth, and said it was great shame unto them all and to the realm to be governed by a boy.