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The Story of Sir Galahad.

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"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."—Matthew v. 8.

My tale is of old Britain and of ancient days, how ancient perhaps we will be long in knowing. At Caerlleon on the River Usk stood a lofty and spacious palace castle, such as we do not see in these modern days. It covered in itself a large area of ground, and round about it were grassy lawns and blooming, sweet-scented gardens, through which ran tinkling rills that fell into fish-pools lined with masonry, or welled up into sparkling fountains. Beyond this pleasure were hedgerows, rarely seen out of England, covered with hawthorn, briar-roses, and honeysuckle, separating it from the orchards, meadows and corn-fields that sloped down to the river banks, along which fat cattle grazed, when not chewing the cud and cooling themselves knee-deep in the stream.

The courtyard, entered by a broad and high sally-port, was full of pages, men-at-arms, and servants. The adjoining stables had stalls for hundreds of horses, and the armory above them contained armor and weapons for as many knights. Strangers also were there from all parts of Britain and from far distant lands, for it was the palace of the renowned King Arthur. The chief place in the vast pile of buildings was the audience chamber and banquet hall. It was adorned with the spoil of lawful wars and of expeditions beyond the sea, with gold and silver and bronze, with ivory, marble, and precious woods, and hung about with tapestry of rich colors and rare designs. There all comes were hospitably entertained, and the king listened with kindly gravity to those who brought petitions. Many were the knights who served him and the commonweal, but a special circle sat at his own feasting board, who were called the Knights of the Round Table. These were all famous men in their day and generation.

The austere Sir Kai was there, the sewer, dapifer, seneschal, or steward, from whom all the MacKays trace their descent. There was the butler, Sir Bedivere, a British Potiphar, and no doubt of kin to him of Egypt, who dwelt at On. Bedwin, the Bishop, was with a man of family, whence came the French Poitevins. The gentle Taliesin, who could be a lion in war, was the bard who sang the Mead Song and many more. The stateliest and handsomest of all was Sir Lancelot of the Lake, a very gallant knight, but, like Sir Modred, the king's nephew, an unfaithful one, though in a different way. There also were Sir Owain and Sir Gawaine, the courteous and the silver-tongued, with burly Sir Bors, and the chivalrous Sir Percivale. And there, too, sat the lady-faced Sir Galahad, whom the wickedest enemy could not smite in battle because his look was that of a ministering angel. These and many more sat at the Round Table with King Arthur and told their high deeds modestly. If woman, or child, priest or laboring man that had been wronged by unlawful might came before the court, the knights contended for the privilege of avenging the wrong, and, putting on their armor, went forth to battle with the oppressor. For there was wrong in the world in these days as there always has been, and it was their devoir and high office to set it right.

Fair ladies also were in King Arthur's court in attendance upon the beauteous Guinevere, who was his queen. They were not treated as women are sometimes treated now by fops and churls, but with all the reverence and courteous chivalry of ancient days. Best of all, and next to the queen, the fairest, was Percivale's sister. What her name was only God and the good angels know. Tired of the world's wrong-doing and hollowness, of petty quarrels and whispered scandals, she left the court for a cell in Camelot, there to fast and to pray that God would come to earth again. While living thus retired in Camelot, an aged man told her how, in the days of King Arviragus, a venerable stranger had come from the Holy Land to Glastonbury, bringing with him the cup or grail out of which our blessed Lord had drunk at His last supper before His death. The venerable man was St. Joseph of Arimathea. This cup he brought had healing power, and he who looked upon it was straightway cured of whatsoever sickness he had. But as, in spite of this, the world's wickedness grew, the cup was caught up into heaven. Therefore the lady of Camelot prayed, "Lord, this world has need of healing. Send down the Holy Grail."

One day a messenger from her came to the court at Caerlleon, and called Sir Percivale aside. Soon as his horse could be saddled and bridled, he rode out his sister's call. At Camelot he saw her, her face transfigured like that of a heavenly angel, as she told him she had seen the Grail. At the dead of night in her cell she heard the sweet unearthly music of silver horns faintly blowing. Then a broad beam of silvery light sloped down from heaven through the casement of her chamber, and down it stole the Holy Grail, "rose red with beatings in it," as if it were alive. For a space the whitewashed walls of the humble cell were dyed with the leaping colors; then the music ceased and then the vision faded. She laid her hand upon her brother's arm and said, "Go, tell the knights of Arthur that the Grail has come to earth again." So Sir Percivale kissed his sister's lips that had told this wonderful story. Then he mounted his horse and rode in hot haste back to Caerlleon. He found the knights all assembled, but without the king, and to their listening ears he told his marvellous tale.

He who harkened most intently and was most deeply moved was Sir Galahad, the boy knight clad in silver armor, he to whom King Arthur had said when he dubbed him knight, "God make thee as good as thou art beautiful." Filled with high purpose, he rode at once to Camelot, to the cell of Percivale's sister. With her own fair hands she girded his sword-belt on him, and bade him go forth, true knight, to be crowned king in the spiritual city. Inspired with her strong faith and pure spirit he returned to his companions of the Round Table. Now, there was in King Arthur's hall a great chair, curiously carved, made by the magician Merlin or Merddin, from whom Caermerthen took its name. It was called the Siege Perilous, and no man could sit therein but he should lose himself either for good or ill. There Merlin once sat and was lost forever. Into that chair sprang Galahad, crying, "If I lose myself, I save myself." Then came a cracking of the roof-tree overhead, and a burst of thunder, and a cry. A beam of light, seven times clearer than day, shot down, and on it was the grail, visible but covered with a cloud. It left a glory on every face, but all tongues were mute as it passed away.

Percivale was the first to find his voice, and he vowed to go a twelve-month and a day in the holy quest. Galahad swore to follow the Grail till death. Sir Bors, Sir Lancelot, Sir Gawaine and many more devoted themselves for brief periods to the same high purpose. Then King Arthur, who had been away in the hunting field, came in and asked the cause of the unwonted excitement. They told him; but he doubted, and said, "You have not seen it, it is a mere imagination." Whereupon Sir Galahad cried, "I saw the Holy Grail, my king, and I heard it say, 'Galahad, and O Galahad, follow me,' and follow it I will to the world's end." Then all took their respectful leave of the king, and in goodly procession went forth upon the quest. But they stayed not long together. Soon they were widely scattered, for doubtful visions in the hills, Will-o'-the-wisps in the fens, and mirages in the heavenly horizon led most of them far afield. Even the good Sir Percivale found himself in a land of delusions, in which he was nigh perishing when he was relieved by a holy man who reproved him for his presumption and lack of humility. And when, with chastened heart, he mounted again, to him came Sir Galahad of the radiant countenance, telling that the vision was true and ever with him in hill and plain, in field and fen, by land and water. So, on together they rode until they came to the great marsh of all, at whose end a thousand heavy timbered piers went out to greet the great salt sea.

The Grail shone brightly before the eyes of Sir Galahad, but Sir Percivale saw it not. He only followed blindly but in dead earnest. He saw his friend's surging along the bridge-like piers, on which the deadly lightnings fell, but nigh them behind him, so that there was no return. The last abutment was reached. Beyond were only the wide sea beneath and heaven's canopy above, but now, yes in that canopy Sir Percivale beheld the Holy Grail. It was overhead but sinking downwards towards Sir Galahad, who had alighted from his panting steed on the last seaward timber, and patiently waited. Sir Percivale saw a mysterious boat come forth from the unknown to receive his friend still clad in his silver armour, while the Grail came down into his hands, and then, like a shooting star, boat and man and Grail sped over the distant sea to enter the spiritual city, where Sir Galahad was crowned king for evermore. Back to Caerlleon half dead went Sir Percivale.

and when the year and the day were ended he told his tale. Sir Bors, like Sir Percivale, had seen the Grail far off, and even the faithless Sir Lancelot, but of all the other champions none. Only Galahad the pure had it in his possession, and for that was crowned immortal king.

King David said that the kingdom of heaven is for him that has clean hands and a pure heart. We who are men think that those who have the best right to it, if right there be at all, are women, so much better in every way. And those of us who are older, and have perforce become familiar with the world's impurity and insincerity, think of innocent and honest girls and boys. There are those who say, with poet Hood, "I know I'm farther off from heaven than when I was a boy." But this is not always true, and it is not true at all of the soul new born from heaven. One who had been an unclean man, and a great sinner, said, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." This purity is of the heart. It is no matter of bodily washing or outward behaviour. These are the clean hands, but not the pure heart. What stains the heart? Not only the things we must not speak of but any sin or wrong. Falsehood stains, and so do envy and dishonesty and evil speaking. Many a poor drunkard, the enemy of no one but himself, is cleaner in God's sight than the censorious Pharisee, and De Quincey's fallen woman of the street's purer than many titled ladies of irreproachable reputation.

O, boys and girls, keep your childhood's faith, your honest scorn of all that is base and low. Retain your bright clear eye that looks up to the sun without winking. Be never afraid of your Pennel, which is the face of God. Be God's brave young Galahads; gentle and pure as he, and yours will be the moral strength of ten. You will overcome all your spiritual enemies, and will behold not the cup, but Him who drank thereof, for any pure heart that really wants to see God shall not fail of the heavenly vision. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." This is the word of God's only and well beloved Son, through whom we know the Father, and that Scripture cannot be broken. It needs not length of days nor great learning to reach this happy goal, for the world, by wisdom knew not God; and Jesus said, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes." Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight.

Does anyone say, "The quest is not for me?" That is a mistake, for we must all see God some day, and the sooner the better. If it is because you feel that you are not pure in heart, then listen to the words of David. "Create in me a clean heart, O God," and to those at the beginning of Isaiah's prophecy, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." The elder who asked St. John in the vision at Patmos who the white robed ones were that stood before the throne of God, answered his own question, saying, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Many came not only through great tribulation, but also through great sin. If you have wandered away on any forbidden path and have soiled your garments, listen to God's voice and come back to get the pure heart with which you may see him now, and at last be crowned King in the spiritual city. Take your seat in the Siege Perilous, which means the surrender of self in whole-hearted devotion to the Saviour, and, losing what men call life in time, save a better self for all eternity. What is it to see God? It is to come face to face with infinite wisdom beauty and goodness, to come into communion with the great heart of love that fills all the universe, and to call all that and more than tongue can tell by the hallowed name of Father. "See God and die," said the superstitious Hebrew of ancient times, and the Arab of today, but the gospel teaches us to say, "See God and live the blessed life, now and for evermore."—The Westminster.

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