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**The Poems of
the Pearl Manuscript**

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The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript

*Pearl, Cleanness, Patience,
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

A Prose Translation

by Malcolm Andrew
and Ronald Waldron

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Preface

Our intention in these translations has been to provide close, accurate prose versions of *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The translations are based on our latest edition of *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript* (University of Exeter Press, fifth edition 2007).

We are acutely aware that the experience of reading a translation is a poor and feeble substitute for that of reading an original text. These translations are, therefore, offered in the hope that they will facilitate understanding of four fine poems – and will lead readers to, rather than away from, the original texts.

MALCOLM ANDREW AND RONALD WALDRON

July 2007

A Note on the Translations

Our intention has been to translate the poems into plain and unadorned prose, staying as close to the original as modern English idiom will allow, in order to reveal what may loosely be termed the 'literal' sense of the text. Readers approaching these poems from an acquaintance with Chaucer's works will already be aware that one of the chief difficulties of Middle English for the modern reader is the occurrence of now-obsolete meanings in familiar-looking words or expressions: *gentle* meaning 'noble', *quaint* meaning 'elegant' or 'intricate', *kind* meaning 'nature' or 'natural', and so on. There are numerous examples of this sort of pitfall (sometimes called 'false friends') in these poems. Thus, for instance, in *Sir Gawain* 34, we believe that *stori* denotes 'written chronicle' rather than simply 'story', in *Pearl* 407, *louez* probably means 'approves of' rather than 'loves'; and in *Patience* 473, 'pleasant' makes better sense than 'wild' for *wyl*. Interpretations such as these are based on the recorded history of the word together with a consideration of its context, and are discussed in the notes to the edition.

Alliterative poetry presents special problems which arise from the nature of the style and metre in which it is written. For the commonest concepts, such as 'man', 'go', or 'fight', the alliterative poet made free use of numerous synonyms with different initial letters. In *Patience* 63-97, a passage of 33 lines, the poet uses no fewer than seven different verbs of motion, with reference to Jonah's response to God's command that he should go to Nineveh: *glyde* (past tense *glod*, 63), *rayke* (65, 89), *sweye* (72), *tee* (87), *com* (78), *aproche* (85), and *pass* (97). Other near-synonyms for 'go' can be found elsewhere in the poems: *bowe* (*Cleanness* 482, *Sir Gawain* 2077), *ferk* (*Sir Gawain* 1072), *sech* (*to*) (*Cleanness* 563, *Sir Gawain* 1052), *threng* (*Patience* 354), *wende* (*Cleanness* 777), and, of course, *go* itself (*Patience* 348). While individual words may express particular shades of meaning, and it is sometimes rewarding to allow for this in one's reading, metrical considerations are undoubtedly influential in the poet's choice, and in many instances the general sense (in this case 'come' or 'go') can be a satisfactory translation.

Alongside this apparent levelling of vocabulary, it should be recognized that a prose translation must necessarily fail to express many layers of meaning latent in the original text, since the language of poetry works as much by what it suggests as by what it denotes. In many contexts the translator is forced to choose between two meanings, both of which may be perceived to be present to a sensitive reader of the poem. This is the case, for instance, in *Sir Gawain* 4, *Watz tried for his tricherie*, where *tried* appears to mean both ‘tried (legally)’ and ‘famous’, or in *Pearl* 259, where the word *cofer* suggests both ‘jewel case’ and ‘coffin’. Examples such as these are analysed in the notes to the edition but have to be treated more arbitrarily in a translation.

These are, moreover, poems which characteristically use paronomasia (wordplay) to conduct searching explorations of the various potential meanings and connotations of certain key words. In the sixth section of *Pearl* (lines 301-60), *deme* is used in a variety of senses, among them ‘judge’, ‘ordain’, ‘censure’, ‘condemn’, ‘allow’, ‘expect’, and ‘understand’. A more sustained example of this tendency occurs in *Cleanness*, where the Middle English *clene* is used to denote or suggest a wide range of qualities, including ‘(morally) pure’, ‘(physically) clean’, ‘chaste’, ‘bright’, ‘fine’, ‘exact’, and ‘perfect’. Other terms treated by the poet in a similar way include *cortaysye* and *trawthe*, while much of the legal terminology in *Pearl* (in addition to *deme*) has been shown to have multiple meanings. Such bold and inventive use of language presents the translator with a considerable challenge. In attempting to render the precise meaning of words in each context, we are conscious that a prose translation greatly weakens the poetic impact of the original. Again it must be emphasized that the translations cannot be a substitute for the poems themselves.

One of the recurring features of these poems is their tendency to switch freely between the past and present tenses, particularly during passages which describe action (as, for instance, in *Cleanness* 129-60, *Patience* 247-81, and *Sir Gawain* 1126-77). After careful consideration, we decided not to make any attempt to regularize this feature in our translations. We have, on the other hand, not felt bound to render the Middle English adverb *ful* (‘very’, ‘fully’, ‘entirely’, etc.) when used for emphasis.

In places where we have felt it necessary to add words, either to clarify meaning or to provide explanation, we have used square brackets, with ‘i.e.’ or ‘*lit.*’ (‘literally’) where appropriate.

The translations of *Pearl* and of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* retain the stanza divisions of the original poems. In the cases of *Cleanness* and *Patience* – the originals of which are not, in our view, divided into stanzas (see the Introduction to the edition, pp. 16 and 19) – we have divided the narrative into paragraphs at what we regard as appropriate junctures. These divisions, of course, have no manuscript authority whatever. We have provided regular line numberings, within square brackets, in order to assist the reader with the process of identifying passages in the translations with equivalent passages in the original texts.

Pearl

I

Lovely pearl, which it pleases a prince to set radiantly in gold so bright: I declare assuredly that I never found her equal in value among those of the orient. So round, so lovely in every setting, her sides were so slender, so smooth; wherever I judged bright gems, I set her apart in uniqueness. Alas! I lost her in a garden; through the grass to the ground it slipped from me. I languish, grievously wounded by the power of my love for that spotless pearl of mine.

[13] Since it sprang from me in that place, I have often watched, longing for that precious thing which used formerly to dispel my sorrow and increase my happiness and all my well-being – that oppresses my heart grievously, [and] causes my breast to swell and burn in sorrow. Never yet did a song seem to me to have such sweetness as a moment of peace let steal over me. In truth there used to come fleetingly to me many [such moments]. To think of her complexion clad, as now, in mud! O earth, you disfigure a beautiful jewel, my own spotless pearl.

[25] That place is bound to be overspread with spice-bearing plants, where such wealth has run to decay; yellow and blue and red blooms shine there most brightly towards the sun. Flower and fruit cannot be faded where it [i.e. the pearl] sank down into the dun clods, for every plant must grow from dead seeds; otherwise no wheat would be brought to the homes [i.e. brought in, harvested]. Every good thing always has its origin in a good thing: so lovely a seed could not fail to be productive, so that flourishing spice plants would not shoot up from that precious spotless pearl.

[37] I entered that green garden, that place which I describe in words, in August on a festival, when corn is cut with sharp sickles. On the grave-mound where the pearl had rolled down, these bright and beautiful plants cast a shadow: gillyflower, ginger, and gromwell, and peonies scattered everywhere at intervals. If it was lovely to look at, still fairer was the scent that wafted from it, where that precious one lives, I believe and know, my precious spotless pearl.

[49] Before that place I clasped my hands together because of the chilling sorrow that seized me; a desolating grief lay deep in my heart, though reason would have reconciled me. I mourned my pearl that was imprisoned there, with fierce arguments that fought insistently. Though the nature of Christ taught me comfort, my wretched will was ever tormented in grief. Such perfume rushed to my brain that I fell upon that flowery turf; I slipped into a sudden sleep on that precious spotless pearl.

II

[61] From that place my spirit ascended after a time; my body remained there on the mound in sleep. Through God's grace, my spirit went on a quest where marvels occur. I did not know where in this world it was, but I knew I was set down where cliffs rise sheer. I turned towards a forest where splendid rocks were to be seen. No one might believe the radiance of them, the gleaming glory that shone from them, for never were tapestries woven by humans of half so glorious splendour.

[73] The sides of all those hills were adorned with crystal cliffs of so clear a quality. Bright woods lay about them, with trunks as blue as indigo; the leaves, which quivered in profusion on every branch, slid over each other like burnished silver. When the gleams from clear patches of sky glided over them, they shone most brightly with a lovely shimmering. The gravel that crunched on the ground was precious orient pearls; the beams of the sun seemed dark and dim by comparison with that splendour.

[85] The splendour of those noble hills caused my spirit to forget all grief. The scents from the fruits were so fresh that it nourished me delightfully like food. Birds of glowing colours, both small and great, flew together in the wood; but the string of the citole and the gittern-player would not be able to reproduce their joyful music, for when those birds beat their wings, they sang with a sweet harmony. No one could find such blessed joy as to hear and see their splendour.

[97] The wood where Fortune was taking me forward was arrayed in so entirely splendid a fashion [that] no one capable of speech is able to describe the glory of it. I walked ever onward in a blissful state, no bank big enough that [it] put obstacles in my way. The further in the wood, the fairer rose the meadow, the shrubs, the spice-plants, the pear-trees, and hedgerows, and water-meadows, and splendid river-banks, their steep slopes like fine gold thread. I came to a stream that meanders along the shore; lord, its splendour was noble!

[109] The adornment[s] of those splendid waters were beautiful banks of bright beryl. Swirling pleasantly the water swept by, flowing straight on with a murmuring sound. On the bottom there shone brilliant stones, which glowed and glinted like a beam of light through glass – as stars streaming with light shine in the winter sky while people on earth sleep; for every pebble set there in the water-course was emerald, sapphire, or [other] fair gem, so that the whole stream shone with light, so noble was its splendour.

III

[121] The noble splendour of hill and dales, of wood and water and lovely meadows, built up joy in me, ended my sorrows, quelled my anguish, and dispelled my pains. Down along a stream that continually flows I went in bliss, my brains brimful [with joy]; the farther I followed those stream-filled valleys, the greater strength of joy constrained my

heart. As Fortune proceeds where she tests [a person], whether she sends pleasure or else pain, the person to whom she sends her desire chances to have more and more [of the same] all the time.

[133] There was more delight in that scene than I could describe even if I had time, for an earthly heart could not have sufficient capacity for the tenth part of those glad joys. Therefore I thought that paradise was over nearby those broad banks; I supposed that the water was a division between pleasure-gardens laid out beside pools; beyond the brook, somewhere or other, I believed the city was situated. But the water was deep, I dared not wade, and all the time I longed more and more.

[145] More and more, and much more still, I longed to see beyond the brook, for if it was beautiful where I was walking, the farther land was still more lovely. I stopped and stared about me; I tried hard to find a ford, but indeed there were more perils the further I walked along the shore. And all the time it seemed to me that I should not hesitate for [fear of] harm, where there were such delightful joys. Then a new matter came to my notice, which moved my mind ever more and more.

[157] More marvels daunted my mind. Beyond that beautiful water I saw a crystal cliff completely radiant: many a glorious ray [of light] rose from it. At the foot of it sat a child, a courteous maiden, most gracious; her mantle was shining white; I knew her well; I had seen her before. That fair maiden at the foot of the cliff shone like glistening gold which has been cut. For a long time I looked towards her there; the longer [I looked], the more and more I knew her.

[169] The more I scrutinized her fair face, when I had noticed her noble form, such gladdening exultation swept to me as had been but little wont to do so before. Desire urged me to call her; but confusion dealt my heart a blow. I saw her in so strange a place – such a shock might well stun my heart. Then she raised her fair forehead, her face as white as smooth ivory: that stung my heart into bewildered amazement, and always the longer, the more and more.

IV

[181] My fear grew greater than my longing [*lit.* than I longed]: I stood quite silent and dared not call; with eyes open and mouth completely closed I stood as meek as a hawk in hall. I thought that quarry was spiritual; I was afraid about what might happen, in case she whom I beheld there eluded me before I could stop her for a meeting. That gracious, flawless fair maiden, so smooth, so slim, so becomingly slender, stands up in her royal array, a precious being adorned with pearls.

[193] There by grace one could have seen pearls of royal worth set, when that [one] fresh as fleur-de-lys came directly down the slope. Her fine linen [garment] was all shining white, open at the sides, and beautifully bound with the finest pearls, in my opinion, that I ever saw yet with my eyes; with large hanging sleeves, I know and believe, decorated and adorned with double pearls; her bright gown to match, all arrayed about with precious pearls.

[205] That girl also wore a decorated crown of pearls and no other stone, with high pinnacles of clear white pearl, with perfect flowers figured on [it]. On her head she had no other circlet; her wimple entirely encompassed her; her face grave enough for a duke or earl, her complexion purer white than ivory. Her hair, that lay lightly on her shoulders, unbound, shone then like bright cut gold. The intense whiteness of her complexion was not inferior even to that of a precious pearl set in an embroidered border.

[217] The wristband and every hem – at hand, at sides, at neck-opening – was set with white pearls and no other gem, and her clothing was brilliant white. But a wonderful flawless pearl was set so firmly in the middle of her breast; a man's judgement might be utterly baffled before his mind could conceive its magnitude. I think no tongue could have power to describe that sight in adequate speech, it was so clean and clear and pure, that precious pearl where it was set.

[229] That precious being arrayed in pearl came down the shore on the opposite side of the water. [There was] no happier man from here to Greece than I, when she was on the bank; she was nearer to me than aunt or niece: therefore my joy was much the greater. That precious being addressed words to me, bowing low in womanly fashion, took off her crown of great value and greeted me with a joyful speech. It was happiness to me that ever I was born to answer that sweet maiden arrayed in pearls!

V

[241] ‘O pearl,’ I said, ‘arrayed in pearls, are you my pearl that I have mourned, grieved for alone at night? I have concealed much longing for you, since you slipped away from me into the grass. Sorrowful, wasted, I am overcome by pain, and you [are] settled in a life of pleasure, in the land of paradise, untroubled by strife. What fate has brought my jewel hither, and caused me this sorrow and great deprivation? Since we were severed and parted from each other I have been a joyless jeweller.’

[253] Then that jewel in noble gems raised her face with its blue-grey eyes, put on her crown of orient pearl, and afterwards then she said gravely: ‘Sir, you have spoken heedlessly, to say your pearl is entirely lost, which is enclosed in such a beautiful coffer as in this charmingly fair garden, to stay here for ever and rejoice, where neither loss nor sorrow ever come near. Here would be a casket for you, indeed, if you were a noble jeweller.’

[265] ‘But, courteous jeweller, if you are going to lose your joy for a gem that was dear to you, it seems to me that you are set on a mad purpose, and concern yourself on account of a transitory cause; for what you lost was only a rose that flowered and withered as nature allowed it; now, through the nature of the chest that encloses it, it is shown to be a precious pearl. And you have called [the Ruler of] your fate a thief, who

has clearly made you something out of nothing; you blame the remedy for your misfortune; you are no proper jeweller.’

[277] Then this visitor was a jewel to me, and jewels were her courteous statements. ‘Indeed,’ I said, ‘my blissful noble one, you completely dispel my great distress. I beg you to pardon me. I believed that my pearl was annihilated; now I have found it I shall rejoice, and live with it in bright groves, and praise my Lord and all His laws who has brought me near this bliss. If I were now beside you beyond these waters, I would be a joyful jeweller.’

[289] ‘Jeweller,’ said that pure gem, ‘why do you humans jest? You are so mad! You have spoken three statements at once: all three were, indeed, thoughtless. You do not know at all what one [of them] means; your speech escaped before you thought [*lit.* before your understanding]. You say you believe me [to be] in this valley because you can see me with [your] eyes; second, you say you will yourself live right here in this country with me; the third, that you will pass this noble stream – that may no joyful jeweller.

VI

[301] ‘I consider unworthy of praise that jeweller who believes well what he sees with [his] eye, and very blameworthy and discourteous one who believes that our Lord, who faithfully promised to raise your life though Fortune caused your flesh to die, would tell a lie. You, who believe nothing unless you have seen it, set His words completely awry; and it is an instance of pride, which ill befits any good man, to believe no account to be true when put to the test except what his judgement alone can understand.

[313] ‘Now judge yourself whether you have spoken in the way in which a human should address words to God. You say you will live in this realm;

it seems to me you ought first ask leave – and even then you might fail (to obtain) consent. You wish to pass over this stream; you must first attain to another course of action. Your corpse must sink, colder, into the earth, for it was forfeited in the Garden of Eden. Our ancestor [i.e. Adam] failed to guard it. Every man must make his way through cruel death before God allows him over this water.’

[325] ‘Do you condemn me,’ I said, ‘my sweet, to sorrow again? Then I [shall] pine away. Now I have found what I lost, shall I give it up again before I end my life? Why must I both find and lose it? My precious pearl causes me great pain. What does treasure avail, but cause one to weep when he must lose it again with sorrows? Now I do not care if I fall from prosperity, nor how far away I am driven. When I am deprived of my pearl what can one expect but lasting sorrow?’

[337] ‘You speak of nothing but the sorrow of grief,’ then said that being, ‘why do you so? Through the tumult of grief for lesser sorrows many a man often loses the greater [thing]. You ought rather to cross yourself, and always praise God, in prosperity and suffering, for anger does not profit you a jot. Whoever must necessarily suffer, let him not be so stubborn; for though you writhe like a doe, struggle and bray out your wild agonies, when you can [go] no further, this way or that, you must endure what He will ordain.

[349] ‘Censure the Lord, arraign him for ever, He will not turn aside a foot from the path. Your recompense is increased not a jot, even if in your misery you should never be happy. Desist from your wrangling and cease to chide, and seek his mercy swiftly and earnestly; your prayer may penetrate His pity, so that mercy will make known her skills. His comfort can assuage your anguish and easily banish your griefs; for, [though you may] lament or rave, grieve and hide your feelings, it is entirely in His power to dispose and judge.’

VII

[361] Then I said to that damsel: ‘Let there be no offence to my Lord if I rashly rave, stumbling in my speech: my heart was all oppressed with a sense of loss, as surging water goes out of a spring. I put myself at His mercy always. Never rebuke me with stern words, though I err, my dear gold-adorned one, but gently show me your consolation, compassionately bearing this in mind: you, who before were the foundation of all my bliss, made sorrow familiar to me.

[373] ‘You have been both my joy and my sorrow, but yet much greater [than either] was my grief; after you were removed from every peril, I had no idea at all where my pearl had gone. Now I see it, now my grief is assuaged. And when we parted we were in harmony; God forbid that we should now be at variance; we meet so seldom anywhere. Though you know how to speak courteously, I am but dust and lack manners; but the mercy of Christ and Mary and John, these are the foundation of all my bliss.

[385] ‘I see you joyously situated in bliss, and I [am] a man all sorrowful [and] dejected. You take very little notice of it, though I often suffer burning sorrows. But now I am here in your presence, I wish to beseech, without contention, that you would tell me, in earnest agreement, what [kind of] life you lead all the time, for I am, indeed, most glad that your condition has become one of honour and good fortune; it is the highway of all my joy, [and] the foundation of all my bliss.’

[397] ‘Now, sir, may bliss befall you,’ that one [so] lovely one of limb and face then said, ‘and [you are] welcome to walk and stay here, for your words are now pleasing to me. Arrogant temper and great pride, I assure you, are bitterly hated here. My Lord does not approve of complaining, for all who live near Him are meek; and when you are to appear in His domain, be deeply devout in complete humility. My Lord, the Lamb, who is the foundation of all my bliss, always approves of such demeanour.

[409] ‘You say I lead a blissful life; you wish to know the status of it. You know well when your pearl fell I was very young and of tender age; but my Lord the Lamb through His divinity took me in marriage to Him, crowned me queen to flourish in bliss for a duration of days that shall always continue; and His dear one is made possessor of all His heritage. I am wholly His. His worth, His nobility, and His lineage is the root and foundation of all my bliss.’

VIII

[421] ‘Blissful one,’ I said, ‘can this be true? – do not be offended if I speak heresy – are you the queen of the blue heavens, whom all this world must honour? We believe in Mary, from whom grace grew, who bore a child in virginity. Who could remove the crown from her unless she surpassed her in some noble quality? Now, because of the uniqueness of her sweetness, we call her Phoenix of Arabia, which flew unique from her Creator – as did the queen of courtesy.’

[433] ‘Courteous queen,’ then said that fair maiden, kneeling on the ground, her face upturned, ‘matchless mother and fairest maiden, blessed originator of every grace!’ Then she rose and paused, and spoke to me there and then: ‘Sir, many here strive for and receive [the] prize, but [there are] no usurpers within this domain; that empress has all heaven – and earth and hell – in her dominion; yet she will oust none from their heritage, for she is queen of courtesy.’

[445] ‘The court of the kingdom of the living God has an attribute in its own nature: everyone who may arrive there is queen or king of all the realm, and yet one shall never dispossess another, but each one [will be] glad of the others’ possession, and wish their crowns were five times as precious, if any improvement of them were possible. But my lady from whom Jesus was born, she holds the highest supremacy over us, and that displeases none of our company, for she is queen of courtesy.’

[457] ‘Through divine grace, as St Paul says, we are all members of Jesus Christ: just as head and arm and leg and belly belong to their body very firmly and faithfully, in just the same way each Christian soul is a limb belonging to the Master of spiritual mysteries. Then consider: what hatred or bitterness is implanted or fixed between your limbs? Your head has neither resentment nor spite if you wear a ring on your arm or finger. Thus we all behave with love and joy towards king and queen by courtesy.’

[469] ‘Divine grace,’ I said, ‘and great charity, I believe, are among you; but provided that my speech does not offend you [i.e. if you don’t mind my saying so], ... you raise yourself over-high in heaven, to make yourself, who were so young, a queen. What greater honour might he obtain who had endured steadfast in the world, and lived in penance all his life to buy his bliss with bodily pain? What greater honour might he receive than to be crowned king through divine grace?’

IX

[481] ‘That Courteous One is too liberal in action, if what you say is true. You lived not two years in our land; you never knew how either to please or to pray to God, nor [did you] ever [know] either Paternoster or Creed – and made a queen on the first day! I cannot believe, so help me God, that God would blunder so badly. On my word [*lit.* by my faith], young lady, it would be fine to hold the rank of countess in heaven, or else [of] a lady of lower position; but a queen! – it is too exalted a rank.’

[493] ‘There is no limit to His generosity,’ that noble maiden then said to me, ‘for everything that He ordains is truth, and He can do nothing that is not just. As Matthew relates in the true gospel in your mass, about almighty God, He conceives [it] very aptly in a parable and likens it to [the] bright [kingdom of] heaven. “My kingdom on high,” he says, “is like a lord who had a vineyard, I perceive. The beginning of the season

had come, the time was right for working in the vineyard.

[505] “‘Labourers know that season of the year well. The lord arose very early to hire workmen for his vineyard, and finds some there for his purpose. They came to an agreement [to work] for a penny a day, and they go out, labour and work and take great pains, cut and tie and make it [the crop] secure. About the third hour the lord goes to the market, and there he finds men standing unemployed. ‘Why are you standing idle?’ he said to them; ‘don’t you recognize any beginning to this day?’”

[517] “‘‘We came here before the beginning of the day’ was the answer given with one accord. ‘We have been standing here since the sun rose, and no man has asked us to do anything at all.’ ‘Go into my vineyard, do what you know how to do’: thus said the lord, and made an agreement of it. ‘Whatever reasonable pay may have mounted up by night I will pay you fully.’ They went into the vineyard and worked, and all day the lord went on his way like this, and brought new men into his vineyard until the day was almost past its end.

[529] “‘At the time of day of evensong, one hour before the sun goes down, he saw very strong men idle there and said to them with a serious voice: ‘Why do you stand idle all day long?’ They said they could find no employment anywhere [*lit.* their hire was nowhere arranged]. ‘Go to my vineyard, young labourers, and work and do what you can.’ Soon the world became dark; the sun had set and it grew late. He gave summons for them to receive their pay; the day had quite ended.

X

[541] “‘The lord observed the end of the day and called to his reeve: ‘Sir, pay the workers; give them the wages that I owe them, and moreover, so that no one may reproach me, set them all in a row and give each one alike a penny. Begin with the last who stands at the end, until you reach

the first.’ And then the first ones began to complain and said that they had worked hard: ‘These exerted themselves only one hour; it seems to us that we ought to receive more.

[553] “‘We who have endured the heat of the day have deserved more, it seems to us, than those who did not work two hours, and you put them on a par with us.’ Then the lord said to one of them: ‘Friend, I do not wish to make any reduction [of what is due] to you; take what is your own and go. Seeing that I hired you for a penny without distinction, why do you now begin to wrangle? Was not a penny your contract then? One can by no means claim more than is agreed on: why then will you ask for more?’

[565] “‘Moreover, is it not lawful for me to give – to do whatever I please with my own? Or else is your eye turned to evil because I am generous and cheat no one?’ Thus shall I apportion it,” says Christ: “the last shall be the first who comes [for reward], and the first shall be last, however swift he may be, for many are called, though few are chosen.” Thus poor men always collect their share, though they came late and were insignificant [on earth], and though their labour is spent with small result: the mercy of God is much the greater.

[577] ‘I have more joy and bliss here, of exalted rank and perfection of life than all the people in the world could win if they were to ask for a reward according to justice. Although I began just now – I came into the vineyard in the evening – my Lord remembered my wages first: I was paid at once in full. Yet there were others who took more time, who laboured and sweated for a long time, who [have] still received nothing [in the way] of pay, and who perhaps will [receive] nothing more this year [i.e. for a long time].

[589] Then I spoke further, and said plainly: ‘Your account seems unreasonable to me; God’s justice is ready and always supreme, or holy scripture is but a fable. In the Psalter there is a clear verse which declares

an incontrovertible point [of doctrine]: “You reward each one according to his merit, you high King ever supreme in judgement.” Now if you came to payment before him who remained steadfast all day long, then those who have done less work would be entitled to take more, and however much less [they worked] so much the more.’

XI

[601] ‘No uncertainty about more or less exists in God’s kingdom,’ said that gentle being, ‘for there every man is paid the same, whether his desert be small or great. For the noble Ruler is no niggard, whichever He metes out – what is pleasant or what is hard: He pours out His gifts like water from a ditch, or streams from a deep source that has never ceased to flow. His generosity is great: those who at any time in their lives submitted to Him who rescues sinners – from them no bliss will be withheld, for the grace of God is great enough.’

[613] ‘But now you argue, in order to confute me, that I have received my penny here unjustly; you say that I who came too late am not worthy of so great a reward. Did you ever know any man [who] remained all the time so holy in his prayers that he did not in some kind of way, at some time, forfeit the reward of bright heaven? And always the older they were the more often they forsook right and committed wrong. Then mercy and grace must guide them, for the grace of God is great enough.’

[625] ‘But an innocent has grace enough: as soon as they are born they descend in due course into the water of baptism. That is when they are brought into the vineyard. Soon the night of death causes the day to sink, inlaid with darkness. Those who never worked amiss before they departed the noble Lord then pays [as] His labourers. They did His bidding; they were in that place [i.e. the vineyard]; why should He not recognize their labour? Yes, and pay them first and in full? For the grace of God is great enough.’

[637] ‘It is very well known that mankind in general was first created for perfect bliss. Our first father forfeited it through an apple upon which he bit; we were all condemned because of that food to die in sorrow, deprived of joy, and then go to the fire of hell, to dwell in that place without relief. But soon there came a remedy for it; precious blood flowed on the cross so cruel, and precious water; then, in that predicament, the grace of God grew great enough.

[649] ‘Enough streamed out of that spring – blood and water from the broad wound. The blood redeemed us from the pain of hell, and saved us from the second death; to tell the truth, the water that followed the spear so cruelly sharpened is baptism, which washes away the deadly sins through which Adam drowned us in death. Now there is nothing in the round world between us and bliss but what He removed, and that [i.e. bliss] is restored in a blessed hour; and the grace of God is great enough.

XII

[661] ‘The man who sins anew may have grace enough if he repents, but he must ask for it with contrition and sorrow, and endure the pain attached to it. But Reason, which cannot stray from justice, always saves the innocent person; it is a judgement that God never gave that the guiltless should ever be punished. The guilty person may find contrition and be brought to grace through mercy; but he who never turned aside towards deceit is safe and justified as an innocent person.

[673] ‘This is how I know for sure that God is to save two [kinds of] men – for this reason: the just man shall see His face, the guiltless man shall come to Him. The Psalter says it in this way in a passage: “Lord, who shall climb Your high hill, or rest within Your holy domain?” He [i.e. the Psalmist] is not slow to answer himself: “He who did no evil with his hands, who is pure and unsullied at heart, shall set his foot [i.e. stand] at rest”: the innocent person is always safe by right.

[685] ‘The righteous man shall also, certainly, come to that fair stronghold – those who do not spend their life in folly or deceive their neighbour with guile. Solomon says plainly about this righteous man, [that] our Wisdom received him; He made him go along most narrow ways and showed him the kingdom of God for a time, like one who says, “Behold yonder beautiful domain: you may win it if you are valiant.” But assuredly, without doubt, the innocent person is always safe by right.

[697] ‘However, concerning just men, a certain man, David, says in the Psalter, if you have ever seen it: “Lord, never bring Your servant to judgement, for no living man is justified before You.” Therefore, when you have to come to the court where all our cases shall be called, if you plead right you may be refuted in argument by this same speech that I have noticed. But [may] He who died bloody on the cross, grievously pierced through the hands, grant you free to go when you are tried, through innocence and not by right.

[709] ‘He who can read correctly, let him look at the book and be instructed how Jesus walked among the people in old times, and people brought their children to Him; they humbly begged Him to touch their children for the happiness and healing that went from Him. His disciples commanded them with reproof “Leave off!” and with their words held back many people. Jesus then graciously said to them: “Stop, let children come to Me; the kingdom of heaven is prepared for such”: the innocent person is always safe by right.

XIII

[721] ‘Justice summoned His gentle ones [i.e. the disciples] to Him, and said no one could win his kingdom unless he came to it absolutely like a child – otherwise he would never enter there. Harmless, true, and undefiled, without stain or blemish of polluting sin: when such knock at the dwelling, the gate will be unbolted for them at once. There is the joy

that will not cease, which the jeweller sought through precious jewellery, and sold all his goods, both woollen and linen, to buy himself a pearl that was flawless.

[733] ‘This peerless pearl that is bought dearly, for which the jeweller gave all his goods, is like the realm of bright heavens – so said the Father of earth and sea – for it is flawless, clean, and bright, and perfectly round, and lovely of nature, and belongs in common to all that were righteous. Lo, it shone right in the middle of my breast: my Lord the Lamb, who shed His blood, He set it here as a symbol of peace. I advise you to forsake the mad world and buy your flawless pearl.’

[745] ‘O flawless pearl in pure pearls,’ I said, ‘who wear the pearl of price, who formed your fair figure for you? Whoever made your clothing was most skilful; your beauty never came from nature – Pygmalion never painted your face, nor did Aristotle through his learning speak of the nature of these special virtues; your complexion surpasses the fleur-de-lis; your angelic bearing [is] so completely gracious. Tell me, beautiful maiden, what kind of position does such a flawless pearl hold?’

[757] ‘My peerless Lamb,’ she said, ‘my beloved Destiny who can amend everything, chose me for His bride, although at one time such a union would have seemed unfitting. When I left your damp world He called me to His beatitude: “Come here to Me, My sweet love, for there is no stain or spot in you.” He gave me strength and also beauty; on the dais he washed my clothing in His blood, and crowned me pure in virginity, and arrayed me in flawless pearls.’

[769] ‘Why, flawless bride who shine so bright, who have such rich and plentiful royal dignities, what kind of thing can that Lamb be who would wed you as His wife? You climbed so high over all others to lead with Him so queenly a life. So many [beautiful] ladies have lived in hard struggle for Christ, and you have thrust out all those noble ones, driving away all others from that marriage, you alone [being] strong and firm enough, a peerless and flawless maiden.’

XIV

[781] ‘Flawless, unblemished, and without stain I am,’ said that beautiful queen, and that I may maintain with honour, but I did not say “peerless queen”. We are the brides of the Lamb in heaven, a company of a hundred and forty thousand, as it is seen in the Apocalypse: St John saw them all in a group. On the hill of Sion, that lovely mound, the apostle saw them in a spiritual vision, adorned for their wedding on that hilltop, the new city of Jerusalem.

[793] ‘I shall tell about Jerusalem. If you want to know what He is like – my Lamb, my Lord, my dear Jewel, my Joy, my Bliss, my gracious Love – the prophet Isaiah speaks compassionately of His meekness: “That glorious Innocent One who was put to death without any criminal charge, was led like a sheep to slaughter, and, like a lamb that the shearer has taken in hand, He closed his mouth against every complaint when the Jews judged Him in Jerusalem.”

[805] ‘In Jerusalem my Love was slain and torn on the cross by wicked ruffians; most willing to bear all our sorrows, he took our grievous troubles on Himself; His face, that was so lovely to look at, was scourged with blows. He who Himself never had any [sin] about Him set Himself at nought for sin; for us He let Himself be scourged and bowed, and stretched on a crude beam; as meek as a lamb that uttered no complaint He died for us in Jerusalem.

[817] ‘In Jerusalem, Jordan, and Galilee, where the good St John baptized, his words accorded with Isaiah. When Jesus came towards him, he declared this prophecy about Him: “Behold the Lamb of God as trustworthy as rock, who puts an end to the heavy sins that all this world has committed. He never yet committed one Himself, yet He daubed them all on Himself. Who can recount the ancestry of Him who died for us in Jerusalem?”

[829] ‘Thus in Jerusalem my sweet Love was twice recognized as a lamb there, according to the true record of both prophets, because of His meek nature and all His bearing. The third time, written clearly in the Apocalypse, agrees well with the others: in the midst of the throne, where the saints sat, the Apostle John saw Him as plainly as possible, opening the book with square leaves where seven seals were attached to the border. At that sight every host bowed down, in hell, in earth, and [in] Jerusalem.

XV

[841] ‘This Lamb of Jerusalem never had any contamination of any colour but lovely white that no spot or blemish could cling to, so luxuriant and abundant was the white wool. Therefore every soul that never had a stain is an honoured wife to that Lamb. And though He may fetch a supply each day, neither wrangling nor strife comes among us, but we would wish that every single one were five – the more the merrier, God bless me! Our love flourishes in a great company, in honour increased and never diminished.

[853] ‘No one can lessen the bliss of us who wear this pearl upon our breast, for they that bear the crest of spotless pearls could never think of dispute. Although our bodies waste away in the earth, and you cry out endlessly in grief, we have complete understanding; our hope is entirely derived from one death. The Lamb makes us glad; our sorrow is cast out; He gladdens us all at every meal. Everyone’s bliss is intense and perfect, and no one’s honour is ever the less.

[865] ‘In case you should think my wonderful story false, in the Apocalypse [it] is written in a passage: “I saw,” says John, “the Lamb, most fair and noble, stand on the mount of Sion, and with Him a hundred thousand virgins and forty-four thousand more. I noticed the Lamb’s name written on all their foreheads, and also His Father’s [name]. Then I heard a

shout from heaven, like the sounds of many waters gathered in a rushing torrent; and as thunder rolls among dark thunder clouds – that sound, I believe, was just as loud.

[877] “Nevertheless, though it rang out piercingly, and though they were loud voices, I heard them utter a quite new sound, that it was most pleasant to hear. They sang that new song very clearly, like harpers harping on their harps, a noble discourse in sonorous notes; the melodies they sang together were most beautiful. Right in front of God’s throne and the four beasts that do obeisance to Him and the elders so grave of face, they kept up their singing continuously.

[889] “Nevertheless, no one was ever so skilful, for all the arts that they ever knew, as to be able to sing a strain of that song, except for the company that follow the Lamb; for they have been redeemed, far removed from the earth, as first fruits due to God, and are united with the noble Lamb, being similar to Him in speech and colour. Because no constraint ever made a lie or untrue words touch their tongue, that spotless company can never leave that flawless master at all.”

[901] ‘Let my thanks be no less [i.e. do not think I am any the less grateful],’ I said, ‘if I interrogate my pearl; I should not so presumptuously test the wisdom of you who are chosen for Christ’s bridal-chamber. I am only filth and dust mingled together, and you are so exquisite a fresh rose, and live here by this pleasant bank where delight in life can never fade. Now, gracious lady, in whom sincerity dwells [*lit.* who contains simplicity], I want to ask you something explicitly, and though I am rough as a peasant, let my request prevail nevertheless.

XVI

[913] ‘Nevertheless, beautiful maiden, I call on you if you can see that it may be possible: as you are glorious and without impurity, do not

reject my piteous prayer. Have you no dwelling-place with castle-wall, no manor where you are able to live together? You tell me of Jerusalem the royal kingdom where noble David was set on the throne, but it cannot be situated near these woods, for that noble place is in Judea. As you are completely flawless [*lit.* flawless under the moon], your dwelling-places should be without stain.

[925] ‘This spotless company you tell me of – such a great company of thousands in a throng – there are so many of you that you must have a great city, without doubt. It would be a bad thing if so beautiful a company of lovely jewels had to sleep out of doors, but by these slopes where I have lingered I see no building anywhere about. I think you [have] come down here and tarry on your own to look on the splendour of this lovely stream. If you have strong buildings elsewhere, direct me now to that fair walled city.’

[937] ‘That city you refer to in the land of Judea,’ that precious creature then said to me, ‘that is the city that the Lamb sought out in which to suffer pain for mankind’s sake, that is to say the old Jerusalem, for there the old guilt was brought to an end. But the new, which descended by God’s embassy, the apostle gave an account of in the Apocalypse. There the Lamb without black spots has brought His fair company; and as His company is without blemish, so is His city without stain.’

[949] ‘To speak plainly of two cities, both nevertheless called Jerusalem – that means no more to you than “city of God” or “vision of peace” – in the one our peace was made certain: the Lamb chose it to suffer pain in; in the other there is only peace to be gleaned, which will last for ever without end. That is the city to which we speed after our flesh is laid to rot, where glory and bliss shall ever increase for the company that is without stain.’

[961] ‘Spotless maiden so meek and mild,’ I said then to that lovely flower, ‘bring me to that pleasant dwelling and let me see your joyful home.’ That

bright maiden said: ‘God will forbid that; you may not enter within His stronghold; but I have obtained permission from the Lamb, through [His] great favour, for [you to have] a sight of it. You may see that pure city from the outside, but not a foot from within; you have no power to make your way into the street, unless you were pure, without stain.’

XVII

[973] ‘If I am to reveal this city to you, go up towards the head of this stream, and I shall follow opposite you on this side, until you are brought to a hill.’ Then I did not want to wait any longer, but passed under boughs so beautifully leaved until on a hill I caught sight of the city and, as I made my way onwards, gazed at it, situated beyond the brook, at some distance from me, shining brighter than the sun with beams of light. The form of it is shown in the Apocalypse, as the apostle John describes it.

[985] Just as John the apostle saw it clearly, I saw that city of great renown, Jerusalem so new and royally adorned, as though it had come down from heaven. The city was all of bright refined gold, burnished bright like gleaming glass, set beneath with noble gems, with twelve tiers fixed on the base, the twelve layers of the foundation admirably joined; each tier was a different stone, as the apostle John splendidly describes this same city in the Apocalypse.

[997] As John names these stones in scripture, I knew the names from his account. The first gem that I perceived in the first course is called jasper – it gleamed green in the lowest step. Sapphire occupied the second place; then the calcedony without blemish clearly showed pale in the third tier; the fourth was the emerald with surface so green; the fifth stone was the sardonyx; the sixth was the ruby. The apostle John perceived it in the Apocalypse.

[1009] John added moreover the chrysolite, the seventh gem in the foundation; the eighth was the beryl clear and white; the two-coloured topaz was set as the ninth; the chrysoprase is fastened as the tenth; the noble jacinth the eleventh; the twelfth, the most trustworthy in any situation, was the amethyst, purple blended with indigo. The wall set above the tiers was of jasper that shone glistening like glass. I knew it from the description of the apostle John in the Apocalypse.

[1021] As John described, I further saw there that these twelve steps were broad and steep; above stood the city, perfectly square, most beautiful, and equal in length, breadth, and height. The streets of gold were as clear as glass, and the wall of jasper shone like egg-white. The walls inside were adorned with all kinds of precious stones that could be present. Each square side of this manor comprised a distance of twelve furlongs in height, width, and length from end to end [*lit.* to traverse before it came to an end], for the apostle John saw the measurement of it.

XVIII

[1033] I saw still more of what John describes: each side of that palace had three gates, so in the enclosing wall I caught sight of twelve, the portals adorned with rich [metal] plates, and each gate with a pearl, a perfect pearl that never fades. To each one in written characters was joined a name of the children of Israel, following their dates, that is to say, according to their dates of birth; the older before the younger throughout. There shone such light in all the streets that they needed neither sun nor moon.

[1045] They had no need of sun nor moon; God Himself was their lamplight, the Lamb their lantern, without doubt; because of Him the city shone brightly. Through wall and dwelling my gaze passed; because [all was] transparent and clear, nothing obstructed the sight. You could observe the high throne there, arrayed about with all the ornamentation,

as John the apostle expressly set forth. The supreme God Himself sat upon it. Directly out of the throne ran a river brighter than both the sun and moon.

[1057] Neither sun nor moon ever shone so sweetly as that copious river [flowing] out of that city; it surged swiftly through every street, without filth or impurity or slime. There was, moreover, no church in that place, neither chapel nor temple was ever built; the Almighty was their appropriate cathedral, the Lamb the sacrifice there as nourishment. The gates were never yet shut, but were always open at every roadway; no one enters there to take refuge who bears any blemish under the moon.

[1069] The moon can acquire no power from there; she is too spotty, her body too ugly, and also it is never night there. Why should the moon climb a circuit there and vie with that glorious light which shines on the surface of the river? The planets are in too wretched a condition, and the sun itself far too dim. Around the water are bright trees that bear twelve fruits of life in quick succession; twelve times a year they bear [fruit] most richly, and renew afresh every month.

[1081] No human heart on earth could endure so great a wonder as when I gazed upon that stronghold, the form of it was so wonderful. I stood as still as a dazed quail in amazement at that bright image, so that I felt neither rest nor toil, I was so enraptured by that pure radiance. For I dare say with firm conviction, had a man endured that favour in the body, even if all the physicians were to have him in [their] care, his life would be lost under the moon.

XIX

[1093] Just as the radiant moon rises before the sun [*lit.* light of day] quite sinks away, suddenly in a wonderful manner I was aware of a procession. This noble city of glorious renown was suddenly, without

summons, full of similar virgins in the same dress as my blissful crowned one. And they were all crowned in the same manner, adorned in pearls and white clothing; on the breast of each one the blissful pearl was fastened joyfully in place.

[1105] With great joy they went together along golden streets that shone like glass; I know there were one hundred thousand, and their garments all matched. It was hard to know [which was] the happiest face. The Lamb with seven horns of bright red gold went proudly in front; his clothing was like prized pearls. They made their way towards the throne. Though they were many, there was no crowding in their array [i.e. grouping], but mild as modest maidens at mass, so they went forth with great joy.

[1117] It would be impossible to describe the delight His coming brought. The elders fell prostrate at His feet when He approached. Legions of angels, summoned together, cast sweet smelling incense; then praise and joy was expressed once more; all sang in praise of that lovely Jewel. The sound that the virtues of heaven uttered in their joy could strike through the earth to hell. Indeed I conceived a great desire to praise the Lamb amongst His followers.

[1129] Delight in gazing upon the Lamb went with much wonder in [my] mind. He was the noblest, the gentlest, and the worthiest that I ever heard tell of; His clothes were so splendidly white, His looks innocent, He Himself so courteous. But a wound very wide and wet [with blood] was visible near his heart, through the lacerated skin. His blood gushed out from his white side. Alas, I thought, who did that malicious deed? Any heart ought to have burned up for sorrow before it had any desire for that.

[1141] No one would see fit to doubt the delight of the Lamb; though He was injured and had a wound, [it] was never visible in His demeanour, His glances were so gloriously happy. I looked among His bright company [to see] how they were laden and filled with life; then I saw there my

little queen who I thought had stood beside me in the valley. Lord, how happily she behaved, she who was so pure, among her companions! That sight caused me to resolve to wade [across] for love-longing in [my] great desire.

XX

[1153] Desire poured into me through eye and ear, dissolving my human mind to madness; when I saw my gracious one, I wanted to be there, though she was set beyond the water. I thought that nothing could harm me by dealing me a blow and offering obstruction to me, and that no one was going to restrain me from plunging into the stream, and swimming the remainder, even if I died there. But I was shaken from that purpose; when I was about to jump wildly into the stream, I was summoned out of that intention: it was not to my Prince's satisfaction.

[1165] It did not please Him that I rushed over the miraculous waters like that, in such a state of frenzy. Though I was rash and impetuous to rush headlong, I was quickly restrained in that course, for just as I sprang to the bank, that impetuosity jerked me out of my dream. Then I woke in that fertile garden; my head was laid upon that hill where my pearl slipped away into the earth. I stretched, and fell into great dismay, and, sighing, said to myself: 'Now may all be to that Prince's satisfaction.'

[1177] It pleased me very ill to be driven so suddenly out of that lovely country, away from all those sights so vivid and pleasing. A grievous longing struck me down in a swoon, and sorrowfully I began to lament: 'O pearl,' I said, 'of glorious honour, what you said to me in this true vision was so precious! If it is a true and real account that you go thus in your bright garland [i.e. crown], then it is well for me in this dungeon of sorrow that you are to that Prince's pleasure.'

[1189] If I had all the time submitted to that Prince's pleasure, and yearned for no more than was allowed me, and been content with that in true resolve, as the pearl that was so fair had begged me, quite probably, drawn into God's presence, I would have been brought to more of His mysteries. But people always want to receive more good fortune than could belong to them by right; therefore my joy was quickly shattered, and I cast out of the everlasting regions. Lord, those who strive against You are mad, or who propose anything against Your pleasure.

[1201] To please the Prince or be reconciled [to Him] is very easy to the good Christian; for I have found Him, both day and night [i.e. at all times], a God, a Lord, an entirely perfect friend. On this mound this happened to me [*lit.* I received this chance], lying prostrate for sorrow for my pearl, which I afterwards committed to God, with my own [blessing] and the precious blessing of Christ, whom the priest shows us every day in the form of bread and wine. May He grant us all to be humble servants and precious pearls to His pleasure.

Cleanness

Whoever were to commend cleanness fittingly, and reckon up all the arguments that she demands by right, lovely examples would he be able to find in support of his discourse, and in the contrary enormous trouble and difficulty. For the Being who created all things is exceedingly angry with the man who follows after him in filth – such as men of religion who read and sing the service, and approach His presence, and are called priests; they go to His temple and are bound to Him, righteously with reverence they arrange His altar: there they handle His own body and partake of it as well. [12] If they are enclosed in cleanness they obtain a great reward; but if they feign wisdom and lack courtesy, by being pure on the outside and all filth within, then they are sinful themselves and altogether defile both God and His utensils, and drive Him to wrath. The King who rules everything is so clean in His court and pure in His household, and fittingly served by angels in very bright clothes, surrounded by all that is clean, both within and without; if He were not scrupulous and fastidious, and loved no evil, it would be too great a marvel – it could not happen.

[23] Christ Himself once made it known in a speech, in which He extolled eight beatitudes and promised to them [i.e. the blessed] their rewards. I am thinking of one among them, as Matthew records, which discloses a clear statement about cleanness in this way: ‘It turns out very well for the man with a clean heart, for he shall look on our Lord with a loved face’ – which is to say that anyone who is wearing any uncleanness anywhere about him shall never come to that sight; for He who banishes all filth from His heart cannot endure the shock of its approaching Him. [33] Therefore do not hurry to heaven in ragged clothes, nor in the hood of a beggar and with hands unwashed. For what earthly man who possesses high rank would be pleased if, when he was placed ceremoniously in a splendid throne, above dukes on the dais, served with

delicacies, a fellow came meanly dressed? [39] If the villain came hastily to the table then, with leggings torn at the knee and his patched rags, and his smock ragged and his shoes out at the toes, or any one of these, he would be put outside, with many great reproaches, perhaps a blow, hurled to the hall door and shoved out violently, and be forbidden to come to that castle ever again, on pain of imprisonment and being put in the stocks; and he will be punished in this way for his mean clothing, though he never transgress further in word or in deed.

[49] And if he would be unwelcome to an earthly prince, the high King in heaven is even harder to him; as Matthew tells in his gospel read at mass of that rich man who made the great banquet for the marriage of his beloved heir, and sent his message to say that they should assemble, and come to his feast in fine clothes: 'For my bulls and my boars are fattened and killed, and my fowls fed and plumped up in readiness for slaughter, my pen-fed poultry and partridges as well, with slabs of wild boar, swans and cranes, all are cooked and roasted ready for the sitting; come quickly to my court, before it gets cold.' [61] When those who were to come there heard his invitation, each excused himself with whatever reason he could escape by. One had bought himself an estate, he said, on his honour: 'Now I am going there as soon as possible to see the homestead.' Another also refused and declared this reason: 'I have wished for and obtained yokes of oxen, and bought them for my servants; I need to go: I am obliged to approach and see them pull the plough.' 'And I have married a wife' – this was how the third excused himself – 'excuse me at court: I cannot come there.' [71] Thus they held back with insolence, each one, so that no one went to the house though he was invited. Then the lord of the people was very ill pleased, and felt indignation about that behaviour; he speaks very seriously. He says: 'Now it will be to their own sorrow that they have refused; their misdeed is more blameworthy than any heathen perversity. [77] So go forth, my men, into the main streets, and waylay, on every side of the city, the travellers, on foot and on horse, both men and women, the richer and the poorer; invite them all courteously to stay at my feast, and bring them gladly to town as though they were barons, so that every part of

my palace may be absolutely full; these other wretches indeed were not worthy.’ Then those that guarded the region went out and came back, brought with them young men that they met along the way, squires who went swiftly on horses, and also many on foot, freemen and serfs. [89] When they came to the court they were well looked after, given places by the steward, set in the hall, by the marshall very courteously made to sit, the seat of each assigned according to his rank. Then afterwards men said to the lord: ‘Lo! lord, by your leave, at your sovereign command and order we have brought, as you have bidden, many strangers, and yet there is more room.’ [97] The lord said to those men: ‘Seek still further; go out into the fields and fetch more guests; search gorse-heaths and woods to see if any men lie there; whatever kind of people are travelling there, bring them here; whether they are proud or mean, do not overlook any – whether they are sound or lame or one-eyed, even if they are both blind and stumbling cripples – so that my house may be filled right to the corners. For, indeed, these same men who have refused me and have not recognised my status at this time, shall never sit in my room to taste my supper, nor eat one mouthful from my stew, even though they should die.’ [109] Then, at those words, the servants hastened out and did the work, making proclamation as he had ordered it, and filled the palace with people of all conditions; they were not all the sons of one woman, begotten by one father. Whether they were respectable or inferior, they were all well placed, always the highest in rank and the most splendidly attired in the forefront, the noblest, who were dressed most brilliantly, at the high table, and then, down the length of the hall, people in plenty. And throughout people were honoured individually at their meal by the marshall, in accordance with the appearance of their dress. Fine men were little neglected in that company, and yet the most humble person in that room was fully served, both with honour and with food and excellent minstrelsy, and all the amusements in the world that a lord should show. And they, having good drink, began to be glad, and each man made himself at ease with his companion.

[125] Now in the middle of the meal the master decided that he wished to see the company that was assembled there, and courteously

show friendliness toward the rich and the poor, and welcome them all with his demeanour, and kindle their joy. Then he goes from his private room into the great hall, and to the noblest at the table, and bade them be merry, cheered them with his friendly welcome, and passed further, went from table to table and talked all the time about pleasant subjects. But as he went across the floor, he noticed a fellow crowded in the throng improperly clothed, not dressed fittingly for a festival, in a garment not befitting a feast, but soiled with labour: the man was not properly dressed to associate with worthy men. And the great lord became angry about that, and decided to punish him. [139] ‘Tell me, friend,’ said the man with a stern expression, ‘how did you come into this dwelling in such dirty clothes? The clothing that you have on does not honour a festival: you, man, are not dressed in clothes for a wedding-feast. How were you bold enough to approach this house, to your misfortune, in a robe so ragged and torn at the sides? You are a vile man in that mean gown; you valued me and my house very poorly and in a very niggardly manner, that you were so prompt to approach my presence here. Do you think that I am a beggar who would approve of your cloak?’ The other man was abashed at his angry words, and hangs his head: he looks at the ground. [151] He was so out of his mind with confusion lest he should suffer that he did not know one word that he should utter. Then the lord spoke and called out exceedingly loudly, and said to his torturers: ‘Take him,’ he orders, ‘bind both his hands behind his back, and immediately fasten cruel fetters to his feet; fasten him firmly in the stocks, and then shut him up deep in my dungeon where sorrow ever dwells – grieving and weeping and gnashing of teeth bitterly together – to teach him to be respectful.’

[161] Thus Christ compares the kingdom of heaven to this noble feast to which many are called; for all, the worse and the better, who were ever baptized in the font, are graciously invited to partake of that feast. But be careful, if- you will, that your clothes are clean and seemly for the festival, lest you suffer harm, for if you approach that Prince of noble lineage, He hates hell no more than those who are unclean. What then are your clothes in which you wrap yourself, which must appear like lovely garments of the best? [171] They are your deeds, surely, that

you have done, and lined with the inclination that lay in your heart; endeavour that those be beautiful and fresh during your lifetime, and well-proportioned in a fine fashion for foot and for hand, and then all your other limbs wrapped most cleanly; then you may see your Saviour and His noble throne. A man may forfeit his bliss, so that he does not see the Sovereign, for more faults than sloth alone; as with arrogance and boasting and swelling pride, violently into the devil's throat one rushes immediately. [181] For avarice and malice and crooked deeds, for perjury and manslaughter and too much drink, for theft and for strife, one may have disfavour; for robbery and debauchery and untrue speech, and disinheriting and depriving widows of dowries, for spoiling of marriages and supporting of villains, for treason and treachery and tyranny also, and for false defamations and spurious laws; for such vices as these, one may fail to obtain the joy that is highly valued, and endure much pain, and never come into the Creator's court, and never set eyes on Him for such bitter deeds. [193] But I have listened to and heard from many excellent scholars, and also read it myself in discourses of morality, that the same noble Prince who rules Paradise is displeased at everything that tends to sin; but I never yet heard it declared in any book that He ever punished so fiercely any work that He made, nor took vengeance for any vileness of vice or sin, nor was so quickly fierce because of anger in His mind, nor ever so suddenly sought to take harsh vengeance, as He did for filth of the flesh that fools have practised; for, as I find, there He forgot all His gracious virtues, and grew furious for vengeance as a result of the anger in His heart.

[205] For the false fiend committed the first crime while he was raised aloft high in heaven, designed to be the fairest of all the noble angels; and he made a recompense unnaturally, like a churl. He saw nothing except how handsome he was himself, but renounced his Sovereign and said these words: 'I shall set up my throne in the north, and be similar to that Lord who made the sky.' As he spoke these words, vengeance descended on him: God drove him to the abyss with His severe judgement, his punishment nevertheless [given] in the moderation of His nature. Yet He lost the tenth part of His noble entourage on that occasion: though

the wretch was so proud on account of his fine clothes and his glorious radiance that shone so bright, as soon as God's judgement came to him, dense thousands fell violently out of heaven. [221] Fiends black all over fell from heaven, whirled at the first blow like thick snow, hurled into the pit of hell as the hive swarms. The fiendish folk clung together for the duration of forty days, before that stinging storm would cease; but as sieved meal smokes thickly under a fine sieve, so that vile shower stretched from heaven to hell on each side of the world, everywhere alike. Yes indeed, it was a terrible outrage and a supreme vengeance, and yet God was not enraged; nor did the wretch make peace, nor ever would, for wilfulness, acknowledge his worthy God, nor pray Him for pity, so proud was his will. Therefore though the blow was severe, the remorse was slight; though he is cast into sorrow, he behaves no better.

[235] But the second vengeance that occurred fell on people through the misdeed of a man who failed in loyalty – Adam the disobedient, ordained to bliss. His place was ordained apart there in paradise, to live there in pleasure for the duration of a period, and then inherit the home that the angels forfeited; but through the urging of Eve he ate from an apple that poisoned all the people who descended from them both, because of a prohibition which was decreed by the Lord Himself, and a punishment assigned to it and openly kept. The prohibited thing was the fruit that the man touched, and the judgement is the death that slays us all; the vengeance was carried out all in moderation and mildness, and afterwards remedied by a virgin who never had an equal.

[249] But in the third [vengeance] all that ought to flourish was destroyed: there merciless anger and great displeasure was shown, which was because of the uncleanness practised on earth by the people who then lived without any masters in the world. They were the most beautiful of figure and also of face, the biggest and the most graceful that were ever created, the strongest, the mightiest that ever stood on feet, and the longest life given to them of all people. For they were the first offspring that the earth bred, the sons of the noble ancestor who was called Adam, to whom God had given everything that was good – all the innocent bliss that a person might have; and those who lived immediately after were

most like the man [i.e. Adam]; therefore since then none have been so beautiful to look at. [263] No law was imposed on them but to look to nature, and keep to it, and chastely fulfill all its course. And then they discovered filth in fleshly deeds, and contrived immoral acts against nature, and practised them improperly upon one another, and also with others, deliberately, in a perverted manner: they defiled their flesh so greatly that the devils saw how the daughters of mankind were extremely fair, and coupled with them in the manner of humans, and begot giants on them with their evil tricks. [273] Those were intemperate and mighty men upon earth, who were renowned for their loathsome practices; he who loved fighting best was famed for being honourable, and always the one who did the greatest harm was considered the noblest. And then evils increased seriously on earth and multiplied many times among mankind, because the mighty on earth so corrupt the others that the Being who created everything begins [to act] very angrily. [281] When He knew every country was corrupt in itself, and every man had strayed from the right ways, cruel afflicting anger touched His heart. Like a man sorrowful within, He said to Himself: ‘It grieves me greatly that I ever made mankind, but I shall destroy and do away with those on this earth who behave foolishly, and drive out of the world everything clothed in flesh, from man to beast, from birds to fishes; all that I ever put a soul in shall be down and dead and driven out of the earth; and I sorely regret that I Myself ever made them; but if I can, from now on, I shall make sure to be careful that I take note of their deceitful deeds.’

[293] There was then a man living in the world, most obedient and righteous, and conducted himself fitly; in the fear of God he spends his days, and always walking with his God, his grace was the greater. His name was Noah, as is very well known. He had three fine sons, and they had three wives: Shem truly was one, the second was called Ham, and the third born was worthy Japhet. [301] Now God spoke wild vengeful words to Noah in vexation, grieved in His mind: ‘The end of all kinds of flesh that moves on earth has presented itself to me, and I intend to carry it out. I am sickened inwardly by their shameful practice; the filth of it has grieved Me and the slime troubled Me. I shall put forth My

power, and destroy everything together, both people and land and all that has life. But make a dwelling place for yourself, that is My will, an enclosed vessel of planks, neatly planed. [311] Construct stalls therein for the wild and the tame, and then plaster it with clay fittingly within, and outside daub all the hammered jointing. And make that vessel of this length and breadth: keep to three hundred cubits for the length, and make the breadth precisely fifty across; and see that your ark has exactly thirty in height, and a wide-opening window constructed above, the measure of a cubit square exactly; a well fitting door, made in the side; have halls inside and lots of recesses, both stalls and compartments and well fastened pens. [323] For I shall rouse up a flood to wash all the world, and kill everything that is alive with surging waters, all that glides and walks and has the breath of life: I shall destroy with My anger all that lives upon earth. But I confirm My covenant with you in this manner, because you have ruled in wisdom and have always been righteous: you shall enter this ark with your noble children and your wedded wife; you shall take with you the wives of your fine sons; I shall save this household of eight from all human souls, and destroy those others. [333] Provide yourself with a pair of every animal that bears life, enclose seven couples of each comely species, keep only a pair of each unclean species in the ark, in order to preserve for Me the seed of all the various species. And always mingle corresponding female animals with the males, each pair by pair, to please each other; supply your chest with all the food that can be found, as sustenance for yourself and also those others.’ This good man goes very promptly and does God’s bidding, in great dread and fear, not daring to do otherwise.

[343] When it was prepared and constructed and fully made ready, then God solemnly uttered these words to him. ‘Now Noah,’ said Our Lord, ‘are you all ready? Have you caulked your vessel all over with clay?’ ‘Yes, Lord, by Your leave,’ said the man then, ‘all is done according to Your instructions, as You granted me wisdom.’ ‘Enter in, then,’ said He, ‘and have your wife with you, your three sons, without dispute, and their three wives; also, as I have ordered, bring beasts in there, and when you are lodged shut yourselves up in there securely. [353] When seven days

have passed I shall swiftly send forth such a rushing tempest of heavy rain, which will wash all deeds of filth from the world; no flesh shall be found alive on earth, except you eight stowed in this ark and the seed that I will save of these various animals.’ Now Noah never stops – he begins that night – until all were stowed and enclosed in accordance with the command.

[361] Then soon came the seventh day, when all were assembled, and all remained in the ark, the wild and the tame. Then the abyss swelled, and banks of water arose, every spring pours forth in raging streams; soon there was no bank that remained unbreached; the great flowing flood rose up to the sky. Many a clustered cloud split all in shreds; every rain-rift tore open and rain rushed to the earth, never ceased in forty days. And then the flood rises, overflows every wood and the wide fields. For when the water from the sky met the earth, all that were mortal drowned in it. [373] There was cause for lamentation when the calamity was known – that there was no help for it but to die in the deep streams; the water grew ever more powerful, destroying homes, rushed into every house, seized those who lived there. First, all who could flee took to flight; each woman with her child leaves the house and went to the high ridges where it was steepest, and quickly they hastened to the high hills. [381] But their efforts were all in vain, for the wild raining tempest, the sweeping waves, never ceased until every valley was brimful to the edges of the hills, and every valley so deep with water that it was filled to the brink. The greatest mountains on earth were then no longer dry, and people flocked there for fear of the retribution. Then the wild animals of the wood floated on the water; some swam on it, hoping to save themselves; some climbed to a high place and stared at the heavens, roared pitifully for dread with a loud clamour. [391] Hares, and also harts, run to the high ground; bucks, badgers, and bulls hurried to the ridges; and all cried out in distress to the King of heaven, each one of them cried out for rescue from the Creator, so that the confusion signified that His mercy has passed, and all His pity departed from the people that He hated. By the time the flood had increased and flowed as high as their feet, then every man saw clearly that he must drown. Friends came together and embraced each other, to suffer

their sorrowful fate and all die together; love looks at loved one and takes his leave, to end all at the same time and part for ever.

[403] By the time forty days were ended, no flesh stirred on earth which the flood had not entirely devoured with contending waves; for it climbed every cliff, fifteen cubits over the highest hill that cowered on the earth. Then all that the breath of life sprang into must needs rot in the mud – no struggling availed – except for the man on board ship and his strange company, Noah who often called the name of our Lord, he and the seven others in the ark, where everyone stayed dry in the vessel, as it pleased glorious God. [413] The ark was lifted on high by rushing currents, thrown to strange regions very near the clouds. It rolled on the wild water, went as it pleased, hurtled on the deep flood, apparently in danger, without mast, or crutch, or fine bowline, cable, or capstan to fasten her anchors to, rudder-band, or helm fastened to the rudder, or any driving sail to seek after the haven, but floated onward with the strife of the fierce winds. Wherever the water surged it (the ark) rebounded; often it rolled around and reared on end; if our Lord had not been their pilot a hard fate would have befallen them.

[425] To specify an exact point in the length of Noah's life: [it was] the six hundredth of his age and no odd years, on precisely the seventeenth day of the second month, that all these springs burst forth and the water flowed, and the flood [lasted] thrice fifty days afterwards; every hill there was hidden by grey waves. Everything that lived in the world, that ever swam, or flew, or went on foot, was destroyed, so that it was fortunate for the remnant that the storm drives, that all species, so lodged, were united within. But when it pleased the Lord of the sky to think of His man who waits for His mercy, then He wakened a wind to blow on the waters; then the flood, which had been great before, subsided. Then he closed up the pools, stopped the wells, commanded the rain to cease: it abated immediately; then the sea subsided, shrinking in on itself. [442] After a hundred and fifty hard days had expired, as that heaving vessel moved heavily about, where the wind and the weather would toss it, it came to rest on a mild day, sinking to the ground; it rested at last on the ledge of a rock on the mount of Ararach in the Armenian hills, which in Hebrew

is otherwise called the Thanes. But though the ark remained enclosed by the crags, the flood did not yet end or sink to the floors of the valleys, but the highest of the ridges were uncovered a little, so that the man on board beheld the bare earth.

[452] Then he pushed open his window, and sent out a messenger from that company to seek lands for them: it was the raven so proud, that was ever disobedient; he was coloured like coal, unfaithful raven. And he takes to flight and flutters on the winds, soars on high to hear tidings. He croaks for pleasure when he finds carrion thrown up on a cliff where the shores lay dry; he had the smell of the flavour and goes there immediately, falls on the foul flesh and fills his belly, and at once entirely forgot the order of yesterday, how the captain who ruled the ark had instructed him. [465] The raven goes forth, caring very little how all people there fare, provided that he finds food. But the man on board who awaited his return cursed him very bitterly together with all other animals. He seeks another messenger, and chooses the dove, brings that beautiful creature on deck, blessed her, and said: 'Go, noble creature, to seek dwellings for us; fly over this dark water; if you find dry land bring a message to proclaim joy to us all. [474] Though that bird is false, may you ever be noble.' She whirled out on the air on very swift wings, continually throughout the day, not daring to alight; and when she finds no ground to set her foot on, she searches around the region and seeks the vessel. She comes down in the evening and sits on the ark; Noah takes her at once and lodges her well. [481] On a second day Noah takes the dove once more and asks her to go over the flood again to search for hills; and she darts about under the sky and scouts around until it was almost night, and then looks for Noah. One evening the dove rests on the ark; she stood on the prow and quietly awaits him. Oh! she brought in her beak a branch of olive, all pleasingly covered with green leaves; that was the sign of safety which our Lord sent them, and of the reconciliation of Himself with those harmless beasts. Then there was joy in that craft where those jumbled together suffered before, and much relief in the vessel that was daubed with clay.

[493] On a fine morning on the first day in the first month that falls first in the year, people laughed merrily in that vessel and saw from it

how the waters had ebbed and the world dried. Each one praised our Lord, but remained always still until they had tidings from the One who shut them in there. Then God's voice came to them, gladdening them all, bade them move to the door: He wished to release them. [501] Then they went to the door, threw it open at once; both the man and his sons went outside, their wives walk with them and the wild animals afterwards, vigorously jostling in a throng, packed very densely. But Noah took out an odd one of each clean species, and raised up an altar and consecrated it reverently, and placed a sacrifice on it of each particular species that was comely and clean: God wishes for no other. When those beasts burned fiercely, and the smoke rose, the smell of the sacrifice reached right to Him who quickens and destroys everything; He speaks in gracious solace very intimate and courteous words to him: [513] 'Now, Noah, I will never again curse all the great company on earth because of anyone's sins, for I see well that it is true that all people's minds are turned to wickedness by the thought of their hearts, and always have been, and will be yet; from their childhood the minds of people are entirely inclined to wickedness. Therefore I shall never, during the existence of this earth, punish so hastily as to destroy everything at once because of mankind's deeds. [521] But increase now and go forth and become many, multiply on this earth, and may honour come to you. Seasons of seed or of harvest shall never fail you, nor heat, nor hard frost, shade nor drought, nor the sweetness of summer, nor the gloomy winter, nor the night, nor the day, nor the new years, but ever continue unceasing: you must rule on earth.' With that He blessed each beast and committed this earth to them. [529] Then there was a wise dispersal, when all the wild animals escaped, each bird that feathers might serve took to flight, each fish that could use fins to the water, each animal that feeds on plants to the field; wild snakes wriggle to their dwelling in the earth, the fox and the polecat turn to the wood, harts to the high heath, hares to gorse-heaths, and lions and leopards to lakeside dens, eagles and hawks to the high rocks, the web-footed birds hasten to the water, and each beast quickly wherever it pleases him best; the four men take control of the earth.

[541] Lo! the high Father inflicted such bitter suffering on the people

that He made because of loathsome deeds; that which He had dearly cherished He punished very severely in destroying the evil that overcame His virtues [i.e. the virtues which He had established]. Therefore take care now, man who desires honour in the pure court of Him who is King of bliss, that you are never discovered in the filth of the flesh, so that any water in the world would fail to wash you. [549] For there is no man under the sun, however seemly in his deeds, who, if he is defiled in sin, will sit down unclean; one speck of a blemish will cause him to miss the sight of the Sovereign who sits so high; so that one shall appear in those bright dwellings, it is necessary to be pure like the shining beryl, which is sound on every side and has no flaw – without blemish or stain, like the pearl. Because it very deeply grieved the Sovereign on His throne that He had ever placed mankind to live on earth, because he had fallen into filth, He fiercely took vengeance, when all the flesh that He had made perished. [561] He regretted that He raised them up and gave them means of life; and likewise it seemed hard to Him that He destroyed them. For when the grievous sorrow touched His heart, He courteously established a covenant with mankind there, in the moderation of His temper and the mildness of His will, that He should never because of any grief smite everything at once, so as to kill all living creatures for any evil that might occur, while the period of the duration of the earth lasts.

[569] That particular judgement never passed His lips on account of any sin. Yet He took vengeance on wicked men afterwards in an awesome manner; for that same sin He fiercely destroyed a rich region, in the anger of His wrath, so that many were afraid; and all was for this same evil, that accursed filth, the poison and the villainy and the vicious impurity that defiles man's soul in his corrupt heart, so that he may not see his Saviour with the sight of his eyes. He hates all evils like hell that stinks; but none troubles Him by night or day like impure obscenity, abuse of oneself: he who is not ashamed for any wickedness, he must be punished.

[581] But perceive, man, in yourself, though you live as a fool, though you bear yourself foolishly, consider sometime whether He who set the power of sight in each bright eye – if He was born blind it is a great wonder; and He who fixed all ears neatly in the face, if He has lost the

power of hearing, it is more than strange: never believe that tale – you will find it untrue. There is no deed so secret that it closes His eyes; there is no man so cautious or so secretive in his conduct that it does not rush swiftly to Him before he has thought it. [591] For He is the searching God, the ground of all deeds, searching out the sexual and emotional longings of every man. And where He finds all fair within a man, with heart honest and sound, he honours that man, sends him a solemn vision: to see His own face; and severely condemns these others, and drives them from His dwelling. But as to the judgement of men for deeds of shame – He has such repugnance of that sin, He is provoked immediately; He cannot bear to hold back, but strikes quickly: and that was once suddenly shown by a disaster.

[601] Once old Abraham is sitting in his country, right in front of his house-door, under a green oak. The light shone brightly from the broad heavens; Abraham stays in the full heat of it: he had moved aside to the shadow under the bright leaves. Then he was aware of three fine Men on the path: if They were handsome and gracious and fair to behold it is easy to believe from the final outcome. [609] As for the man who lay under the leaves, when he had sight of Them he hastens immediately, and the householder goes towards Them as to God and greets Them in unity, and said: ‘Noble Lord, if ever Your servant deserved reward on earth, stay a little with Your man, I humbly beseech; if I dare ask for it, never go from Your poor servant until You have stayed with Your man and rested under the bough, and I shall quickly get you a little water, and swiftly set about having your feet washed. Rest here on this root and I shall go and bring a morsel of bread to comfort Your heart.’ [621] ‘Go forth,’ said the Men, ‘and bring what you say; we will wait for you here by the trunk of this great tree.’ Then he quickly hastened into his house to Sarah, commanded her to be prompt and quick on this occasion: ‘Mix three measures of meal and make cakes; quickly cover them under hot ashes; while I fetch something fattened [i.e. ready to kill], you kindle the fire, promptly to make some broth this very moment.’ He hastened to his cow-shed and brings a calf, that was tender and not tough, ordered its hide to be stripped off, and said to his servant that he should boil

it swiftly; and he prepared it quickly at his command. [633] The man then hastens to be bare-headed, seizes a clean cloth and throws it on the grass, placed on it in a seemly manner those three unleavened cakes, and brings butter in addition and sets it by the bread; he places proper dishes of milk at intervals, then pottage and broth on clean platters. Like a steward he humbly served whatever he had to Them in a worthy manner, with a dignified and courteous demeanour; and God, like a happy guest who was pleased to meet his friend, made merry and praised his feast. Abraham, all hoodless, with arms extended, served food before those Men who wield all power.

[645] Then They said as They sat all three together, when the food was removed and They speak courteously: ‘I shall return here, Abraham,’ They said, ‘once more before your spark of life on earth ceases, and then Sarah shall conceive and bear a son, who shall be Abraham’s heir and after him beget with prosperity and honour the noble people who will hold in heritage what I have granted to men.’ [653] Then the woman behind the door laughed in scorn; and the mad Sarah said softly to herself: ‘Can you believe that you may conceive through sexual pleasure? (And I so long past the age, and my husband also.)’ For certainly, as the scripture says, they were of advanced age, both the man and his wife: such activity had ended for them many a long day since; she remaining barren throughout, that very Sarah, without offspring up to that same time. [661] Then said our Lord where He sat: ‘See! how Sarah laughs, not believing the statement that I uttered to you. Does she think that anything can be difficult for My hands to accomplish? And I still truly affirm the promise that I made; I shall soon come again and give what I promised, and truly send to Sarah a son and heir.’ Then Sarah rushed out and swore on her honour that she had not laughed at the speech They uttered. ‘Enough now: it is not so,’ the Lord then said, ‘for you laughed softly, but let us leave it alone.’ [671] With that They stood up quickly, as if they were about to depart, and immediately turned towards Sodom; for that city was built nearby in a valley, no more than two miles from Mamre, where lived this same man, who goes with our Lord in order to attend Him with conversation and show Him the way.

[677] Then God goes forth; the householder follows Him; Abraham goes with Them, to conduct Them towards the city of Sodom, which had then sinned in the misdeed of this impurity. The Father threatens them, and said thus to the man who followed Him: ‘How should I hide My heart from Abraham the true, so that I did not disclose to him My privy purpose, since he is chosen to be the chief father of children, from whom people will spring so as to fill all the world, and each descendant shall be blessed because of that man? It behoves Me to tell that man the anger of My will, and to disclose all My purpose to Abraham immediately. The disgraceful report of Sodom penetrates My ears, and the guilt of Gomorrah causes Me to grow angry. [691] I shall go down to that people and see Myself if they have done as the report rises aloft. They have learned a practice that pleases me ill, that they have discovered in their flesh, the worst of misdeeds: each male makes his mate a man like himself, and they join together foolishly in the manner of a female. I devised a natural way for them and taught it to them secretly, and esteemed it in My ordinance singularly precious, and set love within it, sharing sweetest of all, and I Myself devised the play of lovers, and made for it a practice most pleasant of all: [702] when two true lovers had joined themselves together, between a male and his mate such joy should come, paradise itself might almost prove no better; provided that they would possess each other in a proper manner; at a quiet secret meeting, undisturbed by sight, the flame of love would blaze so hot between them that all the troubles on earth would not be able to quench it. Now they have changed my decree and scorned nature, and in contempt take for themselves an unclean custom. I intend to smite them severely for that filth, so that men will be warned by them, for ever and ever.’

[713] Then Abraham was afraid and his mood changed, in expectation of the severe hatred that our Lord has promised. All sighing he said: ‘Sir, by Your leave, shall the sinful and the guiltless all suffer the same punishment? Would it ever please my Lord to decree such judgements that the wicked and the worthy must suffer the same retribution, and to weigh on the more wicked side those who never angered You? [720] That was never the custom of You who made us all. Now if fifty good friends

were found in yonder town, in the city of Sodom and also Gomorrah, who never sinned against Your law, but always loved truth, and were righteous and reasonable and ready to serve You, shall they die for the sin that other men committed, and share in their judgement, to have their doom? That was never Your custom – let it not be named – who are a God so gracious and merciful of spirit.’ ‘No, for fifty,’ said the Father, ‘and your courteous speech, if they should be found in that folk free from their filth, I shall forgive all the guilt through My grace alone, and let them at once easily escape altogether unharmed.’ [733] ‘Ah! may You be blessed,’ said the man, ‘so kind and noble, who hold all in Your hand, heaven and earth; but, since I have begun this speech do not take it ill if I who am dust and ashes speak a little more. What if five were lacking from the total of fifty, and the rest were righteous, how does Your will stand?’ ‘If five are wanting from fifty,’ said God, ‘I shall forget all and withhold My hand from harming one man.’ ‘And what if forty were noble and the others guilty: will you directly destroy all and ordain nothing else?’ [743] ‘No, if forty were to lose their right, yet I would delay for a while, and put aside My vengeance, even if it should seem repugnant to Me.’ Then Abraham did obeisance to Him and humbly thanks Him: ‘Now may You be blessed, Saviour, so guileless in Your anger! I am only most evil earth and ash so black, to speak with such a Master as has all power. But I have begun [to speak] with my God, and it seems good to Him; if I, as a fool, go astray, Your magnanimity will suffice. [751] What if thirty worthy [people] were to be punished in yonder towns, what shall I believe of my Lord – would He be merciful to them?’ Then the gracious God gave him answer: ‘Even for thirty in the throng I shall restrain My anger, and immediately hold back from wrath in the delay afforded by My noble qualities, and restrain my wrath because of your noble words.’ ‘What for twenty,’ said the man, ‘would you then destroy them?’ ‘No, if you still desire it, I will grant them grace; if twenty should be true, I will punish them no more, but release all the region from their wanton deeds.’ [761] ‘Now, noble Lord,’ said Abraham, ‘one word more, and I shall endeavour no more to help those men. If ten citizens faithful in Your works were found, will You moderate Your anger and await amendment?’ ‘I agree,’ said the great God, ‘many

thanks' the other; and then the man stopped and went no further. And God goes on His way by those green paths, and he followed Him with the glaze of his eye; and as he looked along where our Lord passed, he still called after Him in an anxious voice: [771] 'Merciful Master – if it would please You to remember Your man [i.e. me] – Lot, who is my beloved brother, lives among that people; he dwells there in Sodom, Your servant so poor, among those cursed men that have greatly grieved You. If You destroy that town, temper Your wrath, as Your mercy may soften it, to spare Your humble servant.' Then he goes on his way, weeping for distress, towards the boundary of Mamre, lamenting for sorrow; and there in anxiety he remains all night in his dwelling, while the Sovereign sent someone to Sodom to investigate.

[781] His message was sent into Sodom at that time, in the same evening, by two angels, going modestly together like handsome young men, as Lot reclined alone at the door of an arbour, in a porch adjoining the gates of that house, which was splendid and rich as was the man himself. As he looked into the street where bold men amused themselves, he saw two fair men walking there together; they were both fine men, with beardless chins, splendid wavy hair like raw silk, with complexion like the briar-rose wherever the bare skin showed. [792] The expression of their clear eyes was very bright; their clothing was pure white and suited them well. Both were very fine and faultless in all their features; no feature was unbecoming in either, for they were angels, and the alert man who sits in the gate understood that; he stood up quickly and ran to meet them, and he bows low to them, Lot, to the ground, and then solemnly says: 'Sirs, I beseech you that you will stop at my house and stay in it. [801] Come to your servant's cottage, I ask here and now; I shall fetch you a tub to wash your feet; I entreat you to stay with me for just one night, and in the pleasant morning you can go on your way.' And they said that they would not come near any house, but quietly there in the street as they found themselves they would remain through the long night and stay outside: the heaven on high was house enough for them. Lot urged them so long with courteous words that they consented to come with him and no longer refused.

[811] The bold man brings them swiftly to his house, which was splendidly adorned, for he had always been wealthy. The men were made welcome as well as the wife was able; his two beloved daughters greeted them reverently; they were gentle maidens, not yet married, and they were lovely and sweet, and very well dressed. Lot then swiftly looks about him and exhorts his men to serve food: ‘But remember that whatever you make must be unleavened, for you must never serve them with leaven or with salt.’ [821] But yet I think the woman turned it to defiance, and said quietly to herself: ‘These disagreeable fellows like no salt in their sauce; yet it would be unreasonable that anyone else should go without, even though both of them are fastidious.’ Then she seasons every one of her broths with salt, against the command of the man who had forbidden it, and also she treated with contempt those who well perceived her attitude. Why was she so mad, the wretch? She angered our Lord. Then they sat at supper, were swiftly served, the guests merry and glad, courteous of speech, very joyful and cordial, until they had washed, both the trestles and the table leant against the wall.

[833] After the men had supped and sat but a while, before ever they went to bed, the town was aroused, everybody who could wield a weapon, the weaker and the stronger, to surround Lot’s house to take the men. In great crowds of people they rush to his gates; the shout rose as though from a terrified watchman; with stout clubs they clatter on the walls of that enclosure, and with a shrill sharp shout they utter these words: [841] ‘If you value your life, Lot, in these lands, send out to us those young men who entered here a while ago, so we can teach them about love, as our desire prompts, as the custom of Sodom is to men who pass through.’ Oh! they uttered and spoke of such abominable filth; oh! they cried out and shouted festering muck, so that the wind and the sky and the earth still stink from the vomit that those venomous words throw up. The householder was startled by that din and shocked by the noise; such sharp shame rushed to him, his heart shrank, for he knew the custom that those wretches spoke of. [852] He was never so deeply astonished by grief in his mind. ‘Alas!’ Lot then said, and he quickly rises, and goes forth from the bench to the great gates. Oh! he feared no harm from

wicked knaves, which would stop him from passing through the gate to face the danger. He went out at the door and pulled it after him, so that a latch held it fast behind him. Then he spoke moderate words to those men, for he hoped to restrain evil men with his courtesy: ‘Oh, my friends so noble, your behaviour is too strange; stop your loud noise and never harm my guests. [863] Shame on you! it is a disgrace to you, you demean yourselves; if you are worthy gentlemen, your antics are evil. But I shall teach you a better practice, according to nature: I have a treasure in my house, my two fair daughters, who are maidens undefiled by any man; in Sodom, though I say it, there are no women more beautiful; they are full-grown, they are mature and ready to be mastered. The pleasure of being brought together with those lovely ones is greater. [871] I shall deliver to you those two who are attractive and beautiful; play with them as you like, and let my guests alone.’ Then the scoundrels so proud raised such a noise that their villains’ speech rushed menacingly into his ears: ‘Do you not know well that you live here an outsider, an immigrant, a knave? We will strike off your head! Who appointed you to be judge to disparage our pastimes, you who came to this city a churl, though you are a rich man?’ Thus they jostled and pressed and crowded round his ears, and would have harrassed him very hard, by force in the throng, but that the young men, so prompt, ran out, flung open the door and got to them, and seized him by the hands and hurried him inside, and fastened the gates firmly with strong bars. [885] The angels blew a tempest among that cursed people, so that they strayed about, as blind as Bayard ever was. They failed to find any trace of Lot’s house, but searched blindly there all night for nothing in the end. Then every man having failed to obtain his pleasure went on his way, and each one hurried to what rest he could get; but those who lived in the town were woken quite awry by the very ugliest calamity ever suffered on earth.

[893] The redness of the first light of day rose in the early morning, when the darkness of midnight could last no longer. Those angels aroused this man very early, and made him get up in alarm, in the name of God; the man jumps up swiftly, very frightened in his heart; they commanded him to seize what he had quickly, ‘with your wife and your servants and

your lovely daughters, for we urge you, Sir Lot, that you save your life. [901] Go quickly from this country before you are destroyed, in haste with all your household, till you find a hill; go quickly on your feet; look in front of your face, but never be so bold as to look behind you, and see that you do not delay a step, but press on fast; never rest till you reach a refuge. For we shall finish and pitilessly destroy this town, swiftly annihilate it with all these men who are so wicked, and we shall end all the land with these men at once; Sodom will very suddenly sink into the ground, and the foundation of Gomorrah shall hurtle into hell, and every part of this region crash into heaps.’ [913] Then Lot said: ‘Lord, what is best to do? If I were to conceal myself as far as I could flee on foot, how should I hide myself from Him who has aroused His wrath in the ferocity of His breath, which burns all things? I do not know where to creep away from my Creator, nor whether his enmity will seek me out before or behind.’ The angel said: ‘Our Father has shown you no enmity, but greatly raised your welfare over those who are destroyed. [921] Now choose yourself a dwelling which may protect you, and He who has sent us here will preserve it for your sake, for you entirely alone are free from this filth, and also Abraham your uncle asked God Himself for it.’ ‘Lord, may he be praised on earth!’ said Lot. ‘There is a city near here that is called Zoar – out here it stands alone on a round hill. I would like, if it is His will, to escape to that city.’ ‘Then go forth,’ said that noble one, ‘and never stop, with those same people you wish to take, who belong to you, and always going on your way, without looking back, for all this land shall be destroyed long before the sun rises.’ [933] The man wakened his wife and his lovely daughters, and two other excellent men that those maidens were intended to marry; and they took it as sport and gave it little attention; though Lot called them earnestly, they lay quite still. The angels hastened the others and urged them on menacingly, and drove all four out of the gates: these were Lot and his dear wife and his lovely daughters; no more reached safety from the five noble cities. These angels took them by hand out at the gates, declaring the danger to them, and commanded them to travel fast: ‘Lest you are caught in the sin of evil men here, see that you obey the command now: go quickly from here!’

And they did not object, but fled quickly. Early, before any light of dawn, they came to a hill.

[947] Great God on high begins in His wrath to rouse very wild storms; He calls the winds and they fiercely flew up and wrestled together, striving loudly from the four quarters of the earth. Clouds clustered at intervals threw up towering clouds, which the frequent thunder-bolt often pierced. The rain poured down, thickly sprinkling fierce sparks of fire and flakes of sulphur, all in stifling smoke smelling very foul, moaned about Sodom on all sides, struck Gomorroh, so that the ground opened, Adma and Zeboin, all four of these cities were completely drenched by the rain, roasted and burned, and the people who dwelt in those cities greatly terrified. [961] For when Hell heard the hounds of heaven, he was wonderfully glad, and opened immediately. He broke open the great barriers of the abyss at once, so that all the region tore asunder in very great fissures, and the cliffs split everywhere all into little shreds, as leaves split away from a book that bursts apart. By the time the smoke from the brimstone had ceased, all those cities and their surroundings sank into hell. Those great crowds of men within did not know what to do when they were aware that no one escaped from the vengeance; such a miserable outcry of yelling rose there, the clouds resounded with it, of which Christ might have pity. [973] The man who was going to Zoar heard that sound, and the girls with him who accompanied him on the way; they were [*lit.* their flesh was] terribly frightened as they continued to flee, going all the time at a quick run, and never daring to turn. Lot and those lily-white ones, his two lovely daughters, went forward [*lit.* followed their face] all the time, looking straight; but the wretched woman, who never obeyed a command, looked behind her back to listen to that calamity. [981] It was vigorous Lot's wife who looked once at the city over her left shoulder, but she waited no longer before she was fixed a rigid stone, a sturdy statue as salt as any sea – and thus she yet stands. Those who were her companions slipped by and did not see her until they [had] arrived in Zoar, and praised our Lord; with eager hands uplifted they devoutly praised Him, who was thus willing to look after and save His servants from such harm. Everything was stifled and ruined and drowned by then; the people of

that little town had run out for fear into that bewildering sea, [and were] quickly destroyed, so that nothing was saved but Zoar, that was set on a hill. [993] The three people dwelt there, Lot and his daughters; for his wife was lost, who remained on the mountain, in a stone statue that tastes of salt, for two misdeeds in which the fool was found unfaithful: one, she served salt before God at the supper, and afterwards she looked behind her, though she was forbidden; for the one she stands a stone, and salt for the other, and all the beasts of the field like to lick her.

[1001] Abraham, who all night had endured much trouble in his heart, and all in anxiety for Lot lay in a state of wakefulness, was up very early the next day; he made his way up where he had left our Lord; he turned his eyes towards Sodom, that had always been the sweetest region on earth, like a colony of paradise, which God established; now it is plunged in a pit as if filled with pitch. Such a red smoke [*lit.* redness of a smoke] arose from the blackness, ashes and cinders flew up in the air there, like a cauldron full of scum that boils on a fire when the bright burning firebrands are kindled under it. [1013] This was a violent retribution that annihilated these places, which has engulfed so fair a folk and sunk the land. Where the five cities were built now is called a sea, which is always turbid and dark, and dead in its nature, livid, bubbling, and black, dismal to approach; that destroyed sin [is] like a stinking pool, so that in smell and in taste it is for ever bitter to experience. [1020] Therefore it is evermore called the dark Dead Sea, for its deeds of death continue there yet; for it is wide and bottomless, and as bitter as gall, and no living thing can survive in that lake, and it destroys every one of the qualities of nature. For lay a lump of lead on it, and it floats on the surface, and place on it a light feather and it sinks to the bottom; and where water can flow to wet any earth, nothing green shall ever grow on it, neither grass nor wood. If any man were pushed into it to be drowned, though he might remain wretchedly in that deep place for a month, he must always live in that lake in perdition evermore, and never suffer death until the last days [i.e. the Last Judgement]. [1033] And since it and also its shores are cursed in nature, the clay that clings around it consists of strong corrosives, such as alum and bitumen, which are both sharp, bitter

sulphur and glass-gall, and many other such; and there foams from that water, in great wax-like curls, the foaming asphalt that spicers sell; and the soil on all the shores by that sea is such that cruelly devours flesh and rots bones. [1041] And there are trees by that lake of traitors, and they bud and bear very lovely blossoms, and the most beautiful fruit that can grow on earth, such as orange and other fruit and pomegranate, as red and as ripe and brightly coloured as any judgement might conceive of any delicacies whatsoever; but when it is bruised or broken, or bitten in two, [there is] no goodness in the world within, but ashes scattering in the wind.

All these are signs and tokens to believe in still, and witness to that wicked conduct, and the retribution that our Father carried out afterwards because of the filth of those people. [1052] Then every person may well perceive that He loves pure conduct; and if He who is our noble Lord loves pure behaviour, and you desire to be known in His court then, to see that Seemly One on [His] throne and His sweet face, I do not know any plainer counsel, but that you should be pure. For Clopignel, in the course of his pure *Romance of the Rose*, where he sets forth a discourse to him who wishes to succeed in being loved by a lady, [says]: ‘Look at her without delay, how she behaves, and what [behaviour] she loves best, and be just so everywhere in body and deeds, and follow the example [*lit.* footsteps] of that mistress you consider noble; and if you behave in this way, even if she were difficult, she will be pleased by that behaviour which is like her own.’ [1065] If, then, you wish to exchange love with God, and loyally love your Lord and become His beloved, then make yourself clean, and model yourself upon Christ, who is always polished as smooth as the pearl itself. For, look, from when He first descended within the faithful maiden, by what a comely contrivance He was enclosed there, when no virginity was overcome, nor violence done, but her body was much cleaner, [since] God was conceived in it. [1073] And again when He was born in Bethlehem the glorious, in what purity they separated; though they were poor, [there] was never a bedroom so joyful as a cow-stall was then, nor a vestry so lovely as a cattle-shed was there, nor any so glad under God as she who should have been groaning. For there the

sickness that is considered the most painful was all well, and there was the fragrance of the rose where decay has ever been, and there was solace and song when sorrow has ever cried; for angels with instruments of organs and pipes, and splendid resounding violins and the lovely fiddle, and all gracious things that might properly gladden a heart, were present about my lady when she was to be delivered. [1085] Then was her gentle Child burnished so clean that both the ox and the ass worshipped Him at once; they knew Him by His cleanness as King of nature, for none before then had ever come so cleanly from such an enclosure. And if He came cleanly thence, most courteous afterwards, so that He who hated with loathing everything that pertained to evil, by the nobility of His nurture He would never touch anything that was base or in which there was filth. [1093] Yet loathsome people came to that Prince, such as many diseased beggars, some leprous, some lame, and the stumbling blind, [those] poisoned, and paralytic, and wasted by inflammations, people with an excess of dry humours, and the dropsical, and finally the dead, all called on that Courteous One and claimed His grace. He healed them with gracious speech from what they ask [i.e. from the disease or disability in question], for whatever He touched immediately turned to health, far cleaner than any skill could contrive. [1101] His touch was so gracious that all filth shunned it, and the searching of both God and Man so good that through the skill of His fingers He never tried to cut or to carve with knife or with blade; therefore He broke bread without blades, for indeed it behaved more perfectly in His fair hands, and fell apart more mysteriously when He wished to part it, than all the blades of Toulouse might endeavour to cut it.

To that extent is He whose court you seek fastidious and pure: how should you come to His country unless you were clean? Now each one of us is diseased and sinful and unclean; then we may say, how should we see that Lord upon [His] throne? [1113] But yes, that Master is merciful. Though you may be a sinful man, and all disfigured with mire, while you live on earth you may shine through confession, though you have served shame, and purify yourself with penance until you become a pearl [i.e. achieve salvation]. Pearl is highly valued where jewellery is

displayed, though it is not considered the most valuable to exchange for money. What reason can be named except for her clean hues, which gain honour above all white stones? [1121] For she that is round in shape shines so bright, without fault or filth if she was perfect [to begin with], and however old she grows in the world through being worn, yet the pearl does not deteriorate while she remains in esteem; and if it happens by chance that she is neglected, so that she becomes dim of colour while she lies in a room, only wash her with reverence in wine as she requires, and by nature she will become brighter than before. So if anyone is defiled by an ignoble deed, so that he is polluted in soul, let him go to confession, and by receiving penance from the priest he can make himself shine much brighter than the beryl or a string of pearls. [1133] But be very careful, if you are washed with the water of confession, and polished as smooth as parchment which has been scraped, [that you] do not defile your soul in sin any more afterwards, for then you displease the Lord with grievous deeds, and provoke Him to anger more seriously than ever, and to hate [you] much more hotly than if you had not washed. For when a soul is reconciled and consecrated to God, He considers it completely His and wishes to keep it; when it again tastes vices He loses it with ill will, as though it were seized wrongfully and stolen by thieves. [1143] Be prepared for retribution then. His wrath is aroused if that which was once His becomes unclean again, though it may be [only] a basin, a bowl or a cup, a dish or a charger, that once served the Lord. He firmly forbids that it should ever be defiled at all, He who is ever righteous feels such repugnance at sin.

And that was made apparent in Babylon in Belshazzar's time, how severe misfortune seized him there, and very quickly, because he profaned the vessels that were formerly used in the temple in the service of the Lord. [1153] If you would grant me an opportunity I should like to tell it, how the fortune of him who would not take care of them was heavier than that of his erring father who seized them by force, and robbed the Jewish religion of all holy objects. Daniel in his discourses explained at one time – as is, moreover, clearly demonstrated in his prophecies – how the nobility of the Jews and glorious Jerusalem was destroyed by force,

and laid low. [1161] For those people were found untrue in their faith, [those] who had promised the supreme God to be faithful to Him for ever; and He consecrated them as His and helped them in their need in many great misfortunes, as it would be marvellous to hear. And they erred from their faith and followed other gods, and wakened His wrath and forced it so high that He aided those faithful to the false religion to destroy those false to the true faith. This was seen in the time when Zedechiah reigned in Judah, which the kings of the Jews ruled. [1171] He sat on Solomon's throne in a solemn manner, but he was slow in loyalty to his gracious Lord: he practised the abominations of idolatry, and despised the religion to which he owed allegiance. Therefore our Father aroused an enemy for him in the world: Nebuchadnezzar harmed him greatly. He made an attack into Palestine with many proud men, and there he destroyed the village homes with warfare; he ravaged all Israel and took the nobles prisoner, and besieged the noblest of Judea in Jerusalem, surrounded all the walls with strong men, [placed] a doughty chieftain at every door, and shut up those within; for the city was so strongly fortified [i.e. against attack] with battlements at the top, and packed with strong men to stop those outside. [1185] Then the siege was placed around the city, skirmishes sharply launched, much injury suffered; at each drawbridge a movable tower of the kind mounted on wheels, which assailed the gates seven times a day; inside the city loyal men fought in towers, and on strong wooden platforms built on the walls; they fought and they defended, and struggled together till two years passed by, yet they never took it. [1193] At long last, food was fast failing the men in the city and many were starving; the biting hunger within hurt them much more sorely than any blow from the company of men which waited outside. Then those crowds in those fine dwellings were without counsel; from the time that food was lacking, they grew thin, and they were enclosed so tightly that they could not stray a foot from that fortress to forage for goods. [1201] Then the king of the country makes a plan with his nobles, to create a stratagem; they crept out on a quiet night before any sound arose, and rush hard through the host before the enemies were aware of it. But before they could elude the watch outside, the alarm

was raised high under the skies; a loud alarm was then sounded on the field; noblemen, aroused from their rest, ran for their clothes, they seize helmets and leap on horses; the clear clarion blare resounded on high. [1211] Then all were rushing fast in a crowd, following the other troop, and soon found them, swiftly overtook them, knocked them from [their] saddles, until every prince had put his opponent to the ground. And there the king was seized by Chaldean princes, and all his nobility overthrown in combat on the plains of Jericho, and were presented as prisoners to the most glorious prince, Nebuchadnezzar, noble on his throne; and he [was] the gladdest man because he had his enemy, and spoke contemptuously to them, and afterwards killed them. [1221] He slew each of the king's sons before his eyes, and cruelly dug out both of his own [i.e. the king's] eyes, and ordered the man to be brought to Babylon the glorious, and put in a dungeon there to suffer his fate.

Now see, this is how the Lord has ordained His retribution: it was not for Nebuchadnezzar or for his nobility of conduct either that the other [i.e. Zedechiah] was deprived of [his] pride with severe punishments, but for his behaviour so wicked towards his kind Lord; for had the Father, who previously preserved him, been his friend, and had he never trespassed against Him in the sin of misbelief, all Chaldea and the countries of India – even include Turkey with them – would have been too lacking in zeal and would have done little harm. [1233] Yet Nebuchadnezzar would never leave this business until he had overturned this town and razed it to the ground. He ordered a noble leader to Jerusalem then – his name was Nebuzaradan – to harrass the Jews; he was master of his [i.e. Nebuchadnezzar's] men and powerful himself, the commander of his [i.e. Nebuchadnezzar's] body of knights in carrying out Nebuchadnezzar's attacks; he quickly broke the defences, and the fortress afterwards, and enters very resolutely, with anger in his heart. [1241] Oh! the victory was poor: the men were away, the nobles gone with the man who ruled the city, and those who remained were so tormented with dire hunger that one woman would have been worth the strongest four. Nevertheless, Nebuzaradan would not hold back, but ordered all to be put to the bare edge of the sword; they slew the fairest of lovely women, bathed children

in blood and spilled their brains; they crushed priests and prelates to death, cut open the bellies of wives and girls, so that their bowels burst out around the ditches, and everyone they could catch was wretchedly killed. [1253] And all who escaped, unconsumed by the sharp sword, were bound and tied on horses quite naked, fetters fastened to their feet under the horses' bellies, and brought wretchedly to Babylon to suffer misery there, to sit in servitude and sorrow, who previously were noble. Now they are changed into churls and burdened with labours, both to pull the cart and milk the cows, who formerly sat in their hall as lords and ladies. [1261] And still Nebuzaradan will never stop until he goes to the temple with all his men; they beat on the barriers, break open the gates, slew at a blow all who ministered there, pulled priests by the hair and struck off their heads, put deacons to death, struck down clerics, and all the maidens of the temple fiercely cut to pieces with the swinging blow of the sword that killed them all. Then they ran to the sacred treasures like wild robbers, and pillaged all the equipment that belonged to the church – [1271] the pillars of pure brass adorned with gold, and the main chandelier carrying the light, which bore aloft the lamp that always shone before the holy of holies where wonders often occurred. They took away that candlestick, and also the crown of glorious costly gold that the altar had upon it, the gridiron and the goblets adorned with silver, the bases of the bright pillars and vessels so fair, precious dishes of gold and fine chargers, the incense dishes and vessels of potent jewels [i.e. jewels with special powers]. [1281] Now Nebuzaradan has seized all these sacred things, and pillaged that precious place and packed those goods; the gold [objects] of the treasury in very great numbers, with all the ornaments of that building, he packed together; he seized contemptuously in a short time all that Solomon had sought to create for many a long year. With all the wisdom that he [i.e. Solomon] had, in order to work righteously, he devised the vessels and the pure vestments; with the skill of his crafts, in order to praise his Lord, he decorated the church and the ornaments together. [1291] Now Nebuzaradan has seized it all together, and afterwards [he] beat down the city and burnt it to ashes. Then with legions of men he rides across country, harries every corner of Israel; with laden

waggons he finds the ruler [i.e. Nebuchadnezzar], delivers to the king the property that he had seized; presented to him the prisoners that they had taken as booty – many men who were honoured while their worldly prosperity lasted, many sons of fine lords, and very wealthy maidens, the proudest of the province, and prophets' children, like Ananias, Azarias, and also Mishael, and worthy Daniel as well, who was a noble prophet, with many a proud mother's son, in great numbers.

[1304] And Nebuchadnezzar makes much joy, now he has conquered the king and won the country, and killed all the boldest and noblest in arms, and laid to the ground the leading men of their faith, and made prisoners the chief of the company of prophets. But his wonder was intense at the joy of the jewellery so noble and splendid, when it was showed to him so bright; Nebuchadnezzar had never before then been informed of such vessels, which were worth so much. [1313] He took possession of them with solemnity, and praised the Lord who was glorious over all, the God of Israel. Such goods, such robes, such lovely vessels, never [before] came out of [any] land to the kingdom of Chaldea. He stowed them away in his treasury in a chosen place, fitly, with reverence, as he was right [to do]; and in that respect he acted like the wise man, as you will understand hereafter, for had he held them cheap, something worse might have happened to him. [1321] That noble man ruled for his lifetime in great royalty, as conqueror of every region he was called caesar, emperor of all the earth and also the sultan, and also his name was inscribed as the god of all earth. And [it was] all through the judgement of Daniel, after he had explained that all good things come from God, and revealed it to him by examples, that he completely acknowledged his [i.e. Daniel's] discourse at last, and often it humbled his spirit, his arrogant deeds.

But all come to die with sorrow in the end: however great a man is, he falls to the ground. [1331] And so Nebuchadnezzar, as he needs must be, in spite of all his great imperial rule, is buried in the earth. But then the bold Belshazzar, who was his eldest child, was installed in his place, and established the kingdom in the city of Babylon, [a kingdom] he believed the greatest, having no equal in heaven or on earth; for he

began in all the glory that the man, Nebuchadnezzar, who was his noble father, left him. So bold a king never appeared in Chaldea before then, but he [i.e. Belshazzar] did not honour Him who dwells in heaven. [1341] But false illusions of fiends, made by hand with tools from hard wood, and raised aloft, and made of stumps and stones, when they are gilded with gold and adorned with silver, he calls mighty gods; and there he kneels and calls out and appeals for help. If they advise him correctly he promises them reward, and if they refuse him his favour, angering his heart, he seizes a great club and knocks them to pieces. Thus he rules his empire in pride and ostentation, in lust and in lechery and loathsome deeds; and [he] had a wife to enjoy, a noble queen, and many mistresses, who were nevertheless called ladies. [1353] The mind of that man was entirely [fixed] on perverse things, on the beauty of his concubines and exquisite clothes, on trying out new foods and foolish fashions, until it pleased the Lord of the heavens to end it. Then this bold Belshazzar resolves on a certain occasion to give a display of his pride; it is not enough for the foolish person to practise every evil thing unless all the world knows his wicked deeds. [1361] Belshazzar caused his edict to be proclaimed throughout Babylon, and his summons spread throughout the land of Chaldea, that all the nobles on earth should gather together and assemble on a set day at the sultan's feast. The man intended to make such a banquet that the king of every land should come to it, every ruler with his retinue, and other noble lords, should come to his court and acknowledge him as lord, and offer him reverence, and listen to his revelry, to look on his mistresses, and call them ladies. [1371] To praise him in his royal state rich men and many a bold baron came to Babylon the noble. So many men went towards Babylon – kings, great emperors, made their way to the court, many noble lords who brought ladies – that to mention the number would be very difficult. For the city was so large and also so strong, situated in the loveliest place on earth [*litt* under the stars], proudly on a smooth plain, fairest place of all, surrounded on every side by seven great rivers, with a wonderfully made wall arrayed very high, with elegant battlements above, carved most skilfully, pinnacled towers at intervals of twenty spear lengths, and [others] more closely crowded

around the outside, with wooden platforms placed at right angles. [1385] The estate which was contained within the precinct was long and very broad and square on all sides, and every side measured seven miles on the ground, and the sultan's residence [was] set in the middle. That was a superb palace, surpassing all others both in construction and in marvels, and walled all around; [there were] tall houses within, the hall proportionate to it, built with so broad a space between the columns that horses might run there.

[1393] When the appointed time of the feast was reached, nobles went there and met on the dais, and Belshazzar prepared to sit at the table, ascended the stone steps [*lit.* the stones arranged as steps] of his massive throne. Then the hall floor was completely covered with knights, and barons were ready everywhere at the side-tables, for no one was placed upon the dais but the noble one [i.e. Belshazzar] himself, and his fair concubines in bright clothes. [1401] When all the people were seated there then the service begins; [there was a] loud blare of trumpets, with broad banners on them, shining with gold, clamour in the hall; everywhere their blasts resound from the walls; men bearing the roast meats upon broad dishes shining like silver, and served from them; [they had] raised canopies over them, carved on top, cut out of paper and tipped with gold, fierce baboons above, beasts underneath, birds fluttering here and there in foliage, and richly enamelled all over in azure and indigo; and all the men carried it in on horseback. [1413] And all the time the sound of kettle-drums, notes of pipes, timbrels and tabours, sounded constantly, cymbals and fanfares answer the noise, and the beating of drumsticks clattered so rapidly. Thus [people] all around the hall were served many times, with pleasure in the various courses, before the lord himself, where the man and all his paramours were sitting at the table; they brought wine to him so fast it warmed his heart and rose as a vapour into his brain and impaired his mind, and his reason grew feeble, and he almost goes mad; for he looks round about, he beholds his wenches, and his fine company of barons around the walls. [1425] Then a folly struck deep into his heart, and he conceived by himself an evil plan; the lord loudly calls for his marshal, and commands him to open the

coffers quickly, and fetch out the vessels that his father, Nebuchadnezzar, noble in his strength, brought [back], [which he] won with his knights and seized from the church in Jerusalem, in Judea, in a reverent manner: [1433] ‘Bring them now to my table, fill them with drink, let these ladies drink from them – I love them in [my] heart; I shall graciously show, and they will know at once, that there is no liberality in any man like the courteous manners of Belshazzar.’

Then this statement was immediately related to the treasurer, and with keys he opens many chests; many a dazzling load was brought into the hall, and many sideboards were covered with white cloths. [1441] The treasures from Jerusalem with dazzling gems were becomingly set out at the side of the hall; the noble altar of brass was brought in, with the splendid cincture of gold arrayed upon it. That which had before been blessed by the hands of bishops and carefully anointed with the blood of beasts, in the solemn sacrifice which had good aroma before the Lord of heaven in His praise, is now placed, to serve Satan the black, before the bold Belshazzar with arrogance and with pride; raised upon this altar were noble vessels that had been cleverly fashioned with such rare skill. [1453] Solomon devoted himself for seven years and a period more, with all the learning that the sovereign Lord sent him, to plan and devise to have them made perfectly. For there were brilliant vessels of lovely burnished gold, enamelled with lapis lazuli, and water pitchers to match, fair covered cups, fashioned like castles, fortified under the battlement with skilfully made bantels [i.e. projecting horizontal coursings], and carved out in figures of wonderful shapes. [1461] The tops of the covers which rose from the cups were elegantly formed into long turrets, pinnacles plainly set there jutted out at intervals, and all embossed above with branches and leaves, magpies and parrots fashioned within, as though they were proudly pecking at pomegranates; for all the blooms on the boughs were shining pearls, and all the fruit in those shapes [were made] of flaming gems, and sapphires, and cornelians, and lovely topazes, alamandines, and emeralds, and amethyst gems, chalcedonies, and chrysolites, and lovely rubies, peridots, and pinkardines, and pearls at intervals throughout; [1473] all were thus ornamented from side to side

with patterns of trailing foliage and trefoils, all around the rims of each beaker and bowl; the goblets of gold engraved round about, and incense-burners adorned with flowers and butterflies of gold; all were placed alike on that altar. The candlestick was at once brought there by a device, arrayed on the pillars, so that many praised it, upon its bases of brass which supported the structure, the boughs above it bright, intertwined with gold, spreading branches on them, and birds sat there, of many skilfully made species, of many kinds of hue, as though with their wings they were fluttering their feathers on the wind. [1485] Among the leaves of the trees lamps were set, and other lovely lights that shone beautifully, such as many candles of wax, embossed on the outside with many a noble beast all of burnished gold. It [i.e. the candlestick] was not accustomed to waste candles in that dwelling, but to stand faithfully in the temple of truth before the holy of holies, where the true Lord expounded His words spiritually to specially chosen prophets.

[1493] You may well believe that the Lord that rules the sky was greatly displeased by that revelry in that strange situation, that His treasures so noble, which before had proved precious in His presence, were defiled by louts. Some had been anointed solemnly in His sacrifice, at the command of Himself who sits so high; now a boaster on a bench tipples from them until he is as drunk as the devil, and is demented where he sits. [1501] The Creator of this world is so disgusted at this that at the height of their sport He settles on a purpose; but before He would harm them in the haste of His wrath, He sent them a warning which seemed a marvel to them. Now all these utensils have been fetched to serve gluttons, set in a fine place, and glittering brightly. Belshazzar on a sudden impulse: ‘Serve us from them! Bring wine in this house! Wassay!’ he cries. Swift servants quickly hurry there, seize cups in their hands to serve kings; others readily pour [wine] into bright bowls, and each man exerts himself on behalf of his master alone. [1513] Truly there was ringing of rich metals when men in that magnificent castle ran to take it [i.e. the wine]; the clattering of lids which those ladies threw [aside] rang out as merrily as music from a psaltery. Then the fool on the dais drank as hard as he could; and then boldly are served chieftains and princes, concubines and

knights; in response to their jollity, as each one had [wine] poured for him he drained the cup. [1521] So these lords sipped these sweet liquors for a long time, and gloried in their false gods, and entreat their grace, though they were [made] of stumps and stones, dumb for ever – no sound ever stole forth from them, their tongues were so fastened. The wretches still call on all the good golden gods, Baalpeor and Belial, and Beelzebub also, praised them as highly as if heaven were theirs, but Him who gives all good things, that God they forgot. Therefore a marvel happened, that many people saw; the king perceived it first and all the court afterwards: [1531] in the royal palace, upon the bare wall, opposite the candlestick, where it shone most clearly, there appeared a hand, with a horrible great stylus in its fingers, and writes sternly; no other shape but a fist, lacking the wrist, cut on the plaster, formed letters. When bold Belshazzar looked at that hand, such a stupefying fear rushed to his heart that his face grew all pale and his composure failed; [1540] the powerful impact of the blow afflicted his joints, his knees knock together and his thighs bend, and with the striking of his palms he treats his cheeks with scorn, and cries out like a frightened ox that roars for dread, all the time watching the hand until it had engraved everything and scratched strange words on the rough wall. When it had scraped the inscription with a rough pen, as a coulter cuts the furrows in clay, then truly it vanished and disappeared from sight; only the letters remained prominent on the plaster.

[1550] As soon as the king was able to speak again for his distress, he ordered his scholars [*lit.* men who were book-learned] to come, to examine the writing [to see] what it meant, and to tell him clearly – ‘for the fingers so grim utterly terrify me [*lit.* frighten my flesh].’ Scholars hasten thereupon to discover the significance, but there was never one so wise that he could interpret one word, or what people’s learning or language either, [or] what information or statement those characters signified. Then the bold Belshazzar became almost mad, and ordered the city [i.e. the citizens] to seek men everywhere who were wise in witchcraft, and other wizards who dealt with magic and interpret letters. [1562] ‘Summon them all to my court, those Chaldean scholars, disclose to them all this marvel that has happened here, and call out with a loud

proclamation: “He who instructs the king, in expounding the language that is expressed in these letters, and resolves the subject-matter [*lit.* makes the subject-matter be resolved] within my mind, so that I may clearly understand what the writing means, he shall be dressed very splendidly in robes of purple, and a collar of bright gold fastened around his throat; [1570] he shall be the primate and prince of pure learning, and he shall be the third among my noblest lords, and the wealthiest of my kingdom to ride with me, except for only two, then he the third.” This announcement was proclaimed, and there came out of Chaldea many scholars who were acknowledged to be the wisest, like the learned sages who knew sorcery, witches and wizards came to that hall, diviners of phantoms who could interpret dreams, sorcerers who called up spirits and many such scholars; and all who looked at that inscription were as ignorant as though they had looked at the leather of my left boot. [1582] Then the king cries out and tears his clothes. Oh! he cursed his scholars and called them peasants; he vowed very often that he would hang the rogues: the man was so distracted that he very nearly went mad. She who was the chief queen heard him scolding from her bedroom. When she was informed by servants what the cause was – such a change of fortune in the main hall – the lady, to relieve the harm that the lord was suffering, moves down the stairs and goes to the king. [1591] She kneels on the cold floor and speaks words of reverence to him with wise speech. ‘Great king,’ said the queen, ‘emperor of the earth, may your life last for ever in length of days! Why have you rent your robe for lack of advice in this matter, though those men are ignorant to read letters, when you have a man in your dominion, as I have often heard, who has the spiritual insight of God who rules all truths? His soul is full of learning, to explain words, to reveal every hidden thing relating to strange happenings. [1601] It is he who has very often raised your father out of many a burning rage with his holy speech. When Nubuchadnezzar was troubled in times of torment, he expounded the essential truth in his dreams; with his advice he restored him from evil fortunes; everything that he asked him, in time he explained completely, through the aid of the spirit, which was present within him, of the most gracious gods who avail everywhere. Because of

his deep learning in divinity and his precious sayings, your bold father commanded his name to be Belshazzar, who is now called Daniel – he of secret arts, who was taken into captivity in the country of the Jews; [1613] Nebuzaradan captured him, and he is now here, a prophet from that province and the best in the world. Send into the city to seek him quickly, and persuade him by [promise of] honour to bring you help; and though the matter that is written over there is obscure, he will interpret it as clearly as it stands on the clay wall.’

That good counsel from the queen was accepted at once; the man was brought before Belshazzar in a while. [1621] When he came before the king and courteously greeted him, Belshazar embraced him, and said: ‘My dear sir, men tell me that you were a true prophet of that province that my father plundered, and that you have holy knowledge in your heart, your soul full of wisdom, to reveal truths; [that] the spirit of God who rules all things is made known to you, and you uncover every secret thing that the King of heaven purposes. And here a marvel has occurred, and I would gladly understand the meaning of the writing that sticks to the wall, for all the Chaldean scholars have failed disgracefully. [1632] If you discover it with wisdom, I will pay you your reward: for if you interpret it correctly and make sense of it, first tell me the words of the letters joined together, and then afterwards tell me the substance of the message, I shall keep the promise that I have made to you, array you in purple cloth, a robe finest of all, and the necklace of bright gold around your neck, and [make] you the third most favoured [man] who follows me: you shall be lord of the king’s council – I offer you no less.’

[1641] Daniel then boldly uttered these words: ‘Great king of this realm, may our Lord guide you! It is certainly true the Sovereign of heaven always aided your father and took care of him on earth, caused him to be the greatest of all rulers, and to control all the world at his wish as it pleased him. Whoever he wished to do good to, good came to him, and whoever’s death he desired, he put to death immediately; whoever it pleased him raise, he was soon on high, and whoever it pleased him to lay low was immediately humbled. [1651] ‘Thus the renown of Nebuchadnezzar was made famous, his kingdom firmly established by the

mighty Lord, because he had a belief in his heart concerning the Highest, that all power came directly from that Prince. And while that counsel was held fast in his heart there was no man on earth as powerful as himself; until it happened one day pride touched him because of his dominion so wide and his prosperous life; he had so huge an opinion of his own deeds that he entirely forgets the power of the supreme Prince. [1661] Then he does not hold back from blasphemy, in such a way as to disparage the Lord; with his words he made his might equal to God's: "I am god of the earth, to rule as it pleases me, like Him who is high in heaven, who rules His angels. If He has formed the earth and the people on it, I have built Babylon, richest city of all, established every stone there through the strength of my arms; no power but mine could ever make another such [city]." This very utterance had not gone from his mouth before the Lord's speech sounded in his ears: [1671] "Now Nebuchadnezzar has said enough; now all your sovereignty is ended at once, and you must remain on the moor, remote from the sons of men, and walk in the wilderness and dwell with the wild animals, like a beast graze on the field, [eating] bracken and grass, to live with fierce wolves and with wild asses." At the height of his pride he departed there from the throne of his high position; he leaves his pleasure, and is wretchedly cast out into an unknown region, far into a distant woodland where people never came. [1681] His mind became unsound; he thought nothing else than that he was a beast, a bull or an ox. He goes outside on all fours, grass was his food, and [he] ate hay like a horse when plants were dead [i.e. in winter]; thus he who was a great king considers himself a cow, until seven summers had passed [*lit.* seven periods had passed, summers I believe]. By that time many thick feathers crowded around his face, that were all arrayed and adorned in the dew of heaven; hair, tangled and matted, flowed all around him, extending from his shoulders to his groin, and entwining twenty-fold it reached to his toes, where many [hairs] clung as though plaster stuck it together. [1693] His beard spread all over his breast to the bare earth, his brows bristly as briars about his broad cheeks; his eyes were hollow and under shaggy hairs, and all was as grey as the kite, with ugly claws that were as hooked and sharp as the kite's talons; he was eagle-coloured

and covered all over [with hair], until he well understood who created all powers and could destroy and restore each kingdom when it pleased Him. [1701] Then He restored his reason to him who had suffered sorrow, so that he recovered his senses and knew himself; then he praised that Lord and believed it was truly none other than He who controlled everything. Then he was soon sent back, his throne restored; his barons came to him, glad of his return, his head was fittingly covered with his own headdress, and so his high estate was promptly set up and restored.

‘But you, Belshazzar, his son and his bold heir, saw these signs with your own eyes and set little store them, [1711] but have always raised your heart against the supreme Lord, have hurled boasting at Him with arrogance and with blasphemy, and now with unclean vanity have defiled his vessels, that from the beginning were raised in His house to honour Him; you have brought them before the barons and poured into them choice wine for your concubines in cursed times; before your table you have brought drink in the blessed vessels that were first blessed with joy by the hands of bishops, praising in them false gods that never had life, made of stumps and stones that could never stir. [1721] And because of that defiling filth, the Father of heaven has sent these strange sights into this hall, the hand with the fingers that terrified your heart, that scratched the wall in outlandish words with the rough pen. Without more ado, these are the words here written, with each character, as I find, as it pleases our Father: *Mene, Tekel, Peres*: written in three words, that rebuke you for your depravity in three ways. Now I intend to expound these words to you quickly: [1730] *Mene* is as much as to say “Mighty God has reckoned your kingdom by an exact number, and in fact has completed it to its latter end.” To teach you about *Tekel*, that term signifies thus: “Your noble reign is chosen to hang in the scales, and has been found lacking in deeds of faith.” And *Peres* follows because of those misdeeds, to tell [*lit.* seek] the truth; in *Peres* truly I find these stern words: “Your sovereignty is divided, you will be dispossessed, your realm is taken away from you, and given to the Persians; the Medes shall be masters here, and you driven from honour.”

[1741] The king at once commanded that that wise man should be

clothed in garments of fine cloth, as the agreement required; immediately then Daniel was dressed in sumptuous purple, and a collar of bright gold placed around his neck. Then a decree was promulgated by the ruler himself: noble Belshazzar commanded that all the people of Chaldea who belonged to the king should bow to him, as [one] acknowledged as third nearest to the prince, highest of all save two, to follow Belshazzar in city and country. [1750] This was immediately proclaimed and acknowledged in the court, and all the people who served him were glad of it. But however Daniel was honoured [*lit.* adorned], that day passed; night approached immediately with many troubles, for another day never dawned, after that same night, before that very judgement that Daniel had expounded was executed. The pleasure of the festivity, of that splendid feast in that hall, lasted until the sun went down; then the colour of the bright sky faded, the fine air grows dark, and the mist drives along the horizon [*lit.* through the edge of the sky] across the low meadows. [1762] Each man hurries quickly to his home, [they] sat at their supper and sang afterwards; then each company goes on its way late at night. Belshazzar was brought to his bed with joy; let him obtain rest as it pleases him; he never rose again. For his enemies, who had long sought that man in order to destroy his lands, are now, at this very time, suddenly assembled in the field in great companies. No one who lived in that city knew about them. [1771] It was the noble Darius, the leader of the Medes, the proud prince of Persia, and Porus of India, with many a very great legion, with men at arms, who has now spied an opportunity to plunder Chaldea [*lit.* Chaldeans]. They thronged thither in the darkness in dense companies, crossed safely over the clear waters and scaled the walls, raised long ladders and went aloft, stealthily took the town by surprise before any cry arose. Within an hour of nightfall they had [made] an entry; still they disturbed no one. They went further, and quietly approached the royal palace; then they ran in with a rush in great companies; [1783] blasts from bright brass trumpets burst out so loud, an alarmed clamour in the sky, which daunted many. People were killed in their sleep before they could escape; every house was ransacked within a short space of time. Belshazzar was beaten to death in his bed, so that his blood and his brains mingled on the bed-clothes; the

king was seized by the heels in his bed-curtain, pulled out by the feet and shamefully abused. [1791] He who was so bold that day and drank from the vessels is now as precious as a dog that lies in a ditch. For the lord of the Medes rises in the morning, noble Darius [who was] set that day on the throne, seizes the city entirely undamaged, and is reconciled with all the barons thereabout, who submitted to him. And thus that land was lost because of the lord's sin, and the impurity of the man who had polluted the furnishings of God's house that were made for a holy purpose. [1800] He was cursed for his uncleanness, and taken in it, put down from his high office for his horrible deeds, and thrust out from this world's honour for ever, and still deprived of pleasures above, I believe: it will be a long time before he looks on our dear Lord.

Thus in three ways I have thoroughly shown you that uncleanness cleaves asunder the noble heart of that gracious Lord who dwells in heaven, provokes Him to be angry, arouses His vengeance; and purity is His comfort, and He loves decency, and those that are seemly and pure shall see His face. [1811] May He send us such grace that we may go brightly in our apparel, so that we may serve in His sight, where joy never ceases. Amen.

Patience

Patience is a virtue, though it may often displease. When sorrowful hearts are hurt by scorn or something else, long-suffering can assuage them and ease the pain, for she [i.e. patience] kills everything bad and extinguishes malice. For if anyone could endure sorrow, happiness would follow; and anyone who, through resentment, cannot endure suffers the more intensely. So it is better [for me] to put up with the blow from time to time, though this may be distasteful to me, than to give vent continually to my resentment. I heard on a holy day, at a solemn mass, how Matthew told that his Master taught His followers. **[11]** He decreed them eight beatitudes, and for each one a reward, severally, according to its merit, in a diverse manner: they are blessed who have poverty at heart, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven to keep for ever; they who practise meekness are also blessed, for they shall possess this world and have all their wishes; they are blessed also who weep for their sin, for they shall obtain comfort in many countries; they are blessed also who hunger after justice, for they shall abundantly be nourished full of all goodness; **[21]** they are blessed also who have pity at heart, for their reward shall be mercy in all ways; they are blessed also who are pure in heart, for they shall see with their eyes their Saviour on [His] throne; they are blessed also who remain quiet, for they shall properly be called the gracious God's sons; they are blessed also who can control their hearts, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, as I said before. These are all the eight beatitudes that were promised to us, if we would love these ladies in imitation of [their] virtues: **[31]** Dame Poverty, Dame Pity, Dame Penance the third, Dame Meekness, Dame Mercy, and fair Cleanness, and then Dame Peace, and Patience put in afterwards. He who had one would be blessed; all would be better. But since I am reduced to a condition that is called poverty, I shall equip myself with patience and amuse myself with both, for in the passage [i.e. the Beatitudes] where these two are discussed, they are presented in one

formula [as] the first and the last, and by pursuit of their wisdom attain one [i.e. the same] reward. [40] And also, in my opinion, they are of the same nature: for where poverty presents herself, she will not be put out, but remains wherever she likes, [whether you are] pleased or annoyed; and where poverty oppresses, though one may think it torment, he must needs suffer a great deal, in spite of anything he might say; thus poverty and patience are, of necessity, playmates. Since I am beset by them together, I am obliged to endure [them]; then it is easier for me to like it and praise their manners, than resist and be angry and have the worst [of it]. If it is ordained for me to receive an inevitable fate, what good does indignation, or making resistance, do me? [51] Or if it pleases my liege lord on earth to command me either to ride or to run to Rome on his business, what good would complaining do me? – it would only invite more trouble. It would be a great thing if he did not compel me, despite my objections, and then I would have to endure compulsion and vexation as my reward, who, if I had complied with his command, would have had his goodwill for my recompense. Did not Jonah once [play] such a trick in Judea? In his attempt to achieve security, he brings misfortune upon himself. If you will linger a little moment and attend to me a while, I shall instruct you by means of it as the Bible tells.

[61] It happened at one time within the borders of Judea, [that] Jonah was appointed prophet to the Gentiles there; God's message, that made him unhappy, came to him, with a harsh sound whispered in his ear: 'Rise quickly,' He says, 'and go on your way; take the way to Nineveh without further words, and in that city spread all around My sayings, which in that place, at the time, I put in your heart. For those who dwell in that city are indeed so wicked and their sin is so great, I cannot delay, but will revenge Myself on their evil and malice immediately; now go there swiftly and proclaim this message for Me.' [73] When that voice, which stunned his spirit, had finished, he became very angry in his mind, and he thought rebelliously: 'If I obey His command and bring them this message, and I am taken in Nineveh, my troubles begin: He tells me those traitors are consummate villains; [if] I come with those tidings, they [will] seize me immediately, confine me in a prison, put me in the stocks, torture

me in a foot-shackle, pluck out my eyes. [81] This is a marvellous message for a man to preach among so many enemies and cursed fiends, unless my gracious God should wish such suffering to befall me, that I should be killed in recompense for some offence. Come what may,' said the prophet, 'I shall approach no nearer to it. I will go some other way that He does not watch over; I shall go to Tarshish and stay there a while, and when I am lost He will probably let me alone.' Then he rises quickly and immediately departs, Jonah, towards port Joppa, all the time grumbling angrily that he would not endure any of those torments for anything, even if the Father who made him was indifferent to his safety. [93] 'Our Lord sits,' he says, 'on a throne so high in His shining glory, and frowns very little even though I should be taken in Nineveh and stripped naked, pitifully torn apart on a cross by many villains.' Thus he travels to that port to seek his passage, finds a fine ship ready for the journey, settles with the seamen, pays their fee to take him to Tarshish as soon as they could. [101] Then he stepped on board that ship [*lit.* on those boards] and they prepare their tackle, hoist the mainsail, fasten ropes; quickly they weigh their anchors at the windlass, smartly fasten the spare bow-line to the bowsprit, haul at the guy-ropes; the big canvas falls; they put in [their oars] on the larboard side and gain the luff [i.e. the advantage of the wind]. The favourable wind behind them finds the swelling sail; it swiftly swings this fine ship out of the harbour.

[109] There was never so joyful a Jew as then was Jonah, who had so boldly escaped the power of the Lord; he certainly supposed that the Being who established all the world had no power to harm any man on that sea. Lo, the witless wretch! Because he was not willing to suffer he has now put himself in a situation of much greater peril. It was a foolish hope that revolved in his mind, that, if he had left Samaria, God looked no farther. Yes, He looked far and wide: of that he [i.e. Jonah] should have been sure; the speech which the king made often declared that to him – noble David on [his] throne, who uttered this speech in a psalm that he set within the Psalter: [121] 'O fools among people, perceive now and then and understand sometimes, though you are advanced in folly: do you suppose that He who created all ears does not hear? It cannot

be that He who made every eye is blind.’ But he who behaves foolishly because of his age fears no blow, for he was far [out] on the sea hastening to Tarshish. But I believe he was overtaken very quickly, so that he shot shamefully short of his mark. For the Ruler of wisdom who knows all things, who always wakes and watches, has stratagems at His command. [131] He summoned that same power He made with His hands; they awakened so much the more angrily because He called angrily: ‘Eurus and Aquilon that sit in the east, both blow at my command upon the dark waters.’ Then there was no interval between His speech and their action, so eager were they both to carry out His command. Immediately the noise begins [to come] out of the north-east, when both winds blew upon the dark waters. Rough storm-clouds rose there with redness underneath; the sea moaned very grievously, amazing to hear; [141] the winds wrestle together so on the dark water that the raging waves rolled so high and plunged back to the abyss, that terrified fishes did not dare to remain anywhere at the bottom because of the turbulence. When the wind and the sea and the ship met, it was a joyless craft that Jonah was in, for it reeled around upon the rough waves. The strong wind struck it abaft so that all their gear broke, then the helm and the rudder tumbled in a heap; first many ropes broke and afterwards the mast; [151] the sail dropped on the sea; then the ship was obliged to drink from the cold water; and then a cry goes up. Yet they cut the ropes and threw everything overboard; many a fellow ran forward there to bale out and throw [overboard]; anxious to save themselves, they scooped out the life-threatening water – for however wretched a man’s way of life may be, life itself is still sweet. There was a hurry to throw cargo overboard – their bags and their feather-beds and their bright clothes, their chests and their coffers, all their casks – and all to lighten that vessel, in case calm should fall. But the noise of the winds was always equally loud, and ever fiercer the water and more furious the currents.

[163] Then those [men] exhausted with toil perceived [there was] no help, but each called on his god that helped him best: some made solemn vows to Vernagu there, some to chaste Diana and mighty Neptune, to Mahomet and Margot, the moon and the sun, and each man according

to his devotion and where he had committed his heart. Then the wisest spoke, very nearly in despair: ‘I believe there is some traitor here, some lawless wretch, who has offended his god and goes here among us. [172] Lo, everybody sinks for his sin and perishes for his offence. I recommend that we deal out lots to every man and whoever the losing one falls to, put him overboard; and what can a man believe but that, when the guilty one is gone, He who rules the storm-cloud will have pity on the others?’ This was agreed, and they were assembled, routed out of every corner to receive what falls to their lots. A steersman quickly ran below deck, in order to seek more men and bring them to the casting of lots. [181] But there was no man that he could not find, except Jonah the Jew, who lay asleep in secret. He had fled for fear of the sea’s roarings into the bottom of the ship, and lay on a board, huddled by the rudder-band, for [fear of] heaven’s vengeance; [he had] slipped into a heavy sleep, and slobbers and snores. The man kicked him with his foot and bade him jump up: may Ragnel in his chains rouse him from his dreams! Then he seized him by the clasped garment, and brought him up by the breast [of his garment] and set him on deck, [and] asked him very roughly what reason he had to sleep so soundly in such dire straits [*lit.* strokes of sorrow].

[193] Soon they have prepared their lots and dealt them out individually, and each time the lot finally fell to Jonah. Then they cried out to him quickly and asked very loudly: ‘What the devil have you done, foolish wretch? Why are you trying, sinful villain, to destroy us all on the sea with your wicked vices? Have you, man, no master or god to call on, that you drift off to sleep in this way when you are going to be killed? [201] What land have you come from, what are you looking for here, where in the world do you want [to go], and what is your business? Look, your judgement is passed on you, for your evil deeds. Give praise to your god before you go hence.’ ‘I am a Hebrew,’ he said, ‘born in Israel; I indeed worship the Being who created all things by a single word, all the world with the sky, the wind and the stars, and all that lives in it. All this misfortune is caused on account of me at this time, for I have offended my God and am found guilty; [211] therefore bear me to the side and plunge me overboard; until then you will get no good fortune, I truly believe.’ He

showed them by signs, so that they understood that he had fled from the face of the gracious Lord; then such fear fell on them and terrified them within that they hasten to row, and let the man [i.e. Jonah] alone. Men strove in haste with long oars, since their sail had slipped away, to row at the sides, to heave and pull as strongly as possible to help themselves. But all this activity was in vain: that would not happen. [221] Their oars broke in the turbulence of the dark water. Then they had nothing in their hands that could help them; then there was no comfort to find, nor any other counsel, but to condemn Jonah to his doom immediately. First they pray to the Prince that prophets serve, that He would give them the grace not to offend Him at all, by steeping their hands in innocent blood, even if the man that they put to death here were His. Quickly they took him then by top and toe; into that fearsome sea they immediately pitch him. [231] No sooner was he thrown out than the tempest ceased: thereupon the sea became calm as soon as it might. Then, though the tackle of those who tottered on the waves was torn, strong and compelling currents constrained them for a while, drove them relentlessly along at the mercy of [*lit.* to serve] the deep, until a gentler one brought them very swiftly to the shore. When they reached the land, praise was lifted aloft to our merciful God, in the manner of Moses, with sacrifice raised up, and solemn vows, and [they] acknowledged Him alone to be God, and truly no other. [241] Though they are cheerful and joyous, Jonah is still afraid; though he did not want to suffer any pain, his well-being is in peril; for what became of that man after he plunged into the water, it would be a marvel to believe, if it were not for the Bible.

Now Jonah the Jew is condemned to drown; men quickly pushed him from that battered ship. A wild wallowing whale, that was driven from the abyss as Providence then ordained, floated beside that ship, and was aware of that man who was going into the water, and swiftly swung himself around to swoop, and opened its gullet; [251] with the people still holding his feet, the fish quickly seizes him; without being touched by any tooth, he tumbled into its throat. Then he [i.e. the whale] swings and sweeps to the bottom of the sea, beside many rough rocks and winnowing sands, with the man in his belly dazed with fear – as it was little wonder,

if he suffered woe, for had not the supreme King of heaven, through His power, guarded this wretched man in the devil's guts, what man might believe, by any natural law, that any living person could remain so long inside him? [261] But he [i.e. Jonah] was succoured by that Lord who sits so high, though he was without hope of well-being in the belly of that fish, and also driven through the deep, and [though he] rolls around in the dark. Lord, his comfort was cold and his distress great, for he knew every misfortune and trouble that befell him: how [in going] from the ship into the seething water [he] was seized by a creature, and thrown in at its throat without more ado, like a speck of dust in at a cathedral door, so large were its jaws. He glides in by the gills through slime and filth, reeling in by a gut, that seemed like a road to him, all the time whirling about head over heels, till he stopped in a compartment as broad as a hall; [273] and there he finds [*lit.* makes fast] his feet and gropes about, and stood up in its stomach, which stank like the devil. There in grease and in filth that smelled like hell, there was built the bower of the man who is willing to suffer no harm. And then he creeps about and tries to find where was the best shelter, in every corner of its stomach, but nowhere does he find either rest or safety, only muck and mire, in whichever gut he goes [into], but God is ever sweet; and there he stayed at last, and called out to the Lord: [282] 'Now, Prince, take pity on Your prophet. Though I am foolish and fickle and false of heart, forgo Your vengeance now, through the power of pity; though I am guilty of deceit, as the scum of prophets, You are God, and all good things are truly Your own. Have now mercy on Your man and his misdeeds, and readily show Yourself a Lord in land and in water.'

With that he came upon a nook and remained in it, where no defilement of filth was closely about him; [291] there he stayed as sound, except for darkness alone, as in the hold of the ship where he had slept before. So in a bowel of that creature he remains alive, three days and three nights, continually bearing God in mind – His might and His mercy, and then His moderation. Now he acknowledges Him in sorrow who could not in good fortune. And this whale always rolls through deep wild places, through many a very rough region, because of the pride

of his will; for that speck in his belly made him feel sick at his heart, I think, though it was little in comparison with him; and as the man floated along, assuredly he heard all the time the great flood on his [i.e. the whale's] back, beating on his sides. [303] Then the prophet very eagerly composed a prayer, in this manner, as I believe (his words were many): 'Lord, to You have I called in severe sorrows; from the hole of the belly of hell You heard me; I called out, and You knew my indistinct voice. You plunged me into the dim heart of the deep sea; the great flow of Your sea enfolded me about; all the watercourses from Your depths and bottomless seas and Your contending streams of so many currents pour over me in one rushing flood. [313] And yet I said as I sat on the sea bottom: "I am sorrowful, cast out from Your clear eyes and separated from Your sight; yet surely I hope to walk in Your temple again and belong to Yourself." I am wrapped in water until my woe stupefies [me]; the abyss binds the body that I live in; the foaming sea itself plays on my head; I have fallen, Sir, to the last boundary of every mountain; the bars of every shore hold me strongly, so that I may reach no land, and You govern my life. [323] You will succour me, Sir, while Your justice sleeps, through the power of Your mercy that is very trustworthy. For when the pang of anguish was hidden in my soul, then I duly remembered my gracious Lord, praying Him for pity to hear His prophet, so that my prayer might enter into His holy house. I have spoken with Your learned men for many a long day, but now I know for sure that those foolish men who trust in vanity and empty things forsake the mercy which is [properly] theirs for something that is of no significance; [333] but I devoutly promise, that which will be truly kept to, reverently to make sacrifice to You when I am spared, and offer You a suitable gift for my safety, and hold good whatever You command me: have here my word of honour.' Then our Father sternly bids that fish the he should spit him out quickly upon bare, dry land. The whale goes, in accordance with His will, and finds a shore, and there he spews up the man as our Lord bade him.

[341] Then he swept to the shore in soiled clothes: it may well be that there was need for him to wash his cloak. The shores that he gazed at and [that] lay around him were of the very regions that he had [previously]

renounced. Then a breath of God's word upbraids the man again: 'Will you still not go to Nineveh on any account [*lit.* by any sort of way]?' 'Yes, indeed, Lord,' said the man, 'grant me Your grace to go at Your pleasure: nothing else is of benefit to me.' 'Rise, approach then to preach; lo, [this is] the place here. Lo, My teaching is contained within you: utter it in that place.' [351] Then the man rose as quickly as he could, and that night he approached very near to Nineveh. It was a very large city and marvellously broad [*lit.* marvellous of breadth]; merely to pass through it was three days' work. Jonah walked one day's journey continuously, before he uttered any word to [any] person that he met, and then he cried out so clearly that all might understand the true purport of his subject; he spoke in this manner: 'Hereafter forty days will fully draw to an end, and then Nineveh will be taken and destroyed; [361] truly this very town will tumble to the ground; you will plunge upside-down deep into the abyss, to be swiftly swallowed by the black earth, and all that live here die [*lit.* lose the life-blood].' This speech leapt forth there and then and spread all about, to citizens and young men who lived in that city; such a terror seized them and a cruel dread, that their demeanour all changed and [they] grew cold at the heart. The man still did not stop, but said all the time: 'The true vengeance of God will destroy this place!' [371] Then the people piteously lamented very quietly, and for fear of the Lord grieved at heart; they seized rough hair shirts that sharply tormented [them], and they bound these to their backs and to their bare sides, dropped dust on their heads, and gloomily beseeched that this penance would please Him who complains of their wickedness. And all the time he cries out in that country until the king heard, and he quickly rose and ran from his throne, tore his rich robe from his naked back, and fell in the midst of a heap of ashes. [381] He peremptorily asks for a hair shirt and fastened [it] around him, sewed a sackcloth over it, and sighed very sadly; then he lay dazed in that dust, with flowing tears, weeping profusely for all his evil deeds. Then he said to his officers: 'Assemble immediately; proclaim a decree, ordained by myself, that all creatures living within this city, both men and beasts, women and children, every nobleman, every priest, and all prelates, all fast willingly for their false deeds; [391] snatch children from the breast,

however much is may distress them, nor shall beast eat broom, or grass either, or go to pasture, or crop plants, nor shall any ox have access to hay, or any horse to water. All shall cry out, pinched with hunger, with all our pure strength; the sound will rise to Him who will have pity; who knows or can know if it will please the Lord who is gracious in the excellence of His courtesy [to have pity]? I know His might is so great, though He is displeased, that in His mild gentleness He will find mercy. [401] And if we leave the practice of our foul sins, and quietly walk in the path He Himself ordains, He will turn from His fury and leave His wrath, and forgive us this wicked conduct, if we believe Him to be God.’ Then all assented to His law and left off their sins, performed all the penance that the prince decreed; and God in His goodness forgave [them], as he [i.e. the king] said [He would]; though He had promised otherwise, He withheld His vengeance.

Great misery then came over the man Jonah; he became as wrathful as the wind towards our Lord. [411] Anger has so seized his heart, he calls out a prayer to the supreme Prince, in [his] torment, in this manner: ‘I beseech you, Lord, now judge Yourself; was not this very thing that has come to pass what I said [*lit.* the speech which I uttered] in my country, when You sent Your word that I should go to this town to preach Your purpose? I knew well Your courtesy, Your wise patience, Your good-natured kindness and Your gentle grace, Your long tolerance of injury, Your reluctant vengeance; and [that] Your mercy is always sufficient, however great the offence. [421] I knew well, when I had spoken whatever I could to threaten all these proud people who live in this city, they could obtain their peace with a prayer and a penance, and that is why I was about to flee far into Tarshish. Now, Lord, take away my life, it lasts too long. Give me my death-agony quickly and put an end to me, for I should rather [*lit.* it would be more pleasant to me to] die at once, I think, than any longer promote Your teaching which makes me false in this way.’ Then [there] sounds in his ear the voice of our Lord, which upbraids this man in a stern manner: [431] ‘Listen, man, is this just, to become angry so arrogantly for any deed that I have yet done or decreed for you?’ Jonah gets up all joyless and grumbling, and

goes out on the eastern side of the great city, and he prepares to remain pleasantly in a field, to watch what would happen afterwards in that city. There he prepared himself a bower, the best that he could, out of hay and fern and a few herbs, for it was bare in that place as regards waving groves, to give protection from the sun [*lit.* bright one] or cast any shade. [441] He stooped under his little booth, his back to the sun, and there he fell asleep and slept heavily all night, while God in His grace caused to grow from that soil the loveliest woodbine over him that a man ever knew. When the Lord sent the dawning day, then the man awoke under the woodbine, looked up at the foliage, that quivered green; no man ever had such a fine bower of leaves, for it was broad at the bottom, vaulted above, enclosed on each side as though it were a house, an opening on the north side and nowhere any other, but all enclosed in a thicket that cast cool shadow. [453] The man looked at the beautiful green leaves, which a wind so light and so cool continually made to wave; the bright sun shone around it, though no ray, [even] the size of a little speck, might shine on that man. Then the man was so happy with his lovely arbour, [he] lies lounging there looking towards town; so joyful about his woodbine he sprawls underneath it, so that he cared for no food that day – the devil take it. [461] And he constantly laughed as he looked all around the arbour, and wished it was in his country where he would be living, on high upon Ephraim or Hermon's hills: 'Indeed, I never wished to possess a better dwelling.' And when night approached he was obliged to sleep; he slips slowly into a heavy sleep under the leaves, while God sent a worm that dug up the root, and the woodbine was withered by the time that the man awoke; and then He orders the west wind to wake very quietly, and says to Zephyrus that he should blow warm, so that no cloud should form in front of the bright sun, and she shall rise up very brightly and burn like a candle.

[473] Then the man awoke from his pleasant dreams, and looked at his woodbine that was wretchedly disfigured, those splendid leaves all withered and wasted; the bright sun had destroyed them before the man ever knew. And then the heat mounted up and burned fiercely; the warm wind from the west scorches plants. The man, who could not hide himself,

suffered on the ground; his woodbine was gone; he wept for sorrow; [481] with bitter, burning anger, he calls out fiercely: ‘Ah, You Maker of man, what triumph does it seem to You thus to destroy Your man before all others? With all the misfortune that You can, You never spare me; I found myself a comfort that is now taken from me, my woodbind so fine that protected my head. But now I see You are determined to take away my pleasure; why do You not put me to death? I survive too long.’ Again our Lord uttered a speech to the man: ‘Is this just, you man, all your proud noise, to become so angry so quickly for a woodbine? Why are you so peevish, man, for so little?’ [493] ‘It is not little,’ said the man, ‘but more a matter of justice [*lit.* more like justice]; I wish I were out of this world, wrapped in clods of earth.’ ‘Then consider, man, if it grieves you sorely: do not be surprised if I wish to help My handiwork; you have become so angry on account of your woodbine, and never worked the period of an hour to tend it, but at a stroke it grew here and was gone at another, and yet this pleases you so ill, you wish to lose your life. [501] Then do not blame Me if I wish to help My creation, and [if I] have pity on those helpless ones who lament for [their] sins; first I made them Myself from my own primal matter, and then watched over them for a very long time and had them under [My] guidance. And if I should lose My work of such long duration, and overthrow yonder town when it had repented, the pain of such a sweet place ought to sink into My heart, [there being] so many wicked men who are repentant there. And of that number yet are some, so utterly without reason, that [they] cannot distinguish between the upright of a ladder and the rung, nor [can they see] what rule inscrutably applies to the right hand and what to the [*lit.* its] left, though they might lose their lives thereby; [513] like little children at the breast who never did harm, and ignorant women who could not distinguish one hand from the other, for all this great world. And also there are many dumb beasts in the city, that may not commit any sin to harm themselves. Why should I be angry with them, since [i.e. if] people will repent, and come and acknowledge Me as King and believe My speech? If I were as hasty as you in this instance, harm would befall; if I could endure only like you, very few would thrive. [522] I cannot be so severe and be considered

merciful, for the power to do harm is not to be exercised without mercy within. Do not be so angry, sir, but go forth on your way; be resolute and patient in sorrow and in joy; for he who is too hasty in tearing his clothes must then sit with more ragged [clothes] to sew them together.’

Therefore when poverty oppresses me and hardships in plenty, very meekly with sufferance it behoves me to become reconciled; therefore penance and sorrow prove it conclusively that patience is a noble virtue, though it may often displease. Amen.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

I

After the siege and the attack at Troy had ended, the city destroyed and burnt to charred timbers and ashes, the man who framed the treasonable plots there was tried for his treachery, the most authentic example on earth. It was the noble Aeneas and his great offspring, who afterwards subjugated provinces and became masters of almost all the wealth of the lands of the west. When noble Romulus proceeds swiftly to Rome, he builds that city in the beginning with great pomp and names it with his own name, as it is now called; [11] Ticius goes to Tuscany and founds dwellings, Langaberde raises up homes in Lombardy, and far over the French sea [i.e. the Channel], Felix Brutus founds Britain with joy on many broad slopes, where war and vengeance and marvel have continued there from time to time, and often both joy and strife have quickly alternated ever since.

[20] And when this Britain was founded by this noble man, bold men flourished there, who loved battle, who brought about trouble there in many a turbulent time. More marvels have often happened here in this land than in any other I know, since that same time. But of all the kings of Britain that lived here Arthur was always the noblest, as I have heard tell. Therefore I intend to set forth a real-life adventure, which some people consider plainly a marvel and an extraordinary adventure of the wonders of Arthur. [30] If you will listen to this poem but a little while, I shall tell it at once, aloud, as I have heard it in the court. The form in which it is set down and fixed, in a brave and powerful chronicle enshrined in true syllables, is that in which it has long existed.

[37] This king was in residence at Camelot at Christmas with many gracious lords, the best of men – all those fine brothers fitly of the Round Table – with splendid revelry in proper fashion and carefree amusements. There men tourneyed many a time and oft: these excellent knights jousted very gallantly, then went to court to perform ring-dances; for there the festival was kept up in full for fifteen days, with all the food and the merriment that people could devise: such noise and music glorious to hear, a pleasant sound in the day, dancing at night – all was supreme happiness in halls and chambers among lords and ladies, as it seemed most delightful to them. [50] With all the good fortune in the world they lived there together, the most renowned knights on earth and the loveliest ladies that ever lived, and he who holds court, the finest king; for this fair people in the hall were all in their prime, the most fortunate on earth, the king a man noblest of mind – it would be difficult to name so bold a warrior-band on a castle-mound.

[60] While New Year was so young that it was newly arrived, that day the company on the dais were served double [portions of food]. After the king had come into the hall with his knights, the singing of mass in the chapel having ended, loud cries were uttered there by priests and others, Christmas celebrated anew, named very often. And then nobles ran forward to offer presents, cried aloud ‘New Year’s gifts!’, gave them by hand, debated eagerly about those gifts; ladies laughed very loudly although they had lost and he who won was not angry – that you may well believe. [71] They made all this mirth until the meal time. When they had washed fittingly, they took their places, the man of higher rank, in each case, in the higher position, as was most fitting; Queen Guinevere, very lovely, seated in the midst, placed on the splendid dais, adorned all around: fine silk round about, a canopy of choice red fabric over her, many tapestries of rich material, that were embroidered and inlaid with the best gems whose value could ever be tested by buying them with money [i.e. the best that money could buy]. The fairest to behold sparkled there with blue-grey eyes; no man could truly say that he had ever seen a more beautiful one.

[85] But Arthur would not eat until all were served; he was so lively in his youthfulness, and somewhat boyish. He loved an active life; he did not care much for lying in bed or sitting long, he was so agitated by his young blood and his restless mind. And also another custom moved him as well, which he had undertaken as a matter of honour: he would never eat on such a festal day until some daring matter had been related to him, a strange tale of some great marvel that he could believe, of princes, of chivalry, of other adventures; [96] or else some man entreated him for a true knight to engage in jousting with him, for a man to lay life against life in jeopardy, either one to concede victory to the other, as fortune saw fit to help them. This was the king's custom wherever he was in court, at each splendid feast among his noble company in hall. Therefore, so proud of face, he stands bold in his place; very youthful in that New Year, he behaves very cheerfully with everybody.

[107] Thus the bold king himself stands there in his place, in front of the high table, talking courteously of this and that. Good Gawain was seated there beside Guinevere, and Agravain of the Hard Hand sits on the other side – both the king's sister's sons and very true knights; Bishop Baldwin sits in the place of honour, and Iwain, son of Urien, shared dishes with him. These were placed on the dais and sumptuously served, and afterwards many trustworthy men at the side-tables. [116] Then the first course came with a blaring of trumpets, resplendent with many a banner that hung from them; there was a new sound of drums with the noble pipes, wild and piercing trills roused echoes, so that many hearts rose very high at their strains. Thereupon delicacies of precious food poured in, an abundance of fresh food, and on so many dishes that it was difficult to find space in front of the people to set down on the cloth the silver dishes that held the various pottages. Each man as he himself liked took there ungrudged; each two had twelve dishes, good beer and bright wine as well.

[130] Now I shall tell you no more about their service at table, for everyone may well understand that nothing was lacking there. Another,

quite new, noise drew near suddenly, so that the prince might have leave to take food; for scarcely a moment after the music had finished, and the first course fittingly served in the court, there rushes in at the hall door a fearsome lord, the very biggest man on earth in height; from the neck to the middle so squarely built and so thick-set, and his loins and his limbs so long and so big, I think he was half-giant on earth, [141] but at any rate I declare him to be the biggest man, and moreover the most elegant for his size who could ride a horse; for although his body was massive in back and in chest, both his belly and his waist were becomingly slim, and every part of him matching completely. For people were amazed at his colour, ingrained in his outward appearance; he behaved like a bold warrior, and bright green all over.

[151] And all arrayed in green were this man and his clothes: a close-fitting tunic, very smooth, that clung to his sides, a fine cloak over it, adorned on the inside with trimmed fur exposed, the whole of the edging bright with lovely fur, and also his hood, which was drawn back from his locks and laid on his shoulders; neat hose of that same green, well pulled-up and clinging to his calf, and fine spurs of bright gold beneath, on silk bands decorated very plentifully with bars, and the man rides there without any shoes on his feet. And all his clothing was truly bright green, both the decorative bars of his belt and other bright jewels which were set plentifully in his splendid array, on silk embroidery about himself and his saddle; [165] it would be too difficult to relate half the details that were embroidered on it [i.e. his array], including birds and butterflies, with bright green beadwork everywhere amongst the gold. The pendants of his breast-harness, the splendid crupper, his bit-studs and all the metal were enamelled thus, the stirrups that he stood on coloured the same, and his saddle-bows all to match, and his glorious saddle-skirts, which continuously shone and sparkled all with green gems. The horse that he rides on completely of the same colour, certainly: a green horse great and thick-set, a steed very powerful to control, restive in embroidered bridle; he was very well-suited to the man.

[179] This man arrayed in green was very fine, and the hair of his head matching that of his horse: lovely hair, spreading out like a fan, envelops his shoulders. An abundant beard like a bush hangs over his chest, which with his splendid hair that extends from his head was clipped all round above his elbows, so that his upper arms were enclosed beneath it in the manner of a king's cape which encircles his neck; the mane of that great horse much like it, well curled and combed, with very many knots plaited with gold thread about the fine green, always a strand of the hair, another of gold; [191] the tail and his forelock plaited to match and both bound with a band of a bright green adorned with very precious stones, to the end of the tuft, and then drawn up with a thong; an intricate knot at the top, on which many glittering bells of pure gold were ringing. Such a living horse, nor such a man as rides him, was never seen in that hall before that time by any eye. His glance was as swift as lightning – so said everyone who saw him. It seemed as if no man would be able to endure under his blows.

[203] Yet he had no helmet or tunic of mail either, nor any throat-
armour nor any plate that pertained to armour, nor any spear or any
shield to thrust or to smite; but in his one hand he had a bunch of holly,
which is greenest when woods are bare, and in his other an axe, a huge
and monstrous one, a cruel battle-axe for anyone to describe in words.
The axe-head was as broad as the length of an ell-rod, the spike made
all of green steel and gold, the blade burnished bright, with a great edge
as well fashioned to cut as a sharp razor's. The grim knight gripped it by
the handle, consisting of a strong staff which was bound with iron to the
end of the shaft and carved all over with pleasing designs in green; [217]
wrapped around it was a cord which was fastened at the head and then
looped many times along the handle, with many choice tassels attached
to it on very richly embroidered buttons of the bright green. This man
comes in and enters the hall, making for the high dais – he feared no
danger. He never greeted anyone but looked high over their heads. The
first word that he uttered, 'Where,' he said, 'is the ruler of this company?
I would gladly set eyes on that man and have a conversation with him.'

He cast his eye on the knights and swaggered up and down. He paused and pondered who had most renown there.

[232] There was gazing for a long time to behold the knight, for everyone wondered what it might signify that a knight and a horse could take such a colour as to grow as green as the grass and greener it seemed, shining brighter than green enamel on gold. Everyone who was standing there stared and cautiously approached him, with all the wonder on earth as to what he would do. For they had seen many marvels but never such a one before; and so the people there considered it illusion and magic.

[241] Therefore many a noble knight was afraid to answer, and all were astounded by his voice and sat stone-still in a deathly silence throughout the fine hall. Their voices died away as if they had all fallen asleep suddenly – I judge it not wholly for fear but partly for courtesy – but allowed him to whom all were duty bound to defer to address the man.

[250] Then Arthur, before the high dais, beholds that strange happening and courteously greeted him, for he was not at all afraid, and said: ‘Sir, welcome indeed to this dwelling. I, the head of this house, am called Arthur. Kindly dismount and stay, I pray you, and whatever your wish is we shall learn afterwards.’ ‘No, so help me He who sits on high,’ said the knight, ‘it was not my mission to stay any time in this house; but because your renown, sir, is built up to such a height and your castle and your men are considered the best, the bravest to ride on steeds in armour, the strongest and the worthiest of mankind, valiant to play with in other noble games, and here courtesy is shown, as I have heard tell – and that has brought me here, indeed, at this time. [265] You may be sure by this branch that I bear here that I go in peace and seek no danger; for had I set out in company, in battle array, I have at home a tunic of mail and a helmet as well, a shield and a sharp spear, shining bright, and other weapons to wield, I assure you, also; but because I wanted no fighting, my clothes are softer. But if you are as bold as all men say, you will graciously grant me the game that I ask for by right.’ Arthur answered and said: ‘Courteous knight, sir, if you ask for battle without armour, you will not lack fighting here.’

[279] ‘No, I do not seek any fight, I tell you truly; there are only beardless children about on this bench. If I were buckled in arms on a high steed, there is no man here to match me, so weak are their powers. And so I ask in this court for a Christmas game, for it is Yule and New Year, and there many vigorous men here. If anyone in this house considers himself so brave, to be so bold-spirited, so reckless of mind, that he dares boldly strike one blow in return for another, I shall give him as a gift this rich battle-axe, this axe, which is heavy enough, to handle as he likes, and I shall endure the first blow, without armour as I sit. [291] If any warrior be so daring as to put to the test what I propose, let him run quickly to me and seize this weapon – I renounce it for ever, let him keep it as his own – and shall stand a stroke from him, unflinching in this hall, provided that you will ordain me the right to deal out another to him by agreement, and moreover I give him respite until the same day a year hence. Now hurry, and let us see at once if anyone here dares say anything.’

[301] If he stunned them at first, more motionless than were all the retainers in the hall, the high and the low. The knight on his horse turned in his saddle and fiercely rolled his red eyes about, arched his bristly brows, shining green, waved his beard [i.e. turned his head from side to side] to see if anyone would rise. When no one would hold speech with him he coughed very loudly and cleared his throat very arrogantly and proceeded to speak. ‘What, is this Arthur’s house,’ said the man then, ‘all the fame of which flows through so many realms? [311] Where now is your pride and your conquests, your ferocity and your wrath and your boastful words? Now is the revelry and the renown of the Round Table overthrown by a word of one man’s speech, for everyone is cowering in fear without a blow being offered!’ With this he laughs so loudly that the lord was offended; for shame the blood rushed into his fair face and cheek; he grew as angry as the wind; so did all who were there. The king, like the brave man he was by nature, then stood nearer that bold man,

[323] And said: ‘Sir, by heaven your request is foolish, and as you have asked for foolishness, it behoves you to find it. I know no man who is

afraid of your boastful words. Give me now your battle-axe, for God's sake, and I shall grant your request that you have asked for.' Swiftly he springs towards him and received it from his hand. Then the other man proudly alights on foot. Now Arthur has his axe and grips the handle and fiercely brandishes it about, intending to strike with it. [332] The bold man stood towering before him, taller than anyone in the house by the head and more. With grim demeanour he stood there and stroked his beard, and with an unmoved expression he drew down his tunic, no more frightened or dismayed by his mighty blows than if any man on the bench had brought him some wine to drink. Gawain, who sat by the queen, bowed to the king: 'I beseech you now with plain words that this quarrel may be mine.'

[343] 'If you would, noble lord,' said Gawain to the king, 'bid me to come from this bench and stand by you there, so that I might leave this table without discourtesy, and if that did not displease my sovereign lady, I wish to give you advice before your noble court. For it seems to me it is not seemly – as it is truly acknowledged – where such a request is raised so loudly in your hall, for you to take it upon yourself, though you yourself may be desirous of doing so, while many so bold sit about you on the bench, that I think none on earth more resourceful in courage nor better persons on the field where battle is raised. [354] I am the weakest, I know, and the feeblest of wit, and my life would be the smallest loss, to tell the truth. I am only praiseworthy in that you are my uncle; I acknowledge no merit in my body but your blood. And since this matter is so foolish that it does not befit you, and I have asked you for it first, assign it to me. And if I speak unfittingly let all this noble court decide without reproach.' Nobles whispered together; and then they advised with one accord: to take the game away from the crowned king and give it to Gawain.

[366] Then the king commanded the knight to rise; and he rose very promptly and prepared himself well, knelt down before the king and takes that weapon. And he courteously relinquished it to him and lifted up his hand and gave him God's blessing, and cheerfully bids him that

both his heart and his hand should be bold. ‘Take care, kinsman,’ said the king, ‘that you strike one blow, and if you deal with him properly, I fully believe that you will stand the blow that he is to offer afterwards.’ Gawain goes to the knight with the battle-axe in his hand and he boldly waits for him – he was dismayed none the more for that. [377] Then the knight in green speaks to Gawain: ‘Let us restate our terms, before we go further. First I entreat you, sir, that you tell me truly what you are called, so that I may rely on it.’ ‘In good faith,’ said the good knight, ‘I am called Gawain, who offer you this blow, whatever happens afterwards, and at this time a year hence will take another from you with whatever weapon you wish – and at the hands of no other living person.’ The other answers in return: ‘Sir Gawain, so may I prosper, I am exceedingly glad that you are to strike this blow.’

[390] ‘By God,’ said the green knight, ‘Sir Gawain, it pleases me that I shall receive from your hand what I have asked for here. And you have repeated without hesitation, in a correct statement, the whole of the covenant that I asked the king for, except that you must promise me, sir, on your word of honour, that you will look for me yourself, wherever on earth you suppose I may be found, and take for yourself such payment as you mete out to me today before this fine company.’ ‘Where should I look for you?’ asked Gawain. ‘Where is your dwelling? I do not know at all where you dwell, by Him that made me, nor do I know you, knight, your court or your name. But direct me faithfully to it and tell me what you are called, and I shall use all my wisdom to get myself there – and that I swear you truly and by my firm word of honour.’ [404] ‘That is enough for the New Year – no more is needed,’ said the knight in the green to Gawain the noble. ‘If I tell you truly that when I have the blow and you have deftly smitten me, if I promptly inform you about my house and my home and my own name, then you may call on me and keep to the agreement; and if I utter no speech then you will be better off, for you may remain in your country and seek no further. But you are delaying! Now take up your grim weapon and let us see how you strike.’ ‘Gladly, sir, indeed,’ says Gawain; he strokes his axe.

[417] The green knight promptly takes his stand; with his head bent a little, uncovers the flesh; he laid his beautiful long locks over his crown, let the bare neck show in readiness. Gawain gripped his axe and heaves it up on high; setting his left foot on the ground in front, he let it come down quickly on the bare flesh, so that the man's sharp blade sundered the bones and sank through the fair flesh and severed it in two, so that the blade of burnished steel bit into the ground. The fair head fell from the neck to the ground, so that many kicked it with their feet where it rolled forward; the blood spurted from the body, shining on the green. [430] And the man neither faltered nor fell any the more for that but strongly leapt forward on firm legs and roughly reached out where men were standing, seized his comely head and lifted it up immediately, and then goes to his horse, catches the bridle, steps into the stirrup and mounts, and holds his head in his hand by the hair; and the knight seated himself in his saddle as firmly as though no misfortune had troubled him, though now headless there. He twisted his trunk around, that ugly body that bled. Many a one was frightened of him by the time he had finished speaking.

[444] For he actually holds up the head in his hand, directs the face towards the nobles on the dais; and it raised the eye-lids and looked with eyes wide open, and spoke as follows with its mouth, as you may now hear: 'See to it, Gawain, that you are ready to go as you promised, and search as faithfully, sir, until you find me, as you have promised in this hall, while all these knights were listening. You make your way to the Green Chapel, I charge you, to receive such a blow as you have meted out – you have deserved it – to be punctually repaid on New Year's morn. I am widely known as the Knight of the Green Chapel; and so, if you inquire, you will not fail to find me. [456] Therefore come, or you deserve to be called cowardly.' With a rough jerk he pulls on the reins, swept out at the hall-door, his head in his hand, so that sparks from the flint cobbles flew from the horse's hooves. No one there knew what country he arrived at, any more than they knew where he had come from. What then? The king and Gawain there laugh and grin about that green man; yet it was openly declared a marvel among those men.

[467] If Arthur the noble king was amazed at heart, he let no sign be seen but said aloud with gracious speech to the fair queen: ‘Dear lady, do not be perturbed on a day like this. Such artistry is certainly fitting at Christmas – playing of interludes, laughing and singing – among the courtly ring-dances performed by knights and ladies. Nevertheless I may well proceed to my meal, for I have seen a wonder, I cannot deny.’ He glanced at Sir Gawain and said aptly: ‘Now, sir, hang up your axe, which has hewn enough.’ [478] And it was placed above the dais, to hang on the tapestry, where everyone could look at it in amazement and relate the wonder of it by true right. Then these men went to a table together, the king and the good knight, and zealous men served them double portions of all delicacies, in the noblest fashion possible, with all manner of food and minstrelsy also. They spent that day in enjoyment until it came to an end on earth. Now consider well, Sir Gawain, that you do not shrink because of the danger from making trial of this quest which you have undertaken.

II

[491] Arthur has received this gift of strange happenings in the beginning of the young year because he yearned to hear valiant boasting. Though such speeches were not forthcoming for him when they sat down, now they are fully provided with formidable work, their hands cram-full. Gawain was glad to begin those games in the hall, but if the outcome is serious, do not be surprised: for though men are merry in spirit when they have strong drink, a year passes very quickly and never delivers the same: the beginning very seldom matches the end. And so this Yule passed, and the year afterwards, and each season in turn followed after the other: [502] after Christmas came harsh Lent, which tests the body with fish and plainer food, but then the coming of spring [*lit.* nature’s weather] contends with winter, frost shrinks into the earth [i.e. disappears], clouds lift, bright falls the rain in warm showers, falls on fair lowlands, flowers appear there, the clothes of both fields and woods are green, birds

proceed to build and sing gloriously for pleasure in the mild summer that follows afterwards along hillsides, and blossoms swell to bloom by splendid and luxuriant hedgerows; then many noble tunes are heard in the lovely woods.

[516] After the season of spring with the gentle winds, when Zephyrus [i.e. the west wind] himself blows on seeds and plants, very lovely is the plant that grows from them [i.e. the seeds], when the moistening dew drops from the leaves, to enjoy a blissful gleam from the bright sun. But then Autumn hastens and soon puts heart into him [i.e. the plant], warns him to grow fully ripe against the coming of winter; with drought he [i.e. autumn] makes the dust rise, to fly high from the face of the earth. [525] Angry wind from the sky wrestles with the sun, the leaves loosen from the tree and fall to the ground, and the grass that was green before withers completely; then everything that grew in the beginning ripens and rots, and thus the year runs by in many yesterdays and winter comes back, as nature demands, in truth, until the moon of Michaelmas was come with pledge of winter. Then Gawain shortly thinks about his arduous journey.

[536] Yet until All Saints' Day he remains with Arthur, who made a celebration on that festival in honour of the knight, with great and noble revelry of the Round Table. Courteous knights and fair ladies were all in a state of anxiety for the sake of that man; but nevertheless they mentioned only pleasant subjects: many who were joyless on account of that noble knight made jokes there. For after the meal he talks to his uncle with sorrow and speaks of his journey, and he said openly: 'Now, liege lord of my life, I ask leave of you. You know the nature of this matter; I do not care to relate the troubles of it any more to you – it would only be idle talk – but I am setting off for the blow tomorrow without fail, to look for the green man, as God sees fit to guide me.' [550] Then the nobles of the castle came together, Ywain and Eric and many others – Sir Dodinal de Savage, the Duke of Clarence, Lancelot and Lionel and Lucan the good, Sir Bors and Sir Bedevere, both strong men, and many other nobles, with

Mador de la Port. All this company of the court approached the king to counsel the knight, with sorrow in their hearts. There was much painful sorrow suffered in the hall that one so valuable as Gawain should have to go on that mission, to suffer a grievous blow and give none in return with his sword. The knight kept a good countenance throughout and said: ‘Why should I hesitate? What can one do but make trial of what Destiny offers, whether painful or pleasant?’

[566] He remains there all that day and dresses in the morning, asks early for his arms, and they were all brought. First a carpet of rich red fabric was spread over the floor, and abundant was the gilded armour that gleamed from it. The bold man steps on it and handles the arms, dressed in a doublet of precious fabric, and then a skilfully-made cape, fastened at the top, which was trimmed with beautiful fur inside. Then they placed the steel shoes upon the knight’s feet; his legs were enclosed in steel by beautiful greaves, to which were attached brightly polished knee-pieces, fastened about his knees with clasps of gold; [578] then fine thigh-pieces, which gracefully enclosed his thick muscular thighs, fastened with laces; and then the linked coat of mail of bright steel rings upon fine material enveloped that knight, and well burnished arm-pieces upon both his arms, with good and fine elbow-pieces and gauntlets of metal plate, and all the goodly armour which was to benefit him at that time; with a splendid surcoat, his gold spurs fastened with pride, he was girt with a very reliable sword with a silk girdle round his waist.

[590] When he was buckled into his armour, his accoutrements were splendid: the smallest lace or loop gleamed with gold. Thus, armed as he was, he hears his mass offered and celebrated at the high altar. Afterwards he comes to the king and his fellow courtiers, takes his leave of lords and ladies in a friendly manner, and they kissed him and escorted him on his way, and commended him to Christ. By that time Gringolet was prepared and girt with a saddle which gleamed very splendidly with many gold fringes, everywhere studded entirely anew, prepared for that business, the bridle decorated around with bars, trimmed with bright gold. The

adornment of the breast-harness and of the splendid saddle-skirts, the crupper, and the caparison, matched the saddle-bows. [603] And it was all costly gold studs, set upon a red background, which glittered and shone like the radiance of the sun. Then he takes and quickly kisses the helmet, which was stapled firmly and padded on the inside. It was high on his head, fastened behind, with a brilliant band of silk over the neck-guard, embroidered and adorned with the best gems on a broad silken band, and birds on the hems, such as parrots depicted among periwinkles, turtle-doves and true-love knots embroidered so densely that it was as though many a lady had been working at it for seven winters at court. The cirlet which ringed his head was even more valuable, with perfect diamonds which were both clear and brown [i.e. of all tints].

[619] Then they showed him the shield, which was of bright gules [i.e. heraldic red] with the pentangle painted in pure gold hues; he takes it by the baldrick, slings it round his neck; that suited the knight well in an apt manner. And why the pentangle appertains to that noble prince I am minded to tell you, though it will delay me. It is a symbol that Solomon invented formerly as a sign of truth, by its intrinsic right; for it is a figure that possesses five points, and each line interlaces with and joins on to the others, and everywhere it is endless, and English people in all parts, I am told, call it 'the endless knot'. [631] Therefore it matches this knight and his spotless arms, for, always trustworthy in five ways, and five times in each way, Gawain was known as a virtuous knight and, like refined gold, free from all baseness, adorned with virtues in the castle. And so he newly bore the pentangle on his shield and surcoat, as a man most true of words and a knight most noble of conduct.

[640] First he was found faultless in his five senses, and likewise the knight never failed in his five fingers, and all his trust upon earth was in the five wounds that Christ received on the cross, as the Creed tells. And wherever this man found himself in battle, his earnest intent was on this, above all else: that he should get all his fortitude from the five joys that the gracious Queen of Heaven had in her Child. (For this reason

the knight had her image fittingly painted on the inner side of his shield, so that when he glanced at it his courage never diminished.) The fifth five that I find that the knight practised was liberality and brotherly love above all things; his cleanness and his courtesy were never defective, and compassion that surpasses all virtues – these perfect five were more firmly fastened to that knight than to any other. [656] Now all these five groups [of five] were indeed fixed on this knight and each one interlaced with another, so that none came to an end, and were established on five points that never failed, nor were ever brought together in any side, nor separated either, without end in any angle that I find anywhere, where the process ever began or came to an end. Therefore on his bright shield was fashioned, royally with red gold upon heraldic red, the knot which is called by learned people the perfect ‘pentangle’. Now noble Gawain is prepared and took his lance right then, and wished them all good day – he thought for ever.

[670] He struck the steed with the spurs and sprang on his way so vigorously that the flint-sparks flew out behind. All who saw that handsome knight sighed in their hearts, and people with one accord said softly to each other, sorrowing for that noble one: ‘By Christ, it is a pity that you, sir, should be lost, you who are so noble of life! It is, truly, not easy to find his equal on earth. It would have made more sense to have acted more cautiously, and have ordained yonder noble one to have become a duke. It becomes him to be a brilliant leader of men in the land, and it would have been better so than for him to be utterly destroyed, beheaded by an other-worldly man, for arrogant pride. [682] Who ever knew any king to take such advice as that of knights in trivial arguments about Christmas games?’ The warm tears that flowed from eyes were very abundant when that fine lord left that abode that day. He made no delay but swiftly went on his way. He rode many uncertain paths, as I learned from the book.

[691] Now this knight, Sir Gawain, rides through the kingdom of Britain, in the cause of God, though it seemed no game to him – often companionless he remains alone at night where he did not find the food

that he liked before him; he had no companion but his horse by woods and downs, nor anyone but God to talk with on the way – till he approached very near to North Wales. He keeps all the isles of Anglesey on the left side and goes over the fords by the headlands, across at Holywell, till he reached the shore again in the wild country of Wirral. Very few lived there whom either God or a good-hearted man loved. [703] And always, as he travelled, he asked men that he met if they had heard any talk of a green knight of the Green Chapel in any region thereabouts. And all said ‘No!’ to him – that never in their lives did they ever see a man of such green hues. The knight took strange ways on many a cheerless slope. His mood changed many times before he could see that chapel.

[713] He climbed over many cliffs in strange regions. Having wandered far from his friends, he rides as a stranger. At every ford or stream where the knight passed it was a wonder if he did not find a foe in front of him, and that so ugly and so fierce that he was obliged to fight. The man finds so many marvels there among the hills, it would be too difficult to tell the tenth part of them. Sometimes he fights with dragons and also with wolves, sometimes with men of the woods that lived in the crags, with both bulls and bears, and boars at other times, and giants that pursued him from the high fell. If he had not been brave and long-suffering, and if he had not served God, there are many occasions when he would doubtless have been killed. [726] For fighting did not trouble him so much that winter was not worse, when the cold clear water was shed from the clouds and froze before it might fall to the faded earth; nearly slain by the sleet, he slept in his armour more nights than enough, on bare rocks where the cold burn runs clattering from the crest, and the frozen water hung high over his head in hard icicles. Thus in peril and pain and severe conditions, this knight rides across country till Christmas Eve, alone. At that time the knight certainly made his lamentation to Mary, that she would direct his course and guide him to some dwelling.

[740] In the morning he rides briskly by a hill into a deep forest that was exceedingly wild, high hills on each side and below woods of huge old

oaks, a hundred together. The hazel and the hawthorn were entwined together, with rough ragged moss spread everywhere, with many unhappy birds which piteously piped on bare twigs for the pain of the cold. The knight upon Gringolet glides under them through many a marsh and mire, a man all alone, concerned about his circumstances, in case he should not manage to see the service of that Lord who on that same night was born of a maiden to end our enmity [i.e. with God]. [753] And therefore, sighing, he said: 'I beseech You, Lord, and Mary, who is the mildest mother so dear, for some lodging where I might solemnly hear mass and Your matins tomorrow, I meekly ask, and accordingly promptly I pray my Lord's Prayer, Ave Maria, and Creed.' He rode in prayer and wept for his sin. He crossed himself several times and said: 'Christ's cross speed me.'

[763] The knight had not crossed himself but thrice before he was aware in the wood of a dwelling within a moat, above a glade, on a mound, framed under the boughs of many huge trunks round about the ditches, the finest castle that a knight ever owned, set in a meadow, a park all about, fenced in by a close palisade of spikes, which enclosed many trees for more than two miles around. The knight beheld that stronghold from one side, as it shimmered and shone through the bright oaks. [773] Then he respectfully takes off his helmet and solemnly thanks Jesus and St Julian, who are both kindly, who had treated him courteously and listened to his cry. 'Now,' said the knight, 'I beseech you to grant good lodging!' Then he spurs on Gringolet with his gilt spurs, and he most fortuitously has chosen the main way, that quickly brought the knight to the end of the bridge in haste. The drawbridge was firmly raised; the gates were securely shut; the walls were well constructed – it [i.e. the castle] feared no wind's blast.

[785] The horseman tarried, waiting on the bank of the deep double ditch which surrounded the house. The wall went down in the water amazingly deep and it swept aloft again a huge height, made of hard cut stone up to the cornices, fortified under the battlements in the

best style; and then very fine watch-towers arrayed at intervals, with many excellent loop-holes that fastened very neatly; that knight never gazed upon a better barbican. And farther in he beheld the high hall, towers set up here and there, crocketed very thickly, fair pinnacles that joined exactly [to the towers below], and wonderfully tall, with carved finials, skilfully intricate. [798] There he perceived many chalk-white chimneys, that shone very white upon roofs of towers. So many painted pinnacles were scattered everywhere among battlements of the castle, clustered so thickly, that it looked as if it were all completely cut out of paper. The noble knight on the horse thought it fair enough, if only he might manage to get inside the bailey, to lodge pleasantly in that house while the festival lasted. He called, and soon there came a perfectly obliging porter; on the wall he received his petition and greeted the questing knight.

[811] ‘Good sir,’ said Gawain, ‘would you go on an errand for me to the noble lord of this house, to ask for lodging?’ ‘Yes, by St Peter!’ said the porter, ‘and truly I believe that you are welcome, sir, to stay as long as it pleases you.’ Then the man went eagerly and quickly came back, and people readily with him to welcome the knight. They let down the great drawbridge and courteously went out, and knelt down on their knees on the cold earth to welcome this same knight in the way which seemed proper to them. They allowed him through the great gate, opened wide, and he courteously asked them to rise and rode over the bridge. Several men held his saddle while he dismounted, and then many bold men stabled his steed. Knights and squires came down then to bring this man into the hall with joy. [826] When he lifted up his helmet many people hastened to take it from his hand, to serve the gracious knight; they took both his sword and his shield. Then he greeted each of those men very courteously, and many a proud man there pressed forward to honour that prince. They took him, all buckled into his armour, to the castle, where a fine fire burned fiercely in the hall. Then the lord of the people comes down from his chamber to meet the man on the floor with honour. He said: ‘You are welcome to enjoy whatever is here, as you please; it is all

your own to have and use as you wish.’ ‘Many thanks,’ said Gawain; ‘may Christ reward you for it.’ In the manner of joyful men, each folded the other in his arms.

[842] Gawain looked at the man who graciously greeted him, and thought him who owned the castle a bold knight, a huge man indeed, and of mature age. His beard was broad and bright and all beaver-coloured; powerful, firm of stance on mighty legs; face as fierce as fire, and courteous of speech; and it appeared to the knight [i.e. Gawain] that he was certainly a suitable person to exercise sovereignty in the castle over excellent men. The lord turned aside to a chamber and solicitously orders that a man should be assigned to him, to serve him humbly; and there were ready at his bidding plenty of men who brought him to a bright bedroom where the bed-clothes were splendid: bed-curtains of pure silk with bright gold hems, and rare counterpanes with fine edging of bright ermine on top, embroidered round about, curtains running on ropes, with red gold rings, tapestries of rich fabrics from Toulouse and Tharsia spread on the wall, and under foot, on the floor, to match. [860] There the knight was divested of his coat of mail and of his armour, with cheerful talk; men promptly brought rich robes, to put on and to change and choose the best. As soon as he had taken one and had it on – one which looked well on him, with flowing skirts – truly it seemed to everyone from his appearance almost as if spring had come in all its colours, all his limbs under the garment shining and beautiful; it seemed to them that Christ never made a finer knight. Wherever in the world he was from, it seemed that he might be a peerless prince in the field where fierce men fought.

[875] Before the fireplace, where charcoal burned, a chair was promptly prepared for Gawain, with coverings – cushions upon quilted seats – which were both skilfully made; and then a fine mantle was put on that man, of a brown silk, embroidered most splendidly, and well lined on the inside with the best of furs, all of the best ermine on earth, his hood of the same material. And he sat in that becomingly splendid seat

and warmed himself quickly, and then his mood improved. Soon a table was set up on fine trestles, covered with a clean cloth that showed pure white, napkin and salt-cellar and silver spoons. [887] The knight washed as he wished and went to his meal. Men served him very becomingly with various excellent broths, seasoned in the best manner, in double helpings, as it befitted, and many kinds of fish – some baked in bread, some grilled on the embers, some boiled, some in broth flavoured with spices – and in each case sauces so subtle that the knight was pleased. The knight very courteously and graciously called it a feast again and again, when all together the men, equally courteously, exhorted him: ‘Take this penance now and next time it will improve.’ That man made much mirth because of the wine that went to his head.

[901] Then inquiry was made in a tactful manner, by discreet questions put to that prince, so that he courteously acknowledged that he was from the court that noble Arthur the gracious governs alone, who is the splendid royal king of the Round Table, and it was Gawain himself who sits in that house, come to that Christmas feast, as chance then befell him. When the lord had learned that he had the knight, he laughed loudly about it, so delightful it seemed to him, and all the men in that castle made great joy to appear in his presence readily at that time, to whose person all excellence and prowess and refined manners belong and who is always praised, and whose honour is greater than that of all men on earth. [915] Each man said very softly to his companion: ‘Now shall we see becomingly skilled demonstrations of courteous manners and the faultless expressions of noble conversation. We can learn, without asking, what sort of thing success in conversation is, since we have welcomed that excellent father of good breeding. God has indeed generously given us His grace, who allows us to receive such a guest as Gawain, when men will sit and sing, rejoicing in His birth. This man will now bring us to an understanding of noble manners. I believe that anyone who has the opportunity of listening to him will learn something of the art of conversing about love.’

[928] By the time dinner was over and the noble knight had risen, it was nearly night-time. Chaplains made their way to the chapels, rang the bells most nobly, just as they should, to the glorious evensong of the festival. The lord goes to it, and the lady also; she gracefully enters into a fine closed pew. Gawain hurries along very happily and makes his way at once. The lord takes him by the sleeve and leads him to sit, and acknowledges him familiarly and calls him by his name, and said he was the most welcome man in the world. And he thanked him earnestly; and they embraced each other and sat together quietly during the service.

[941] Then it pleased the lady to look at the knight; then she came from her closed pew with many fair ladies. She was the most beautiful creature alive in respect of flesh, face, figure, complexion, and deportment, and lovelier than Guinevere, the knight thought. She made her way through the chancel to greet that noble knight. Another lady led her by the left hand, who was older than she was, an aged woman it seemed, and highly honoured by men about her. But those ladies were dissimilar in appearance: for if the young one was blooming, the other was sallow; a glowing pink everywhere adorned the first one, rough wrinkled cheeks sagged on the other; the first lady's kerchiefs [were adorned] with many bright pearls; her breast and her bright throat, exposed bare, shone more brightly than snow which falls on hills; [957] the other was attired over the neck with a neckerchief, muffled up over her swarthy chin with chalk-white veils, her forehead wrapped in silk, swathed everywhere, with embroidered hems and lattice work covered in fine stitching, so that nothing of that lady was bare but the black brows, the two eyes and the nose, the naked lips, and those were disagreeable to see and exceedingly bleared. A charming lady on earth one may call her, by God! Her body was short and thick, her buttocks rounded and broad; more delicious to taste was that which she had with her.

[970] When Gawain saw that fair lady who looked graciously [at him], having excused himself from the lord, he went towards them. The elder he greets, bowing very low; the lovelier he embraces in his arms a little. He kisses her fittingly and speaks in a courtly manner. They beg the

favour of his company and he swiftly asks to be their servant truly if it pleased them. They take him between them and, making conversation, lead him to the private room, to the fireplace, and quickly they ask for spiced cakes, which servants sped to bring them in plenty, and the pleasant wine with them each time. [981] The lord often leaps to his feet in a friendly manner, reminding them over and over again to make merry, ceremoniously took off his hood and hung it on a spear, and directed that those who devised most amusement during Christmas were to win it as a trophy: 'And, on my honour, I shall try with the help of my friends to contend with the best, before I lose the garment.' Thus with laughing words the lord makes merry, to gladden Sir Gawain with games in hall that night, until it was time the lord ordered lights. Gawain took his leave and directed himself to bed.

[995] On the morrow, as every man remembers that time when the Lord was born to die for our destiny, joy grows in every dwelling on earth for His sake. So it did there on that day, through many delicacies: both at breakfast and at dinner, bold men arranged very skilfully made dishes on the dais in the best manner. The venerable old lady sits in the place of honour; the lord courteously took his place beside her, as I believe. Gawain and the beautiful lady sat together right in the centre, where the food properly came, and afterwards went around the whole hall, as seemed most fitting to them, until each man was duly served according to his rank. [1007] There was food, there was mirth, there was great joy, so that I would have difficulty to tell of it, even if, perhaps, I were to take pains to describe it in detail. But still I know that Gawain and the delightful lady found such pleasure in each other's company through the pleasant courtly conversation of their confidential words, with chaste courteous speech free from impurity, that their pleasant occupation surpassed the pleasure of any nobleman there, in truth. Trumpets, kettledrums, and much piping were present there. Each man attended to his own pleasure, and those two attended to theirs.

[1020] Much merriment was made there that day and the second, and the third, just as hectic, hastened in afterwards – the joy of St John’s day was excellent to hear, and people there intended that it was the last of the holiday. Those who were guests there were due to go in the grey morning; therefore they stayed up amazingly late, drank wine, and incessantly danced their favourite ring-dances. At last, when it was late, they take their leave, each one who was a visitor to go on his way. Gawain said goodbye to him [i.e. the host]; the host seizes him, leads him to his own private room, beside the fireplace, and there he holds him back and heartily thanks him for the delightful honour that he had brought him, to honour his house in that festive season and grace his castle with his gracious demeanour. [1035] ‘Indeed, sir, it will be the better for me as long as I live that Gawain has been my guest at God’s own festival.’ ‘Many thanks, sir,’ said Gawain, ‘in good faith it is yours, all the honour is your own – may the supreme King reward you – and I am, sir, at your command, to do your bidding, as I am bound to, in great things and in small, by obligation.’ The lord earnestly endeavoured to keep the knight longer; Gawain answers him that he could by no means stay longer.

[1046] Then the man asked him very courteously what terrible deed had compelled him to ride away so eagerly from the king’s court all by himself at that festal time, before the holidays were completely over. ‘Indeed, sir,’ said the knight, ‘you speak only the truth. A great and urgent mission drew me from that abode, for I myself am summoned to seek a place, and I do not know whatever direction in the world to go to find it. I would not fail to reach it on New Year’s morning for all the land in Britain, so help me our Lord! Therefore, sir, I ask you this question here: that you tell me truly if ever you heard an account of the Green Chapel, where it stands on the ground, and of the knight coloured green who holds it. [1060] An appointment was established by agreement between us, for me to meet that man at that rendezvous, if I happened to live so long; and there is but little time until that same New Year, and I would see that knight, if God will allow me, more gladly, by Christ, than possess any good thing! Therefore, indeed, if you please, I am obliged to go; I now have barely

three days to bestir myself, and I would be as glad to fall down dead as to fail in my mission.’ Then the lord said with a laugh: ‘Now it behoves you to stay, for I shall direct you to that trysting place before the time expires. Let the whereabouts of the Green Chapel bother you no more; but you shall remain in your bed, sir, at your ease, until well on in the day, and leave on the first day of the year, and come to that rendezvous at mid-morning, to do what you like there. Remain until New Year’s Day, and rise and depart then. You shall be put on the right road; it is not two miles from here.’

[1079] Then Gawain was very glad and he laughed happily: ‘Now I thank you heartily beyond all your other kindnesses. Now my adventure is accomplished, I shall remain at your command and in other ways do what you think fit.’ Then the lord seized him and sat him down beside himself, and sent for the ladies for their greater enjoyment. There was seemly pleasure by themselves in private; the lord uttered such merry words in friendship that he seemed like a man who was about to go off his head, who didn’t know what he might do. Then he spoke to the knight, in a loud voice: ‘You have agreed to do whatever I command – will you keep this promise here and now?’ ‘Yes, sir, indeed,’ said the faithful knight, ‘while I stay in your castle I shall be obedient to your command.’ [1093] ‘As you have had a hard journey,’ said the man, ‘and have come from afar, and have since stayed up late with me, you are not well recovered in respect either of sustenance or of sleep, I know for a fact. You shall remain in your bedroom and lie at your ease tomorrow morning until the time of Mass, and go to your meal when you wish with my wife, who will sit with you and amuse you with company until I return to court. You stay and I shall rise early; I intend to go hunting.’ Gawain agreed to all this, bowing, like the courteous man he was.

[1105] ‘Yet further,’ said the man, ‘let us make an agreement: whatever I win in the forest becomes yours, and you give me in exchange for it whatever bad luck you have. My dear sir, let us strike a bargain on these terms: to answer honourably, to whichever man may fall the worse lot or

the better.’ ‘By God,’ said Gawain the good, ‘I agree to it; and it seems delightful to me that it pleases you to play.’ ‘If someone will bring us the drink [to pledge our word], this bargain is made’ – so said the lord of that people; everyone laughed. [1114] They drank and conversed and behaved freely, these lords and ladies, as long as they pleased, and then with refined manners and many courteous words they stood and lingered and spoke quietly, kissed most courteously, and took their leave. With many energetic servants and gleaming torches, every man was brought to his bed at last in great comfort. Before they went to bed, they often repeated the terms of the agreement; he who had long been lord of that people certainly knew how to keep up the fun.

III

[1126] Very early before the day dawned the people got up. Guests who wanted to go called their servants, and they hasten up immediately to saddle horses, prepare their gear, and pack their bags; the nobles prepare themselves, all dressed to ride, quickly mount, seize their bridles, each man on his way to where it well pleased him. The dear lord of the land was not the last dressed for riding with many men; he ate a morsel quickly, after he had heard mass; he goes swiftly to the hunting-field carrying a horn. By the time that any daylight shone upon the earth, he and his men were on great horses. [1139] Then huntsmen who were expert leashed their hounds in pairs, opened the kennel door and called them outside, blew three single notes powerfully on their horns. Hounds bayed in response, and made a fierce noise; and they controlled and turned back the hounds that chased false scents, a hundred huntsmen of the best, as I have heard tell. Keepers of hounds went to their hunting-stations, huntsmen took off the leashes; there arose a great noise in that forest on account of the good blasts (of the horn).

[1150] At the first sound of the baying [of hounds on the scent] the wild animals trembled. Deer hurtled into the valley, frenzied with fear,

hastened to the high ground, but they were quickly turned back by the ring of beaters, who shouted loudly. Then they allowed the stags with the high heads to pass, also the wild bucks with their broad antlers; for the noble lord had forbidden that any man should rouse any male deer in the close-season. The hinds were held in with cries of ‘Hay!’ and ‘War!’ The does poured with a great noise into the deep valleys. There could be seen the slanting flight of arrows as they were loosed; at every turning in the wood an arrow swished, burying their broad heads deep in the brown flesh. [1163] Oh! they bray and bleed, they die on hillsides, and all the time hounds pursue them in a headlong chase, huntsmen with loud horns hastened after them, with a ringing sound as if rocks were splitting. Any animal that escaped the archers was pulled down and slaughtered at the receiving stations, when they had been harassed on the heights and driven down to the streams, so skilful were the men at the low hunting stations; and so huge were the greyhounds that they quickly seized them and pulled them down as fast as men could turn and look. The lord, transported with delight, galloped forward and dismounted again and again, and passed that day with joy thus until the dark night.

[1178] Thus the lord amuses himself along the edges of the forest, and Gawain the good man lies in a fine bed, stays snug until the daylight shone on the walls, under a lovely counterpane, with curtains around. And as he dozed [*lit.* drifted in sleep], he heard a little stealthy sound at his door and [heard it] quickly open; and he raises his head up out of the clothes, lifted up the corner of the curtain a little, and looks warily in that direction [to see] what it might be. It was the lady, loveliest to behold, who drew the door after her secretly and silently, and came towards the bed; and the man was embarrassed, and lay down cunningly and pretended to be asleep. [1191] And she stepped quietly and stole to his bed, opened the curtain and crept inside, and sat herself very softly on the bedside, and remained there an exceedingly long time to see when he would wake up. The man lay snuggled down a very long time, pondered in his mind what the circumstance could portend or signify. It seemed amazing to him; but yet he said to himself: ‘It would be more seemly, by talking to her,

to discover in due course what she wants.’ Then he stirred and stretched and turned towards her, and opened his eyelids and behaved as though he was surprised, and crossed himself with his hand, as if to become the safer by his (silent) prayer. With very lovely chin and cheek, both white and red together, she spoke very amiably with slender laughing lips.

[1208] ‘Good morning, Sir Gawain,’ said that fair lady, ‘you are an unwary sleeper, that one may slip in here. Now you are captured in a moment! Unless we can arrange a truce between ourselves, I shall bind you in your bed – be sure of that.’ All laughing, the lady uttered those jests. ‘Good morning, fair lady,’ said the joyful Gawain, ‘my fate shall be as you determine, and that pleases me well, for I yield myself promptly and cry out for mercy; and that is best, in my opinion, for I am obliged of necessity!’ (And thus he jested in return with much happy laughter.) ‘But if you, lovely lady, would then grant me permission, and release your prisoner and ask him to rise, I would leave this bed and dress myself better; I should take more pleasure in talking with you.’ [1222] ‘No indeed, fine sir,’ said that sweet lady, ‘you shall not rise from your bed. I give you better instructions: I shall imprison you here on the other side too, and then talk with my knight whom I have caught. For I am well aware, indeed, you are Sir Gawain, whom all the world honours; wherever you ride, your honour, your courtesy is graciously praised by lords, by ladies, by all who live. And now you are here, indeed, and are we quite by ourselves; my lord and his men have gone a long way off, other men are in their beds, and my ladies too, the door is shut and fastened with a strong latch; and since I have in this house him who pleases everyone, I shall make good use of my time, while it lasts, with conversation. You are welcome to me [*lit.* to my body], to take your own pleasure; I must of pure necessity be your servant, and shall be.’

[1241] ‘In good faith,’ said Gawain, ‘that seems agreeable to me. Though I am not he of whom you now speak – I am a man unworthy to attain such an honour as you have just mentioned, I myself know well – by God, I should be glad if you saw fit that I should devote myself, by word or

deed, to obliging your worthy self; it would be a sheer delight.’ ‘In good faith, Sir Gawain,’ said the fair lady, ‘if I disparaged or made little of the excellence and the prowess that pleases everyone else, it would be small courtesy. [1251] But there are many ladies who would rather now have you, gracious knight, in their grasp, as I have you here – to make courtly play with your charming words, to find solace for themselves and assuage their longings – than much of the treasure or gold that they have. But I praise that very Lord who rules the heavens that I have wholly in my hand what everyone desires, through grace.’ She who was so fair of face made him such a great welcome. The knight answered everything she chanced to say with innocent speeches.

[1263] ‘Madam,’ said the handsome man, ‘Mary reward you, for I have found, in good faith, your liberality noble; and some people take their mode of conduct a good deal from others; but the honour they bestow is not at all my deserving – it does credit to yourself, revealing the goodness of your own heart [*lit.* who can only behave generously].’ ‘By Mary,’ said the noble lady, ‘it seems to me otherwise; for were I worth all the multitude of women alive, and all the prosperity of the world were in my hand, and I should haggle and choose to get myself a husband, for the qualities that I have perceived in you, knight, here, of good looks and graciousness and joyful demeanour – for this is what I have heard before and now believe it to be true – there should be no man on earth chosen before you.’ [1276] ‘Indeed, worthy lady,’ said the knight, ‘you have chosen much better; but I am proud of the value that you place on me and, solemnly [as] your servant, I consider you my sovereign [lady] and become your knight, and may Christ recompense you.’ Thus they spoke of many things until mid-morning passed, and all the time the lady behaved as if she loved him a great deal. The man acted guardedly and behaved most politely; though she may have been the loveliest lady the knight had ever known [*lit.* remembered], he had brought with him so much the less love because of the penalty he was going to meet forthwith – the blow that should strike him down, and cannot be avoided [*lit.* and needs it must be done]. The lady then spoke of leaving; he consented immediately.

[1290] Then she wished him good day, and laughed with a twinkle, and as she stood she astounded him with her severe words: 'Now may He who prospers every speech reward you for this pleasure, only it is hard to believe that you are Gawain!' 'Why?' said the man, and he asks eagerly, afraid that he had fallen short in the manner of his speeches. But the lady exclaimed 'God bless you' and said: 'For this reason: anyone as good as Gawain is rightly considered to be, and in whom courtesy is so completely embodied, could not easily have stayed so long with a lady without asking for a kiss through his courtesy, by some trifling hint at the end of a speech.' Then Gawain said: 'Indeed, let it be as you please; I shall kiss at your command, as befits a knight, and, in addition, lest he should displease you; so urge it no more.' [1305] With that she comes nearer and takes him in her arms, bends down graciously and kisses the knight. They courteously commend each other to Christ; she goes out at the door without any further sound, and he prepares to rise and immediately hurries, calls to his manservant, chooses his clothing, goes out, when he was ready, gladly to mass; and then he proceeded to his meal, that fittingly awaited him, and enjoyed himself all day, with merriment, until the moon rose. A man was never better received between two such noble ladies, the elder and the younger; they found much pleasure together.

[1319] And all the time the lord of the land is away at his sport, hunting the barren hinds in woods and heath. He had killed there such a quantity of does and other deer by the time the sun went down, it would be wonderful to assess. Then at last the people spiritedly assembled, and quickly made a heap of game from the slaughtered deer. Those of highest rank went there with many men, gathered the plumpest that were there, and had them gracefully cut open in the prescribed manner. Some who were there examined them at the 'assay'; they found two fingers' breadth of flesh on the poorest of them all. Then they slit the hollow at the base of the throat, took hold of the gullet, scraped it with a sharp knife, and tied up the flesh. Then they slit along the four legs and stripped off the hide; they opened the belly, drew the bowels carefully to avoid undoing the ligature of the knot. [1335] They seized the throat and properly

separated the gullet from the wind-pipe and tossed out the guts. They cut out the shoulder-joints with their sharp knives, drawing them through a small hole so as to keep the sides intact; then they cut the breast and divided it in two. And then one of them begins once again at the neck, quickly cuts the carcase open right to the fork, removes the neck offal and truly after that they promptly loosen all the membranes on the ribs; thus they correctly clear out the offal along the bones of the back right down to the haunch, so that it all hung together, and they lift it up quite intact and cut it off there – and that, I believe, they properly designate the ‘numbles’. Then they loosen the folds of skin behind the fork of the thighs; they make haste to cut the carcase in two, dividing it along the backbone.

[1353] Then they cut off both the head and the neck, and next they separate the sides swiftly from the backbone, and throw the ‘raven’s fee’ into a thicket. Then they pierced each thick side through by the ribs, and then hung each by the hocks of the haunches, each man receiving what befits him for his fee. Upon a skin of the fine beast they feed their hounds with the liver and the lungs, the lining of the stomachs, and bread soaked in blood mingled with it. [1362] They vigorously blew ‘capture’, their hounds bayed; then they took their venison, packed up for home, sounding very loudly many powerful notes on the horn. By the time daylight was finished, the company had all come into the fine castle, where the knight waits quietly, with joy and a bright fire kindled. The lord comes to that place: when Gawain met with him, there was all the happiness that could be desired.

[1372] Then the lord commanded all the company to assemble in that hall, both the ladies to come down with their women. In front of all the people in the hall he bids men faithfully to fetch his venison before him; and most graciously, in merriment, he called Gawain, directs his attention to the number [*lit.* tails] of extremely well-grown beasts, shows him the bright meat cut on the ribs: ‘How does this sport please you? Have I won renown? Have I abundantly deserved thanks by means of my skill?’ ‘Yes

indeed,' said the other man, 'this is the finest catch that I have seen for many a year [*lit.* seven years] in the season of winter.' 'And I give it all to you, Gawain,' said the man then, 'for by the agreement of the covenant you may claim it as your own.' 'This is true,' said the man; 'I say the same to you: that which I have honourably won within this abode shall indeed with as good a will become yours.' [1387] He clasps his fair neck within his arms and kisses him as courteously as he could contrive: 'There take my winnings; I got no more. I bestow it completely and would do so even if there were more.' 'It is good,' said the host, 'thank you for that. It may be of such a nature that it would turn out to be the better prize, if you would tell me from whom you won this good fortune by your own cleverness.' 'That was not in our agreement,' said he; 'ask me no more, for you have received what is due to you; rest assured you cannot have anything else.' They laughed and made merry with admirable speeches. They immediately went to supper, with many new delicacies.

[1402] And afterwards they sat by the fireplace in the private room, servants brought excellent wine to them frequently, and again in their jesting they agree to carry out on the next day the same terms that they had made before: whatever fortune happens, to exchange their winnings, whatever new thing they received, when they met at night. They agreed to the conditions before all the court – the drink was brought forth in jest at that time – then they took leave at last in a friendly manner; each man went quickly to his bed. [1412] By the time that the cock had crowed and cackled but thrice, the lord had leapt from his bed, [and so had] all the men, so that the meal and the mass were properly despatched, the company went on their way to the wood, before any daylight dawned, to the chase. To the loud sound of huntsmen and horns, they soon pass through meadows; they unleashed among the thorns hounds which ran in a headlong course.

[1421] Soon the hounds signal [by baying] that they have a scent at the edge of a wooded marsh; the huntsman urged on the hounds who had first drawn attention to the scent, uttered excited words to them with a

loud noise. The hounds that heard it hastened there swiftly, and rushed with all speed to the trail, forty at once. Then such a babble and noise rose from the assembled hounds that the rocks round about rang. Huntsmen encouraged them with horn and with voice; then all in a throng they surged together between a pool in that wood and a forbidding crag. In the middle of a wooded mound beside a high rock at the edge of the marsh, where the rough hillside had fallen in confusion, the hounds went to the dislodgement [of the quarry], with the men after them. The men cast about both the crag and the wooded knoll, until they were sure they had contained the beast whose presence had been revealed by the voices of the bloodhounds. [1437] Then they beat the bushes and bade him rise; and he came out menacingly, straight across the line of men. There rushed out the most amazing boar, which had long since left the herd on account of his age, for he was huge and broad, the greatest boar of all, very fierce when he snorted; then many were troubled, for he flattened three [men] to the earth at the first thrust, and sprang forward at a good speed without [causing] further injury. Others shouted ‘Look out!’ very loudly, and cried ‘Hey! Hey!’, put horns to mouth, quickly sounded the recheat [to call the hounds together]. Many were the merry voices of men and of hounds that hastened after this boar with clamour and with noise, to kill it. Very often he stands at bay and causes injury in the midst of the pack of hounds. He hurts some of the hounds, and they howl and yell most miserably.

[1454] Men pushed forward to shoot at him then, shot their arrows at him, hit him often; but the points which struck his shoulders were blunted by the toughness [of them], and none would penetrate the bristles of his brow; though the smooth shaft shattered in pieces, the head bounced back wherever it hit. But when the blows of their incessant strokes hurt him, then, maddened by the persistent attacks, he charges at the men, injures them cruelly where he dashes forward; and many were afraid at that and drew back. [1464] But the lord gallops after him on a swift horse, he blows his horn like a bold warrior, he sounded the recheat, and rode through thick bushes, pursuing this wild boar until the sun

was setting. They spend this day with this same activity in this manner, while our gracious knight, Gawain, lies in his bed, comfortably at home in bedclothes splendid of hue. The lady did not forget to come to greet him; she visited him very early, in order to bring about a change in his attitude.

[1476] She comes to the curtain and peeps at the knight. Sir Gawain welcomed her courteously first, and she replies to him using very eager language, sits herself softly by his side and laughs a good deal, and with a look of love she bestowed these words on him: ‘Sir, if you are Gawain, it seems to me a wonder, a man who is always so well disposed to good things, and you cannot understand the manners of society, and if someone teaches you to know them, you cast them from your mind: you have quickly forgotten what I taught you yesterday in the very truest teaching I could put into words.’ ‘What is that?’ said the knight. ‘Indeed I do not know. If what you declare is true, the blame is mine.’ ‘But I taught you about kissing,’ said the fair one then, ‘to claim it immediately wherever favour is shown; that becomes every knight who practises courtesy.’ [1492] ‘Put an end to that speech, my dear lady,’ said the bold man, ‘for I would not dare do that, in case I were refused. If I offered [a kiss] and were refused, I would, indeed, be [put in the] wrong.’ ‘On my word,’ said the lovely lady, ‘you may not be refused; you are strong enough to force the issue with strength, if it pleases you, if anyone were ill-bred enough to refuse you.’ ‘Yes, by God,’ said Gawain, ‘you speak well; but force is considered ignoble in the land where I live, and so is every gift that is not given with a good will. I am at your command, to kiss when it pleases you; you may take [a kiss] when it pleases you and leave off when it seems good to you, in due course.’ The lady bends down and graciously kisses his face. They utter many words there about the punishments and favours of love.

[1508] ‘I would like to know from you, sir,’ the noble lady said at that point, ‘if you did not become angry about this, what might be the reason that one so young and so active as you are at this time, so courteous, so

chivalrous, as you are known far and wide – and from among the whole [code] of chivalry, the thing principally praised is the faithful practice of love, the very doctrine of knighthood; for to speak of the striving of true knights, it is the rubric written at the head of their works, and the very works themselves, how men have risked their lives for their true love, endured grievous times of hardship for their love, and later avenged and dispelled their sorrow through their valour, and brought joy into [their ladies'] bower through their own merits – [1520] and you are known as the most handsome knight of your generation, your fame and your honour are spread abroad everywhere, and I have sat by you here on two different occasions, yet I never heard any words come from your lips [*lit.* head] that ever pertained to love at all. And you, who are so courteous and fastidious in your promises, ought to be eager to show and teach a young thing some tokens of the arts of true love. Why! are you ignorant, you who possess all the renown, or else do you consider me too stupid to listen to your courtly conversation? For shame! I come here alone and sit to learn some pleasure from you; do teach me from your wisdom while my lord is away from home.'

[1535] 'In good faith,' said Gawain, 'may God reward you! It is a great good pleasure and a huge delight to me that one as noble as you should wish to come here and take pains with so worthless a man, as to amuse yourself with your knight and show any kind of favour; it gives me pleasure. But to take upon myself the task of expounding true love, and relating the subject-matter and stories of chivalry to you, who (I know well), possess more skill in that art, by far, than a hundred such as I am, or ever shall be, while I live on earth, it would be a folly many times over, my gracious lady, upon my honour. [1546] I should be willing to carry out your wish to the best of my ability, as I am greatly obliged [to do], and shall be your servant evermore, so help me God!' In this way that gracious lady put him to the test and tempted him often, in order to bring him to wrong, whatever else she intended; but he defended himself so fitly that no offence was apparent, nor any impropriety on either side, nor were they aware of anything but pleasure. They laughed and amused

themselves for a long time; at last she kissed him, graciously took her leave, and went on her way, indeed.

[1558] Then the knight bestirs himself and rises to mass, and afterwards their dinner was prepared and courteously served. The knight amused himself with the ladies all day, but the lord galloped over the fields again and again, pursues his ill-fated boar, that rushes along the hillsides and bit asunder the backs of the best of his hounds where he stood at bay, till bowmen broke it [i.e. his stand], and made him move out into the open despite all he could do, such deadly arrows flew there when the people assembled. But yet he made the bravest men jump at times, till at last he was so exhausted that he could run no more, but with all the haste that he could he reached a hole in a water-course, by a rock where the stream runs. [1571] He got the bank at his back, begins to scrape – the froth foamed hideously at the corners of his mouth – sharpens his white tusks. Then all the very brave men who stood round him became weary of trying to hurt him from a distance, but none of them dared go near him because of the danger; he had previously hurt so many that it then seemed hateful to everyone to be torn any more by his tusks, [he] who was both fierce and maddened.

[1581] Till the knight came himself, urging on his horse, saw him [i.e. the boar] stand at bay near his men. He dismounts gracefully, leaves his horse, draws out a bright sword and strides forward powerfully, hastens swiftly through the ford where the fierce beast waits. The wild animal was aware of the man with the weapon in his hand, raised his hair on end; he snorted so fiercely that many feared for the man, lest the worst befell him. [1589] The boar charges straight at the man, so that the man and the boar were both in a heap in the strongest current of the stream. The other had the worst of it, for the man aims at him well, as they first met, firmly placed the blade right in the hollow at the base of the throat, struck him up to the hilt, so that the heart broke apart, and he yielded snarling and was carried downstream very quickly. A hundred hounds seized him, fiercely biting him; men brought him to the bank and dogs do him to death.

[1601] There was the blowing of ‘capture’ on many loud horns, proud shouting aloud by men who were able [to do so]; hounds bayed at that beast, as the masters of game, who were the chief huntsmen of that onerous chase, commanded. Then a man who was skilful in woodcrafts begins to cut up this boar correctly. First he cuts off his head and sets it on high, and then rends him all roughly along the backbone, draws out the bowels, burns them on red-hot embers, with bread blended with them rewards his hounds. [1611] Then he cuts out the meat in bright broad slabs, and cuts up [the boar] into the prescribed parts, as is right and proper; moreover he fastens the two complete sides together, and afterwards hangs them securely on a strong pole. Now with this same boar they hasten home. The boar’s head was borne in front of the very knight who had killed it in the ford through the strength of his mighty hand. He was impatient to see Sir Gawain in the hall; he called, and he [i.e. Gawain] came promptly, to receive his payment there.

[1623] When he saw Sir Gawain, the lord speaks with pleasure, very loudly and with merry laughter. The good ladies were sent for, and the household assembled; he shows them the slabs of meat and recounts to them the tale of the width and length of the wild boar, also the viciousness of his defence, when he fled in the wood. The other knight very courteously commended his deeds and praised his actions as giving proof of great accomplishment, for, the bold knight said, he had never before seen such a well-fleshed beast or such sides of a boar. Then they handled the huge head; the noble man praised it and made a show of abhorrence at it, in order to praise the lord. [1635] ‘Now, Gawain,’ said the host, ‘this catch is your own by precise and binding agreement, you know truly.’ ‘It is true,’ said the knight, ‘and as surely true [as you are], I shall give you all my winnings in return, upon my honour.’ He took the man about the neck and kisses him courteously, and again he served him there in the same way [i.e. kissed him again]. ‘Now we are even,’ said the knight, ‘in this evening, in respect of all the covenants that we have formally established since I came here.’ The lord said: ‘By St Giles, you are the best that I know! You will be rich in a while if you carry on such trade.’

[1648] Then they set up tables on trestles, threw cloths upon them; bright lights then shone by walls, torches of wax. Servants laid the table and served in the hall all around. Great noise and music sprang up there around the fire in the hall, and in many ways at the supper and afterwards, many noble songs such as Christmas part-songs and new ring-dances, with all the dignified amusement that one may tell of. [1657] And our gracious knight constantly beside the lady; she sweetly made such a demonstration [of regard] to that man, with secret stolen looks, to please that bold knight, that the man was quite astonished and inwardly angry, but he would not repulse her on account of his good breeding, but behaved with complete courtesy towards her, even though this might be misconstrued. When they had amused themselves in the hall for as long as they wished, he [i.e. the host] called him [i.e. Gawain] to the private room and they went to the fireplace.

[1668] And there they drank and conversed, and agreed once more to do the same on New Year's Eve; but the knight asked leave to depart in the morning, for it was near to the appointment to which he had to go. The lord dissuaded him from that, persuaded him to stay, and said: 'As I am a true knight, I pledge my word of honour that you will reach the Green Chapel to perform your business, sir, at first light on New Year's Day, long before prime [i.e. 9 a.m.]. Therefore lie in your bedroom and take your ease, and I shall hunt in the wood and keep to the covenant, exchange winnings with you when I return hither. [1679] For I have tested you twice and I find you faithful. Now remember tomorrow [the saying] "Third time, throw best"; let us make merry while we may and think about joy, for one can get sorrow whenever one pleases.' This was readily agreed and Gawain is persuaded to stay; drink was happily brought to them and they went to bed with lights. Sir Gawain lies and sleeps very quietly and comfortably all night; the lord, who attends to his sports, was dressed very early.

[1690] After mass, he and his men had a bite to eat. The morning was fine; he asks for his mount. All the men who were to follow him

on horseback were ready prepared on their horses in front of the hall gates. The countryside was very beautiful, for the frost clung [to it]; the sun rises red, its redness reflected upon a bank of cloud, and in its full brightness drives the clouds from the sky. Huntsmen unleashed [their hounds] by the side of a wood; rocky banks rang in the wood with the noise of their horns. Some [of the hounds] hit upon the scent where the fox was lurking, trail again and again across it in their wily ingenuity. A small hound gives tongue at it; the huntsman calls him on; his fellows rush to him, panting very hard, they ran forward in a rabble on the right track, and he [i.e. the fox] scampers before them; they found him at once. [1705] And when they caught sight of him they pursued him fast, vilifying him in no uncertain terms with a furious noise, and he twists and turns through many a troublesome thicket, doubles back and listens by hedges again and again. At last by a little ditch he leaps over a fence, steals out quietly at the edge of a wooded marsh, thinking to have escaped out of the wood by tricks, away from the hounds. He had turned in then, before he knew it, to a well-placed hunting station, where three fierce [hounds] – all greyhounds – came at him in a rush. He dodged back quickly and leapt off violently in a changed direction. With all the woe on earth he went away to the wood.

[1719] Then it was pleasure indeed to hear the hounds, [their voices] mingled together, when all the pack had met up with him; on seeing him they call down on him such an imprecation, as though all the clustering cliffs were crashing in a heap. Here he was shouted at when men met him, loudly he was greeted with snarling speech; there he was threatened and often called ‘thief,’ and all the time the hounds on his tail, so that he could not tarry. He was often run at when he broke cover, and often swerved in again, so wily was Reynard. And yes! he led them astray, the lord and his company, in this way among the hills until well on in the afternoon, while the noble knight at home sleeps for the good of his health within the fine curtains, in the cold morning. [1733] But the lady, on account of her wooing, did not allow herself to sleep, nor did she allow the purpose which stuck in her heart to become blunted, but rose

quickly, went there in a beautiful cloak, reaching to the floor, which was perfectly furred with well trimmed skins; no seemly coif on her head, but the noble jewels [i.e. pearls?] set about her hair-fret in clusters of twenty; her lovely face and her throat laid all bare, her breast uncovered in front, and also her back. She comes inside the bedroom door and closes it after her, pushes open a window and calls the man, and this is how she urgently exhorted him with her lively words, in a cheerful manner: 'Ah! man, how can you sleep? This morning is so bright.' He was deep in uneasy sleep, but then he heard her.

[1750] In the deep uneasy sleep of dreams that noble knight muttered, as a man who was troubled by many oppressive thoughts, how Destiny would deal out his fate to him on that day when he meets the man at the Green Chapel, and must endure his blow without more resistance. But when that fair lady came he recovered his wits, starts out of the dreams and answers quickly. The lovely lady came, laughing sweetly, bent over his handsome face and gracefully kissed him. He welcomes her courteously with an urbane manner; [1760] he saw her so glorious and splendidly dressed, so perfect in her features and of such fine complexion, strong surging joy warmed his heart. With pleasant and gentle smiles they fall into [conversation on] pleasant subjects, so everything that was broached between them was bliss and happiness and joy. They uttered friendly words; much delight was then in that place. There was great peril between them, unless Mary be mindful of her knight.

[1770] For that noble princess pressed him so insistently, urged him so near the limit, that he needs must either accept her love there or rudely refuse. He was concerned about his courtesy, lest he should be boorish, and more about his guilt if he were to commit sin and be a traitor to the man who owned that house. 'God forbid!' said the man [to himself]. 'That shall not happen!' With a little flirtatious wit he turned aside all the expressions of affection that sprang from her mouth. [1779] The lady said to the man: 'You deserve blame if you do not love that person you are lying beside, [who is] wounded in heart more than anybody in the

world, unless you have a sweetheart, someone dearer to you, who pleases you better, and have pledged your word to that noble one, confirmed so definitely that you do not care to break it – and that I now believe! And I pray you that you now tell me that truly; for everything that is dear, do not conceal the truth through guile.’ The knight said: ‘By St John’ (and he smiled gently), ‘in faith I have no [sweetheart] at all, nor will I have any for the time being.’

[1792] ‘That is a word,’ said that person, ‘that is worst of all; but I am truly answered – that seems painful to me. Kiss me now, noble one, and I shall go away; I can do nothing but lament as long as I live, as a woman deeply in love.’ Sighing, she bent down and kissed him sweetly, and then she parts from him and says as she stands: ‘Now, dear, at this parting, do me this favour: give me something as your gift, your glove for example, so that I may think of you, sir, to lessen my grief.’ ‘Now indeed,’ said that man, ‘I wish I had here the most precious thing, for love of you, that I have on earth, for you have deserved, indeed, exceedingly often more recompense by rights than I could give. [1805] But to give you, as a love-token, something of little worth! – it is not equal to your dignity for you to have at this time a glove as a trophy given by Gawain. And I am here on a mission in strange lands, and have no men with bags of fine things (which I regret, lady) for friendship at this time; each man must act according to his situation – do not take it amiss or be distressed.’ ‘No, noble knight of high honour,’ said that lovely lady, ‘though I did not have anything of yours, yet you should have something of mine.’

[1817] She offered him a fine ring of red gold workmanship, with a glittering stone standing out, that sent forth flashing beams like the bright sun; understand well, it was worth a huge amount. But the knight refused it and quickly said: ‘Before God, I wish for no gifts, my fair lady, at this time; I have none to offer you, nor will I take anything.’ She offered it to him most earnestly, and he refuses her offer, and swore swiftly on his word that he would not take it; and she was sorry that he refused and said afterwards: ‘If you refuse my ring because it seems too valuable,

and you do not wish to be so greatly beholden to me, I shall give you my girdle, which will profit you less.’ [1830] She quickly took a belt that was fastened around her waist, tied over her gown, under the bright cloak; it was made from green silk and mounted with gold, embroidered all over, inlaid by hand. And that she offered to the man and cheerfully implored him to take it, though it were of little value; and he said the he would by no means touch either gold or treasure, before God should send him the grace to accomplish the adventure to which he had devoted himself there. ‘And therefore, I pray you, do not be displeased, and stop your importunity, for I shall never agree to grant it to you. I am deeply beholden to you because of your kindness, and [obliged] always to be your servant in all circumstances.’

[1846] ‘Now, do you refuse this piece of silk,’ said the lady then, ‘because it is plain in itself? And so it seems, perhaps: look! it is no bigger than this and its value is even less [than it seems]. But whoever knew the qualities that are woven into it, he would esteem it at greater value, perhaps; for whatever man is girt with this green belt, while he had it closely fastened about him, there is no man under heaven who could cut him down, for he could not be slain despite any strategem [i.e. trickery] on earth.’ Then the knight considered, and it came to his mind that it would be a godsend [*lit.* jewel] for the hazard assigned to him: when he reached the chapel to receive his doom, if he could escape without getting killed it would be a fine strategem. [1859] Then he gave in to her insistence and allowed her to speak, and she pressed the belt on him and offered it to him earnestly, and he consented and gave in of his own free will, and she implored him, for her sake, never to reveal it, but faithfully to conceal it from her lord. The knight agrees that no one should ever know of it, indeed, but they two, on any account. He thanked her often very much, most earnestly with heart and thought; then she kissed the hardy knight for the third time.

[1870] Then she takes her leave and leaves him there, for she could not get any more pleasure from that man. When she had gone, Sir Gawain

quickly dresses himself, rises and decks himself out in noble array, puts away the love-girdle the lady had given him, hid it most carefully where he would find it again. Then he makes his way first of all to the chapel, approached a priest in private and asked him there if he would hear his confession and teach him better how his soul should be saved when he should pass away. [1880] He made a clean confession there and revealed his sins, the greater and the lesser, and begs for forgiveness, and asks the man [i.e. the priest] for absolution; and he absolved him reliably and made him as clean as if doomsday had been appointed on the next day. And then he makes himself as cheerful among the noble ladies, with fine ring-dances and all kinds of joy, as he never did except on that day, until the dark night, with bliss. Everyone there took delight in him, and said: ‘Indeed, he was never yet so merry, since he came here, before this.’

[1893] Now let him stay in that shelter, where friendship befell him! The lord is still in the field, pursuing his sport. He has headed off this fox that he has followed for a long time; as he leapt over a fence to look for the villain, at a place where he heard the hounds in full chase, Reynard came moving through a rough thicket, and all the rabble in a rush hard on his heels. The man was aware of the animal and waits cautiously, and draws the bright sword and lunges at the beast. And he flinched on account of the sharp blade and was about to retreat; a hound rushed to him, just before he could do so, and right in front of the horse’s feet they all fell on him and worried this wily beast with a fierce noise. [1906] The lord swiftly dismounts and seizes him immediately, snatched him very quickly out of the mouths of the hounds, holds him high over his head, shouts loudly, and many fierce hounds bay at him there. Huntsmen hurried there with a great many horns, sounding the recheat in proper fashion all the time until they saw the man. When his noble company had come, all who carried a horn blew together and all the others, who had no horns, shouted; it was the most joyful sound that anyone ever heard, the glorious noise that was raised for Reynard’s soul with clamour. They reward their hounds there, they fondle and stroke their heads, and then they take Reynard and strip off his coat.

[1922] Then they make for home, for it was nearly night, sounding loudly on their powerful horns. The lord has arrived at last at his beloved home, finds a fire in the hall, the knight beside it, the good Sir Gawain, who was happy with everybody – he experienced much joy among the ladies on account of friendship. He wore a silk garment of blue, which reached to the floor; his surcoat, which was softly furred, suited him well, and his matching hood hung on his shoulder; both were trimmed all around with fur. He meets the host in the middle of the floor, and greeted him jovially, and said graciously: ‘I shall now be first to fulfil our agreement, which we happily affirmed when the drink flowed freely.’ [1936] Then he embraces the knight and kisses him three times, as feelingly and deliberately as he could place them. ‘By Christ,’ said the other knight, ‘you have had a lot of luck in obtaining this merchandise, if you found the market good.’ ‘Oh never mind the market,’ said the other quickly, ‘since the gain which I obtained is publicly paid.’ ‘Mary,’ said the other man, ‘mine is inferior, for I have hunted all this day and have got nothing but this vile fox skin – the Devil take the goods! – and that is very poor to pay for such precious things as you have earnestly imprinted on me, three such good kisses.’ ‘Enough,’ said Sir Gawain, ‘I thank you, by the Cross.’ And as they stood he [i.e. the host] told him how the fox was slain.

[1953] With merriment and minstrelsy, with dishes to their taste, they made as merry as anyone could, with laughter of ladies, with jesting speeches (Gawain and the host were both as merry as they could be), unless the company had been demented or else drunk. Both the man [i.e. the host] and the company made many jokes, until the time had come that they must part; men had to go to their beds at last. Then this gracious man humbly takes his leave of the lord first, and courteously thanks him ‘for such a marvellous stay as I have had here. May the Supreme King reward you for your hospitality at this solemn festival! [1964] I pledge [*lit.* give] myself to you [i.e. as your servant] in return for one of your own, if it pleases you, for I must needs go tomorrow, as you know, if you will offer me a man, as you promised, to show me the way to the Green Chapel, as God will allow me to partake of the judgement of my fate on

New Year's Day.' 'In good faith,' said the host, 'with a good will, all that I ever promised you I shall hold ready.' He assigns a servant there to set him on the way and conduct him beside the hills, so that he had no delay, to ride through the forest and go most directly beside the woods. Gawain thanked the lord for proffering him such an honour. Then the knight has taken his leave of the fine ladies.

[1979] He speaks to them with sorrow and with kisses, and he urged them to accept many hearty thanks; and they promptly gave him the same in return. They commended him to Christ with melancholy sighs; then he departs courteously from the household. He thanked each man he came to for his service and his kindness and his particular trouble that each had taken to serve him with solicitude; and each man was as sorry to part from him there as if they had always lived honourably with that fine knight. [1989] Then with men and lights he was led to his bedroom and gladly brought to his bed to be at his rest. Whether or not he slept soundly I dare not say, for he had much to ponder on the next day, if he wished to, in thought. Let him lie there quietly; he has what he sought nearby. If you will be quiet for a while, I shall tell you what they did.

IV

[1998] Now the New Year approaches and the night passes, the day presses against the darkness, as God commands. But wild storms awoke in the world outside; clouds drove the cold keenly down to the earth, and there was bitter wind enough from the north to torment the unprotected flesh. The snow showered down sharply, stinging the wild animals; the whistling wind struck down from the high ground and filled every valley with huge snowdrifts. The man who lay in his bed heard it very well – though he keeps his eyes closed, he sleeps very little; every time a cock crowed he was aware of the hour. Quickly he got up before the day dawned, for there was light from a lamp that shone in his bedroom. He called to his manservant, who promptly answered him, and bade

him bring him his coat of mail and saddle his horse. [2013] The other man bestirs himself and fetches him his clothes, and dresses Sir Gawain magnificently. First he clad him in his clothes, to keep out the cold, and then his other accoutrements, which had been carefully kept: both his abdominal armour and his pieces of plate-armour polished very bright, the rings of his splendid mail-coat rocked free of rust; and everything was as bright as in the beginning, and he gave hearty thanks [for that]. He [now] had on him every piece, polished most splendidly; the most elegant (knight) from here to Greece ordered the man to bring his horse.

[2025] While he was putting the finest clothes on himself – his surcoat with the badge of bright workmanship set upon velvet, with potent gems inlaid and clasped everywhere, the seams embroidered, and beautifully lined with fine furs – still he did not leave off the belt, the lady's gift; Gawain did not forget that, for his own good. When he had belted the sword upon his rounded hips, then he arranged his love-token twice about himself, wrapped it carefully about his waist, happily, that knight; the girdle of green silk well suited the magnificent knight, upon the glorious red cloth, that was splendid in appearance. [2037] But this same man did not wear this girdle for [its] costliness, for pride of the pendants, though they were polished, and though the glittering gold glinted at the ends [of them], but to save himself when he had to suffer, to endure calamity without resistance, to defend him from sword or knife. When, soon after, the brave man, fully equipped, comes outside, he thanks the noble household often and abundantly.

[2047] Then Gringolet was prepared, that massive great horse, having been lodged in comfort and in a trustworthy manner: that high-mettled horse was in the mood to gallop then, because of his [fine] condition. The man goes to him and looks at his coat, and said solemnly to himself and swears on his word: 'There is a company herein this castle who bear courtesy in mind. The man [who] supports them, may he have joy; the dear lady, may she be loved while she lives! If they welcome a guest out of charity and dispense favour [i.e. hospitality], may the Lord

who governs heaven on high reward them, and also you all! [2058] And if I might lead life on earth any length of time, I should willingly offer you some recompense, if I might.’ Then he steps into the stirrup and mounts; his man offered him his shield, he took it on his shoulder, spurs Gringolet with his gilt heels, and he leaps forward on the pavement – he no longer stood prancing. His man, who bore his spear and lance, was then mounted. ‘I commend this castle to Christ’ – he wished it good fortune for ever.

[2069] The drawbridge was let down, and the wide gates unbarred and swung open on both sides. The knight crossed himself quickly and passed over the boards, compliments the porter [who] knelt before the prince – [and the porter] wished him good day and commended him to God, [praying] that He would save Gawain – and went on his way with no one but his man, who was to direct him to make his way to that perilous place where he must receive the terrible blow. They pass by hillsides where boughs are bare; they climbed by crags where the cold clings. [2079] The clouds were high, but threatening underneath. Mist lay damp on the moor, condensed on the mountains; each hill had a hat, a huge cap-cloud. Brooks bubbled and splashed on the hillsides round about, dashing white on the banks, where they [i.e. the riders] made their way down. The path which they had to take through the wood was very devious, until it was soon the time when the sun rises at that time of year. They were on a very high hill; the white snow lay round about. The man who rode beside him bade his master to stop.

[2091] ‘For I have brought you here, sir, at his time, and now you are not far from that well-known place which you have inquired and asked about so particularly. But I shall tell you truly, since I know you, and you are indeed a man whom I love well: if you would act according to my judgement, it would be the better for you. The place that you hasten to is considered very perilous: in that deserted place there dwells a man, the worst on earth, for he is bold and grim and loves to strike [blows], and he is bigger than any man on earth, and his body stronger than the best four

that are in Arthur's house, [or] Hector, or anyone else. [2103] He brings it about at the Green Chapel that no one passes by that place so proud in his arms that he does not strike him dead with a blow of his hand; for he is an intemperate man and practises no mercy. For be it churl or chaplain who rides by the chapel, monk or ordained priest, or any other man, it seems to him as pleasant a thing to kill him as to remain alive himself. Therefore I tell you: as truly as you sit in the saddle, if you go there you will be killed, if the knight has his way – believe you me, truly – though you had twenty lives to lose. He has dwelt here for a long time, [and] caused much strife on the battlefield; you cannot defend yourself against his grievous blows.

[2118] 'Therefore, good Sir Gawain, let the man alone and go away some other way, for God's sake! Go through some other region, may God help you! And I shall hurry home again; and promise you moreover that I shall swear "by God and all His good saints", "as may God and the holy object help me", and many oaths, that I shall faithfully keep your secret and never utter an account that you ever attempted to flee because of any man as far as I knew.' 'Many thanks,' said Gawain, and ill-humouredly he said: 'Good luck befall you, sir, who intended to benefit me, who I believe would have faithfully kept my secret; [2129] but no matter how faithfully you kept it, if I passed this place, hastened to flee for fear, in the manner that you describe, I would be a cowardly knight, I could not be excused. But I am determined to go to the chapel, whatever may happen, and speak whatever words I wish with that same man, whether good or ill come of it, as Providence sees fit to dispose. Though he may be a grim fellow to master, and armed with a club, the Lord is well able to ordain that His servants should be saved.'

[2140] 'Mary!' said that other man, 'now you so much as say that you wish to bring your own harm upon yourself, and that it pleases you to lose your life, I do not care to dissuade you. Here take your helmet on your head, your spear in your hand, and ride down this same path, by the side of that rock, till you are brought to the bottom of the wild valley.

Then look a little way off in the glade, on your left hand, and you will see in that valley the very chapel and the huge warrior who keeps it. Now farewell, in God's name, Gawain the noble! [2150] I would not go with you for all the gold on earth, nor keep you company through this wood one foot further.' Then the man in the wood pulls round his bridle, hit the horse with his heels as hard as he could, gallops over the plain, and leaves the knight there alone. 'By God Himself,' said Gawain, 'I will neither weep nor groan; I am entirely obedient to God's will and to Him I have committed myself.'

[2160] Then he spurs Gringolet and picks up the path, pushes on past a rock at the edge of a thicket, rides down through the wooded slope right to the bottom. And then he looked about him, and it seemed wild to him, and he saw no sign of habitation anywhere about, only high and steep banks on both sides, and rough, lumpy crags with rugged outcrops; the clouds seemed to him to be grazed by the jutting rocks. Then he paused and restrained his horse at that time, and looked repeatedly from side to side, seeking the chapel. He saw nothing of the kind on any side – and it seemed strange to him – except, at a short distance across a glade, a sort of mound, a smooth-surfaced barrow on the side of a slope beside the water's edge, by the channel of a stream which passed there; the burn surged in it [i.e. the channel] as if it were boiling. [2175] The knight spurs his horse and came to the mound, dismounts gracefully, and ties the reins of his noble steed to the rough branch of a tree. Then he goes to the barrow, walks about it, debating with himself what it might be. It had a hole at the end and on either side, and was overgrown with grass in patches everywhere, and was all hollow within, only an old cave or a crevice in an old crag – he could not say which it was. 'Alas! Lord,' said the noble knight, 'is this the Green Chapel? The devil might well recite his matins here around midnight!'

[2189] 'Now indeed,' said Gawain, 'it is desolate here; this chapel is threatening, overgrown with plants. It well suits the man dressed in green to perform his devotions here in the Devil's manner; now I feel, in my

five senses, that it is the Devil who has imposed this appointment on me to destroy me here. This is a chapel of doom; ill fortune befall it! It is the most accursed church that I ever came in!’ With high helmet on his head, his lance in his hand, he winds his way up to the roof of that rough abode. Then he heard from that high hill, [coming from] within a hard rock beyond the brook, on a hillside, an exceedingly loud noise. [2201] Wow! it clattered on the cliff as if it would split asunder, as though someone were grinding a scythe on a grindstone. Wow! it whirred and rasped like water at a mill; wow! it swished and rang out, ghastly to hear. Then ‘By God,’ said Gawain, ‘that equipment, as I believe, is being prepared in honour of marking out the field of combat for me, with due ceremony. Let God’s will be done! [To cry] “Alas!” will not help me a bit. Even though I lose my life, no noise shall make me fear.’

[2212] Then the knight called very loudly: ‘Who is in charge in this place, to keep an appointment with me? For now good Gawain is walking right here. If any man wants anything, let him come here quickly, now or never, to further his business.’ ‘Wait!’ said someone on the hill high above his head, ‘and you will very soon have what I once promised you.’ Still he swished on hastily with that noise for a while, and turned back to his sharpening, before he would come down; and then he makes his way by a crag and comes out of a hole, whirling out of a nook with a formidable weapon, a battle-axe, newly prepared, with which to return the blow, [2224] with a huge blade fastened to the handle, sharpened on a grindstone, four feet wide [i.e. from point to point] – it was no less, by that belt which shone brightly! – and the man in green, attired as at first, both the face and the legs, hair and beard, except that gracefully on his feet he moves quickly on the ground, set the handle to the rock and strode alongside. When he came to the water, where he did not wish to wade, he vaulted over on his axe and boldly strides in the snow, fiercely grim, on a field that was broad round about. Sir Gawain greeted the knight; he did not bowed at all low to him. The other said: ‘Now, dear sir, you can be trusted to keep an appointment.’

[2239] ‘Gawain,’ said that green man, ‘may God watch over you! Indeed you are welcome, sir, to my place, and you have timed your journey as a true man should; and you know the conditions arranged between us: twelve months ago at this time of year you were to take what fell to your lot, and I should promptly repay you at this New Year. And in this valley we are truly on our own; here are no men to part us, fight as we like. Take your helmet off your head, and receive your pay here. [2248] Make no more resistance than I offered to you then, when you whipped off my head at a single stroke.’ ‘No, by God,’ said Gawain, ‘who gave me a soul, I shall not bear you the slightest ill-will, whatever injury befalls me; only limit yourself to one stroke, and I shall stand still and utter no resistance to your doing as you wish anywhere.’ He leant and bowed his neck and showed the white flesh all bare, and behaved as though he feared nothing; he did not intend to flinch for fear.

[2259] Then the man in green quickly prepared himself, heaves up his grim weapon, to smite Gawain; with all the strength in his body he lifted it on high, aimed at him as powerfully as if he intended to destroy him. Had it hurtled down as forcibly as he pretended, he who was ever brave [i.e. Gawain] would have died there from his blow. But Gawain glanced sideways at that battle-axe as it came gliding down to destroy him in a flash, and shrank a little with his shoulders on account of the sharp iron. The other man checks the bright weapon with a sudden deflection, and then reproved the prince with many proud words: [2270] ‘You are not Gawain,’ said the man, ‘who is considered so good, who never quailed because of any army by hill or by valley, and now you flee for fear before you feel injuries! I never did hear of such cowardice on the part of that knight. I neither flinched nor flew, sir, when you aimed a blow, nor uttered any objection in the house of king Arthur. My head flew to my feet and yet I never fled; and you, before receiving any injury, are afraid at heart. For which reason I ought to be called the better man.’ Gawain said: ‘I flinched once and will do so no more; but if my head falls on the ground I cannot replace it.

[2284] ‘But make haste, sir, by your honour, and come to the point with me – mete out my destiny to me and do it at once. For I shall stand a stroke from you and start no more until your axe has hit me – have here my word of honour.’ ‘Have at you then!’ said that other man, and heaves it [i.e. the axe] up, and looks as fiercely as though he were mad. He aims at him powerfully but does not touch the man, suddenly restraining his hand before it could do harm. Gawain waits for it properly and flinched in no limb, but remained as steady as the rock or else a stump that is anchored in rocky soil with a hundred roots. Then he spoke again cheerfully, the man in the green: ‘So, now you have all your courage [*lit.* your heart whole], I am obliged to strike. [2297] May the noble order of knighthood which Arthur bestowed upon you keep you now and preserve your neck at this stroke, if it is able to accomplish that!’ Gawain very fiercely then said with vexation: ‘Why, strike on, you fierce man! You threaten too long. I believe that you have struck fear into your own heart [*lit.* your heart is afraid of yourself].’ ‘Indeed,’ said the other man, ‘you speak so fiercely, I will no longer continue to hinder your business right now.’ Then he takes his stance to strike and puckers both lip and brow. No wonder if it displeases him who expected no rescue.

[2309] He swiftly lifts his weapon and let it down precisely with the edge of the blade beside the bare neck. Though he struck fiercely, he hurt him no more than to nick him on the one side, so that the skin parted. The blade sank to the flesh through the white skin, so that the bright blood spurted to the ground over his shoulders. And when the man saw the blood shine on the snow, he leapt forward with feet together more than a spear’s length, quickly grabbed his helmet and threw it on his head, with his shoulders he jerked down his fair shield, pulls out a bright sword and speaks fiercely – [2320] never since he was a child born of his mother was he ever in this world half so happy – ‘Cease, sir, from your onslaught! Offer me no more! I have taken a stroke in this place without resistance, and if you give me any more I shall quickly repay [them] and promptly give them back – depend on that – and in hostility. Only one stroke falls

to my lot here – the covenant established in Arthur’s halls ordained just so – and therefore, gracious knight, now stop!’

[2331] The knight moved away from him and rested on his axe, set the shaft on the ground and leant on the blade, and looked towards the man who was walking on the glade, how that brave man, undaunted, boldly stands there, armed, most fearless; it pleases him at heart. Then he speaks cheerfully in a great voice and, in a resounding speech, he said to the man: ‘Bold knight, do not be so angry on this battle-field. No one has treated you discourteously here, nor acted otherwise than as the covenant at the king’s court laid down. I promised you a stroke and you have it – consider yourself well paid. I release you from all remaining obligations whatever. If I had been unrestrained, I could perhaps have repaid a blow more harshly and have done you harm. [2345] First I threatened you playfully with a feint only, and did not cut you with a gash. I offered [it] to you with justice, because of the agreement that we confirmed on the first night; and you faithfully and honestly keep your agreement with to me: you gave me all your winnings, as a good man should. The second feint I offered you, sir, for the next day: you kissed my fair wife, and gave the kisses to me. For both [these] two [occasions] I offered you here only two mere feints, without harm. A true person must restore truly; then one need fear no danger. On the third [occasion] you failed in that respect, and therefore [you must] receive that tap.

[2358] ‘For it is my garment that you are wearing, that same woven girdle. My own wife gave it to you, I truly know well. Now I know all about your kisses and your actions also, and about my wife’s wooing. I brought it about myself; I sent her to test you, and truly you seem to me the most faultless man who ever lived [*lit.* walked]. As the pearl in comparison with the white [i.e. dried] pea is of greater value, so is Gawain, in respect of good faith, beside other fine knights. Only in this respect a little was lacking in you, sir, and you were wanting in good faith; but that was not for any intricate workmanship, nor for wooing either, but because you loved your life – I blame you the less.’ The other bold

man stood in thought a great while, so overcome with vexation that he shuddered within; all the blood from his breast suffused his face, so that he quite shrank for shame at what the man said. [2373] The very first words that the knight uttered [were]: ‘Cursed be both cowardice and covetousness! In you is degeneracy and vice, which destroy virtue.’ Then he seized the knot and undoes the fastening, violently flung the belt to the man himself: ‘Look! there is the deception – may evil befall it! Because of concern about your blow, cowardice taught me to reconcile myself with covetousness, and to forsake my nature: that is liberality and good faith, which pertain to knights. Now I am sinful and dishonourable, I who have always been afraid of treachery and dishonesty – may sorrow and care betide both of them! I acknowledge to you, knight, in private here, my conduct has been completely at fault. Let me understand your wish, and next time I shall be cautious.’

[2389] Then that other man laughed and said in a friendly manner: ‘I consider it assuredly amended, the injury that I had. You are confessed so clean, your offences acknowledged, and have had penance plainly from the point of my blade. I consider you cleansed of that guilt and purified as completely as if you had never transgressed since you were first born. I give you, sir, the girdle that is hemmed with gold; [2396] because it is green like my gown, Sir Gawain, you may think about this bout of ours when you mingle again among noble princes, and this will be a noble token of the exploit of the Green Chapel in the dwellings of chivalrous knights. And you must [come] back in this New Year to my abode, and we shall revel for the remainder of this glorious festival very pleasantly.’ The lord there invited him pressingly and said: ‘I believe we shall fully reconcile you with my wife, who was your bitter enemy.’

[2407] ‘No, truly,’ said the knight, and seized his helmet, and takes it off courteously and thanks the man, ‘I have stayed long enough – may good fortune befall you, and may He who institutes all honours soon repay you for it [i.e. your hospitality]! And commend me to that gracious lady, your fair wife, both the one and the other, my honoured ladies, who have

thus cleverly beguiled their knight with their trick. But it is no wonder if a fool behave stupidly and is brought to sorrow through the wiles of women; for so was Adam of old beguiled by one, and Solomon by many different [ones], and Samson, again – Delilah meted out his fate to him – and similarly David was deluded by Bathsheba, and endured much sorrow. [2420] Since these were troubled by their wives, it would be a great advantage to love them well and not trust them, if a man could. For these were of old the noblest, those who were pre-eminently favoured by fortune, of all those upon earth who have wandered in mind; and all these were deceived by women with whom they had relations. If I am now beguiled, it seems to me that I ought to be excused.

[2429] ‘But your girdle,’ said Gawain, ‘ – may God reward you! – that I shall keep willingly, not for the precious gold, nor the girdle, nor the silk, nor the long pendants, [nor] for the value of it or the honour of ownership, nor for the fine ornamentation; but I shall often see it as a sign of my transgression, when I ride in honour lament to myself the sinfulness and the fallibility of the perverse flesh, how liable it is to catch blemishes of sin. And thus, when pride shall incite me on account of chivalric prowess, looking at this love-girdle will humble my heart. But one thing I would ask of you, do not be offended: since you are lord of the land yonder in which I have stayed with you with honour – may the Being who holds up the heavens and sits on high reward you for it – what is [*lit.* how do you call] your true name? – and that is all.’ [2444] ‘That I shall tell you truly,’ said the other then: ‘I am called Bertilak de Hautdesert in this land. Through the power of Morgan la Fay, who lives in my house, and [her] skill in learning, [she who is] well instructed in magic arts – she has acquired many of the miraculous powers of Merlin, for she has formerly had very intimate love-dealings with that excellent scholar, as all your knights at home know. Her name is therefore Morgan the goddess; there is no one so exalted in pride whom she cannot humble completely.

[2456] ‘She sent me in this array [i.e. as the Green Knight] to your fair hall to make trial of your pride, [to see] if [the report] which is current,

of the great renown of the Round Table, is true. She sent this marvel to deprive you of your senses, in order to distress Guinevere and cause her to die from terror at that man who spoke in supernatural manner with his head in his hand before the high table. That is she who is at home, the aged lady; she is actually your aunt, Arthur's half-sister, the daughter of the duchess of Tintagel [i.e. Igerne], upon whom the noble Uther later begot Arthur, who is now famous. [2467] Therefore I entreat you, sir, come to your aunt. Make merry in my house: my household loves you and I bear you as much good will, sir, on my honour, as I do any man on earth, because of your great integrity.' And he told him 'No!' – he would not on any account. They embrace and kiss and commend each other to the Prince of Paradise, and part right there on the wintry ground. Gawain happily on his horse hastens valiantly to the king's castle, and the knight in the pure green to wherever he wished.

[2479] Gawain, whose life had been reprieved, now rides wild pathways in the world on Gringolet; often he lodged where he had a roof over his head and often completely outside, and many times overcame hazards in valleys, which I do not intend at this time to relate. The wound that he had received in his neck had healed and he wore the shining belt round it, diagonally, like a baldric, tied at his side, the belt fastened under his left arm with a knot, in order to signify that he had been found guilty of a fault. And thus he comes to the court, a knight safe and sound. Joy awoke in that dwelling when the nobles learned that good Gawain had come; it seemed excellent to them. [2492] The king kisses the knight, and the queen also, and then many a trustworthy knight who came to greet him, who asked him about his journey; and he tells his amazing story, confesses all the hardships that he had, the episode in the chapel, the behaviour of the knight, the wooing of the lady, finally the belt. He laid bare to them the nick in his neck, which he received at the knight's hands as a reproof for his faithlessness. He suffered torment when he had to tell; he groaned for grief and vexation. The blood flowed into his face, for shame, when he had to reveal it.

[2505] ‘Look! lord,’ said the knight, and took hold of the belt, ‘this is the ribbon of this reproof [i.e. the scar] which I carry in my neck. This is the injury and the damage which I have obtained because of cowardice and covetousness, which infected me there; this is the token of infidelity in which I have been detected. And I must needs wear it as long as I may live; for one may conceal one’s offence but one cannot remove it, for where it is once attached it will never be separated.’ The king comforts the knight, and all the court also laugh loudly at that [i.e. Gawain’s speech] and agree in a friendly manner that lords and knights who belonged to the Table, each man of the brotherhood, should have a baldric, a ribbon about him diagonally, of a bright green, and wear it in the same manner [as Gawain], for the sake of that knight. [2519] For that was agreed [to be] the glory of the Round Table, and he [was] honoured who had it, for ever after, as it is told in the best book of romance. Thus in Arthur’s day this adventure happened – the chronicles of Britain bear witness to it. Since Brutus, the bold warrior, first came here, after the siege and the attack at Troy had ended, indeed, many exploits of this kind have happened in times past. Now may He who wore the crown of thorns bring us to His bliss! Amen.

Evil be to him who thinks evil.