

Sir Thomas Malory's
TALES OF KING ARTHUR
Edited and abridged with an introduction by
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BOOK 3
EXCALIBUR

Then the king and Merlin departed.

ND AS THEY RODE, King Arthur said, "I have no sword." "No force," said Merlin, "hereby is a sword that shall be yours, and I may." So they rode till they came to a lake, the wich was a fair water, and broad. And in the midst of the lake Arthur was ware of an arm clothed in white samite, that held a fair sword in that hand.

"Lo!" said Merlin, "yonder is that sword that I spake of." With that they saw a damsel going upon the lake. "What damsel is that?" said Arthur. "That is the Lady of the Lake," said Merlin; "and within that lake is a rock, and therein is as fair a place as any on earth, and richly beseen; and this damsel will come to you anon, and then speak ye fair to her that she may give you that sword."

So anon came the damsel unto Arthur, and saluted him, and he her again. "Damsel," said Arthur, "what sword is that yonder, that the arm holdeth above the water? I would it were mine, for I have no sword." "Sir Arthur, king," said the damsel, "that sword is mine, and if ye will give me a gift when I ask it you, ye shall have it." "By my faith," said Arthur, "I will give you what gift ye will ask." "Well!" said the damsel, "Go ye into yonder barge, and row yourself to the sword, and take it and the scabbard with you. And I will ask my gift when I see my time."

So king Arthur and Merlin alit and tied their horses to two trees, and so they went into the barge, and when they came to the sword that the hand held, then King Arthur took it up by the handles, and took it with him, and the arm and the hand went under the water.

Then King Arthur looked on the sword, and liked it passing well. "Wheter like you better," said Merlin, "the sword or the scabbard?" "I like better the sword," said Arthur. "Ye are the more unwise," said Merlin, "for the scabbard is worth ten of the swords, for whiles ye

have the scabbard upon you, ye shall lose no blood be ye never so sore wounded. Therefore keep well the scabbard always with you.”

So they came unto Caerleon, whereof his knights were passing glad. And when they heard of his adventures, they marvelled that he would jeopard his person so, alone. But all men of worship said it was merry to be under such a chieftan, that would put his person in adventure as other poor knights did.

Then king Arthur let send for all the children born on Mayday, begotten of lords and born of ladies; for Merlin told King Arthur That he that should destroy him should be born on Mayday. Wherefore he sent for them all, upon pain of death; and so there were found many lords’ sons, and many knights’ sons, and all were sent unto the king. And so was Mordred sent by King Lot’s wife. And all were put in a ship to the sea, and some were four weeks old, and some less.

And so by fortune the ship drove unto a castle, and was all toriven, and destroyed the most part save that Mordred was cast up, and a good man found him, and fostered him till he was fourteen year old, and then he brought him to the court, as it rehearseth afterward, toward the end of ”The Death of Arthur”.

So many lords and barons of this realm were displeased, for their children were so lost, and many put the wite on Merlin more than on Arthur; so what for dread and for love, they held their peace.