And far over the French flood Felix Brutus\(^{a}\)
On many spacious slopes set Britain with joy
And grace;
Where war and feud and wonder
Have reigned the realm a space,
And after, bliss and blunder
By turns have run their race.

\(^{a}\) And when this Britain was built by this brave noble,
Here bold men bred, in battle exulting,
Stirrers of trouble in turbulent times.
Here many a marvel, more than in other lands,
Has befallen by fortune since that far time.

The translation, which attempts to keep the meter and alliteration of the original, is by Brian Stone, published in 1959 and fully revised in 1972. It is based on the text of Sir Israel Gollancz (1940), with readings adopted from that of J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon (2nd ed., 1967). Annotation is by the present editor.
With all the meat and merry-making men could devise,
Gladdly ringing glee, glorious to hear,
All was happiness in the height in halls and chambers
For lords and their ladies, delectable joy.
With all delights on earth they housed there together,
Saving Christ's self, the most celebrated knights,
The loveliest ladies to live in all time.
And the comeliest king ever to keep court.
For this fine fellowship was in its fair prime
Far famed,
Stood well in heaven's will,
Its high-souled king acclaimed:
So hardy a host on hill
Could not with ease be named.

The year being so young that yester-even saw its birth.
That day double on the dais were the diners served.
Mass sung and service ended, straight from the chapel
The King and his company came into hall.
Called on with cries from clergy and laity,
Noel" was newly announced, named time and again.
Then lords and ladies leaped forth, largesse distributing.
Offered New Year gifts° in high voices, handed them out.
Bustling and bantering about these offerings.
Ladies laughed full loudly, though losing their wealth,
And he that won was not woeful, you may well believe.
All this merriment they made until meal time.
Then in progress to their places they passed after washing.
In authorized order, the high-ranking first;
With glorious Guinevere, gay in the midst,
On the princely platform with its precious hangings
Of splendid silk at the sides, a state" over her
Of rich tapestry of Toulouse" and Turkestan°
Brilliantly embroidered with the best gems
Of warranted worth that wealth at any time
Could buy.
Fairest of form was this queen.
Glinting and grey° of eye;
No man could say he had seen
A lovelier, but with a lie.

But Arthur would not eat until all were served.
He was charming and cheerful, child-like and gay,
And loving active life, little did he favour
Lying down for long or looking on a seat,
So robust his young blood and his beating brain.
Still, he was stirred now by something else:
His noble announcement that he never would eat
On such a feast-day till informed in full
Of some unusual adventure,° as yet untold,
Of some momentous marvel that he might believe,
About ancestors, or arms, or other high theme;
Or till a stranger should seek out a strong knight of his,
To join with him in jousting, in jeopardy to lay
Life against life, each allowing the other
The favour of Fortune, the fairer lot.

Such was the King's custom when he kept court,
At every feast among his free° retainers
In hall.
So he threw amid the throng,
A ruler royal and tall,
Still standing staunch and strong.
And young like the year withal.
Erect stood the strong king, stately of mien,
Trifling time with talk before the topmost table.
Good Gawain° was placed at Guinevere's side.
And Agravan° of the Hard Hand sat on the other side.
Both the King's sister's sons, staunchest of knights.
Above, Bishop Baldwin began the board,
And Ywain, Urien's son, ate next to him.
These were disposed on the dais and with dignity served,
And many mighty men next, marshalled at side tables.
Then the first course came in with such cracking of trumpets,
(Whence bright bedecked blazons° in banners hung)
Such din of drumming and a deal of fine piping.
Such wild warbles whelming and echoing
adventure a custom of Arthur's often mentioned in French romances. The adventure (chance encounter, French aventure) might happen to one of the company then and there, or merely be reported by someone present.
free fea, noble
The guests sat on benches or forms.

Gawain Gawain is usually presented, in early Arthurian romance, as the greatest of Arthur's knights for his courtesy and war-like prowess. Later, his status is reduced. He was Arthur's nephew and his estates were in Scotland.
Agravain Gawain's brother
Baldwin . . . board The bishop, Arthur's adviser, sat in the place of honor at his right hand.
Ywain, . . . son. Ywain and Urien may have been historical Welsh kings. Ywain was also Arthur's nephew and one of his best knights.
blazon coats of arms

state canopy
Toulouse toile, a rich fabric, perhaps from Toulouse in France
Turkestan tape, rich and costly Eastern stuff
grey the regular color for a medieval heroine's eyes

iv
v
vi
That hearts were uplifted high at the strains,
Then delicacies and dainties were delivered to the guests,
Fresh food in foison,\(^6\) such freight of full dishes
That space was scarce at the social tables
For the several soups set before them in silver
On the cloth.
   Each feaster made free with the fare,
   Took lightly and nothing loth;
   Twelve plates were for every pair,
   Good beer and bright wine both.

VII

Of their meal I shall mention no more just now.
For it is evident to all that ample was served;
Now another noise,\(^8\) quite new, neared suddenly,
Likely to allow the liege lord to eat;
For barely had the blast of trump abated one minute
And the first course in the court been courteously served,
When there heaved in at the hall door an awesome fellow
Who in height outstripped all earthly men.
From throat to thigh he was so thickset and square.
His loins and limbs were so long and so great,
That he was half a giant on earth, I believe;
Yet mainly and most of all a man he seemed.
And the handsomest of horsemen, though huge, at that;
For though at back and at breast his body was broad.
His hips and haunches were elegant and small.
And perfectly proportioned were all parts of the man,
As seen.
   Men gaped at the hue of him
   Ingrained in garb and mien,
   A fellow fiercely grim,
   And all a glittering green.

And garments of green girt the fellow about—
A two-third-length tunic, tight at the waist,
A comely cloak on top, accomplished with lining
Of the finest fur to be found, made of one piece,
Marvellous fur-trimmed material, with matching hood
Lying back from his locks and laid on his shoulders;
Fifty held-up hose, in hue the same green,
That was caught at the calf, with clinking spurs beneath
Of bright gold on bases of embroidered silk,
But no iron shoe armoured that horseman's feet.

And verily his vesture was all vivid green,
So were the bars on his belt and the brilliants set
In ravishing array on the rich accoutrements
About himself and his saddle on silken work.
It would be tedious to tell a tithe of the trines
Embroided and embroidered, such as birds and flies,\(^7\)
In gay green gauds,\(^6\) with gold everywhere.
The breast-hangings of the horse, its haughty crupper,\(^8\)
The enamelled knobs and nails on its bridle,
And the stirrups that he stood on, were all stained with the same;
So were the splendid saddle-skirts and bows
That ever glimmered and glistened with their green stones.
The steed that he spurred on was similar in hue
   To the sight,
   Green and huge of grain,
   Mettlesome in might
   And brusque with bit and rein—
   A steed to serve that knight!

IX

Yes, garbed all in green was the gallant rider,
And the hair of his head was the same hue as his horse,
And floated finely like a fan round his shoulders;
And a great bushy beard on his breast flowing down,
With the heavy hair hanging from his head,
Was shorn below the shoulder, sheared right round,
So that half his arms were under the encircling hair,
Covered as by a king's cope, that closes at the neck.
The mane of that mighty horse, much like the beard,
Well crisped and combed, was copiously plaited
With twists of twining gold, twinkling in the green,
First a green gossamer, a golden one next.
His flowing tail and forelock followed suit,
And both were bound with bands of bright green,
Ornamented to the end with exquisite stones,
While a thong running through them threaded on high
Many bright golden bells, burnished and ringing.
Such a horse, such a horseman, in the whole wide world
Was never seen or observed by those assembled before.
Not one.
Lightning-like he seemed
And swift to strike and stun.
His dreadful blows, men deemed,
Once dealt, meant death was done.

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\(^{6}\) foison plenty
\(^{7}\) noise The "adventure" was arriving which had to take place before Arthur would consent to eat.
\(^{8}\) gauds ornaments
\(^{9}\) crupper harness strap passing under the horse's tail, or saddle skirts. The harness and trappings of a knight's horse were often very elaborate.
Yet hauberk* and helmet had he none,
Nor plastron* nor plate-armour proper to combat,
Nor shield for shoving, nor sharp spear for lunging;
But he held a holly* cluster in one hand, holly
That is greenest when groves are gaunt and bare,
And an axe in his other hand, huge and monstrous,
A hideous helmet-smasher for anyone to tell of;
The head of that axe was an ill-red long.
Of green hammered gold and steel was the socket.
And the blade was burnished bright, with a broad edge.
Acuteh honed for cutting, as keenest razors are.
The grim man gripped it by its great strong handle,
Which was wound with iron all the way to the end.
And graven in green with graceful designs.
A cord curved round it, was caught at the head,
Then hitched to the haft at intervals in loops,
With costly tassels attached thereto in plenty
On bosses of bright green embroidered richly.
In he rode, and up the hall, this man,
Driving towards the high dais, dreading no danger.
He gave no one a greeting, but glared over all.
His opening utterance was, 'Who and where
Is the governor of this gathering? Gladly would I
Behold him with my eyes and have speech with him.'
He frowned;
Then stopped to study who might
Be the noble most renowned.

The assembled folk stared, long scanning the fellow,
For all men marvelled what it might mean
That a horseman and his horse should have such a colour
As to grow green as grass, and greener yet, it seemed,
More gaudily* glowing than green enamel on gold.
Those standing studied him and sidled towards him
With all the world's wonder as to what he would do.
For astonishing sights they had seen, but such a one never;
Therefore a phantom from Fairyland the folk there deemed him.
So even the doughty were daunted and dared not reply,
All sitting stock-still, astounded by his voice.

Throughout the high hall was a hush like death;
Suddenly as if all had slipped into sleep, their voices were
At rest;
Hushed not wholly for fear,
But some at honour's behest;
But let him whom all revere
Greet that gruesome guest.

For Arthur sensed an exploit before the high dais,
And accorded him courteous greeting, no craven he,
Saying to him, 'Sir knight, you are certainly welcome.
I am head of this house: Arthur is my name.
Please desist to dismount and dwell with us
Till you impart your purpose, at a proper time.'
'May He that sits in heaven help me,' said the knight,
'But my intention was not to tarry in this turret'd hall.
But as your reputation, royal sir, is raised up so high,
And your castle and cavaliers are accounted the best,
The mightiest of mail-clad men in mounted fighting,
The most warlike, the worthiest the world has bred,
Most valiant to vie with in virile contests,
And as chivalry is shown here, so I am assured,
At this time, I tell you, that has attracted me here.
By this branch that I bear, you may be certain
That I proceed in peace, no peril seeking;
For had I fared forth in fighting gear,
My hauberk and helmet, both at home now.
My shield and sharp spear, all shining bright.
And other weapons to wield, I would have brought;
However, as I wish for no war here, I wear soft clothes.
But if you are as bold as brave men affirm,
You will gladly grant me the good sport I demand
By right.'
Then Arthur answer gave:
'If you, most noble knight,
Unarmoured combat crave.
We'll fail you not in fight.'

'No, it is not combat I crave, for come to that,
On this bench only beardless boys are sitting.
If I were hased in armour on a high steed,
No man among you could match me, your might being meagre.
So I crave in this court a Christmas game,
For it is Yuletide and New Year, and young men abound here.
If any in this household is so hardy in spirit,
Of such mettlesome mind and so madly rash
As to strike a strong blow in return for another,
I shall offer to him this fine axe freely;
This axe, which is heavy enough, to handle as he please.
And I shall bide the first blow, as bare as I sit here.
If some intrepid man is tempted to try what I suggest,
Let him leap towards me and lay hold of this weapon,
Acquiring clear possession of it, no claim from me ensuing.
Then shall I stand up to his stroke, quite still on this floor—
So long as I shall have leave to launch a return blow
Unchecked.
Yet he shall have a year
And a day's reprieve, I direct.
Now hasten and let me hear
Who answers, to what effect.'

If he had astonished them at the start, yet stiller now
Were the henchmen in hall, both high and low.
The rider wrenched himself round in his saddle
And rolled his red eyes about roughly and strangely.
Bending his brows, bristling and bright, on all,
His beard swaying as he strained to see who would rise.
When none came to accord with him, he coughed aloud,
Then pulled himself up proudly, and spoke as follows:
'What, is this Arthur's house, the honour of which
Is bruited abroad so abundantly?
Has your pride disappeared? Your prowess gone?
Your victories, your vaunts, where are they?
The revel and renown of the Round Table
Is now overwhelmed by a word from one man's voice.
For all flinch for fear from a fight not begun!'
Upon this, he laughed so loudly that the lord grieved.
His fair features filled with blood
For shame.
He raged as roaring gale;
His followers felt the same.
The King, not one to quail,
To that cavalier then came.

'B by heaven,' then said Arthur, 'What you ask is foolish,
But as you firmly seek folly, find it you shall.
No good man here is aghast at your great words.
Hand me your axe now, for heaven's sake,
And I shall bestow the boon you bid us give.'
Knelt low to his liege lord, laid hold of the weapon;
And he graciously let him have it, lifted up his hand
And gave him God's blessing, gladly urging him
To be strong in spirit and stout of sinew.
'Cousin, take care,' said the King, 'To chop once,
And if you strike with success, certainly I think
You will take the return blow without trouble in time.'
Gripping the great axe, Gawain goes to the man
Who awaits him unwavering, not quailing at all.
Then said to Sir Gawain the stout knight in green,
'Let us affirm our pact freshly, before going farther.
I beg you, bold sir, to be so good
As to tell me your true name, as I trust you to.'
'In good faith,' said the good knight, 'Gawain is my name.
And whatever happens after, I offer you this blow,
And in twelve months' time shall take the return blow
With whatever weapon you wish, and with no one else
Shall I strive.'
The other with pledge replied,
'T'm the merriest man alive
It's a blow from you I must bide,
Sir Gawain, so may I thrive.'

'By God,' said the Green Knight, 'Sir Gawain, I rejoice
That I shall have from your hand what I have asked for here.
And you have gladly gone over, in good discourse,
The covenant I requested of the King in full,
Except that you shall assent, swearing in truth.
To seek me yourself, in such place as you think
To find me under the firmament, and fetch your payment
For what you deal me today before this dignified gathering.'
'How shall I hunt for you? How find your home?'
Said Gawain, 'By God that made me, I go in ignorance;
But instruct me truly thereof, and tell me your name.
And I shall wear out my wits to find my way there;
Here is my oath on it, in absolute honour!'
'Said Gawain, 'By God that made me, I go in ignorance;
Nor, knight, do I know your name or your court.
But instruct me truly thereof, and tell me your name,
And I shall wear out my wits to find my way there;
Here is my oath on it, in absolute honour!'
'That is enough this New Year,' no more is needed,'
Said the gallant in green to Gawain the courteous,
'To tell you the truth, when I have taken the blow
After you have duly dealt it, I shall directly inform you
About my house and my home and my own name.
Then you may keep your covenant, and call on me,
And if I waft you no words, then well may you prosper.'

Stay long in your own land and look for no further
Trial.
Now grip your weapon grim;
Let us see your fighting style.'
'Gladly,' said Gawain to him,
Stroking the steel the while.

On the ground the Green Knight graciously stood,
With head slightly slanting to expose the flesh.
His long and lovely locks he laid over his crown,
Baring the naked neck for the business now due.
Gawain gripped his axe and gathered it on high,
Advanced the left foot before him on the ground,
And slashed swiftly down on the exposed part,
So that the sharp blade sheared through, shattering the bones,
Sank deep in the sleek flesh, split it in two,
And the scintillating steel struck the ground.
The fair head fell from the neck, struck the floor,
And people spurned it as it rolled around.
Yet the fellow did not fall, nor falter one whit,
But stoutly sprang forward on legs still sturdy,
Roughly reached out among the ranks of nobles,
Seized his splendid head and straightway lifted it.
Then he strode to his steed, snatched the bridle,
Stepped into the stirrup and swung aloft.
He settled himself in the saddle as steadily
As if nothing had happened to him, though he had
No head.
He twisted his trunk about.
That gruesome body that bled;
He caused much dread and doubt
By the time his say was said.

For he held the head in his hand upright,
Pointed the face at the fairest in fame on the dais;
And it lifted its eyelids and looked glaringly,
And menacingly said with its mouth as you may now hear:
Be prepared to perform what you promised, Gawain;
Seek faithfully till you find me, my fine fellow,
According to your oath in this hall in these knights' hearing.
Go to the Green Chapel without gainsaying to get
Such a stroke as you have struck. Strictly you deserve

faintest in fame nobles; those at the high table

stroke only
That due redemption on the day of New Year.
As the Knight of the Green Chapel I am known to many;
Therefore if you ask for me, I shall be found.
So come, or else be called coward accordingly!
Then he savagely swerved, sawing at the reins,
Rushed out at the hall door, his head in his hand,
And the flint-struck fire flew up from the hooves.
What place he departed to no person there knew,
Nor could any account be given of the country he had come from.
What then?
At the Green Knight Gawain and King
Grinned and laughed again;
But plainly approved the thing
As a marvel in the world of men.

Though honoured King Arthur was at heart astounded,
He let no sign of it be seen, but said clearly
To the comely queen in courtly speech,
'Do not be dismayed, dear lady, today:
Such cleverness comes well at Christmas tide,
Like the playing of interludes, laughter and song,
As lords and ladies delight in courtly carols.
However, I am now able to eat the repast,
Having seen, I must say, a sight to wonder at.'
He glanced at Sir Gawain, and gracefully said,
'Now sir, hang up your axe: you have hewn enough'
And on the backcloth above the dais it was boldly hung
Where all men might mark it and marvel at it
And with truthful testimony tell the wonder of it.
Then to the table the two went together,
The King and the constant knight, and keen men served them
Double portions of each dainty with all due dignity,
All manner of meat and minstrelsy too.
Daylong they delighted till darkness came
To their shores.
Now Gawain give a thought,
Lest peril make you pause
In seeking out the sport
That you have claimed as yours.

Fitt 2

Such earnest of noble action had Arthur at New Year,
For he was avid to hear exploits vaunted.
Though starved of such speeches when seated at first,
Now they were high matter indeed, their hands full of it.
Gawain was glad to begin the games in hall,
But though the end be heavy, have no wonder,
For if men are spritely in spirit after strong drink,
Soon the year slides past, never the same twice;
There is no foretelling its fulfilment from the start.
Yes, this Yuletide passed and the year following;
Season after season in succession went by:
After Christmas comes the crabbed Lenten time,
Which forces on the flesh fish and food yet plainer.
Then weather more vernal wars with the wintry world,
The cold ebb and declines, the clouds lift,
In shining flowers the rain sheds warmth,
And falls upon the fair plain, where flowers appear;
The grassy lawns and groves alike are garbed in green;
Birds prepare to build, and brightly sing.
The solace of the ensuing summer that soothes hill
And dell.
By hedgerows rank and rich
The blossoms bloom and swell,
And sounds of sweetest pitch
From lovely woodlands well.

Then comes the season of summer with soft winds,
When Zephyrus himself breathes on seeds and herbs.
In paradise is the plant that springs in the open
When the dripping dew drops from its leaves,
And it bears the blissful gleam of the bright sun.
Then Harvest comes hurrying, urging it on,
Warning it because of winter to wax ripe soon;
He drives the dust to rise with the drought he brings,
Forcing it to fly up from the face of the earth.
Wraithful winds in raging skies wrestle with the sun;
Leaves are lashed loose from the trees and lie on the ground
And the grass becomes grey which was green before.
What rose from root at first now ripens and rots;

earnest pledge
action MS. "adventures," meaning chance encounters
Now ... full literally, Now they were fully provided with stern deeds (to talk of), whole handfuls of them
weather famous passage of welcome to spring, preparing for change in the action of the poem and echoing Gawain's lack of care—as yet—for the debt he will have to pay when the year slides again
Zephyrus the west wind

cleverness or; curious deeds
interludes pageants, short homestory plays, at entertainments or between the acts of sacred dramas
keen quick
meat food
So the year in passing yields its many yesterdays,
And winter returns, as the way of the world is,
I swear;
So came the Michaelmas moon,
With winter threatening there,
And Gawain considered soon
The fell way he must fare.

Yet he stayed in hall with Arthur till All Saints Day, 
When Arthur provided plentifully, especially for Gawain,
A rich feast and high revelry at the Round Table.
The gallant lords and gay ladies grieved for Gawain,
Anxious on his account; but all the same
They mentioned only matters of mirthful import.
Joylessly joking for that gentle knight's sake.
For after dinner with drooping heart he addressed his uncle
And spoke plainly of his departure, putting it thus;
'Now, liege lord of my life, I beg my leave of you.
You know the kind of covenant it is: I care little
To tell over the trials of it, trifling as they are.
But I am bound to bear the blow and must be gone tomorrow
To seek the gallant in green, as God sees fit to guide me.'

Then the most courtly in that company came together,
Ywain and Eric and others in troops,
Sir Dodinal the Fierce, the Duke of Clarence,
Lancelot and Lionel and Lucan the Good,
Sir Bors and Sir Bedivere, both strong men,
And many admired knights, with Mador of the Gate;
All the company of the court came near to the King
With carking care in their hearts, to counsel the knight.
Much searing sorrow was suffered in the hall
That such a gallant man as Gawain should go in quest
To suffer a savage blow, and his sword no more
Should bear.
Said Gawain, gay of cheer,
'Whether fate be foul or fair,
Why falter I or fear?
What should man do but dare?'

He dwelt there all that day, and at dawn on the morrow
Asked for his armour. Every item was brought.
First a crimson carpet was cast over the floor
And the great pile of gilded war-gear glittered upon it.
The strong man stepped on it, took the steel in hand.
The doublet he dressed in was dear Turkestan stuff.
Then came the courtly cape, cut with skill,
Finely lined with fur, and fastened close.
Then they set the steel shoes on the strong man's feet,
Lapped his legs in steel with lovely greaves,
Complete with knee-pieces, polished bright
And connecting at the knee with gold-knobbed hinges.
Then came the cuisses, which cunningly enclosed
His thighs thick of thw, and which thongs secured.
Next the hauberk, interlinked with argent steel rings
Which rested on rich material, wrapped the warrior round.
He had polished armour on arms and elbows,
Glittering and gay, and gloves of metal,
And all the goodly gear to give help whatever
Betide;
With surcoat richly wrought,
Gold spurs attached in pride,
A silken sword-belt athwart.
And steadfast blade at his side.

When he was hasped in armour his harness was noble;
The least lace or loop was lustrous with gold.
So, harnessed as he was, he heard his mass
As it was offered at the high altar in worship.
Then he came to the King and his court-fellows,
Took leave with loving courtesy of lord and lady,
Who commended him to Christ and kissed him farewell.
By now Gringolet had been got ready, and girt with a saddle
That gleamed most gaily with many golden fringes,
Everywhere nailed newly for this noble occasion.
The bridle was embossed and bound with bright gold;
So were the furnishings of the fore-harness and the fine skirts.
The crupper and the caparison accorded with the saddle-bows.
And all was arrayed on red with nails of richest gold,
Which glittered and glanced like gleams of the sun.
Then his casque, equipped with clasps of great strength
And padded inside, he seized and swiftly kissed;
It towered high on his head and was hasped at the back,
With a brilliant silk band over the burnished neck-guard,
Embroidered and bossed with the best gems
On broad silk edging, with birds about the seams,
Such as parrots painted with periwinkles between,
And turtles and true-love-knots traced as thickly
As if many beauties in a bower had been busy seven winters
Thereabout.
The circlet on his head
Was prized more precious no doubt,
And perfectly diamonded,
Threw a gleaming lustre out.

Then they showed him the shield of shining gules,
With the Pentangle in pure gold depicted thereon.
He brandished it by the baldric, and about his neck
He slung it in a seemly way, and it suited him well.
And I intend to tell you, though I tarry therefore,
Why the Pentangle is proper to this prince of knights.
It is a symbol which Solomon conceived once
To betoken holy truth, by its intrinsic right,
For it is a figure which has five points,
And each line overlaps and is locked with another;
And it is endless everywhere, and the English call it,
In all the land, I hear, the Endless Knot.
Therefore it goes with Sir Gawain and his gleaming armour.
For, ever faithful in five things, each in fivefold manner,
Gawain was reputed good and, like gold well refined,
He was devoid of all villainy, every virtue displaying
In the field.
Thus this Pentangle new
was also used as a magic sign, to give power
ingenuity, it is sometimes associated with the five letters of the name of Jesus or with his five wounds.

XXVII
He carried on coat and shield,
As a man of truth most true
And knightly name annealed.

First he was found faultless in his five wits.
Next, his five fingers never failed the knight,
And all his trust on earth was in the five wounds
Which came to Christ on the Cross, as the Creed tells.
And whenever the bold man was busy on the battlefield,
Through all other things he thought on this,
That his prowess all depended on the five pure Joys
That the holy Queen of Heaven had of her Child.
Accordingly the courteous knight had that queen's image
Etched on the inside of his armoured shield,
So that when he beheld her, his heart did not fail.
The fifth five I find the famous man practised
Were—Liberality and Loving-kindness leading the rest;
Then his Continence and Courtesy, which were never corrupted;
And Piety, the surpassing virtue. These pure five
Were more firmly fixed on that fine man
Than on any other, and every multiple,
Each interlocking with another, had no end,
Being fixed to five points which never failed,
Never assembling on one side, nor sundering either,
With no end at any angle; nor can I find
Where the design started or proceeded to its end.
Thus on his shining shield this knot was shaped
Royally in red gold upon red gules.
That is the pure Pentangle, so people who are wise
are taught.
Now Gawain was ready and gay;
His spear he promptly caught
And gave them all good day
For ever, as he thought.

XXVIII
He struck the steed with his spurs and sprang on his way
So forceably that the fire flew up from the flinty stones.
All who saw that sight seemed sick at heart,
And all said to each other softly, in the same breath,
He carried on coat and shield,
As a man of truth most true
And knightly name annealed.

He carried on coat and shield,
As a man of truth most true
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He carried on coat and shield,
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He carried on coat and shield,
As a man of truth most true
And knightly name annealed.
In care for that comely knight, "By Christ, it is evil
That yon lord should be lost, who lives so nobly!
To find his fellow on earth, in faith, is not easy.
It would have been wiser to have worked more warily,
And so had a happier fate than to be utterly destroyed,
Beheaded by an unearthly being out of arrogance.
Who supposed the Prince would approve such counsel
As is giddily given in Christmas games by knights?"
Many were the watery tears that whelmed from weeping eyes,
When on quest that worthy knight went from the court
That day.
He faltered not nor feared,
But quickly went his way;
His road was rough and weird,
Or so the stories say.

Now the gallant Sir Gawain in God's name goes
Riding through the realm of Britain, no rapture in his mind.
Often the long night he lay alone and companionless,
And did not find in front of him food of his choice;
He had no comrade but his courser in the country woods and hills,
No traveller to talk to on the track but God,
Till he was nearly nigh to Northern Wales. The isles of Anglesey he kept always on his left,
And fared across the fords by the foreshore
Over at Holy Head to the other side
Into the wilderness of Wirral, where few dwelled
To whom God or good-hearted man gave his love.
And always as he went, he asked whomever he met
If they knew or had knowledge of a knight in green,
Or could guide him to the ground where a green chapel stood.
And there was none but said him nay, for never in their lives
Had they set eyes on someone of such a hue
As green.
His way was wild and strange
By dreary hill and dean.
His mood would many times change
Before that fane was seen.

He rode far from his friends, a forsaken man,
Scaling many cliffs in country unknown.
At every bank or beach where the brave man crossed water,
He found a foe in front of him, except by a freak of chance,
And so foul and fierce a one that he was forced to fight.
So many marvels did the man meet in the mountains,
It would be too tedious to tell a tenth of them.
He had death-struggles with dragons, did battle with wolves,
Warred with wild men who dwell among the crags,
Battled with bulls and bears and boars at other times,
And ogres that panted after him on the high fells.
Had he not been doughty in endurance and dutiful to God,
Doubtless he would have been done to death time and again.
Yet the warring little worried him; worse was the winter,
When the cold clear water cascaded from the clouds
And froze before it could fall to the fallow earth.
Half-slain by the shot, he slept in his armour
Night after night among the naked rocks,
Where the cold streams splashed from the steep crests
Or hung high over his head in hard icicles.
So in peril and pain, in parous plight,
This knight covered the country till Christmas Eve
Alone;
And he that eventide
To Mary made his moan.
And begged her be his guide
Till some shelter should be shown.

Merrily in the morning by a mountain he rode
Into a wondrously wild wooded cleft,
With high hills on each side overpeering a forest
Of huge hoary oaks, a hundred together.
The hazel and the hawthorn were intertwined
With rough ragged moss trailing everywhere.
And on the bleak branches birds in misery
Piteously piped away, pinched with cold.
The gallant knight on Gringolet galloped under them
Through many a swamp and marsh, a man all alone.
Fearing lest he should fail, through adverse fortune,
To see the service of him who that same night
Was born of a bright maiden to banish our strife.
And so sighing he said, 'I beseech thee, Lord
And thee Mary, mildest mother so dear,
Marvels like any hero of romance, riding out in fallow dun-colored, untold search of adventure.
That in some haven with due honour I may hear Mass
And Matins tomorrow morning: meekly I ask it,
And promptly thereto I pray my Pater and Ave
And Creed.  
He crossed himself and cried
For his sins, and said, 'Christ speed
My cause, his cross my guide!'
So prayed he, spurring his steed.

Tho'se the sign of the Saviour on himself he had made,
When in the wood he was aware of a dwelling with a moat
On a promontory above a plateau, penned in by the boughs
And tremendous trunks of trees, and trenched about;
The comeliest castle that ever a knight owned,
It was pitched on a plain, with a park all round,
Impregnably palisaded with pointed stakes,
And containing many trees in its two-mile circumference.
The courteous knight contemplated the castle from one side
As it shimmered and shone through the shining oaks.
Then humbly he took off his helmet and offered thanks
To Jesus and Saint Julian, gentle patrons both,
Who had given him grace and gratified his wish.
'Now grant it be good lodging!' the gallant knight said.
Then he goaded Gringolet with his golden heels.
And mostly by chance emerged on the main highway,
Which brought the brave man to the bridge's end
With one cast.
The drawbridge vertical,
The gates shut firm and fast,
The well-provided wall—
It bled at never a blast.

The knight, still on his steed, stayed on the bank
Of the deep double ditch that drove round the place.
The wall went into the water wonderfully deep,
And then to a huge height upwards it reared
In hard hewn stone, up to the cornice.
Built under the battlements in the best style, courses jutted
And turrets protruded between, constructed
With loopholes in plenty with locking shutters.

'Good sir,' said Gawain, 'will you give my message
To the high lord of this house, that I ask for lodging?'
'Yes, by Saint Peter,' replied the porter, 'and I think
You may lodge here as long as you like, sir knight.'
Then away he went eagerly, and swiftly returned
With a host of well-wishers to welcome the knight.
They let down the drawbridge and in a dignified way
Came out and did honour to him, kneeling
Courteously on the cold ground to accord him worthy welcome.
They prayed him to pass the portcullis, now pulled up high,
And he readily bid them rise and rode over the bridge.
Servants held his saddle while he stepped down,
And his steed was stabled by sturdy men in plenty.
Strong knights and squires descended then
To bring the bold warrior blithely into hall.
When he took off his helmet, many hurried forward
To receive it and to serve this stately man.
And his bright sword and buckler were both taken as well.
Then graciously he greeted each gallant knight.
And many proud men pressed forward to pay their respects.
Garbed in his fine garments, he was guided to the hall.
Where a fine fire was burning fiercely on the hearth.
Then the prince of those people appeared from his chamber
To meet in mannerly style the man in his hall.
'You are welcome to dwell here as you wish,' he said,

Pater . . . Creed the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Creed
Christ . . . guide common formula of prayer
sign of the Saviour i.e., he crossed himself
buckler shield
Then watched awake with me, you are not well supplied
With either sustenance or sleep, for certain, I know;
So you shall lie long in your room, late and at ease
Tomorrow till the time of mass, and then take your meal
When you will, with my wife beside you
To comfort you with her company till I come back to court.

You stay,
And I shall get up at dawn.
I will to the hunt away.'

When Gawain’s agreement was sworn
He bowed, as brave knights may,

Moreover,’ said the man, ‘Let us make a bargain
That whatever I win in the woods be yours.
And any achievement you chance on here, you exchange for it.
Sweet sir, truly swear to such a bartering.
Whether fair fortune or foul befall from it.’

‘By God,’ said the good Gawain, ‘I agree to that,
And I am happy that you have an eye to sport.’

Then the prince of that people said, ‘What pledge of wine
Is brought to seal the bargain?’ And they burst out laughing.
They took drink and toyed in trifling talk.
These lords and ladies, as long as they liked.
And then with French refinement and many fair words
They stood, softly speaking, to say good-night.
Kissing as they parted company in courtly style.
With lithe liege servants in plenty and lambent torches,
Each brave man was brought to his bed at last,

Full soft.
Before they fared to bed
They rehearsed their bargain oft.
That people’s prince, men said,
Could fly his wit aloft.

At the first cry wild creatures quivered with dread.
The deer in distraction darted down to the dales
Or up to the high ground, but eagerly they were
Driven back by the beaters, who bellowed lustily.
They let the harts with high-branching heads have their freedom,
And the brave bucks, too, with their broad antlers,
For the noble prince had expressly prohibited
Meddling with male deer in the months of close season.
But the hinds were held back with a ‘Hey!’ and a ‘Whoa!’
And does driven with much din to the deep valleys.
Lo! the arrows’ slanting flight as they were loosed!
A shaft flew forth at every forest turning,
The broad head biting on the brown flank.
They screamed as the blood streamed out, sank dead on the sward,
Always harried by hounds hard on their heels,
And the hurrying hunters’ high horn notes.
Like the rending of ramped hills roared the din.
If one of the wild beasts slipped away from the archers
It was dragged down and met death at the dog-bases
After being hunted from the high ground and harried to the water,
So skilled were the hunt-servants at stations lower down,
So gigantic the greyhounds that grabbed them in a flash,
Seizing them savagely, as swift, I swear,
As sight.

names of the calls were mote, trut, trourcoun, trummourest.
close season Winter, September to June, was
the closed season for male deer; only females
were hunted during winter.
ramped sloping
The lord, in humour high
Would spur, then stop and alight.
In bliss the day went by
Till dark drew on, and night.

Thus by the forest borders the brave lord sported,
And the good man Gawain, on his gay bed lying.
Lay hidden till the light of day gleamed on the walls.
Covered with fair canopy, the curtains closed.
And as in slumber he slept on, there slipped into his mind
A slight, suspicious sound, and the door stealthily opened.
He raised up his head out of the bedclothes.
Caught up the corner of the curtain a little
And watched warily towards it, to see what it was.

It was the lady, loveliest to look upon,
Who secretly and silently secured the door.
Then bore towards his bed: the brave knight, embarrassed,
Lay flat with fine adroitness and feigned sleep.
Silently she stepped on, stole to his bed.
Caught up the curtain, crept within.
And seated herself softly on the side of the bed.
There she watched a long while, waiting for him to wake,
Slyly close this long while lay the knight.
Considering in his soul this circumstance.
Its sense and likely sequel, for it seemed marvellous.
"Still, it would be more circumspect," he said to himself,
"To speak and discover her desire in due course."

So he stirred and stretched himself, twisting towards her.
Opened his eyes and acted as if astounded,
And, to seem the safer by such service, crossed himself
In dread.
With chin and cheek so fair,
White ranged with rosy red,
With laughing lips, and air
Of love, she lightly said:

"Good morning, Sir Gawain," the gay one murmured,
"How unsafely you sleep, that one may slip in here!
Now you are taken in a trice. Unless a truce come between us,
I shall bind you to your bed—of that be sure."
The lady uttered laughingly those playful words.
"Good morning, gay lady," Gawain blithely greeted her.
"Do with me as you will: that well pleases me.
For I surrender speedily and feigned sleep.
With laughing lips, and air
Of love, she lightly said:"

"In good truth," said Gawain, "that is a gain indeed.
Though I am hardly the hero of whom you speak.
To be held in such honour as you here suggest,
I am altogether unworthy, I own it freely.
By God, I should be glad if you granted it right,
For me to essay by speech or some other service,
To pleasure such a perfect lady—pure joy it would be."
"In good truth, Sir Gawain," the gay lady replied,
"If I slighted or set at naught your spotless fame
And your all-pleasing prowess, it would show poor breeding.
But there is no lack of ladies who would love, noble one,
To hold you in their arms, as I have you here,
And linger in the luxury of your delightful discourse.
Which would perfectly pleasure them and appease their woes,—
Rather than have riches or the red gold they own.
But as I love that Lord, the Celestial Ruler,
I have wholly in my hand what all desire
Through his grace."

My young . . . still (ll. 1237–40) This seems like a direct assault for the first temptation of Gawain, engineered at least—see below—by a succentor.
'Madam,' said the merry man, 'May Mary requite you!
For in good faith I have found in you free-hearted generosity.
Certain men for their deeds receive esteem from others,
But for myself, I do not deserve the respect they show me;
Your honourable mind makes you utter only what is good.'

'Now by Mary,' said the noble lady, 'Not so it seems to me. 
For were I worth the whole of womankind,
And all the wealth in the world were in my hand,
And if bargaining I were to bid to bring myself a lord,
With your noble qualities, knight, made known to me now.
You, good looks, gracious manner, and great courtesy,
All of which I had heard of before, but here prove true.
No lord that is living could be allowed to excel you.'

'Indeed, dear lady, you did better,' said the knight,
But I am proud of the precious price you [xit on me.
And solemnly as your servant say you are my sovereign.
May Christ requite it you: I have become your knight.'

Then of many matters they talked till mid-morning and after.
And all the time she behaved as if she adored him;
But Sir Gawain was on guard in a gracious manner.
Though she was the winsomest woman the warrior had known.
He was less love-laden because of the loss he must
Now face—
His destruction by the stroke,
For come it must was the case.
The lady of leaving then spoke; 
He assented with speedy grace.

And without more words she went out by the door.
He made ready to rise with rapid haste,
Summoned his servant, selected his garb,
And walked down, when he was dressed, debonairly to mass.
Then he went to the well-served meat which awaited him.
And made merry sport till the moon rose
At night.

Never was baron bold
So taken by ladies bright.
The young one and the old:
They threw all three in delight.

And still at his sport spurred the castellan,
Hunting the barren hinds in holt and on heath.
So many had he slain, by the setting of the sun.
Of does and other deer, that it was downright wonderful.
Then at the finish the folk flocked in eagerly.
And quickly collected the killed deer in a heap.
Those highest in rank came up with hosts of attendants,
Picked out what appeared to be the plumpest beasts
And, according to custom, had them cut open with finesse.
Some who ceremoniously assessed them there
Found two fingers' breadth of fat on the worst.
Then they slit open the slot, seized the first stomach,
Scraped it with a keen knife and tied up the tripes.
Next they hacked off all the legs, the hide was stripped,
The belly broken open and the bowels removed
Carefully, lest they loosen the ligature of the knot.
Then they gripped the gullet, disengaged deftly
The wezand from the windpipe and whipped out the guts.
Then their sharp knives shore through the shoulder-bones,
Which they slit open a small hole, leaving the sides intact.
Then they cleft the chest clean through, cutting it in two.
Then again at the gullet a man began to work
And straight away rived it, right to the fork.
Flicked out the shoulder-fillets, and faithfully then
He rapidly ripped free the rib-fillets.
Similarly, as is seemly, the spine was cleared
All the way to the haunch, which hung from it;
And they heaved up the whole haunch and hewed it off;
And that is called, according to its kind, the numbles.

debonairly elegantly
holt wood
assessed i.e. to see how good and thick the flesh was.
The chief of the hunt cut a slit down the breast, or brisket. Hunting was a highly formalized, aristocratic pastime, with an elaborate language and etiquette.

slices from the back and joints
At the thigh-forks then they strain
And free the folds behind,
Hurrying to hack all in twain,
The backbone to unbind.

Then they hewed off the head and also the neck,
And after sundered the sides swiftly from the chine.
And into the foliage they flung the fee of the raven.
Then each fellow, for his fee, as it fell to him to have,
Skewered through the stout flanks beside the ribs.
And then by the hocks of the haunches they hung up their booty.
On one of the finest fells they fed their hounds,
And let them have the lights, the liver and the tripes,
With bread well imbrued with blood mixed with them.

Then the master commanded everyone to meet in the hall,
Called the ladies to come down with their company of maidens.
Before all the folk on the floor, he bid men
Fetch the venison and place it before him.
Then gaily and in good humour to Gawain he called.
Told over the tally of the sturdy beasts,
And showed him the fine fat flesh flayed from the ribs.
'How does the sport please you? Do you praise me for it?
Am I thoroughly thanked for thriving as a huntsman?'
'Certainly,' said the other, 'Such splendid spoils
Have I not seen for seven years in the season of winter.'
'And I give you all, Gawain,' said the good man then.
For according to our covenant you may claim it as your own.'
'So be it,' said Gawain, 'For my true gains in this great house,
I am not loth to allow, must belong to you.'

And he put his arms round his handsome neck, hugging him,
And kissed him in the comeliest way he could think of.
'Accept my takings, sir, for I received no more;
Gladly would I grant them, however great they were.'
'And therefore I thank you,' the thane said, 'Good!
Yours may be the better gift, if you would break it to me
Where your wisdom won you wealth of that kind.'
'No such clause in our contract! Request nothing else!'
Said the other, 'You have your due: ask more,
None should.'
They laughed in blithe assent
With worthy words and good;
Then to supper they swiftly went,
To fresh delicious food.

And sitting afterwards by the hearth of an audience chamber,
Where retainers repeatedly brought them rare wines,
In their jolly jesting they jointly agreed
On a settlement similar to the preceding one;
To exchange the chance achievements of the morrow,
No matter how novel they were, at night when they met.
They accorded on this compact, the whole court observing,
And the bumper was brought forth in banter to seal it.
And at last they lovingly took leave of each other,
Each man hastening thereafter to his bed.
The cock having crowed and called only thrice,
The lord leaped from bed, and his liege men too,
That mass and a meal were meetly dealt with,
And by first light the folk to the forest were bound
For the chase.

And within the quagmire they quickly scented quarry and gave tongue,
And the chief huntsman urged on the first hounds up,
Sparing them on with a splendid spate of words.
The hounds, hearing it, hurried there at once,
Hill on the trail furiously, forty together,
And made such echoing uproar, all howling at once,
That the rocky banks round about rang with the din.
Exchanging what we achieve when the chase is over.

For twice I have tested you, and twice found you true.

Now "Third time, throw best!" Think of that tomorrow!

Let us make merriment while we may, set our minds on joy.

For hard fate can hit man whenever it likes.

This was graciously granted and Gawain stayed.

Blithely drink was brought, then to bed with lights

They pressed.

All night Sir Gawain sleeps

Softly and still at rest;

But the lord his custom keeps

And is early up and dressed.

After mass, he and his men made a small meal.

Merry was the morning; he demanded his horse.

The men were ready mounted before the main gate,

A host of knightly horsemen to follow after him.

Wonderfully fair was the forest-land, for the frost remained,

And the rising sun shone ruddily on the ragged clouds,

In its beauty brushing their blackness off the heavens.

The huntsmen unleashed the hounds by a holt-side,

And the rocks and surrounding bushes rang with their horn-calls.

Some found and followed the fox's tracks,

And wove various ways in their wily fashion.

A small hound cried the scent, the senior huntsman called

His fellow foxhounds to him and, feverishly sniffing,

The rout of dogs rushed forward on the right path.

The fox hurried fast, for they found him soon

And, seeing him distinctly, pursued him at speed.

Unmistakably giving tongue with tumultuous din.

Deviously in difficult country he doubled on his tracks.

Swerved and wheeled away, often waited listening.

Till at last by a little ditch he leaped a quickset hedge,

And stole out stealthily at the side of a valley,

Considering his stratagem had given the slip to the hounds.

But he stumbled on a tracking-dogs' tryst-plane unawares.

And there in a cleft three hounds threatened him at once.

All grey.

He swiftly started back

And, full of deep dismay,

He dashed on a different track;

To the woods he went away.
Her features so faultless and fine of complexion.
He felt a flush of rapture suffuse his heart.
Sweet and genial smiling slid them into joy
Till bliss burst forth between them, beaming gay
And bright;
With joy the two contended
In talk of true delight.
And peril would have impended
Had Marv not minded her knight—

For that peerless princess pressed him so hotly,
So invited him to the very verge, that he felt forced
Either to allow her love or blackguardly rebuff her.
He was concerned for his courtesy, lest he be called caitiff,
But more especially for his evil plight if he should plunge into sin.
And dishonour the owner of the house treacherously.
'God shield me! That shall not happen, for sure.' said (he knight.
So with laughing love-talk he deflected gently
The downright declarations that dropped from her lips.
Said the beauty to the bold man, 'Blame will be yours
If love not the living body lying close to you
More than all wooers in the world who are wounded in heart;
Unless you have a lover more beloved, who delights you more,
A maiden to whom you are committed, so immutably bound
That you do not seek to sever from her—which I see is so.
Tell me the truth of it, I entreat you now;
By all the loves there are. do not hide the truth
With guile.'

Then gently, 'By Saint John,'
Said the knight with a smile,
'The truth is this, that I have never
Gave you my girdle—'

'She proffered him a rich ring wrought in red gold,
With a sparkling stone set conspicuously in it,
Which beamed as brilliantly as the bright sun.
You may well believe its worth was wonderfully great.
But the courteous man declined it and quickly said,
Before God, gracious lady, no giving just now!
Not having anything to offer, I shall accept nothing.'
She offered it him urgently and he refused again,
Fast affirming his refusal on his faith as a knight.
'If you reject my ring as too rich in value,
Doubtless you would be less deeply indebted to me
If I gave you my girdle, a less gainful gift.'
She swiftly slipped off the cincture of her gown
Which went round her waist under the wonderful mantle
Embroidered only at the edges, with hand-stitched ornament.
And she pleaded with the prince in a pleasant manner
To take it notwithstanding its trifling worth;
'But he told her that he could touch no treasure at all.
Not gold nor any gift, till God gave him grace
To pursue to success the search he was bound on.
'I beg you not to be displeased;
Press no more your purpose, for I promise it never
Can be.
I owe you a hundredfold
For grace you have granted me;
And ever through hot and cold
I shall stay your devoted.'
"Do you say "no" to this silk?" then said the beauty; "Because it is simple in itself? And so it seems.

Lo! It is little indeed, and so less worth your esteem.

But one who was aware of the worth twined in it Would appraise its properties as more precious perhaps, For the man that binds his body with this belt of green, As long as he laps it closely about him, No hero under heaven can hack him to pieces, For he cannot be killed by any cunning on earth."

Then the prince pondered, and it appeared to him A precious gem to protect him in the peril appointed him When he gained the Green Chapel to be given checkmate; It would be a splendid stratagem to escape being slain. Then he allowed her to solicit him and let her speak, She pressed the belt upon him with potent words And having got his agreement, she gave it him gladly.

Beseeking him for her sake to conceal it always, And hide it from her husband with all diligence.

That never should another know of it, the noble swore Outright.

Then often his thanks gave he With all his heart and might, And thrice by then had she Kissed the constant knight.

Then with a word of farewell she went away For she could not force further satisfaction from him.

Directly she withdrew. Sir Gawain dressed himself, Rose and arrayed himself in rich garments,

But laid aside the love-lace the lady had given him, Secreted it carefully where he could discover it later.

Then he went his way at once to the chapel, Privily approached a priest and prayed him there To listen to his life's sins and enlighten him On how he might have salvation in the hereafter.

Then, confessing his faults, he fairly shrove himself, Begging mercy for both major and minor sins.

He asked the holy man for absolution
And was absolved with certainty and sent out so pure
That Doomsday⁵ could have been declared the day after.
Then he made merrier among the noble ladies, With comely carolling and all kinds of pleasure.

Than ever he had done, with ecstasy, till came
Dark night.

Such honour he did to all,
They said, 'Never has this knight
Since coming into hall
Expressed such pure delight.'

Now long may he linger there, love sheltering him! The prince was still on the plain, pleasuring in the chase, Having finished off the fox he had followed so far.

As he leaped over a hedge looking out for the quarry, Where he heard the hounds that were harrying the fox, Reynard came running through a rough thicket With the pack all pell-mell, panting at his heels.

The lord, aware of the wild beast, waited craftily, Then drew his dazzling sword and drove at the fox. The beast baulked at the blade to break sideways, But a dog bounded at him before he could, And right in front of the horse's feet they fell on him, All worrying their wily prey with a wild uproar.

The lord quickly alighted and lifted him up, Wrenched him beyond reach of the ravening fangs, Held him high over his head and halloosed lustily, While the angry hounds in bordes bayed at him.

Thither hurried the huntsmen with horns in plenty, Sounding the rally⁶ splendidly till they saw their lord. When the company of his court had come up to the kill, All who bore bugles blew at once, And the others without horns halloed loudly.

The requiem that was raised for Reynard's soul And the commotion made it the merriest meet ever, Men said.

The hounds must have their fee: They pat them on the head, Then hold the fox; and he Is reft of his skin of red.

Then they set off for home, it being almost night, Blowing their big horns bravely as they went. At last the lord alighted at his beloved castle And found upon the floor a fire, and beside it The good Sir Gawain in a glad humour By reason of the rich friendship he had reaped from the ladies. He wore a turquoise tunic⁷ extending to the ground;
The reins, hooking them round a rough branch;  
Then he went to the barrow, which he walked round, inspecting,  
Wondering what in the world it might be.  
It had a hole in each end and on either side,  
And was overgrown with grass in great patches.  
All hollow it was within, only an old cavern  
Or the crevice of an ancient crag: he could not explain it  
Right.  
'O God, is the Chapel Green  
This mound?' said the noble knight.  
'At such might Satan be seen  
Saying matins at midnight,'  
LXXXVIII  
'Now certainly the place is deserted,' said Gawain.  
'It is a hideous oratory, all overgrown.  
And well graced for the gallant garbed in green  
To deal out his devotions in the Devil's fashion.  
Now I feel in my five wits, it is the Fiend himself  
That has tricked me into this tryst, to destroy me here.  
This is a chapel of mischance—checkmate² to it!  
It is the most evil holy place I ever entered.'  
With his high helmet on his head, and holding his lance  
He roamed up to the roof of that rough dwelling.  
Then from that height he heard, from a hard rock  
On the bank beyond the brook, a barbarous noise.  
What! It clattered amid the cliffs fit to cleave them apart.  
As if a great scythe were being ground on a grindstone there.  
What! It whirred and it whetted, like water in a mill.  
What! It made a rushing, ringing din, rueful to hear.  
'By God!' then said Gawain, 'that is going on,  
I suppose, as a salute to myself, to greet me  
Hard by.  
God's will be warranted:  
"Alas!" is a craven cry.  
No din shall make me dread  
Although today I die.'  
LXXXIX  
Then the courteous knight called out clamorously,  
'Who holds sway here and has an assignation with me?  
For the good knight Gawain is on the ground here.  
If anyone there wants anything, wend your way hither fast,  
And further your needs either now, or not at all.'  
'Bide there!' said one on the bank above his head,  
'And you shall swiftly receive what I once swore to give you.'  
checkmate destruction; see l. 1857

Yet for a time he continued his tumult of scraping,  
Turning away as he whetted, before he would descend.  
Then he thrust himself round a thick crag through a hole,  
Whirling round a wedge of rock with a frightful weapon,  
A Danish axe² duly hewn for dealing the blow,  
With a broad biting edge, bow-bent along the handle,  
Ground on a grindstone, a great four-foot blade—  
No less, by that love-lace⁵ gleaming so brightly!  
And the gallant in green was garbed as at first,  
His locks and limbs the same, his locks and beard;  
Save that steadily on his feet he strode on the ground,  
Setting the handle to the stony earth and stalking beside it.  
He would not wade through the water when he came to it,  
But vaulted over on his axe, then with huge strides  
Advanced violently and fiercely along the field's width  
On the snow.  
Sir Gawain went to greet  
The knight, not bowing low.  
The man said, 'Sir so sweet,  
Your honour the trysts you owe.'³  
xc  
'Gawain,' said the Green Knight, 'may God guard you!  
You are welcome to my dwelling, I warrant you,  
And you have timed your travel here as a true man ought.  
You know plainly the pact we pledged between us:  
This time a twelvemonth ago you took your portion.  
And now at this New Year I should nimbly requite you.  
And we are on our own here in this valley  
With no seconds to sunder us, spar as we will.  
Take your helmet off your head, and have your payment here.  
And offer no more argument or action than I did  
When you whipped off my head with one stroke.'  
'No,' said Gawain, 'by God who gave me a soul,  
The grievous gash to come I grudge you not at all;  
Strike but the one stroke and I shall stand still  
And offer you no hindrance; you may act freely,  
I swear.'  
Head bent," Sir Gawain bowed,  
And showed the bright flesh bare.  
He behaved as if uncowed,  
Being loth to display his care.
Then the gallant in green quickly got ready,
Heaved his horrid weapon on high to hit Gawain,
Swinging savagely enough to strike him dead.
Had it driven down as direly as he aimed,
The daring dauntless man would have died from the blow.
But Gawain glanced up at the grim axe beside him
As it came shooting through the shivering air to shatter him,
And his shoulders shrank slightly from the sharp edge.
The other suddenly stayed the descending axe,
And then reproved the prince with many proud words:
'You are not Gawain,' said the gallant, 'whose greatness is such
That no hill or hollow no army ever frightened him:
For now you flinch for fear before you feel harm.
I never did know that knight to be a coward.
I neither flinched nor fled when you let fly your blow,
Nor offered any quibble in the house of King Arthur.
My head flew to my feet, but flee I did not.
Yet you quail cravenly though unscathed so far.
So I am bound to be called the better man.'
Said Gawain, 'Not again
Shall I flinch as I did before;
But if my head pitch to the plain,
It's off for evermore.'

But be brisk, man, by your faith, and bring me to the point;
Deal me my destiny and do it out of hand,
Till your axe has hit me. Here is my oath on it.'
'Haven't you then?' said the other, heaving up his axe,
Putting the haft to earth, and leaning on the head.
Gripping the rocky ground with a hundred grappling roots.
Then again the Green Knight began to gird:
'So now you have a whole heart I must hit you.
May the high knighthood which Arthur conferred
Preserve you and save your neck, if so it avail you!' Then said Gawain, storming with sudden rage,
'Cease your blows, sir, strike me no more.
I have sustained a stroke here unresistingly.
And if you offer any more I shall earnestly reply,
Resisting, rest assured, with the most rancorous
Despite.
The single stroke is wrought
To which we pledged our plight
In high King Arthur's court.
Enough now, therefore, knight!'
First in foolery I made a feint at striking. 
Not rending you with a riving cut—and right I was, 
On account of the first night's covenant we accorded; 
For you truthfully kept your trust in troth with me, 
Giving me your gains, as a good man should. 
The further feinted blow was for the following day. 
When you kissed my comely wife, and the kisses came to me: 
For those two things, harmlessly I thrust twice at you 
Feinted blows. 
Truth for truth's the word; 
No need for dread, God knows. 
From your failure at the third 
The tap you took arose.

xcv
'For that braided belt you wear belongs to me. 
I am well aware that my own wife gave it you. 
Your conduct and your kissings are completely known to me, 
And the wounding by my wife—my work set it on. 
I instilled her to try you, and you truly seem 
To be the most perfect paladin ever to pace the earth. 
As the pearl to the white pea in precious worth, 
So in good faith is Gawam to other gay knights. 
But here your faith failed you, you flagged somewhat, sir. 
Yet it was not for a well-wrought thing, nor for wooing either, 
But for love of your life, which is less blameworthy.'

The other strong man stood considering this a while. 
So filled with fury that his flesh trembled. 
And the blood from his breast burst forth in his face 
As he shrank for shame at what the chevaher spoke of. 
The first words the fair knight could frame were; 
'Curses on both cowardice and covetousness! 
Their vice and villainy are virtue's undoing.'
Then he took the knot, with a twist twitched it loose, 
And fiercely flung the fair girdle to the knight, 
'Lo! There is the false thing, foul fortune befall it! 
I was craven about our encounter, and cowardice taught me 
To accord with covetousness and corrupt my nature 
And the liberality and loyalty belonging to chivalry. 
Now I am faulty and false and found fearful always. 
In the train of treachery and untruth go woe and shame. 
I acknowledge, knight, how ill 
I behaved, and take the blame. 
Award what penance you will: 
Henceforth I'll shun ill-fame.'

xcvi
Then the other lord laughed and politely said, 
'In my view you have made amends for your misdemeanour; 
You have confessed your faults fully with fair acknowledgement, 
And plainly done penance at the point of my axe. 
You are absolved of your sin and as stainless now 
As if you had never fallen in fault since first you were born. 
As for the gold-hemmed girdle, I give it you, sir. 
Seeing it is as green as my gown. Sir Gawain, you may 
Think about this trial when you throng in company 
With paragons of princes, for it is a perfect token, 
At knightly gatherings, of the great adventure at the Green Chapel. 
You shall come back to my castle this cold New Year. 
To revel away the rest of this rich feast.'

xcvii
'No, forsooth,' said the knight, seizing his helmet. 
And dabling it with dignity as he delivered his thanks, 
'My stay has sufficed me.' Still, luck go with you! 
May He who bestows all good, honour you with it! 
And commend me to the courteous lady, your comely wife; 
Indeed, my due regards to both dear ladies, 
Who with their wanton wiles have thus waylaid their knight. 
But it is no marvel for a foolish man to be maddened thus 
And saddled with sorrow by the sleights of women. 
For here on earth was Adam taken in by one, 
And Solomon by many such, and Samson likewise; 
Delilah dealt him his doom; and David, later still, 
Was blinded by Bathsheba, and badly suffered for it. 
Since these were troubled by their tricks, it would be true joy 
To love them but not believe them, if a lord could, 
For these were the finest of former times, most favoured by fortune 
Of all under the heavenly kingdom whose hearts were 
Abused; 
These four all fell to schemes 
Of women whom they used. 
If I am snared, it seems 
I ought to be excused.'
'But your girdle,' said Gawain, 'God requite you for it! Not for the glorious gold shall I gladly wear it, nor for the stuff nor the silk for the swaying pendants. Nor for its worth, fine workmanship or wonderful honour; but as a sign of my sin I shall see it often. Remembering with remorse, when I am mounted in glory, how it tends to attract tarnishing sin. So when pride shall prick me for my prowess in arms, one look at this love-lace will make lowly my heart.

But one demand I make of you, may it not incommode you: since you are master of the demesne I have remained in a while, make known, by your knighthood—and now may He above, who sits on high and holds up heaven, requite you!—how you pronounce your true name; and no more requests.'

'Truly,' the other told him, 'I shall tell you my title. Bertilak of the High Desert I am called here in this land. Through the might of Morgan the Fay, who remains in my house through the wiles of her witchcraft, a lore well learned,—many of the magical arts of Merlin she acquired. For she lavished fervent love long ago on that susceptible sage; certainly your knights know of their fame. So “Morgan the Goddess” she accordingly became; the proudest she can oppress and to her purpose came—'

'She sent me forth in this form to your famous hall to put to the proof the great pride of the house; the reputation for high renown of the Round Table; she bewitched me in this weird way to bewilder your wits and to grieve Guinevere and goad her to death with ghastly fear of that ghost's ghoulish speaking with his head in his hand before the high table. That is the aged beldame who is at home; she is indeed your own aunt, Arthur's half-sister, daughter of the Duchess of Tintagel who in due course is pride mother of the deadly sins, which a knight, especially, must avoid.

Bertilak The name Bertilak is Celtic. High Desert (Haul-desert) probably refers to his castle. Morgan le Fay sorceress half-sister of King Arthur, who imprisoned his knights, first called “goddess” (l. 490) by the 12th-century Gerald of Wales. She was said to have told Arthur of Lancelot's adultery with Guinevere, and Guinevere is said to have revealed her intrigue with another knight—hence their enmity (l. 2450). Merlin the wizard of Arthur's court, who fell in love with Morgan and taught her his magic. Duchess of Tintagel See Malory, Morte D'Arthur, below. The story is first told by Geoffrey of Monmouth (12th century). Igraine, Duchess of Tintagel, conceived Arthur by King Uther Pendragon, who deceived her in the bkeness of her husband; after her husband's death she married Uther.

Now Gawain goes riding on Gringolet in lonely lands, his life saved by grace. Often he stayed at a house, and often in the open, and often overcame hazards in the valleys, which at this time I do not intend to tell you about. The hurt he had had in his neck was healed, and the glittering girdle that girt him round obliquely, like a baldric, was bound by his side and laced under the left arm with a lasting knot, in token that he was taken in a tarnishing sin; and so he came to court, quite unscathed. When the great became aware of Gawain's arrival, there was general jubilation at the joyful news. The King kissed the knight, and the Queen likewise, and so did many a staunch noble who sought to salute him. They all asked him about his expedition, and he truthfully told them of his tribulations—what chanced at the chapel, the good cheer of the knight, the lady's love-making, and lastly, the girdle. He displayed the scar of the snick on his neck where the bold man's blow had hit, his bad faith to proclaim, he groaned at his disgrace, unfolding his ill-fame, and blood suffused his face when he showed his mark of shame.

'Look, my lord,' said Gawain, the lace in his hand. This belt confirms the blame I bear on my neck. My bane and debasement, the burden I bear.'
THE VISION OF PIERS PLOWMAN

It is surprising how little we know about where, when, and by whom The Vision of Will Concerning Piers Plowman was written. The poem was widely known and read, and it exists in a large number of manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, was printed several times in the sixteenth, and was used, known, and recopied by sixteenth-century poets such as Skelton, by the religious Reformers a little later, and by others. A later clue is that the poet makes reference to people such as Holy Church, Lady Meed, Conscience, and Kind Wit, and to contemporary events and pressures. It is hard to imagine a reviser, C, entering so thoroughly into the highly individual, vivid, and complicated style and personality of the original poet, B, and rising, in his additions, to the power and intensity of the earlier version. Nevertheless, the poetic quality of C is sometimes weaker, so that it may be the work of a later reviser rather than the poet of the B text's final revision, made toward the end of his life.

"Langland," then, is a fiction, but a convenient one. His long dream-allegory poem describes those ingredients of the social and religious condition of England in his day which he wishes to see reformed. The form in which it is cast allows the poet to pass easily from one mode of existence to another, from the description and out-spoken criticism of current religious and social practices to the introduction of allegorical personalities such as Holy Church, Lady Meed, Conscience, Kind Wit, and the rest. As in a dream, the real fits perfectly well with the abstract or symbolic; and the dream may help us to see the essential truth behind the apparent, the spiritual implication of the actual. Neither cancels out the other: they are coordinates. This is not to say that the poem always has the fourfold significance that in the medieval period was drawn out of the text of the Bible—that it can everywhere be read for its literal meaning, its allegorical significance, its application to Christ and the church, and its application to divine love. The poem always functions on at least two levels, however—literal and figural—and sometimes on more; and it transposes easily from one to another.

So, this first and most important principle underlying the procedures of Piers Plowman until scholarship finds a better. Even so, we are not much ahead, since we know nothing of William Langland either, and may be giving this name to at least two separate poets. Piers Plowman exists in three versions, called by scholars A, B, and C. All composed between about 1360 and about 1385. A, the earliest and shortest (about 2500 lines), opens with an allegorical vision of the corruption of society and the attempt to purify it through Piers the Plowman. Piers personifies the ordinary man, seeking goodness through humility, honest endeavor, and obedience to the law of God. This section is followed by another, much shorter: The Vita de Dowel, Dobet and Dobest (The Life of Do Well, Do Better, and Do Best), in which another vision is presented.

In his quest for the good Christian life and for the rational and intellectual foundations of faith, the poet asks information from Thought (intellectual activity), Wit (rational understanding resulting from thought), Study (Wit's wife; formal, disciplined reading and thought), and others. The search is inconclusive.

The B text, of about fifteen years later, is a radical revision and expansion of A. Adding further books, or passus (Latin passus, a step or stage), this version almost trebles the length of the whole. The search for Do Well is expanded, leading to Do Better (the life of Christ) and then to Do Best (the life of the church), each of them embodied in Piers.

The C text is a revised version of B, about ten years later, of much the same length, with some major cuts and additions.

Scholars are divided as to whether these three versions are the work of one man, or more. Though many now believe that one man was the author, this is not certain and the situation is baffling. It is less easy to explain the correspondences between the versions if more than one poet had been at work than it is to explain the differences if we accept A, B, and C as the work of a single poet rewriting his poem, keeping his theme intact, developing parts of it, and cutting out others, in response to changes in opinion and interest, and to contemporary events and pressures. It is hard to imagine a reviser, C, entering so thoroughly into the highly individual, vivid, and complicated style and personality of the original poet, B, and rising, in his additions, to the power and intensity of the earlier version. Nevertheless, the poetic quality of C is sometimes weaker, so that it may be the work of a later reviser rather than the poet of the B text's final revision, made toward the end of his life.

THE VISION OF PIERS PLOWMAN

For being caught by cowardice and covetousness.
Which I must needs wear while I live.
For man can conceal sin but not dissever from it,
So when it is once fixed, it will never be worked loose.'

First the king, then all the court, comforted the knight,
And all the lords and ladies belonging to the Table
Laughtered at it loudly, and concluded amiably
That each brave man of the brotherhood should bear a baldric,9
A band, obliquely about him, of bright green,
Of the same hue as Sir Gawain's and for his sake wear it.

So it ranked as renown to the Round Table
And an everlasting honour to him who had it,
As is rendered in Romance's rarest book.
Thus in the days of Arthur this exploit was achieved,
To which the books of Brutus9 bear witness;
After the bold baron, Brutus, came here,
The siege and the assault being ceased at Troy
Before.
Such exploits, I'll be sworn,
Have happened here of yore.
Now Christ with his crown of thorn
Bring us his bliss evermore! AMEN.

HONY SOYT QUI MAL PENCE
c. 1380-1400

THE NAME OF WILLIAM LANGLAND, TRADITIONALLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE POEM, MUST SERVE

HONY SOYT QUI MAL PENCE

9 This has been thought to mean, in con-

junction with the motto of the Order of the
Garter—Hony soyt qui mal pense—placed at
the end of the poem by the scribe, that the poem
commemorates the founding of the Garter by
Edward III about 1347. But the colors are
wrong: the garter was dark blue. A later Gawain
romance makes the lace white and sees in it
the origin of the collar worn by Knights of the
Garter. The association looks like an afterthought,
not intended by the Gawain poet, despite his
concern with chivalric values.

books of Brutus i.e. any chronicle or romance
of the "matter of Britain".

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