

to His creature who had forsaken Him, in the likeness of a man, most seemly, most beautiful and most amiable that ever might be seen with man's eye, clad in a mantle of purple silk, sitting upon her bedside, looking upon her with so blessed a face that she was strengthened in all her spirit, and said to her these words:

"Daughter, why hast thou forsaken Me, and I forsook never thee?"

And anon, as He said these words, she saw verily how the air opened as bright as any lightning. And He rose up into the air, not right hastily and quickly, but fair and easily, so that she might well behold Him in the air till it was closed again.

And anon this creature became calmed in her wits and reason, as well as ever she was before, and prayed her husband as soon as he came to her, that she might have the keys of the buttery⁶ to take her meat and drink as she

had done before. Her maidens and her keepers counseled him that he should deliver her no keys, as they said she would but give away such goods as there were, for she knew not what she said, as they weened.

Nevertheless, her husband ever having tenderness and compassion for her, commanded that they should deliver to her the keys; and she took her meat and drink as her bodily strength would serve her, and knew her friends and her household and all others that came to see how Our Lord Jesus Christ had wrought His grace in her, so blessed may He be, Who ever is near in tribulation. When men think He is far from them, He is full near by His grace. Afterwards, this creature did all other occupations as fell to her to do, wisely and soberly enough, save she knew not verily the call of Our Lord.

6. **buttery**: pantry.

Getting at Meaning RECALLING, INTERPRETING, CRITICAL THINKING

1. What explanation does Kempe give for her insanity? What symptoms does she display? How is her illness treated?

2. What experience returns Kempe to sanity? Who is the first to believe that she has recovered?

Developing Skills in Reading Literature

1. **Autobiography.** An autobiography is the story of a person's life created by that person. Autobiographical writing reveals both the qualities of the subject and the characteristics of the subject's society. What generalizations can you make about Kempe's personality and character? What are her conceptions of the devil and of God? What seems to be the conception of the causes and cures of emotional illness? What can you deduce about medical care?

2. **Point of View.** Point of view can mean a person's unique way of looking at things. In a general sense the point of view of this autobiography is Margery Kempe's, for the selection presents her perceptions of

reality. Notice that Kempe is referred to as "this creature," suggesting a certain pity or contempt for her. Whose point of view might this phrase represent, that of Kempe or of the scribe recording her story?

In literature the term *point of view* refers specifically to the narrative method used to present a prose selection. Most autobiographies are written in the first person, using the pronouns *I* and *we*. This selection, however, is written in the third person with the pronouns *she* and *her*. What might account for this unusual narrative method?

Developing Writing Skills

See Handbook: How To Write About Literature, page 938, Lessons 1-4.

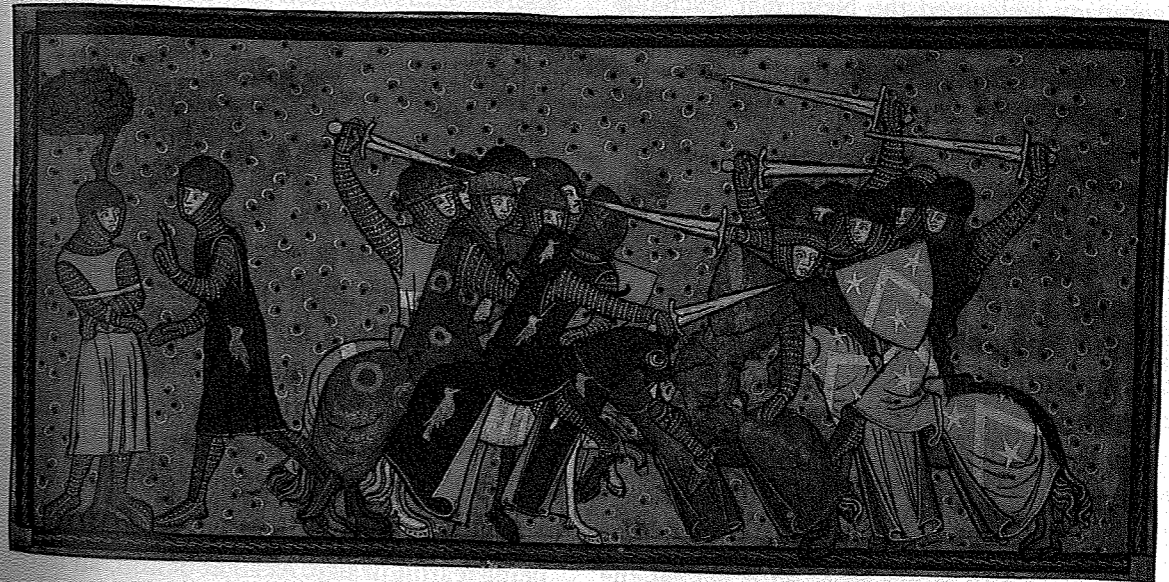
Narrating an Autobiographical Incident. Write one chapter of your autobiography. Limit your focus by first deciding on a time framework: for example, one year of school, one particular summer, one important vacation, one significant relationship, or one memorable job. Then describe one significant episode.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, believed by some scholars to be the work of the so-called Pearl Poet, first appeared about 1370. In its original Middle English form *Sir Gawain* is a poem of more than 2500 lines, which are divided into 101 stanzas grouped into four major sections. The alliterative verse is similar to that of *Beowulf*, reflecting the revival of interest in native English poetry that took place during the fourteenth century.

Sir Gawain is a narrative rich in the Arthurian legend and the chivalric code. This code represented a fusion of Christian and military ideals as the basis for gentlemanly conduct. The chief chivalric virtues were piety, bravery, loyalty, and honor. The most important of these was probably loyalty. The chivalrous knight was loyal to God, to his master, and to the mistress of his heart. Besides the battlefield the tournament was the chief arena in which knights demonstrated the virtues of chivalry.

Sir Lancelot sometimes is considered the perfect knight; however, in the early Arthurian tradition that role belonged to Sir Gawain. He was the greatest of the Knights of the Round Table, famous for his physical prowess, courtesy, and integrity. His encounter with the Green Knight forces him to acknowledge his human weakness and his failure to live up to the knightly ideal.



A CLASH BETWEEN MOUNTED KNIGHTS.
Ill. Ms. Roy (16GVI-F.178).
British Library Board.

from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Translated by Y. R. Ponsor

Chapter 1

Winter lay upon the land. Cold held forest and field in its grim clutch, and in the night sky the stars glittered like gems. The wolf slid from shadow to shadow, stalking hapless prey, falling upon the unwary with death in his fangs. Deep in caverns the great trolls and other monsters mumbled in uneasy sleep, seeking warmth. Over moor and fen¹ the mists rose and fell, and strange sounds troubled the chill silence.

But on the hill, lights gleamed in the castle. In the court of Camelot were gathered all the brothers-in-arms of the Table Round and their fair highborn ladies to celebrate the Christmas season. A full fifteen days it was then, a time of merriment and mirth and rich revel. Laughter rang loud through the halls, and all the music and delight that the mind of man might devise. With merrymaking and glee the company welcomed the New Year, exchanging gifts and calling out glad Noel.

On this New Year's day, fresh and crisp-cold, twice the usual number of celebrants crowded the great hall, and the most noble, the fairest, and most famous was Arthur himself, the most honorable man who ever ruled a court or led an army into battle. This king was a man of the greatest good will and generosity of soul, and it would be difficult to imagine a bolder company than that one gathered in the castle on the hill.

Among the group on the high dais facing the great hall lined with tables of noble knights was Guenevere, Arthur's wife, the comeliest maid, the gracious lady of the gleaming gray eyes. Her silken garments sparkled with rich jewels, and her golden hair shone as softly as her eyes. With her sat the young Gawain, with Agravaine the Strong-hand on the other side; both were the king's

nephews and worthy knights who had proved their prowess many times in test and trial. At the head of the table sat the chief of all bishops in Cornwall, the saintly Bedwin, and with him, Urien's son Iwain.

But Arthur, full of his own happiness and childlike in his joy, would not sit until all were served. For most of all he loved life, its joys and its adventures, and his eager brain and young blood would not allow him to lie abed or sit around lazily. And besides, he had taken upon himself a vow that on this special day of all days, he would not eat until a rare tale of ancestors and arms and high adventure were told, or some grand marvel might be devised, or a challenge of knights to join in jeopardy, jousting life for life as fortune might favor. So he stood before the high table, speaking of trifles and laughing at the noise and fine festival of his free men as the first course was announced with the crackling of trumpets, with drums and tuneful pipers. In the corner a bard awakened the lute and many a heart lifted with his touch upon the strings. Then came the platters piled high with fine food, venison and other meats, and great bowls of soup, and a plenty of strong beer and fine red wine. And all drank and ate as much as they wanted.

Hardly had the first course been finished when the great hall door crashed open and in rode a terrifying knight. He must have been the hugest man on earth, so broad and thick from neck to waist, so long of leg and strong of arm that I half thought him a giant, except for his fine features of face. Everyone knows that giants are hideous to look upon, besides being fearful in size. At sight of him, all in the

1. *fen*: bog, marsh.

hall fell silent, struck dumb by this apparition. For this bold man, from toe to top, in clothes and in countenance, was bright green.

Believe me: all garbed in green, this man, and all his trappings. He wore a tight coat with a heavy mantle adorned with ermine, the same fur lining the hood that had fallen from his head and lay upon his shoulders. Green were the stockings on his legs, and decorated with gold embroidery, and bright golden spurs on his feet, and shoes with upturned toes. His belt was set with gleaming jewels, all emerald green, and indeed they were scattered over all his array and that of his horse, the saddle and bridle and reins, all gaudy in gold and green. The trappings of the horse, the breast-cloth and bits and bridle, even the stirrups in which he stood, all were enameled and gleamed goldenly, and the green gems glittered like the eyes of a cat. The steed itself which he straddled was a great heavy horse, hard to hold; and it was the same green as the man who rode it.

Gloriously was this man outfitted in green, and the hair of his head as green as his horse. It fanned out full and fell to his shoulders, and he had a heavy beard which reached his chest. It gleamed green upon the leather tunic. Such a pair had never before been seen on earth, nor since that time! Everyone said he looked as bright as a flash of lightning, and, indeed, who could withstand his stroke! He wore neither helm nor hauberk²—no, no coat of mail did he wear, nor want!—and he carried no weapons, neither spear nor shield to smite or to save. But in his hand he carried a bough of holly, that branch which is greenest when all others are bare; and in his other hand an ax, heavy and horrid, a cruel weapon right out of a nightmare. The head measured at least an arm's length, and was of green steel worked with gold, the bit burnished bright, the broad edge honed to shear as closely as a sharp razor. The steel of the haft which he held in his hand was wrapped with iron wire to its very end, graven with green in delicate design. A

thong bound it about and fastened at the head where it was tasseled and braided with bright green.

This knight moved through the great hall's silent crowd right up to the high table, and he feared no danger, greeted no one, but looked straight ahead. Then he reined in his horse and faced the room. He stared boldly at the knights, looking them up and down, and his voice thundered when he spoke.

"Where is the leader of this company? I would like to see him and to speak in courtesy with him, as the rules of chivalry require."

He waited and looked at them and considered who might among this company be the most renowned.

Everyone stared at him in wonder, marveling as to what his appearance might mean, how such a knight and such a horse might be such a strange color, green as growing grass, and glowing with enamel and gold. Everyone studied him as he sat there on his horse, and they walked cautiously around him with all the wonder in the world as to what he might do. Many strange things had they seen, but never any such as this. Possibly a phantom, or some fey³ creature, they deemed him to be, for green is a magic color. But all of these brave knights feared to question him and, stunned at his voice, were dumbstruck. A heavy silence filled the royal chamber, and all those who had been chattering sat as if caught in a dream—some, I suppose, out of politeness, some out of uneasiness, and some in fear, but let another man decide which!

Then Arthur, standing before the dais, greeted him, and bowed courteously, for he was never rude, and said,

"Fair knight, welcome to this place. I am Arthur, the chief of this company. Alight and rest, I beg you, and whatsoever your will may be, we shall be glad to learn."

2. *hauberk*: a long tunic made of chain mail.
3. *fey*: enchanted.

"No, God is my witness that to waste time in idle talk is not my errand," replied the knight. "But your fame, lord, is raised high, and through town and countryside you are regarded as the best and bravest ever to ride in battle gear, the noblest and the finest of the world's kind. You are all known to be valiant in dealing with all sorts of adventures, and your hall is known for courtliness. Many tales of this company have reached my ears, and that is what has brought me hither at this special time.

"You may see by this branch which I bear here that I have come in peace, seeking no trouble; for had I fared forth in a frame of mind to fight, I would have brought helm and hauberk, and shield and bright-shining spear, and other weapons to wield also. But because I seek no strife, I am dressed as you see. But if you are as brave as everyone says, you will gladly grant me the game that I ask as a guest's right."

And Arthur answered, "Gentle knight, if you crave combat, you will not fail to find it here."

"No, I seek no contest, as I have told you, especially since I see on these benches only beardless children! If I were geared up for fighting and mounted on my high steed, there is no man here who could match me." And he looked upon them with scorn. "I seek in this court only a Christmas game, for it is Yule and the New Year, and the time to exchange gifts. If there should be any in this hall who considers himself brave enough in heart, hot enough in blood, or quick enough of wit that he would dare exchange stroke for stroke with me, let him come forth. I will give him as my gift this fine heavy ax—heavy enough it is to do his will!—and I shall take the first blow as bare as here I sit. If any of these fine warriors may be so bold as to accept my challenge, let him step forth and seize this weapon. I quit-claim it forever, and he may keep it as his own, and I shall kneel before him and stand him a stroke. And then you will grant me the

right to deal him an equal blow, though I will give him respite of a year and a day. Now let any man who so dares speak quickly."

Chapter 2

If the people had been astonished at first, now they all, high and low throughout the hall, sat as if turned to stone. The knight on his steed twisted in the saddle, his red eyes flashing around the room, his green hair flying with each movement of his head. Then he sat still, staring at them and stroking his beard as the silence lengthened. When no one spoke, he stood in his stirrups and, shaking his fist above his head, he shouted at them.

"What is this? Is this Arthur's court and castle, of which the whole world sings praises? Where now is your pride? Where is your fighting spirit? Where now your fierceness and fame and all your fine words? Now is the reputation and glory of the Round Table overthrown by the mere words of one man, without a single blow being struck, because you are afraid to answer!"

Then the blood shot for shame into Arthur's face, and he turned as angry as a storm-wind, as indeed did all of them. Men muttered and surged forward in anger, half-rising from their places, white with wrath. But Arthur held up his hand and sprang to face the green man.

"Sir, by heaven! Seek no further! As you in your own folly have asked, so shall it be! No man here is afraid of your boasts. Give me your ax, and with God's help, I shall break every bone in your body. I myself accept your challenge and will meet your terms."

The Green Knight laughed aloud and leaped lightly from his horse and landed before Arthur, taller by head and shoulders than any man in the court. The king seized the ax and gripped the handle tightly and waved it about, striking this way and that to test its feel. The

knight calmly removed his mantle and then his short coat, no more dismayed by the threatening blows than if some man had brought him a glass of wine.

Then Gawain, who sat by the queen, called out, "I beseech you, uncle, to grant me a kindness. Let this contest be mine. Gentle lord, give me permission to leave this table and stand in your place there. If I may without discourtesy—if my liege lady will not take it amiss—I would presume to counsel you before your royal court." He stood up and spoke clearly. "I think it is not seemly that such a challenge should be raised in this high chamber, much less that you yourself should so valiantly choose to answer it while so many brave warriors remain on these benches. No better men can be found on any field of battle, nor any more skillful in arms. All men know that I am the least brave, and the feeblest of wit, and the least deserving to be of this company. In truth, it is only because I am your nephew that I am worthy at all; I know no bounty but your blood in my body. And since this business is so foolish and trivial, none of it should concern you at all.

"So I ask: Let it come to me, and if I fail in its performance, then the fault is in me and no blame shall fall on this court."

Arthur moved from table to table consulting with his nobles, as is the custom in such cases, and all agreed that the king should retire from the contest and give Gawain the game.

Gawain turned and bowed to the gray-eyed Guenevere and she smiled on him, and he came down from the dais and, kneeling before his king, he received the ax from Arthur's hands. And Arthur smiled affectionately upon him and raised his hand and asked God's blessing, praying that both Gawain's heart and his hand should be strong.

"Be careful, nephew," he said softly, "and set yourself for the stroke. If you direct it properly, I am sure that you will be able to bear the burden of the blow which he will

later inflict." And Arthur removed himself and went and leaned against the edge of the dais and watched eagerly.

Gawain walked, ax in hand, to the Green Knight, who had been waiting patiently. He looked upon Gawain and he said, "Now, let us reaffirm our bargain before we go on. But first I would ask you, sir, what is your name?"

"I am Gawain," the young man said. "It is Gawain who gives you this blow, whatever may happen afterwards. One year from now, you may return the favor with whatever weapon you wish, asking leave of no one else."

"By God," shouted the other, "it pleases me greatly that I should receive this blow from your hands. You have rightly repeated the covenant which I made with your king—except that you must seek me, friend, where-soever you think I may be found, pledging to come alone, and return to me such wages as you deal to me today before this court."

"And where shall I look for you? Where is your home? I know neither your kingdom nor your name, kith nor kin. Tell me your realm and name and I shall certainly find you. That I swear on my honor."

"No," said the green man, "nothing more is necessary now. But I promise that when I have taken your blow, if you strike squarely, then I will tell you how to find me so that you may fulfill our bargain."

Then he laughed.

"If I do not speak, then so much the better for you; you can stay in your own land and light no wayfarer's fires. But enough! Take up your weapon and let us see how you handle an ax!"

"Sir," said Gawain, "I will," and he stroked the edge of the ax.

The Green Knight knelt on the floor and bent his head and gathered his long, thick hair in one hand and drew it over the crown of his head. His bare neck shone whitely. Gawain set himself, left foot forward on the floor. He grasped the ax and lifted it aloft, and he

brought it down like a lightning bolt upon the bare neck. The sharp steel sliced through the pale flesh and sundered the bones and sheared it in half, and the steel blade buried itself in the floor with a great ringing crash.

The fair head flew from the shoulders and rolled about near the tables, and some of the knights kicked at it with their feet, a grim, grisly game. Blood burst from the body, red gleaming on green. The knight did not falter or fall, but at once he sprang up on his strong legs and jumped into the crowd and snatched up his head by the hair and lifted it high for all to see. Then, striding to his horse, he caught up the reins, stepped into the stirrups and sat aloft, still holding his head high in one hand.

And they say that he sat in his saddle as though nothing whatever ailed him, headless though he was. He twisted from side to side, turning that hideous, still-bleeding body in the saddle. Those who watched in fear were even more horrified to see that he was about to speak.

He turned the grim face toward the high table, and the head lifted up its eyelids and looked at them. Then it looked at Gawain and the mouth moved and the lips spoke.

"Look to it, Gawain, that you do as you have sworn, and seek faithfully until you find me. All men know me as the knight of the Green Chapel. To the Green Chapel you must come, I charge you, to receive such a blow as you have dealt here to me today. You will find me if you try. If you fail to come, coward shall you be called by the whole world."

With a quick movement he pulled his horse around and fled through the great door, still head-in-hand, and the fire from the hooves of his flint-shod steed flashed through the hall. What native land he would return to, none there knew, any more than they knew from whence he had come. In a moment a roar of astonishment filled the hall, and Arthur and Gawain burst into laughter at the strange event. All agreed that it had been a marvel among men.

Although Arthur, ever the wise king, had a great uneasiness in his heart, he did not let a hint of it be seen, but he spoke to his queen with courtly speech.

"Dearest lady, let not today dismay you. Often such a magic and wondrous event occurs at this season, along with the music of minstrels and the laughter of lovely ladies and brave knights."

And he touched her hand gently and gazed into her eyes. Then he sat back, looked around the room, and cried out, "Now at last I may address myself to my dinner, for I have certainly seen a marvel, I must admit."

He smiled at Gawain with love shining on his fair face and he said, "Hang up your ax, nephew, it has done its work for today." And it was placed on the wall above the high table where all might admire and wonder at the sight and the strange adventure. Then they sat down again at the tables, each to his place, king and knights, and the servants brought double portions of all the best dishes and with all manner of good will they passed the rest of the evening.

But be sure, Sir Gawain, that fear does not cause you to fail in this test, this challenge which you yourself have taken into your own hands!

The year passes rapidly and soon Sir Gawain sets out to find the Knight of the Green Chapel. Near Christmas he stops at a castle where the lord offers him hospitality and an opportunity to rest before his encounter with the Green Knight.

Each day the lord departs to hunt, while Gawain remains behind with the lady of the castle who seems intent on seducing the young knight. The men have agreed to exchange what each has won during the day, and so, at the end of the first day, the lord gives Gawain a deer, and Gawain gives the lord a kiss. The second night the lord gives Gawain a boar's head; Gawain gives him two kisses. On the third evening the lord gives Gawain a fox. Gawain gives the lord three kisses but not the magical green silk scarf that the lady

has given him as protection. True to the chivalric code, Gawain has not betrayed the lord; however, he feels guilty about keeping the green scarf. He wears it as he rides out from the castle to his rendezvous with the Knight of the Green Chapel.

At a bubbling brook Gawain hears someone sharpening a scythe; the person turns out to be the Green Knight. Gawain offers himself to the knight who moves as if to deliver a fatal blow to Gawain's neck. Gawain flinches slightly, and the Green Knight reproaches him for his cowardice.

Gawain asks for a second chance. Again the Green Knight brings down his ax but stops before the blade hits Gawain. This time Gawain does not flinch. The Green Knight then tells Gawain to bare his throat. Gawain complies and the Green Knight nicks his neck. Gawain leaps up and prepares to defend himself, as he has now fulfilled the terms of their agreement.

Chapter 11

The Green Knight turned from him and leaned upon his ax, set the shaft to the ground and leaned upon the blade and looked at the lad who waited there. How steadfast, how fearless, and how bold he looked, how ready for battle! And he was pleased in his heart. He laughed with a ringing voice and spoke happily with the lad.

"Bold knight, upon this field of honor be not so fierce! No man here has used you dishonorably, nor treated you discourteously, but only as the decree at Arthur's court allowed. I owed you a stroke and you took it, so hold yourself well paid. I release you of any remnant of all other rights. If I had been more nimble, perhaps I could have wrought you a more harmful blow. First, I merely menaced you with a pretended blow and cut you with no cruel blade. That was for the agreement we made on that first night when you faithfully gave me the day's gains, as an honest man would. That second pretended blow was for the second day when you kissed my dear wife, which kisses you gave to me. And for both of

those I offered you but two scant blows without scathe. For an honorable man is true to his word and he needs fear no danger.

"But on the third day you failed in that honor, and therefore you took that tap on the neck."

He looked at Gawain steadily, and Gawain at him, still as stone. And the green man continued.

"It is my garment you wear, that green silken girdle. My own wife offered it to you, I know. Ah, I know all about those kisses and your character also, and the wooing of my wife! I wrought all this myself. I sent her to test you. Truly I think that you must be the most faultless man that ever walked the earth. As a pearl in purity is to white peas, so is Gawain in virtue to all famous knights. But you fell short a little there, sir; you failed in faith. But it was not for intrigue, nor for lawless lust either, but because you loved your life, and I cannot blame you for that."

Gawain still stood like one stunned, so aggrieved with embarrassment that he cried for anguish inside. All the blood of his body burned in his face and he shrank for shame as the green man talked. He took off his helm and held it in his hands. At last he spoke wrathfully.

"Cursed be both cowardice and covetousness! In them is villainy and vice that destroys virtue!" And he caught up the pentangle and tore it loose and flung it roughly down. "Lo!—there is breaking of faith. Foul be its fall! I coveted my life and cowardice led me into fault for fear of your blow, made me forsake my nature, the generosity and loyalty that are a true knight's." And he bowed his head and wept bitterly. "Now am I false indeed and from fear have I fallen into treachery and deceit. Both bring only sorrow and shame. I confess to you, sir, here on this spot, that I have indeed been false to you in my conduct. If you will but allow me to regain your good will, I shall guard against its happening again."

Then the Green Knight laughed and said amiably: "I consider it entirely acquitted, any harm that I had. You have confessed freely and are aware of your failing and you have stood the sharp penance of my sword. I hold you cleansed of that fault and made as pure as if you had never transgressed since your birth. And I give you, sir, as a gift, that very scarf, as green as my own robe." He touched the silk at Gawain's waist lightly, and laid an arm across his shoulders.

"Sir Gawain, you may think upon this particular contest as you fare forth among the great and chivalrous knights of this world. Let this be the clear token of the adventure of the Green Chapel." Then he laughed and said merrily, "Now, you shall in this New Year come back again to my dwelling and we shall revel away the remainder of this festal time. With my wife, I promise, we shall certainly reconcile you, she who you thought was your keen enemy."

"No," said Gawain, and he took up his helm and looked sadly at the green man. "This has been a sorrowful journey. Good fortune betide you and may He who ordains all honor grant it to you! And commend me to that gracious lady, your comely companion, and the other lady, both the honored ladies who so cunningly beguiled this knight with their tricks.

"It is no great marvel to be made a fool of or to be won to sorrow through the wiles of a woman; for so was Adam, the first man on earth beguiled; and Solomon by many and various women; and Samson also, Delilah dealt him his wyrd! David was deluded by Bathsheba and suffered much woe. All these men were brought to disaster by woman's wiles.

"It would be a great gain to love them and yet to believe them not. But no man can do that. For these were the noblest men of old, all blessed above other men and yet they were all beguiled by women with whom they had dealings. To find myself in that company I

think must be excused." Then he shook off sad thoughts.

"But your girdle I will accept with a right good will, not for the bright gold, nor for its magic—" here Gawain blushed again—"nor for the silk or fringed sides, nay, not for worth nor worship nor noble works. But as a symbol of my transgression I shall keep it always with me, a reminder, when I ride in renown, of the fault and frailty of feeble flesh, how susceptible it is to the stains of evil. And when pride of prowess inflates me, the sight of this will humble my heart.

"But one request I make, if it does not displease you: Since you are the lord of that land where I stayed with such pleasure, thanks to you, will you tell me your name? Only that and no more?"

"That I shall, certainly," replied the green man. "I am called Bercilak de Hautdesert in this land. Through the power of Morgan le Fay, who lives in my house and has the skill of magical lore, all of this has happened. Morgan, the beautiful, the mistress of Merlin—many men has she taken, for she has had love dealings with that excellent wizard who knows all the knights of your court. Morgan the goddess is also her name. There is none so high in power or pride that she cannot tame!

"She sent me in that manner to your royal court in order to test the pride of its men, to see if the reputation of the Round Table were true. She sent me in that strange way to take away your wits and to frighten the fair Guenevere, to make her die with fear at the sight of that man who spoke with his head in his hand before that Table High. She took the form of that old one in my house, the ancient lady; she is in fact your aunt, the half-sister of Arthur, daughter of the Duchess of Tintagel, that lady upon whom the mighty Uther later fathered Arthur, who is your king.

"Therefore I entreat you, dear man, to come to your aunt and rejoice in my house. My court loves you, and I do as well, indeed, as any man under heaven."



SIR GAWAIN BEHEADS THE GREEN KNIGHT,
WATCHED BY KING ARTHUR AND QUEEN GUINEVERE.
Ill. Ms., late fourteenth century. British Museum.

But Gawain still refused. He would not under any conditions. So they embraced in friendship and saluted each other as fine princes and parted right there in the cold. Gawain, mounted on his fine horse, hastened homeward to Arthur's court and the Green Knight wended wheresoever he would.

Gawain rode then through many wild ways in the world on Gringolet. He had been given back his life, a fine gift indeed, and many a thought he gave to that strange event as he traveled. Sometimes he harbored in a house and sometimes out of doors. He had many adventures in the valley and he vanquished many, but I will not take time to tell all that in this tale.

The wound in his neck healed and he wore the green belt fastened like a baldric at his side, tied under his left arm, the end in a knot, as token of the fact that he was guilty of sin.

And thus at last he came to the court, did Gawain the good knight.

Happiness sped through those halls when it was learned that Gawain had returned. Everyone thought it was a fine thing, indeed, and somewhat unlooked for. The king kissed the knight and the queen did also, and many knights sought him out to salute him and make inquiry of his wayfaring fortune. And he told the wondrous tale and confessed everything that had happened, the adventure at the chapel, the good will of the green man, the love of the lady, and the silk that he wore. He showed them the scar that he bore on his neck, the sign of his shameful disloyalty to the green man. He suffered when he told them and groaned with grief and mortification, and the blood burned in his face for shame when he spoke of it.

"Lo, lord," said Gawain to Arthur, as he held forth the silk, "here is the band of blame which I bear like the scar on my neck. This is the offense and the loss, the cowardice and covetousness that caught me there. This is the symbol of falsity in which I was taken. I will wear it all my life, for no one may hide his misdeed, nor may he undo it. Once guilt has touched a man, he is never free of it again."

And the king comforted the knight and all the court laughed and lovingly agreed on the spot that each man of the Table Round should henceforth wear such a baldric, the slanting ribbon of bright green, for the sake of that beloved man, and they would wear it with delight. And so it came to be accorded as the renown of the court and always afterwards anyone who wore it was especially honored.

So in Arthur's day this adventure occurred, as books of romance will witness. Many strange and curious wonders have happened in Britain since the days of Brutus whose race came from Troy. But surely this tale of Gawain and his contest with the Green Knight in a trial of honor and faith is one of the most wondrous.