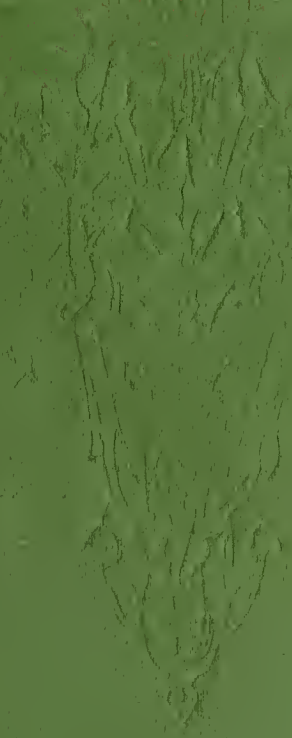
# PARSIVAL

HAUPTMANN



# PARSIVAL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TORONTO

# PARSIVAL

BY

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AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION

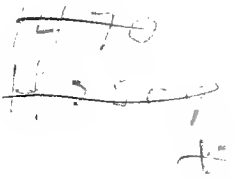
BY

OAKLEY WILLIAMS

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1915




Set up and electrotyped. Published March, 1915.

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## I

 ARSIVAL'S mother's name was Heartache. I should hate to make anyone feel sad, but I believe we might call every mother, or at any rate, very, very many mothers by this name. What Heartache's other name was, and of what stock she came, we do not know. Some people say that her family was of knightly degree, others speak of her as a peasant woman, so Parsival in his youth, would have then been nothing more than a common country lad. Of whatever stock he might be, Parsival himself knew nothing about it, and his mother, who may well have known, never said a word to him on the matter. Her name was not Heartache for nothing.

Parsival's early childhood was very happy, for Heartache lived in a little log hut, hidden

deep in the solitude of the woods: a hut that Heaven knows who had built for her. Maybe Heartache herself had built it, for she was deft in handling not only the spade and hoe, but the axe as well, and, furthermore, Parsival had never set eyes on human being other than her. "There is no work Heartache shirks," was a favourite adage of hers.

Parsival was very fond of his mother, and was, as I have said, very happy under her care, although she was not gay and was never able to laugh whole-heartedly, but at best force a painful smile to her lips. The merry, sturdy boy gave it no further thought; he enjoyed his meals, felt safe and snug when his mother had tucked him up in bed, and in the day-time made the little herb and flower garden round about the house, the forest and green solitude all around his splendid playground.

Parsival passed the first twelve or thirteen, or maybe, even fourteen years of his life in the games of childhood. Every child knows what games mean, and that they are just about the most precious thing in the world. As for the

grown-ups, many of them have, I am sorry to say, become wholly unknowledgeable in this matter. Now and then, one or other of the grown-ups who is able to value games at their proper worth, has troubled his head about the deeper meaning of play; it is an emprise which no one lays upon us, and no one constrains, which is devoid of sordid profit, and, perhaps for this very reason, is pure joy all through.

Parsival was a strong lad. He revelled in the sunshine, in the flowers of the forest, in the birds, in climbing trees, in the oak apples, in the wood-pigeons' nests, in the snow, in the storm, not to forget the wild beasts, great and small, which dwelt in the forest, and which, from his ninth and tenth year onwards, he began to hunt with craft and courage. Traffic with nature after this fashion is like to make your blood clean, your eye steady and far-seeing, your bones firm and the muscles of your body tough. Therefore it was as well that no rude louts from the towns, who might have made game of him, crossed his path, for he would have man-handled them terribly.

It would not have been hard to make game of him on several counts. Whether it had been of his mother, Heartache's intent, or whether circumstances had brought it about in her despite, the boy knew nothing of God nor of the Devil, and, if he had given the matter a thought at all, he would have taken it for granted that no human beings other than Heartache and himself, lived in the world, and that, starting from the log hut, the world would come to an end a few bow-shots away in every direction. But, as you know, this is not the case. The world is exceeding wide-spread, and is peopled by a multitude of folk, who are split up into nations, each one of which speaks its own proper tongue, and also differs from others in many ways. For these, and other reasons, the lad Parsival might have passed for a dunce, even among boys of his own age, although his stupidness was, in fact, only lack of experience.

He would, maybe, have taken a bearded man that might have crossed his path, for a dangerous wild animal; he would have held a bishop in his cope for something kin to a big strange

bird, but he would not have run away, but would have attacked them, man and bishop alike, fiercely, for his mother had taught him the use of the bow and arrow, and had also given him a hatchet, that might at need serve for a battle-axe, to hang in his belt. Strangely enough, his mother taught Parsival that all Nature was their foe, and that you could only have and hold the commonest things, if you took and kept them by stress of arms.

The boy would, it is true, have had some such feeling in his blood, even if his mother had not taught it to him of intent.

Parsival, who could neither read nor write, and to whose eyes a boundary stone in the forest and, let us say, a book, would have been very much the same thing, whom children learning their A, B, C, in the lowest form would have put to confusion, was broad of chest, had the far-seeing eye of a bird of prey, and the delight in battle and the courage of a lion. With it all he was like a fox in the acuteness of his hearing and keenness of his scent. Slipping through the forest of nights, nothing escaped him. He knew

the meaning of every sound long before it would have been within the range of the ordinary human ear. A no less degree of fear kept pace with his lusty courage, that fear which is common to the strongest wild animals and safeguards them from being surprised, unawares and defenceless, by a foe. So Parsival was ever ready for the fray, and in the art of throwing his axe or putting it to other account, and of sending his arrow at a hundred paces or more to the precise mark he meant to hit, there was none to match him; not even a real hero, let alone a boy learning his A, B, C, in the lowest form of his school.

## II

EARTACHE was by nature, and taking her all in all, a woman of the sort that is sparing of words and keeps her own counsel. Parsival had no more seen her laugh than he had seen her weep. She was never wont to display marked tenderness towards the boy, but he could do nothing rash without her eye watching and safeguarding him. This is what happened when, in his guilelessness, he was about to pick up a thick, poisonous snake, when he was on the point of jumping into the flames of a forest fire, for, with their crackling and spluttering, he took them for wild beasts, licking their greedy jaws, and was about to fight them with his axe. It would be no light matter to record all the moments of danger when the inexperience of a child put Parsival in jeopardy and his mother guarded and saved his life.

One day, when a terrible storm was raging through the forest, and, tearing them up by

the roots, was over-throwing many an old giant of the woods in the clearing where Heartache's log hut stood, Parsival had stayed out hunting longer than was his wont. Amid the wild upheaval and the clash of tree-tops and tree trunks, he had followed the course of a swollen mountain torrent up-stream and had gained heights he had not hitherto climbed, even with his mother's goats. This time neither wolf nor elk nor bear had drawn him on; it was rather the clouds chasing across the sky, the moist, heady, raging air, and, above all these, a general feeling of an uncertain something that, like stirred and storm-tossed Nature, was drawing him upwards and onwards. The mountain torrent that rushed foaming to meet him in headlong bounds and with deafening din, the maddened air, that, shrieking and howling, snapped the trees and hurled them across the watercourse, seemed to brave him to kindred unrestraint. Truth to tell, a feeling of savagery took possession of him, so that he shouted at the top of his voice, and, in an access of strength, in very fact set about uprooting trees. He snapped their

stems, twisted them off and flung them into the rushing water. Parsival was anything rather than wantonly malignant, but forces that have not had time to become creative, are often perforce bound to find vent in destruction, and furthermore, in the great divine scheme of creation, even destructive forces are creative.

When he had gained the highest peak of a ridge of rock above the tree line, something moved the boy, with an almost irresistible longing, to go down into the unknown on the further side, and he would, without a doubt, have pushed on, and for the first time have spent the night beyond his mother's roof, had not, of a sudden, a cry out of the mist, stealing over the mountain ridge, startled him and moved him to turn back homewards. He had already turned his steps back, when he quieted his fears with the explanation that he had suffered himself to be tricked by the cry of some solitary bird of prey. None the less he had heard, quite clearly and distinctly, the word "Heartache" in the air.

When Parsival came home this time, his mother's manner was strange. She said, it is

true, never a word but the lad, glancing at her askance with a puzzled sense of guilt, could not help marking how drops of dew were brimming over the rims of her eyes and for a long time, one after the other, flowed down and, in very fact, bathed his mother's grave and hard face. What was it? What did it mean? It was something new, something passing his understanding. But it was further beyond his understanding still when Parsival felt his own cheeks bathed in tears and, touching his own eye with his finger, became aware that it too had been turned into a well of salty water. "Yesterday," something within him said, "you were still stone all through: to-day you have been melted."

On the morrow Heartache said to Parsival, "You know the herbs that are poisonous, and you know the snakes. I have taught you to trap the wild beasts of the forest in snares and gins and to overcome them with the spear or with the arrow. But all these foes are of no account; there are men."

And for the first time Heartache now began to tell her son how the races of mankind are

spread over the surface of the earth, like the sand of the seashore, and how neither the beasts of the field nor the human race has any other foe that is as terrible as man. The fight against the beasts was, she said, child's play. The cruelty of the brute was, as against the high art of human cruelty, mercy. In the human being, she said, dwelt many qualities far above the brute: others, far lower than those of any beast. So there was no brute, only human, treachery.

In this fashion Heartache never ceased to instill, drop by drop the poisonous and poisoned matter, as it were, of an old hidden wound into the child's pure soul. The conclusion of her discourse was, "Stay with me: shun the world of men."

## III

HENCEFORWARD Heartache's son could not go on spending his days, as heretofore, in thoughtless happiness. He had learned how a very great multitude of folk, besides his mother and himself, fashioned in their likeness, were in the world, and how he must needs hold them for his worst foes. And, had they not, in very truth, dealt his mother that unhealed hurt of which he had now for the first time become aware? What else could have wrung those tears from his mother, tears that had even melted his hardness, and in a pang of pity, beyond his understanding, had made his eyes overflow? When he pondered on the misdeeds of men against his mother, and of all the other things his mother had told him concerning them, he felt a hatred against them that at times rose to a mad lust for the destruction of all who bore the name of man, even of himself among them. "Wherefor, if men be no

better, have they being at all, and wherefor am I, who am nothing better than a man, alive?"

Once Parsival had tangled himself in such thoughts as these, he longed for a weapon that might prove apter to the hand and more terrible than his axe—for a weapon made to rush into the world to better purpose and to avenge his mother on men.

Spring, summer, autumn, winter now came round again. Spring returned again and Parsival did not cease to brood on his mother's hurt beyond all healing and on the race of men, whose existence, for one cause or another, in part because of his hate, in part because of new, unknown reasons, drew him more and more. The craving to set forth among men grew in him with irresistible and painful force, and neither the song of the birds, nor his hunting and fishing, availed to turn his thoughts from the hot longing to cross the mountain ridge, beyond that parting of the ways, where the bird of prey's cry of "Heartache" had led him to turn back. The poor lad could not put the thought away, although it seemed to him quite impossible to

leave his ageing mother, whose sole friend and guard he was, behind in the wilderness alone.

It was a very wholesome and natural force that was drawing Parsival into the outside world, and yet the boy felt conscious of guilt, and doubly guilty at the sight of his mother. How sorrowful was her look, a look that seemed to probe him to the innermost recesses of his soul!

And now I have to tell of a marvel.

It is a strange happening, which, none the less, is always being proved true anew: that every man's hand must needs, in due season, find that one particular weapon which is serviceable and proper to it as none other can be. The marvel that occurs in such cases, always is and remains alike great, even if the manner whereby the right hand is, at the right time, led to grasp the right weapon, seems to us most natural and a matter of course.

In the case of the lad Parsival, however, it was, judged by its outward happening alone, out of the ordinary and wonderful. He was passing by just as, on the margin of a mountain lake, a falcon struck a dove which fell to the

ground, ravelled up into a ball with the bird of prey. After the boy's bow-string had shrilled and a lucky shot had pierced the falcon's breast, the archer marked that the dove was still alive. It was lying on the ground beating its wings. There is no gainsaying a hunter's trade is cruel, yet, it can be said that the true hunter, though he does, indeed, practise the art of killing, is, apart from this, inclined to pity and by no means cruel. Heartache's son drew near, intent to put the bleeding dove out of its misery. But for some reason or other he stayed his hand this time from killing the little bird with a turn of his wrist, and so its life was spared. "Live or die," said the hunter aloud, picking up his bleeding quarry and cradling it carefully in the crook of his arm, "the issue lay with my arrow: it has proved your saviour. I will not be more cruel than my unfeeling tool."

"The issue lay with my arrow," was what Parsival said, but deep within him a shudder he could not understand shook him; it was as if the true issue here had lain with some all-present unseen Power, not with him or with his

arrow. As if under some magic spell, he had perforce to draw water from the low lying level of the lake, for the dove, that drank it eagerly, to bathe its hurts, and to refresh it by laving it in the cool waters of the lake.

Having done this Parsival heard the call of a wild dove from a little eyot, overgrown with beech trees, where of himself he would have guessed the nest, whence the stricken dove would have come, to be. And straightway, as if at the behest of a bidding beyond dispute, he had plunged into the deep water up to his armpits to reach the island, intent to restore the dove to the nest of its forsaken, cooing mate. He succeeded in making land, and, since he was able to climb the tallest tree as easily as the brown bear, the poor little bird, flooding a clutch of speckled little eggs with her blood, was soon restored to her downy nest. When Parsival had climbed down from the branches of this thousand year old beech tree, he found a sword. A pigeon-blood ruby, gleaming in the depths of the hollow trunk, led the boy to its discovery. He snatched at it because he maybe took the

jewel for the eye of a woodland owl, but forthwith became aware that it was inset into a bronze hilt that ran out into a bare and broad blade. Although he had hitherto never seen a sword, as soon as he drew it clear in his hands, he knew what it meant and what its purport was, and also that, with this flashing trove in his hand, there was now no further need to delay his setting forth into the world.

## IV

N the morrow, when, as of wont and use, Parsival awoke on his couch of sweet-smelling moss in his mother's log hut, and saw her busy at the hearth, he sprang to his feet and told her that he must needs avenge her on the world and on the race of men. In her first dismay and in her dread of losing him, she, after the manner of many a mother, said something that served, as nothing else could have, to fire his purpose doubly into flame. He was, she said, unarmed and unarmoured. Then the boy could forbear no longer, though he had resolved to keep the trove of the sword secret from his mother. With pride and victory in his eye he drew the broad, gleaming weapon from under the skins of his bed.

"I must needs leave you, Mother," he said, "because I can know no peace as long as I have not found out and punished the man who did you the hurt that will not heal."

Heartache made answer, weeping:

"That hurt was not to the death. If you forsake me, you will do me a far greater hurt which will be unto death indeed. But if you should fall in with, and punish the man at whose door lie all the deepest sorrows of my lonely life, you would, in lieu of one, be putting me to ten torturing, long-drawn deaths."

But Parsival took up his sword, passed out across the glade, set his teeth, and did not turn back once when he heard his mother weeping aloud and pitifully for him to come back.

He roamed at a venture for several days. No voice had called its warning "Heartache" on the mountain ridge where he had turned back the first time. Bravely and stoutly as he pressed on, the world was unending, and he could not forbear wondering why he did not come to the edge of it. If, in his own despite, the thought of his forsaken mother bade fair to constrain him to turn back, he quieted heart and conscience by telling himself over and over again that he needs must avenge his mother on the race of men, and,

above all, on him that had done her so great a wrong. By this time he had been three days afoot, but in the meantime, save for his own reflection in the water, had not set eyes on any human being.

Of a certainty, he thought, so soon as the first of them chances to cross my path, we shall come to blows forthwith. As he looked forward, delight of battle mingled with his hatred of his kind. But it was not the thought of vengeance alone, nor the delight of battle alone, but another joy was astir in this hope of chancing upon men. It was a delight that disquieted him, and made him, as it were, flush red in spirit for shame of his far-off mother.

On the late afternoon of the third day of his wanderings, the lad had reached the edge of the forest, and, far off on a flower-strewn meadow, beheld a tent of fair purple silk. Seeing that he had grown up, though in outward guise of great strength and of gentle birth, with a country lad's simple mind and that fear was a stranger to him, he made not the least ado in passing within the tent.

Here it was that he saw the first of the human race.

Here, God wot, there was assuredly no work for the sword in his hand, or for the thought of vengeance for Heartache. For what met his eyes was—to blurt it out—a fair, peaceful-seeming maid. Parsival was at once aware that he had to do, not with one of his own kind, but with a much younger sister of his mother. There was no room to doubt it, if only because the young woman-thing was shedding floods of Heartache's tears. The maid was dismayed at the sight of the rough man of the woods, but something in his look gave her confidence. She did not know that once again, as once before at the sight of his mother's tears, the soul of the young adventurer had melted under her tears. He gave her greeting and his first words were to ask who was the man that had done her secret hurt. Then she wept the more loudly, and amid her sobs began to speak and Parsival listened to her whole story.

She had, he heard, been carried off by a cruel man, a robber Knight, although she had plighted

her troth to a young gallant, who had been not her delight alone, but the joy of her old father and mother to boot. The rude and hateful man, who, in the lists of Knighthood, bore the name of the Proud Knight of the Heath, was carrying her away against her will and had brought every attempt to set her free to nought. He had even slain her betrothed in single combat.

"Where is this proud Lord of the Heath?" asked Parsival, "for he is the very quarry I am seeking above all other."

Not long afterwards the Proud Knight, on his black charger, came sweeping over the heath. He was in truth a terrible man, such as Parsival had pictured him in his imagining. His beard was black, it hung down to his middle and was twisted into his sword belt. Under his black eyebrows, flashed black eyes full of grim harshness and of proud disdain, that death alone could quench. He reined in his horse, which neighed loud, whereat helmet, spurs and chain mail clashed and clanged again. When the Proud Knight opened his lips, only these wrathful words escaped the hedge of his strong

ivory teeth, "Peasant lout, what wouldst thou here?"

"Just such a one as thou," quoth Parsival, that he might avenge Heartache on him. And, as if two lions in one, the lad leapt at the knight.

The fight was hot, but the victory at the last fell to Parsival. The Proud Knight lay slain on the edge of the forest. He lay dyeing the grass and the daisies red in his ebbing blood. When Parsival beheld the knight, hacked by his sword, lying in his blood on this wise, a shudder shook him for the work he had done. He told himself that he had avenged Heartache. But he was fain not to see the maid, whom he had freed from her persecutor again. He therefore struck back into the woods.

# V

FOR a few days after his first emprise, Parsival maybe roamed the woods, until the longing to return home to Heartache overcame him.

The spirit of the black dead knight lay upon him like an overwhelming burden, and it seemed to him as if only on his mother's breast, could he shake it off. His delight in battle had passed, his eager, headstrong craving for wayfaring had flickered out in aimless wandering. But now, after his resolve to take flight back to his mother's heart had come to the sticking point, new life poured in upon him. There he would win back the old, guiltless, and careless days.

He was running as he had never run before. It seemed to him as if he were only coming back belated from his day's hunting. He had, maybe, fallen asleep and had had a troublous dream, but, at bottom, void of meaning. What his mother had said came back to him now, "You

will, if you go, do me a far greater hurt than that which the unknown man has dealt me."

"Mother," he had it in his mind to say, as soon as, with merry greeting, he had passed into the dear log hut again, "Mother, I have sinned in going away from you. I shall stay with you now and for ever."

Then his mother, he told himself, would stroke his cheek and would smile away the dread lurking in the deepest depths of his being like some evil blight, the dread fraught with the remembrance of what other things his mother had said to him at their leave taking. These were her words, "But if you were to fall in with and to punish the man at whose door lie the deepest sorrows of my lonely life, you would, in lieu of one, be putting me to ten torturing long-drawn deaths."

No! the Proud Knight of the Heath had of a surety not been that man.

Parsival had crossed the border heights, and had kissed the stones for joy where Heartache's call from the air had before constrained him to turn back. He raced joyously down the slopes

and foothills, with the bounds of a mountain deer. Here every tree, every blade of grass, every fern, every woodland flower, seemed to him to be already thriving the better in his mother's lap and under Heartache's loving hand. He reached the lake, where hardly a week before he had saved the dove from the hawk, and when he climbed the tree in whose branches he had found the wild dove's nest, he heard the twitter of fledglings, and to his delight saw the parent birds flitting safe and sound, round a nest full of hungry nestlings. He took his sword and lowered it back again deep into the hollow of the tree.

After doing this, he felt of a sudden far more light of heart. He knew that in a few hundred paces, he would, in accord with his reckoning, reach the log hut he henceforward was resolved never to leave again.

Then of a sudden, he became aware of the figure of a man, whom he could see through the branches of the tree, from above, and who was standing, in a boat, not far from the shore of the lake, with rod and line.

Heartache's son had never, as we know, beheld a human being in this spot. He did not therefore trust his eyes, but climbed down the branches of the tree to the ground and hailed the strange fisherman with a shout.

The fisherman, without allowing himself to be distracted from his pursuit, seemed to hold Parsival for some strayed traveller, who had lost his way, and wished to be set on the right road. He, therefore, answering the hail with a question, asked how Parsival chanced to be in these parts and whither he wished to fare.

"Well-a-day, whither art thou faring? And how comes it thou chancest in these parts?"

Parsival made answer. "As for me, thou shouldst know that forest and lake and everything round about belong to my mother, belong to Heartache."

"The world belongs to Heartache," quoth the fisherman, throwing his line out so that the lure fell into water not very far away from the lad. He said, a second time, "The world belongs to Heartache, Parsival."

"How comes it that thou knowest me?"

"That I shall not tell," the fisherman made answer.

"Hast caught many fish?" Parsival went on, more for the sake of saying something because he felt ill at ease in the man's strange company.

"I am in truth only waiting for one single fish, and I long for nothing more earnestly than that it should take my lure."

"Then go on waiting till thou turn black," said Parsival, at the last, with a freshet of youthful high spirits. "I cannot cut time to waste with thee, for my mother awaits me."

He ran away and in a short time had reached the glade where the log hut stood, but, none the less, seen from some way off, it seemed to be in some wise changed. His heart was beating wildly, as, with halting footsteps, he drew near the old, well-loved dwelling-place. What had befallen? Parsival fell on his face and swooned away.

When he recovered his senses, he found the fearsome spectacle, the sight of which had struck him like a blow with a hammer, unchanged. Heartache's hut, the cradle and shelter of his young life, was gutted through and through by

fire. Even the black ashes had grown cold, and, as he raked them over, showed no trace of heat. Where was Heartache? Parsival made search through the forest round about and called to her at the top of his voice.

After he had sought his mother until nightfall, but to no purpose, the strange fisherman, with whom he had bandied words, came into his mind, and the thought flashed through his brain that the man might chance to be able to give him word of his mother's whereabouts. Had he not, albeit, in some spirit of mockery maybe, declared that the whole world belonged to Heartache?

He reached the lake and to his joy, found the fisherman fishing unconcerned, although the evening was already drawing towards twilight, and his boat had drifted rather far from the shore towards the middle of the lake. At about this hour, the mirror of the lake was quite black, only in its depths the purple battlements of a sunken castle seemed to glow like flame.

"Fisherman ahoy!" shouted Parsival. Without stroke of oar or turn of rudder, the boat, as if of herself, began to drift towards the shore.

Parsival's voice demanded where Heartache might be, and the fisherman, who even now kept his eyes fixed on his line alone, made answer somewhat after this fashion:

"Thou wilt have travail to find thy mother again. I could tell thee many things of her and of her lot in life, but my mouth is sealed, as long as I have not caught the fish on which all turns. Nevertheless follow, I bid thee, the shores of the lake, and seek the place where the great river flows in to it. Wend thy way up stream until thou find a certain castle standing alone, knock at the gate there and it is not beyond the bounds of what may be that thou mayest have some tidings of thy mother from its inmates."

In his grief and wrath at the tangled words, Parsival almost had it in his mind to leap into the fisherman's boat for to wrest his secret from him by main force. His grief for his lost mother knew no bounds, and he did not know how he was to endure his longing and torment for her and not die. But, quite of a sudden, darkness fell and Parsival at the instant saw no more of the fisherman and his boat.

## VI

HE was now stumbling on blindly through the darkness, because there was nothing left him to do, if he would still have word of his mother, than to seek the castle of which the fisherman had spoken. A bitter and a fearsome night it was that he had to live through. He was astounded how it could come to pass that a man such as he could go under in such perplexity of distress. When, the thick darkness made it, ever and anon, impossible for him to press on, he more times than once swung from the terror of despair to fits of Berserker wrath that spent themselves with bleeding fists against stones and tree trunks.

He did not, be sure, cease to shout Heartache's name over and over again into the rustling wilderness of the woods, whence, ever and again, a mournful echo gave him answer, an echo that only made his helplessness, his fears, his longing, and in the end, his rage, the greater. He seemed,

in his own eyes, as one befooled, as one tricked. They had tricked him of the most precious thing the world had held for him, but where to look for the trickster, for the cheat, he could not tell. He went so far as to challenge the air, the night, the trees, the rocks, the waters, and the earth, to give him back his mother on pain of his everlasting enmity.

Toward morning, Parsival became aware that he was wending his way up stream on the banks of a somewhat broad river. The grey dawn, heralding the sun, disclosed a deep valley that, steep and rocky, widened out or narrowed in on either shore of the river bed. The farther he fared the more foreign the landscape became, and had he not been stricken to the soul, he would, at the last, have believed himself in Paradise.

Strange plants, strange flowers, trees and grasses encompassed him round about. Great cockatoos and other parrots flitted in smaller or larger flocks, speaking with human tongues, above the clear and green waters of the hurrying river. They hovered above his head and

it seemed to him as though they were giving him greeting. Once he thought he heard one say:

"Boy Parsival, thy father awaiteth thee," and he pondered within himself for a long time what this saying might mean and what kind of bird this "father" who, they said, was awaiting him, might prove to be. But it was not only the parrots that were tame in this river valley. Stags with their hinds were lying at rest and chewing the cud on its soft turf under holly oaks of a thousand years growth. Snuffing antelopes, creatures that, in their outward semblance summed up all the graciousness, and all the gentle nobility of peace, trotted up to the wayfarer fearlessly, and nuzzled him with their soft nostrils. Heather as high as a grown man stood in snowy flower, and from groves of thick laurel came the fluting of hidden songsters, whose notes were of unearthly, liquid sweetness. Over this dream-like, breathless pleasance was of a sudden wafted the far off sound of a bell, a sound that made every bird stay its flight, or song and caused the antelopes, and the

deer, to stand still, even to pause in chewing the cud. With necks outstretched they turned towards a patch of flaming purple in the far distance at the head of the valley, a spot whence in the red dawn the river was now streaming like a broad highway of crimson blood. Nor could Parisval forbear to turn to the selfsame quarter. Then he became aware that the ruby light had its rise from the pinnacles of a proud castle, which of a surety was none other than the one he sought, and that to which the fisherman had sent him.

Then he heard unseen voices in the air, chanting this chant-like song:

I dwell beside a broad, fair river,
I dwell within a lofty dome,
The broad, fair flood flows through the dome,
And ever broader grows the river,
And ever higher towers the dome,
Endless the stream flows through the dome.

I am afloat upon the river,
Wherein a second dome is mirrored.
I plunge deep down within the dome,
And rise on high above the river,

A-wing within the upper dome,
Music floods through the upper dome.

Wave after wave comes from the river
And all's a-quiver in the dome,
And thrilling, echoing, through the dome
Thou know'st not, art thou but the river?
Art all that moves and stirs the dome?
Art at the last thyself the dome.

Not long afterwards the boy had gained the gates of the mysterious castle, after crossing to the threshold of the castle over a bridge of clearest crystal that spanned the river which was notably broad here and still flowed like a stream of blood. He knocked at the gate and was bidden welcome by a kindly warder with a long white beard. At the sight of this new human being and man, his mother's bitter judgment concerning mankind came into his mind, and he could not bring himself to answer the old man's kindly questions touching his errand other than with darkling wrath.

"Ye have done my mother hurt beyond all healing," quoth he, "and, if, over and above,

ye have taken her away and hold her captive, look well to yourselves, for I shall set her free by force or put fire to your castle at all four corners at once, as ye did to my mother's log hut."

The warder was a man of lofty bearing. Save that his kindly gravity was, as it were, deepened by a certain air of friendly gentleness, you could not have told that this headstrong utterance had touched him. He only said, quite simply: "In the name of the Holy Grail, enter."

"What is the Grail to me?" quoth Parsival.

"Ask God as to that," the warder made answer.

"Who is God, old greybeard? I know not."

The venerable man, who bore a coat of silver mail, plain to see, under his long, white cloak and across it a sword in a broad gold belt, said, as if in reproof, "Call me Gornemant." And he went on solemnly: "What thou dost not know concerning God, thou wilt never learn of asking questions. So long as thou art speaking, lad, God holds His peace, and only when thou has learnt to hold thy peace in very deed, will

God speak. Go, the Lord of the Castle awaits thee."

But Parsival was in no mind to be over-awed. In the company of another knight, or whoever else he might be, arrayed like the warder, he passed up a broad, marble stairway, brawling at the top of his voice. He would, he said, know how to avenge his mother a hundredfold, if so be they had done her a twofold wrong. But his guide only crossed his hands on his breast and bowed his head, in humble fashion before him. By this demeanour Parsival was, in some measure, put to confusion. Over and above, came the sight of the many stairways, chambers, halls, and casements of the castle, whose whole fabric put him in mind of the work of magic. He was led through crypts where many twisted pillars of black marble mirrored the light of a single blood-red lamp. Thereupon, his guide said: "We are in the depths beneath the river here."

He had to grope his way behind his guide through narrow, unlit galleries, then round and round in circles, and up and up, stair after stair,

as though winding round the trunk of a mighty tree of stone. A postern gate stood open, and he saw a vast dome overhead, high and broad, and glistening with gold, the like of which the poor lad had not even in his dreams beheld. The whole building, wherein he himself was only some antlike thing, seemed to breathe soft melody. No wonder that the simple lad, Parsival, was not straightway master of his senses, and was for a while quite unmindful who he was or what his errand in this place.

When he awoke from his bewilderment he was alone.

But he was forthwith wholly given up to listening, gazing, and marvelling anew. Was it he himself that he felt, heard, and saw all round about him? Was it in good sooth, only his soul that was fulfilled with such visions as these? Was it, this soul of his, the throbbing dome that he bore within himself? Or was he dead, and himself nothing other than a vibrating breath lost in all these moving marvels?

For of a truth it was only in outer seeming alone that all this was stable. It seemed rather

as if it were fashioned of some ethereal fabric. Moreover this vast cathedral was, it seemed, twofold, and dizziness overtook him as, gazing down through the streaming mirror of the floor, he beheld the second mighty dome reversed, and like a bowl, deep as an abyss, beneath his feet.

But amid all this swaying, quivering, and throbbing, there came a voice wherein the car "Heartache" was ever a-tremble, his Mother's name, fraught with that mystery and meaning that once before had led him to turn back.

And not unlike a man smitten with blindness Parsival staggered on. Fleeting visions encompassed him, swiftly fashioned, to vanish as swiftly. Thus he thought to behold his mother fashioned of some white substance, clad in white raiment, with a white dead body of one done to death, like the Knight of the Heath, laid across her knees.

All this is witchcraft, thought Parsival, who had stretched out his hands in the joyful agony of recognition towards Heartache, whereupon it all melted like some aërial cheat.

While he was brooding over this illusion, the first of a rather long train passed like little ants into the church through a side chapel, and Parsival marked its passage. His guide, who now showed himself anew, told him that the Lord of the Castle was of this train of old men and young. Every one of them was wearing a white tunic and the big red cross embroidered in needlework on their breasts. With the entry of the train the solemn inward music of the vast vault of stone had swelled in volume. The guide speaking said: "It is not meet for a stranger to address the Lord of the Castle. Therefore prithee, Parsival, wait until he bids thee speak."

The train drew nearer and with it one borne upon a litter and arrayed in far more costly fashion than the rest. Before them all, under a silken baldaquin, was borne a marvellous crystal vessel that seemed to glow of itself in a pure and white radiance. They passed on, and it seemed to the waiting lad as if not even one of many men drawing near in the convoy paid heed to him at all.

He grew discomfited, and his guide stayed his

unrest. At this moment they bore by a spear bleeding at the point. The spear, borne by its bearer at the slope, dripped from its mystic source of blood, drop after drop of blood into the glistening bowl. They had at the last borne it up the steps of an altar, and set it down above it as the holy of holies.

To the boy's eye these wondrous happenings seemed, as indeed they were, a wonder passing all understanding. Albeit, amid so many things that passed understanding, it became in some sort a riddle, whose reading was at that moment of less concern to him. Grief for his mother was eating him up. At sight of her counterfeit fashioned of mist all the son's longing was stirred anew, and the sight of so many folk and men put him in mind of Heartache's bitter words touching the whole race of men. He was about to burst forth in rough words when Gornemant bade him hold his peace, because, so he said, the High Mass was about to begin.

"What may this portend?" thought Parsival.

But the question died in stubbornness and grief, until the office filled even him with awe.

For that which now came to pass in this secret mystic church was a fearsome mystery. A piercing cry of pain, as of slow martyrdom and murder, rent the building. It was as though the bleeding spear were being slowly thrust into the flesh of a living man, as though they were filling the cup with blood gushing from the side of a victim in torment. Parsival was about to rush in rashly, for he thought he saw that none other than the man on the litter was being put to such dreadful torment. But Gornemant held him back in a grip, quiet but strong, that restrained the lad with numbing strength.

"I cannot cut my time to waste here," quoth Parsival, still a-quiver with horror. "Your secret church mislikes me. Ye practise things here for which I would fain call ye to answer sword in hand."

Gornemant asked: "Wouldst thou not learn what this sacrifice of flesh and blood may import?"

"No," said the boy, "I would in no wise learn. Tell me rather where my mother is, and who has turned her hut to ashes."

In the meantime the train passed back, but without the sacred furniture, the crystal vessel, and the bleeding spear. These, together with the bloody cup, they had left on the high altar under knightly guard. The Lord of the Castle, who, strangely enough, was the pale man in costly garments on the litter, bade them set him down, and spake these words to the waiting boy in a hollow, somewhat laboured, but steady voice.

"Who art thou?"

"I am Heartache's son," quoth Parsival.

"Who sent thee hither?"

"A fisherman whom I found fishing in Heartache's lake," quoth Parsival.

"What was it for which the fisherman was fishing?"

"His speech was folly. He said he had to angle to catch the fish on which all turned before he were able to tell me aught touching my mother," Parsival made answer stubbornly.

"Wherefore didst thou leave thy mother?"

The lad made answer: "Because I would fain avenge her on the race of men, and above all

on one that did her a secret hurt beyond all healing."

The Lord of the Castle asked and said: "Who, prithee, is that?"

Parsival answering said: "I know not."

The Lord of the Castle, who was a man of haggard mien, furrowed by pain, whose sunken eyes shone like black diamonds, the Lord of the Castle held his peace, so that he might still his heart beating plain to hear, and his bosom gasping for breath. Then he went on: "Look me in the eye, boy."

Parsival, with a fierce and forbidding glance, did his command.

"Dost now know who I am?"

"Thou art mine enemy," quoth Parsival, mindful of his mother's bitter words touching the race of men.

"Behold," said the other in answer, making as if about to cast off the ermine of his kingly robes, "behold I too am a man that travaileth under a hurt beyond all healing. But seeing that I too have done my brethren and my sisters wrong, I have given myself to the service of the

Intercessor, and have committed all vengeance into His hand. But on myself alone do I take vengeance in as much as I am guilty and deserving to suffer. I have no enemy in the world."

"I marvel thereat," quoth Parsival.

Thereupon the Lord of the Castle: "Hast thou till now done no man hurt?"

The boy was stricken dumb and could make no answer. Then the train moved on and passed from sight before Parsival, touched to the quick, regained the mastery of his senses.

## VII

IT was Gornemant and a troop of younger horsemen that bore Parsival company across the crystal bridge, beyond the castle, and far into the enchanted champaign. At one moment the boy was humbled in spirit, at another violent, and swayed to and fro from grief to wrath, because that he had neither found his mother, nor had tidings of her. Many a time, as they drew farther and farther away from the castle, he looked back because some new feeling of heaviness lay heavy on his soul, a feeling almost akin to the sadness of farewell, hard as it was in his plight to understand it. Old Gornemant seemed to know it, although on setting forth the lad had flung passing disdainful and angry words about him.

'It cannot be otherwise," he declared gravely, "I must needs bear thee company with my fellow knights, as far as the boundaries of our

own domain. Thou art yet in banishment in a world that is not ours."

"Thank God for that, old muttonhead," quoth Parsival, laughing albeit with something of constraint.

"That is right. That likes me well," said Gornemant. "Thou hast learnt to know me. There is naught deserving of praise in a lamb save that it is longsuffering. Grant me this merit, and I am well content. In gratitude therefor I shall now furnish thee with a little keepsake which may perchance in time to come prove not wholly without profit to thee on thy wanderings."

This was the keepsake, or rather the admonishment of Gornemant.

"Since thou hast left Heartache's care, Parsival, nothing has fallen out for thee as thou wouldst have had it fall. Aforetimes thou hadst eyes wherewith thou wert able to tell everything afar off and near by. Thenceforward thou has become as one little better than blind. Withal thou hast not even made thy way far into the stranger world. Thou didst deem that

grief for thy mother's secret hurt had kindled thee to wrath, and moved thee to set out for an avenger against the race of men, of whom thy mother told thee that they were by far more evil than wild beasts. Yet thy mother was herself only human, but thou gavest it never a thought. And therefore I give it thee to bear in mind to-day. Thou holdest that that which drove thee forth from the race of men was grief, was, above all, hate. Learn that hate is Love's twin brother, albeit, as cannot be gainsaid, ill-favoured. And when thou didst set forth, Parsival, at the left hand thou hadst, it is true, the ill-favoured twin brother plain to see by thy side; but at thy right hand, holden for the time from thine eyes, his twin sister, Love, as well."

"I would fain not confound thy callow young head in greater confusion, Parsival. I would only commend this twin sister to thee, even if she be not, as yet, manifest to thy eyes. And now let us speak of other matters."

The big, boorish scapegrace had hitherto hearkened with strained attention. He gazed about him, he beat the air, he was fain to believe

that, inasmuch as the old man were not making a mock of him, he must needs touch the twin brother and the twin sister, and behold them with his eyes. "Let us see what more old grey-beard will trot out," he then thought.

And Gornemant now went on:

"Ever since on that day of tempest that uprooted the trees in thy mother's forest, the thought was in thy mind to be as unconstrained as the whirlwind and the mountain torrent, whirling its banks down upon its flood, thou hast been entangled in a net of error and a life full of riddles. Thou hadst thy first tidings touching the world and the race of men from thy mother. One veil of the lack of knowledge has fallen. But now learn that the world and mankind are a riddle enwrapt in countless veils of myriad hues. Thou didst save a dove by slaying a hawk. When thou spedst that arrow, twin sister, Love, though thou knewest it not, guided thy hand. She, too, it was that lured and drew thee on, when thou didst place the dove back beside her mate on the half hatched eggs of her nest. So Love was thy

guide, and, is it not a wonderous thing, guided by Love didst thou find the sword. It had a ruby in its hilt, and it seemed to thee as if a gleaming drop of blood from the wounded dove had dropped upon it from above."

So this thing had indeed befallen, but by what manner of means can he know all this, thought Parsival within himself.

"Thou shall now learn what this sword portends. Much guiltless blood cleaves to it. The heroes that have wielded and misused it were at the last led, guided of a surety, by the hand of God, to put it away from them. They buried it in the trunk of a hollow beech where thou, too, didst find it, and where thou too, singled out by the beck of God, hast hidden it once more. Then thou didst run out hot foot into the world, and camest upon the little maid in her tent on the edge of the wood."

("Now I know who that was," thought Parsival within himself. "It was none other than the twin sister, Love.")

"Thou didst then fall in with the knight whom thou hast slain out of hand. Thou art no mur-

derer," he said, as the young man at his side made as if to break in hotly; "'tis true, ye fought. Nevertheless that doth not hinder it that thou hast laden a grievous and uneasy burden, that thou hast taken blood-guiltiness, upon thy shoulders. Not long hereafter brother twin, Hate, held thee no longer thrall, and Love drew thee unresisting homeward to thy mother's hearth. But thou didst not find thy mother again. The roof of thy youth had been torn away, the refuge of thy youth was a blackened heap of ashes."

"Aye, in very truth it was," Parsival now cried with wrathful fervour. "And now that I know the robber and the despoiler, woe betide him! Heaven knoweth wherefore when I beheld him the right thought did not come to me. Wherefore else should the treacherous fisherman have been stealing round about Heartache's lake? But I shall draw forth my sword where I have hidden it. I shall find the angler again, and when I find him he shall, as did the proud Lord of the Heath, water the green grass with red blood!"

"Thou hast outstayed that moment," said Gornemant. "The sick Lord of the Castle whom thou hast seen, and the lonely fisherman on Heartache's lake, were one and the same."

"Yet for a breathing space it shot through my soul while I gazed upon him," cried Parsival.

In the meantime Gornemant with the lad had come to a pleasance shut in behind tall hedges of roses. Their companions had hastened on before them, and had there set up a tent of black gleaming silk with a cross of gold above its ridge. "Here," said the old man, "we have come to the boundary, and I believe thou wilt, not without having given ear to me to the last, fare forth stubborn and headstrong into the stranger world of dangers and entanglements."

As he spoke fair pages with bright curls bore, the while strange music filled the air, a helmet, a shield, and a coat of mail, on purple cushions from out of the black tent.

"How comes it that my sword is in your

hands?" cried Parsival, astounded, but old Gornemant made answer:

"We shall show thee the falcon, the dove, and the fisherman to boot."

Thereupon he took the casque, and showed him a falcon of gold with an arrow through its breast, a glorious imagery wherewith the armourer had adorned it. He took the shield, in the middle of which a bleeding dove was plain to see. The breastplate displayed the counterfeit of an angler with rod and line in fair inlaid workmanship. "These devices stand for Heart-ache," said Gornemant, pointing with his finger to certain curious designs done in rubies, and traced as an oval framework round the picture of the dove and shield.

"To what man doth all this belong?" asked Parsival with eyes that shone with covetousness.

"Kneel thee down," Gornemant bade him, without making answer.

Parsival only knew that he fell willy-nilly on his knees. "Thou wilt wear these arms first, Parsival, and then earn them. Fare forth into the wide world, but first rehearse these words

after me, and imprint what I shall say on thy memory."

He spoke in a clear loud voice, and the young man on his knees rehearsed the words as plainly.

"Love your enemies.

"Bless them that curse you.

"Pray for them that persecute you and despitefully use you."

"Pray for them that persecute you and despitefully use you," repeated Parsival, in an oddly unsteady voice; and on the same instant Gornemant dealt him so shrewd a blow on the cheek that he all but swooned, and then was about to leap to his feet like a goaded lion. But on the same instant he was aware how a red banner with a Head crowned with thorns and furrowed by pain was unfurled behind Gornemant, and he heard words passing his understanding saying: "Tell us, Thou Christ, which it was that smote Thee?"

After these happenings they put the helmet on Parsival's head, buckled the armour about him, girt a new sword about his thigh, and made fast his shield on his left arm. Thereupon

Gornemant clapped his hands. They heard the sound of heavy hoofs, and a strong, unbroken horse, quivering but obedient, drew near, trailing the hair of its thick, long mane and tail on the ground.

Gornemant cried: "The war-horse is thine, Sir Parsival," and straightway they bridled and saddled the steed.

"Then truth, I stand not on the order of my going," said Heartache's son, as he leapt lightly into the saddle. Neighing loudly the charger bore its rider thence.

## VIII

 IRST at a gallop, then at an amble, at the last at foot pace, Parsival might well have put half a day's journey behind him when he came to a river and a ferryman's hut. The man saw to it that the horse had provender, and seeing that the evening was drawing in, proffered the knight the shelter of his hut.

"You are mine enemy," said Parsival, "but it would ill beseem me were I already unmindful of the lesson 'Love your enemies,' that Gornemant taught me but this very day." Therewith he accepted the shelter and held out his hand to the poor ragged boatman.

When the other had seated himself with his guest at the meal of bread, a few thin slices of bacon, and a sour wine, and the knight had laid his costly pieces of armour on the blackened wooden bench, he said: "What purports the

falcon with the arrow through its breast you bear on your casque?"

"I do not know," said Parsival.

"What does the dove on your shield purport? What of the fisherman on your breastplate?"

"You set me too many questions, old beaver," quoth Parsival. "Methinks the future will in due time make the purport of all these devices plain to me. For the nonce, do not addle your brain with them, and bide your time in patience as I do."

But the fisherman was still wishful to know what the word "Heartache" meant.

"So far as that is concerned, I know, alack! more than I would lief know. Heartache is my poor mother whom I have lost by mine own fault, and for whom I must now make quest up and down throughout all the world until the end of my life."

That same night on his hard couch in the ferryman's cot, Sir Parsival dreamed a dream.

The falcon of beaten gold on his helmet came flying to his bedside, and said in a clear voice: "Pluck the arrow from my breast, Parsival."

"No," quoth the sleeper, "for with beak and claw hast thou done my mother bloody hurt."

The image of the dove then cast itself loose from the shield, and came flying on to Parsival's breast. The little dove said: "Pluck the arrow from the golden falcon's breast, Sir Parsival."

To the sleeper's great amazement, the falcon had now taken to itself the image of the sick Lord of the Castle or of the Head crowned with Thorns. For the third vision of this disquiet slumber the fisherman on the breastplate came to the new-made sleeping knight to rehearse the words in turn: "Pluck thou the arrow from the golden falcon's breast, Sir Parsival."

"No," moaned the dreamer. "But tell me now what manner of fisherman thou art?"

"A Fisher of Men," quoth the angler.

"And what is the fish that above all others thou must needs catch?" asked the dreamer.

"It is thou," said the fisherman, "thou thyself art the fish, Sir Parsival."

On the morrow the ferryman took the young knight in his glittering harness high on his horse's back across the river in his broad wherry.

Before day broke, while the visions of his dream together with all else that had befallen him, were passing through his mind, he bethought himself what significance it behoved him to give them. Beyond all doubt the devices on his arms were interwoven with his living fate in time past and to come. Yet it was beyond his cunning to unriddle them. Then of a sudden the ferryman asked him, just as the boat was touching the farther bank: "Sir Knight, what law have you laid upon yourself?" And Parsival, who was as quickly aware that a true knight is subject not to the general laws of chivalry alone, but must above all else lay stern laws of lofty self-control, never to be broken, upon himself, said, as gaining the shore, with a great bound of his horse, he turned the mettled snorting beast back towards the river, boat, and ferryman: "When there comes to your ears the renown of a knight who puts these questions to all and sundry of his peers on whom he chances: 'Whither hath Heartache been borne?' 'What meaneth the dove on my shield, the falcon pierced by an arrow on my crest, and the fisher-

man on my breastplate?' then bethink you this was Parsival, Heartache's orphaned son. But when Parsival is minded to fight with an adversary without quarter, for life or death, he will set upon him with the words: 'Die, for thou knowest where the cruel bloodhound is that did Heartache hurt.'"

At these words the war-horse at a touch of the spur sped away.

After all these happenings years sped by, during which time folk at many places and ends of the earth had word of the strange knight who bore the falcon pierced by an arrow on his helm, the fisherman and the dove for his devices, and overthrew every man who did not give answer concerning them to the young warrior's content. Many a knight of highest renown he had ridden down with the cry: "Die, for thou knowest where he is that did Heartache hurt," so that without ruth they had to bite the grass, for that means that those overthrown writhed on the ground, and in their death agony did in very truth bite earth and grass. What wonder that Parsival, encompassed by dark report, was for the most

part hated, still more feared. He was, some folk said, possessed of a stubborn black madness which some curse had laid upon him.

Amid the many adventures that befell the mysterious and homeless knight, there came at length one, one only, that put him in grave jeopardy and did not let him issue scathless. It was on the open plain, not very far from the sea, in the stormy days of autumn rainfall, that a knight on a white horse, wrapped in a black cloak, displaying nothing save a golden dove, crossed his path.

"Where is Heartache? What meaneth the falcon pierced by an arrow on my crest, what the dove, and what the fisherman?" Parsival asked, as was his wont. But from behind the closed visor only this answer reached him: "Inquire from me rather of the Grail, Sir Parsival." But on a sudden the other shouted: "Die, for thou knowest where the bloodhound is that did my mother hurt." And herewith the fight began whose din folk could hear far off in the low lying villages on the canal and lakes, but it did not end with the death of the stranger knight, but

for first in the out-tiring of both champions. "Give answer to my question," panted Parsival; and "Ask of me concerning the Grail," the answer came again. A new onset, fiercer than the first, locked the adversaries. Nor did victory fall to Parsival this time, rather it looked much as if the stranger masked knight outmatched him in strength. One time or another in this world every man finds his master.

And, in truth, at the third onset the champion with the golden dove, had, after a long struggle, planted his knee on Parsival's chest.

"I should of rights strip ye of your dangerous harness, Sir Parsival," he said. "But for the nonce, I shall forbear, and shall set you free to fare up and down the land for a season like a bull consumed by silent wrath. Ye are still something uncouth and rude for knighthood, and meseems a hard and uncomfortable winter reigns behind your brow. As ye are now delivered fenceless into my hands, Sir Parsival, ye are, as ye well know bounden by the laws of chivalry to do my bidding. I therefore lay this behest upon you, first, for the space of a year,

to fight, neither for your own honour nor in behalf of any king, neither in war nor in single combat. During which term ye shall, in lieu of asking others, commune with yourself what the falcon, dove, and fisherman may portend, where your mother dwells, and he that did her hurt. Ye will furthermore commune with yourself concerning the Grail, and seek, by peaceful ways, to gain knowledge there anent what it be, and also who your father is."

Discomfited, and almost eaten up by shame for the lost honour of his arms, the vanquished knight gave pledge in all these matters.

## IX

IT was in very dolorous mood that the knight rode in through the gates of a great city. He had looped his helmet on his arm, and his uncovered head drooped forward on his breast as of a man asleep. In answer to his weary summons, they showed him the way to the inn nearest by. His horse was fouled by dust, caked with mud, and was bleeding from more wounds than one, but the knight left it to the grooms of the hostelry without paying it further heed, and withdrew into the chamber allotted to him.

This city was under the rule of its Queen, Blancheflour, a beauteous maiden. The report of her beauty was far-spread, and had drawn thither a multitude of wooers, among whom, nevertheless, no man had crossed her path whom she could love and make her spouse and King. From her Castle, high above the city, you looked down upon the sea and on the har-

bour, and on the heavy-laden ships of merchandise that sailed in and out upon the flood tide from every people and from every nation.

But none the less, and though she had a kindly old kinswoman to bear her company, time hung heavily on the maiden queen. Her people had to see to it that she was enlivened by all the news of the city day by day. She was intent to have word of every stranger of mark, and to have travellers of renown, or such as were of high station, brought to her presence.

When she learnt of the coming of a wounded young knight, who, with a countenance white as chalk, had ridden dolorously into the city on a black battered horse, and was lodging at the "Sign of the Blue Wallet," she straightway took note thereof. A knight with a grizzled beard would maybe have kept her thoughts less busy than a youth who was still all but unbearded. It was her pleasure to learn, and that in full particular, what devices the knight bore.

Now they had given no close heed to that matter. One of Blancheflour's serving men meanwhile drew out of a varlet at the "Blue

Wallet," what it was her pleasure to learn, and they brought her word concerning the helmet, shield, and breastplate of the spent and wounded knight.

Strange to relate she was thereat moved in deep and joyful fashion, and would liefest have straightway set forth to see the sick knight. But he had, so they told her, barred his door, and was to all seeming lying deep in sleep.

Then she bade them send physicians and wine to the knight. On his awakening he was, she gave order, to have food from the Royal kitchens and to be tended with all care.

She slept very unrestfully that night. On the morrow towards noon-day they led the knight, whose face was still wan, into her presence.

Before that either had spoken a word, the one to the other, Blancheflour was aware, as was Parsival, that thenceforward their fates were linked together for aye. Before the maid had parted the red lips of her sweet mouth for the first greetings she had given her heart to Parsival, and Parsival, standing there in his

falcon helmet, and bowing himself low before her, would fain, for the first time vanquished through and through, have fallen at her feet for her thrall and bondsman.

"Sir Knight," Blancheflour, with a light quiver in her voice, now began,—her worthy kinswoman in her high white snood standing behind her chair—"Sir Knight, I have had you summoned to our presence for a wholly particular intent, and first of all give you our thanks for your coming. They have told me, and I now behold it with my own eyes, that you bear a golden falcon pierced by an arrow on your casque, the image of a fisherman on your corselet, and a dove on your shield. All these symbols, for a certain reason which I shall make plain to you anon, touch me nearly. If it be not irksome to you, Sir Knight, will ye tell me who bestowed these arms on you?"

Parsival kissed the lady's hand. "Gornemant," he said, "bestowed these arms on me."

The Queen held her peace. Her kinswoman, in the high white snood, and the close black cloth habit, meantime asked: "Sir Knight, saw

ye Gornemant?" When the other confirmed it, she went on: "Then ye are the first after five and twenty years have come and gone that can give me tidings of the brother of the whilom King, of the brother of my husband, who is likewise dead, and of the lost Duke Gornemant." She wept aloud, and Queen Blancheflour—a name that means as who should say Blackthorn Blossom—was at pains to comfort her in so far that she in some measure regained the mastery of herself.

"In truth, Sir Knight," quoth Blancheflour, her eyes veiled in tears, "the King, my father, the husband of my good kinswoman, and the lost Duke Gornemant were three brothers inseparable until, so the chronicles of our house record, Gornemant set out for the Holy Land, and has since then been missing. He, too, bore on his arms the devices you now bear," and she bade them bring what is called a missal manuscript, a precious codex, on whose parchment folios, fairly illumined in colours, Parsival's armour, too, was piece for piece on record.

"Beyond all doubting," quoth he, "it was

your father's brother who endowed me with his own armour and gave me the accolade. But I hold that I was not worthy of these honours."

Both dames now offered lodging in one of the wings of the Castle to Parsival, but he said: "I am not worthy."

It was in some sort a confession, when, with dull resignation, he set forth the reasons of his refusing. This was the long and short of his confession, to wit: that he had done honour neither to his mother nor to Gornemant's arms, that his hopeless darkling temper accorded ill with the happy spirit of light, beauty, and love in Blancheflour's realm. For the rest, he was no longer of knightly degree, and had assuredly been vanquished in fearful fashion. If his arms were left him, they were left him for an act of grace and under bond not to put them to use for the space of a year. "That I am not worthy of them, ye can learn from the words of the knight who overthrew me not far from your city. He bade me, in lieu of asking others concerning the meaning of my device, to commune with myself concerning them for the space of a

year, and furthermore he bade me commune concerning another matter, concerning the Grail."

Then said Blancheflour: "That ye shall indeed do, but not elsewhere than in the old library of my Castle where the ancient scrips concerning the Holy Grail, which moved my Uncle Gornemant to set forth to the Holy Land, are stored. He was wont to sit buried in parchments, not for one year alone, but for many a year, and of nights the watchmen on the towers and in the streets of the city were wont to mark the light in the casement above them where this solitary man was making search into the secret of the Grail."

"I am unlettered," said Parsival.

"By so much the better," quoth Blancheflour, "then I shall read them to you."

# X

HENCEFORWARD folk saw Sir Parsival on the high roads no more. His black war-horse stood in Queen Blancheflour's marechal, or was led out for exercise in the riding school by royal grooms. His armour was laid aside in the armoury where it used to be stored in the days of the lost Gornemant.

Parsival himself went forth in soft shoes, in a green fur-edged surcoat, and had at most a pruning knife in his belt. His fair hair fell over his shoulders unbound.

In this guise folk oft-times saw him passing through the Palace gardens, whose beauty was of great renown in the world, if not as great as that of the winsome Blackthorn Blossom, Blancheflour, whose bower they were. But in the course of that year whosoever had sight of Parsival had no need to seek for Blancheflour, for she was for the most part by his side. In

the realm, as indeed beyond its borders, folk were already looking one fine day to see the young knight raised to the degree of Prince Consort.

Blancheflour became Parsival's teacher. His rough demeanour became gentler. The influence of the noble and beauteous maiden brought about the change his mother, Heartache, had failed to achieve. The young warrior knew no headstrongness towards her. At the beginning she used to read to him in her tuneful voice, until she had kindled his desire for learning, and he began to spell out words like a child learning to read. She bade them bring writing tools of gold, and then she guided the stalwart hero's hand as if it were that of a backward little boy.

All these studies commended themselves greatly to Parsival, and he could not understand how a schoolboy could ever harbour the thought of playing truant.

Three months had hardly passed before the knight could read and write a little, could play the lute and sing one or two tuneful little songs.

But Blancheflour had taught him other and more beautiful things, among which merry and heart-whole laughter, hitherto wholly unknown to him, but wherein he now proved himself adept, was not the least. In truth, among her gifts were others yet more precious. Her presence always had the power to turn night into day, and day into holiday for Parsival. But all these things did not exhaust the fulness of the wondrous power she wielded over the man who had fallen victim to numb sorrow at his mother's loss, into error and into sullen wrath, who had even failed to turn all that had befallen him in the mystic castle to his enlightenment. For Blancheflour, in this regard a nursing sister, had the power of healing the seared places where the mother's painful lessons of hate had eaten their way into his flesh. In truth, she set up her own winsome presence in the place of his memory of his mother, and therewith his grief for her loss and her wrong in Parsival's soul.

He used to bear her company to the Cathedral, and mark her devoutness when amid bowed

heads and bended knees Holy Mass was being sung to music. By virtue of her teaching the whole office was by slow degrees, though, of course, only as a wonder passing all understanding, made plain to him. After some time he was held to be well-instructed enough to partake the Body of the Lord.

In the old library of the Palace was a parchment that gave some inkling touching the falcon pierced by an arrow, the dove and the fisherman. It disclosed certain mysteries that were as new to Blancheflour as to Parsival, wherefore they were wont to bend their heads, cheek touching cheek, over the scrip together. Oftimes they were in no wise grave, and lost sight of the letters amid the tears of their laughter, and in the tangle of his curls and hers that mingled over the book.

In converse with Blancheflour, it was not long before the knight could not longer blind himself to the fact that every man, whatever his nature, has a father. The thought that he, too, had a man for a father made him first joyful and then disquiet. He then asked himself why

his mother had never told him of his father, his mother who must have known him, as Blancheflour knew him, Parsival. His thoughts on this matter were full of reproach. He held that Heartache had no right to keep the name, station, and abode of his father, and in short the whole of his father, from him. It was Blancheflour who in this matter, too, tempered his always somewhat headstrong judgment. She told him of people in whose instance wedlock, which in its beginning was idle joyousness and bliss, closed in misery. But this brought Parsival into jeopardy of slipping back into his old slough of despond.

For he had chanced to hit upon the thought that it might mayhap be his own father that had done Heartache the hurt beyond all healing. Wrestling with this thought, he used to withdraw himself for days and not come forth into the open air. Smitten with how deep a blindness, had he not made quest for his father as after an arch enemy, his father whom he now would have met with very other feelings. What an infinitely merciful providence had safe-

guarded him from becoming his own father's murderer.

In this train of thought the sable knight of the golden dove, who had thrown himself like an iron barrier athwart his path, and, when he had flung himself against it, had overthrown him, came back to Parsival's remembrance. Wherefore had the stranger even after victory, not raised his visor, wherefore had he sought him, of all men, out, and who might he be? It was not thinkable that a sick and wounded man should put forth such strength. With this assurance Parsival kept a thought that was ever ready to assail him afresh at bay; it was that not the fisherman on Heartache's lake and the sick Lord of the Castle alone, but the sable knight with the golden dove as well, were one and the same. Be it as it might, he was now resolved to beseech Queen Blancheflour to essay with him the study of the Grail and of its purport.

This he did, and the Queen led him into the library which was a very roomy and ancient vault. Many precious codices, guarded by scholars, were stored there. A venerable old

man with a white beard, bowed low before the Queen and led the two into a separate chamber, not unlike to a chapel, that was dimly lit by curious hanging lamps such as you may see in mosques. Here an aged worthy Arab in a green turban with a long white beard, rose to his feet from a green table, lit to that end by a reading lamp, where he had unrolled an ancient Arabic scroll. The ample white robes of a Bedouin enfolded him like a cloud.

Parsival had really well nigh fallen into the error of taking the old Arab for the Almighty, concerning whom he had of late learnt so many mystic and wondrous things. But before he had betrayed himself by some ill-considered question, the bookman told him that he was an Arab searcher and sage, who for more than seventy years had searched all the parchments stored there for the deepest secret of the Grail, a secret he was striving to bring into accord with the Bible of the Mohammedans, the sacred Koran.

Both Blancheflour's and Parsival's courage sank when he showed them the endless shelves

of books, all the tomes of which were concerned with the Holy Grail. To be master of them you would have assuredly wanted several hundred years, even if you had given day and night wholly and solely to their study. But Blancheflour, after her wont in such matters, forthwith called upon the learned bookman to deliver a short discourse on the matters of greatest import in the myth of the Grail. The Arab had bowed his head over his parchments again when the bookman began.

## XI

 HE bookman's discourse:

"When Our Lord Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross by His own people at Jerusalem, a fearful deed that has fallen to the lot of very many bearers of salvation at the hands of their own people, a rich and worthy man, Joseph of Arimathea, bade them, after some interval of time, take the body down from the dishonourable gallows, and lay it to rest in a family sepulchre he himself had made ready in his garden. For this deed he was thrown into prison, and some have averred that he lived forgotten for forty years, in prison without food or drink."

"And without the light of day," said the Arab.

"Even so," repeated the bookman, somewhat angered, "without the light of day to boot."

"Vindicta salvatoris," quoth the Arab, but without heeding him the bookman went on with his discourse.

"During the forty years of his imprisonment Joseph of Arimathea's life was preserved by heavenly meat and heavenly drink. After His Resurrection, Jesus Christ, the Saviour, Himself brought a gleaming dish of crystal into his barred and bolted cell, a vessel in which neither meat nor drink ever failed. This vessel is called the Grail. Folk have debated whence this vessel came. What alone is certain is that at the hands of the Saviour, it came to do wondrous works, and was bestowed for a gift on Joseph of Arimathea. Some say the Saviour's sacred Blood was caught in this vessel when they took the Body from the cross."

The Arab said: "It was none other than the paten whereon at the Last Supper that Jesus took with His disciples the Paschal lamb, the blessed Paschal meat, was laid."

"Thereupon I am about to touch," said the bookman. "My thesis, the ductus of my discourse . . ."

"I lean in general to the view," said the Arab, "that the Grail was the cup of the Last Supper, and by no means the dish."

"Be that as it may," the bookman went on, talking the Arab down, "Whether cup or platter, it hath, it may be, seemed good to God's almighty power to turn the twain into one. However it may be, most illustrious Queen Blancheflour and noble Sir Knight, in the Holy Mass they celebrate in the cathedral and in the Chapel Royal, we have an afterglow of the miracle that was wrought on Joseph of Arimathea during his imprisonment."

"But afterglow only," said the Arab.

"I shall," quoth the bookman, "deliver my discourse better digested at a more convenient season, most illustrious Queen. If Mass and Grail do indeed differ, the paten nevertheless whereon 'the Body of the Lord' is distributed, has at times and seasons wrought not less wondrous works. The Grail, 'tis true, hath remained a secret. Joseph of Arimathea brought the miraculous vessel with him from Jersualem into northern lands, whither, on his release from captivity, he fared forth from Palestine. But no mortal man knows for certain what has befallen the vessel."

"I shall soon have knowledge thereof," said the Arab. "The astronomers have foretold an age of one hundred and fifteen years for me, and I need at the utmost ten to finish my studies. Even then I should be only a hundred and one years old, and I should then, three and twenty years before my death, be so far forward as to find the way to the companionship of the Grail and to the Castle of the Grail blindfold."

"What is the companionship of the Grail?" asked Parsival.

"Joseph of Arimathea founded it," said the Arab. "Eleven companions of the Grail constitute it. The place of Joseph of Arimathea is already being held by his twenty and first successor. The name of the Presbyter or Grail King of this present day is, as I have now ascertained for certain, Amfortas. At the Round Table, as the order of the service of the Grail, instituted by the prophet Jesus Himself ordains, the seat at the King's right hand is left empty. For eleven hundred years they have been awaiting the Prophet's coming again."

"Of the Christian Saviour," said the book-

man. "Blind pagans at best have traffic with Allah and his prophet."

"I see more things than thou," said the Arab, and therewith he gazed long and searchingly at Parsival's high and white brow.

"Forgive me, wise man," said the bookman, "if your last utterance did not wholly prevail to set my doubts at rest."

But the Arab, without turning his eyes from Parsival, made an end of speaking in somewhat solemn fashion.

"Heartache lives in the King's heart. The Keeper of the Grail is wounded, is sick. Amfortas awaits his son. Come-who-may-come will find him."

The significance of these words escaped Blancheflour in some measure. All the deeper the mark they left on Parsival. As she took her leave the young Queen said: "You should have asked Gornemant concerning the Grail, his ancestry, and his present abode. The news the bookworms have given us leaves me ill content."

Quoth the Knight: "If you will lend me your

ear for the space of an hour I shall make you better instructed. The debate between the bookman and the Arab, and in particular the latter's last words, have in the twinkling of an eye disclosed the errors and misdeeds of my past life, what I have lost and what I have held. Behold, Blancheflour, the Grail was, as it were, laid by my cradle, and I did not know it, nor did I know how to be worthy of it. The scales have now fallen from my eyes."

## XII

IT was Blancheflour's wish to wed Parsival, and it therefore irked her to mark how the spirit of inward disquiet, the spirit of unrest, regained its dominion over him. She could not forbear fearing lest he should set forth before the wedding, so as to make atonement, as he said, for all he had left undone, and to purge himself of all the errors that oppressed him

He had told his mistress of the castle of the Grail where he declared he had been. He had spoken of Gornemant as a paladin of the Grail. He had told her much of the piercing cry of pain the Grail King had uttered during the bloody office of the Mass, the remembrance of which served not least to darken and confound his counsel. Oft of nights, he said, he had heard this cry in his dreams, and had thereby been, as it were, driven forth restlessly up and down the world. Every man, he held, bears his pain

as long as he needs must, and man alone can set free his fellow man.

"It is not well," quoth the Dame of the White Snood to Blancheflour, "that Parsival should tangle himself in these fantasies of the Grail. It is as it befell Gornemant aforetime. In like manner his spirit, too, began to play the will o' the wisp. Then he fared forth, and has not come back. It may, I know, be," she went on, "that he is perchance yet alive, and has, maybe, in truth, given your Parsival the accolade somewhere down yonder in the land of the Turks. But it may also be that he has but taken these arms from some wight or other that stripped Gornemant of them, and bore them together with his stolen name. The more I ponder the matter the harder does it become to believe the story Parsival has told us of his accolade by Gornemant. The simple fellow is labouring under the fantasy of his own conceits. Gornemant for sure died long ago, battling for the Holy Sepulchre."

As far as that Blancheflour's doubts did not, it is true, carry her. None the less she feared

for Parsival's reason when he told her in all seriousness that Amfortas, the Keeper and King of the Grail, was, as he was now well assured, his bodily father.

In long debates he set forth to her by what path he had come to this assurance. "My mother, Heartache's spirit, prevailed to safeguard me so long as it encompassed me. Beyond these limits it availed nothing for my weal. I beheld my father for the first time after I had restored a wounded dove to its nest. Its pursuer, a falcon, lay pierced by an arrow at my feet, but my father, who at that moment put on the likeness of a fisherman, was busy angling in Heartache's lake. I am the fish he then would fain have caught.

"I saw my father for the second time and for the third time shortly before and shortly after I had found my mother's cot a heap of ashes, and had lost Heartache for ever. Once again he seemed to be nothing more than a common fisherman, but he had only doffed the ensigns of his high office, for he is, and at that time already was, King of the Grail. He set my feet

on the road to the refuge of the Holy Castle Montsalvas.

"I beheld the Castle and beheld the Grail, and ringing in my ears, I still hear the words, my father, as King of the Grail, asked me, and the answer I made thereto. 'Dost know me?' asked he, and I thereon, 'Aye, thou art mine enemy.' Then did I cast away the Grail, my father, and Heartache.

"Having been given the accolade by Gornemant, I dreamed this dream in the ferryman's hut. The falcon in my casque came flying to my bed, and said 'Pluck the arrow from my breast, Parsival.' The dove on my shield set herself free. She fluttered fearfully above my head, and said 'Pluck the arrow from the golden falcon's breast.' 'Thou should'st pluck the arrow from the falcon's breast,' said the fisherman, and likewise drew near my bed. 'What manner of fisherman art thou?' I asked. 'A fisher of men,' he made answer, 'but of the whole race of men thou art the catch that above all others I must bring to land.' I saw my father again for the last time, sweet Queen

Blancheflour, before I came to you a beaten and a vanquished man. None other than he was the Sable Knight and my master in the fray. He wrought his best and his last for his froward son by a first well-judged terrible chastening. By grace thereof I was brought to you, and in your sweet presence the wild beast of the forest first grew into a human being worthy of the name of man. I now know, for the first time, how every fight that would be worthy must be fought in the cause of peace alone."

Poor sweet Blackthorn Blossom could make naught of all this tangled skein. She was fain to wed him, fain to make him King, and she would fain be the one keeper and inmate of his soul. "Set me free, set free your poor Blancheflour that loves you with every fiber of her heart," she cried. Then he told her of his resolve to go in quest of the King of the Grail and to release him from his pain. He would have, he said, no peace either by day or night until the arrow were plucked from the golden falcon's breast.

Meantime at Blancheflour's instance, all

things were made ready in haste for the wedding feast, and she prevailed upon Parsival to agree to their marriage. The knight thenceforward seemed to be content with his lot, and the Grail, as well as all that turned thereon, was put behind the joy of the passing day. At length all things were made ready, and amid the pealing of bells and the rejoicings of the people, Blancheflour, crowned with myrtle, was led at the side of the fairest man to the church and altar where they plighted their troth, and the priest blessed their wedlock.

On the evening of the feast day the blissful pair had gone to rest together. On the morrow Blancheflour awoke and found her husband's place empty. They made search for Parsival, but the day passed, and day after day passed by, and no man was able to find him. The Queen fell sick unto death, and when she was made whole again, and new strength was returned to her, it seemed as though she had grown older by ten years.

Folk hardly knew her again, so pale and haggard did she look in her black widow's weeds.

## XIII

O Sir Parsival had stolen away by stealth.

Before break of day he had saddled his mettled black stallion with his own hand, had donned his arms and other harness, and had ridden forth into the night.

In the cathedral, amid the plighting of his troth, his ears had rung with quite other melodies from the far-off secret church, and during the wedding feast, amid all the carousings and rejoicings, he had in spirit of a sudden beheld the banner with the Crown of Thorns and had heard Amfortas's cry of pain.

But when darkness fell, and the halls and chambers of the Castle were ablaze with lights, a lamentable wind sprang up round about the house, and borne on its breath Sir Parsival never ceased to hear the word "Heartache," "Heartache."

Then Parsival said within himself: "So long

as I have left my mother's cry and my father's anguish unstilled, there can be no happiness for me," and therefore, deep as it cut him to the soul, he must needs forsake his young wife. He had now for many a long day been wandering to and fro up and down the world, but he had never for a moment doubted that he would find the way to the Castle of the Grail again, for did it not lie not very far away from the spot where Heartache's cot had stood? But even to find this country again was, as the issue soon showed, none too light a task.

In the end he did indeed find this heap of ashes without being wholly aware how long he had spent on the journey. As he beheld the place of the sad ruins again, Parsival wept. He wept long ere he set out on the quest anew. He soon came to Heartache's lake, but thenceforward everything seemed to mock the happenings of the past that stuck so closely in his remembrance.

He had hoped within himself to fall in here with his father in the guise of a fisherman, but far as the eye could range over the black, un-

moved face of the water, there was no human being in sight. Only here and there fish were leaping above the surface, and seemed, undisturbed by beavers or fish-eating birds, unscared by human beings, to have multiplied in the meantime a thousand fold. For days and days Parsival rode along the shore, without reaching the end of the lake, and without finding the place where the river ran into it. Over and over again did he ponder the matter, and rehearsed most closely to himself how everything had befallen when on that night of despair he had, at the fisherman's bidding, not failed to find the way to the Castle, and over and over again, as he looked out on the country now wholly foreign to him, he grew distraught and saddened to hopelessness.

In some such season as this a strange thing befell him. The shores of the lake at the spot where he chanced to be drew somewhat nearer together. Then, on the further shore of the lake, he became aware, or thought he was aware, of a woman with unbraided hair in beggar's rags, who, so it seemed to him, was beckoning to him

feverishly. She called out, and although her voice could not carry to Parsival's ear, the young man who was now beckoning in answer to her, shouted back as loud as he could. Then she pointed to a spot on the shores of the lake which Parsival, so he understood it, was to make so as to fall in with her. A little shudder shook him. None the less he turned his horse thither. When he had ridden a long way at a fast pace and looked up, he had lost sight of the woman on the other bank.

The self-same thing happened again after the knight, errant in good truth, had come to the very spot where the ragged, beckoning woman had first shown herself. She was now standing on the other shore, and was beckoning and calling from the place where he had been before he first caught sight of his strange quarry. He pricked his ears and listened with strained intentness to catch the faintest sound of her voice across the breadth of the silent lake, and in very deed, so it seemed to him—his blood froze round his heart—the word "Heartache" was borne long-drawn across the water. "Here am I,"

he shouted back. "I am Parsival," and the woods gave back his voice. Thereupon the chase began afresh, and its upshot was that, believing he was riding towards the stranger, he again found himself alone in the spot whence he had first set out.

When Parsival had resolved to make an end of this strange and disquieting chase, he did not know for certain how long it had lasted. He now gave up all hope of ever learning whether the whole matter were a phantasm, or what meaning was hidden behind the phantasm. It now seemed to him as if he had wholly lost the road towards the Castle of the Grail, and that he had to set forth on one wholly in the opposite direction. Before long he was back in the world of his fellow men, but among a people whose tongue he could not understand, whence it became clear to him that he had again ridden at misadventure. He struck into the forest afresh, and there on the third or fourth day of his wayfaring fell in with a hermit.

Moved by the frankness of sore distress, he asked the hermit, who entreated him hospi-

tably to his simple fare, whether he could not set his feet on the right road to the Castle of the Grail and to the Holy Sepulchre itself. But the old man only shook his head. Parsival, meantime, went on after the manner of a confessional to pour out the many straits and disillusionments of his life. In the end the hermit made answer: "If I can tell thee naught touching the road to the Grail, nevertheless I now know that thou art he concerning whom other pilgrims have enquired of me, for they sought to learn whether a knight in quest of the road to the Holy Grail had passed by. And now tell me by what name men call thee. Art called Parsival?"

"From my childhood upwards," the Knight made answer.

"That was the name," the hermit went on, "and so art thou none other than he they sought."

"Who were they that enquired after the seeker for the Grail, and what the manner of their bearing?" asked Parsival.

"The first to enquire after thee—but that is a good twenty or thirty years ago—carried a

rod, and together therewith a basket of fresh water fishes, and I therefore had of necessity to set him down for a fisherman. Perchance he had fallen on evil days, but from his countenance and noble bearing he was, meseemed, a man of gentle birth."

"My father, and none other," quoth Parsival.

The monk went on: "Not long afterwards, a woman enquired after Parsival, but not, as I mind me now, after the seeker of the Grail. It is only a short time ago since the woman after many years, passed by anew." "Did she put the question for Parsival, the seeker of the Grail?"

"She spoke of him as of a boy that had run away from home, and had become entangled in error, need, and tribulation."

"I am that boy, and it was my mother, Heart-ache," quoth Parsival, "and I must now to horse for to overtake her."

"But thou art no boy," said the hermit. "The wayfaring woman that passed by here half naked and distraught, and dragging a sack of flints behind her, cannot therefore well be

thy mother, nor canst thou be the boy for whom she was seeking."

"When I forsook my mother, I was less than fifteen. I am no more than eighteen years of age this day," quoth Parsival.

From the little forest shrine that he had himself built, the hermit then fetched the silver paten, the platter on which he was wont to give the wafer of the Holy Supper to the poor charcoal burners dwelling round about. It was well burnished, and Parsival could behold himself therein as in a mirror.

"Witchcraft!" he cried, "My hair has grown white overnight," and because he glared at the hermit fiercely and distrustfully with eyes that yet were young, the other with a sly smile made answer:

"Time—not I—is the magician, Sir Knight. That stealthy witch, Time, hath turned thee grey. Let not this change in the course of thy wayfaring and in the eternal changefulness of all things touch thee nearly. Hearken rather to what I may have yet to tell of the third that came to enquire after the seeker for the Grail."

Thereupon he told of a Knight behind a black visor that had borne a golden dove for sole device on his sable mail. And once again Parsival must perforce believe that it was the Grail King and his father in one and the same person. The hermit laughed yet louder, and said: "Sir Knight, it cannot be that ye are the son of two fathers."

Parsival flung himself on his horse, for he held the hedge priest to be in truth a magician. He is mocking and poisoning me, he thought, with treachery and deceit.

But he was now minded to put all else from him for a season, and to see Blancheflour, his forsaken young wife, once more.

## XIV

 HE cathedral bells, and the bells of all the rest of the churches, were tolling when Parsival came to the gate of the city, over which, though Blancheflour had exalted him to be its king, he had never ruled.

"What do the bells mean?" asked Parsival of a burgher who chanced to pass by.

"Our aged Queen is being borne for burial," quoth the man.

"What old Queen is this?" asked the Knight. "But a year ago ye had to my knowing a very youthful damsel for your Queen."

"There in truth ye are in error," said the comfortable burgher. "Our widowed Queen entered upon the fiftieth year of her age this very year," and every man knows that she has been widowed for thirty years at the least."

"I have knocked at the wrong door then,"

Parsival made answer. "For the rest, what was the name of your widowed ruler?"

"She was called Blancheflour. Her missing husband's name was Parsival. Thirty years ago he left her on the morrow after their wedding."

"Is not the whole of earthly life a nightmare dream?" thought Parsival, as the long kingly mourning train passed out beyond the gates.

The crypt of this city's sovereign house was a marble temple, built in a little cypress grove without the walls. Many torches were ablaze. Twelve knights bore Blancheflour, in accord with the custom of the times, on an open bier.

"Aye, thou hast now become Blackthorn Blossom in very truth," thought Parsival, as he gazed on the well-remembered face, now white as fine linen under the parting of white hair.

She had the aspect of an old woman, yet of a bride withal. For, agreeably to her last wish, they had arrayed her in her bridal robes of white samite, and wrapped her in clouds of green veils. Sprays and posies of the white sloe blossom were wrought in fine needlework over all her garments.

Parsival was minded to fling himself on the bier and on the dead, but to his terror he was aware that he could neither utter sound, nor stir hand or foot.

Of a sudden someone beckoned to him. It was the learned Arab.

After the convoy had passed beyond the gates, the Knight had alighted from his horse, and had made it fast somewhere. Now on sight of the Arab, his power of movement was of a sudden restored to him, and he was thereupon aware that he was walking in grave state behind the bier on the left of the man in the white turban. Amid the clanging of bells, and the chanting of the priests, the while the birds were singing, and the dust of the high road choking their nostrils, the Arab spoke to Parsival in the unmoved voice of one who tells a tale:

"I can tell by thy bearing that thou hast not found the road to the Grail. As concerning myself I am one hundred and twenty years old this day, older than the star-gazers foretold, and had Blancheflour lived but one year more, I should have known how to lead her blindfold

to the road to the Grail. For I would have thee know that she never ceased brooding all the time that thou wert gone, save only about the way to the Grail, not, I fear me, for the rightful purpose of finding the holy mystery of the Lord, but of seeing thee, poor Parsival, again. I learnt of the planets, but I never made it known to Blancheflour, that thou would'st come back on the third day after her death without having found the Grail."

Parsival asked: "Who is the Knight in silver harness with the silver swan on his casque, that, like to the sun-god, rides on a horse white as snow behind the bier?"

"That is Lohengrin," said the Arab. "It is thy son. But I counsel thee not to make thyself known to him. The most kindly heart beats in his breast, and all the world loves him and cherishes him. One man alone he hates and seeks as for his bitterest foe, for him that did his mother hurt beyond all healing."

Then Parsival took himself out of the convoy, and let the weeping people pass in endless train behind the good Queen's coffin, to her

grave. Where all men were weeping, none marked it that Parsival was likewise bathed in tears.

Parsival had forsaken his mother to battle against the world. When he turned back he never found her more. He forsook the Grail, which, when it was borne past him, he did not know for what it was, and when he did, or at least guessed what it might be, he never prevailed to find again. Intent to find it, he forsook his young wife, and cast away an earthly kingdom; for when he came back he found his wife no more, and his own son a stranger to him, who knew him as little as all the rest of them—save the old Arab—and from him he must needs flee as from an enemy.

After all these errors and tribulations of his earthly life, it would seem as if something like to a spring too tautly strained had snapped in Parsival's soul. The most exceeding anguish of a wild despair that had driven him out anew from the company of men into waste places of a sudden surceased in a state of the deepest numbness. In a glade in the midst of the forest

he alit from his erstwhile fiery steed, took the bridle from its mouth, the saddle from off its back, and with a touch of a switch gave it the freedom of the woods. For himself he doffed his helm, and hung it up together with his sword, shield, and breastplate, in the branches of an oak.

Thence the golden falcon with the arrow through its breast now gazed down like ownerless treasures on the wild denizens of the wood. But Sir Parsival was left unharnessed and unarmed. When he left the place barefooted and clad in his shift alone, night had fallen, the moon had climbed the tree-tops. A wind sprang up, and the Knight threw a last farewell look on the treasures of his knight errantry, clanging spectre-like in the breeze.

Thenceforward Parsival became a serving man. He served as a bearer of burdens in cities, as a serf in the hard forced labour of the countryside. No man knew him. Aye, he himself had forgotten his own, but not his mother's, Heartache's name. Although he no longer sought to find her, she seemed to him to be wondrously

more fond and near than ever before. His fellows, the other grooms and porters, soon came to take him for an old simpleton, because he was passing gentle, and was oft-times wont to speak to them of a thing beyond their understanding, of the beauty of the Grail.

## XV

 T was an autumn day, and the poor, long-suffering Bearer of Burdens, erst-while Parsival, had finished his day's work in the harbour of a certain town, and was giving ear to the talk among the other wage-earning men who were making holiday. Their talk was of the prowess of a knight who of late had made himself of great renown in the world, and bore on his shield the words: "To the strong defiance, for the weak defence." Of him folk told many strange tales that singled him out from all the rest of those to whom knight errantry, as men termed it, had brought equal renown. All the world ran to him for aid, as to a mailed archangel, an angel of justice sent of God. The poor folk far and wide surnamed him "Sir Good-at-Need."

Not once nor twice, but a hundred times, had Sir Good-at-Need acted after the pattern of the Good Samaritan. He used to lift the sick and

wretched objects of all sorts who chanced to cross his path on his snow-white steed, to carry them, walking himself at his horse's head the while, where help and succour awaited them. He used to wend his way into the very humblest cottages, even though he had to bare his curly head, carry his casque under his arm, and bend himself very low. He scattered gold as largesse broadcast and gingerbreads for handsel, and children, above all others, ran after him.

His fellow knights as a body, and the rich in the land, looked on him askance, and their hate grew the hotter the more that the love of the common people turned to him.

"There ye have true chivalry," said the Bearer of Burdens on a sudden, after he had learnt of all these matters. "He stands in grace. Would my lot had been as kind while I was yet knight errant. Whoso bears arms must needs be a harbinger of mercy and of peace, else is he recreant, nothing less."

At these words of the poor Bearer of Burdens his fellow workmen broke into laughter. "If thou wert knight errant may the devil fly away

with me if I were not the terrible Parsival, Queen Blancheflour's man."

Thereupon, after they had guffawed anew, another said: "Never, for sure, was knight so fierce and cruel as Parsival," and now the poor Bearer of Burdens was listening to his own bloody story. It was, of course, full of false witness; for, knowing nothing of the causes that had moved him, they said that Parsival had been crafty, treacherous, and cruel, a liar and an adventurer. The Evil One, himself, to whom he had bartered himself, had made away with him. For the rest, so they all bellowed, one louder than the other, Parsival was a bondsman's son; he was not of gentle birth.

The poor Bearer of Burdens only smiled the while they defamed his past. He thought within himself, I have deserved this and more also, but now I wait patiently trusting in God for grace.

Meantime a third of his mates had let fall some words concerning Sir Good-at-Need that made him pay close heed anew: "This same knight Sir Good-at-Need is not only a chirurgeon who can staunch wounds, but one that can deal

them no less shrewdly than Parsival. For he is, wit ye well, in quest of one that dealt his mother a secret hurt, and if he find him, woe betide him. I would liefer lie in the deepest dungeon of Turkey than be the miscreant he seeks."

Towards evening of the morrow Sir Good-at-Need came riding into the town amid the rejoicings of the common people. They shouted "Hosannah!" strewed flowers and green branches in his path, and one or two women were carried so far by vain superstition as to fling themselves before his horse for it to step over them. They fondly believed to be healed thereby of their incurable ills. It seemed to be an odd chance that the knight, on coming to the harbour, called from his saddle, of all men, to the poor Bearer of Burdens, and bade him show him the way.

Poor unknown Parsival had meantime passed through the most terrible hours and moments of his life. He was well aware that Sir Good-at-Need was none other than his son, Lohengrin, and feared to be made known to him for the man who had despoiled his mother, Blancheflour,

of her life's happiness, and had done her slow and deadly hurt. Death at the hands of his son did not seem to him the worst of all; but a veritable agony of horror overtook him at the thought that he should be hated and spurned for his worst enemy by the man whose father he was and whom he loved. Therefore he made a miserable object in the knight's eyes, as he made answer after this fashion.

"If thou art knight errant, and thou askest of none other than of me to point thee the road thou shouldst take, may God grant me to set thee right. Make no more quest for him that did thy mother secret hurt."

"I give thee thanks for thy counsel, old man," said Lohengrin, with hearty kindliness, but the Bearer of Burdens went on: "And now in token of peace, alight from thy horse, break bread with me, and suffer me to tell thee certain matters concerning the Holy Grail and concerning Parsival."

At the outset Lohengrin thought that some mischance or other had turned the old porter's brain, but when he heard him touch on the name

of Parsival and on the Holy Grail he was resolved to do the weak old man's pleasure. He lifted him on his steed, and led the horse by its bridle rein to the door of the wretched hut of planks where his poor Lazarus purposed to sup with him.

So Parsival was now seated on the milk-white steed of his beloved son, Lohengrin, without the other misdoubting who he was. What wonder that for secret joy he wept salt tears that would not be denied.

The while the meal lasted the shining paladin, beloved of God, was alone with his unknown father. When they had broken bread together and had taken the first sup from the common cup, they both heard the sound of bells, and forthwith were aware that the sound did not come from any cathedral in the town. Parsival, the old Bearer of Burdens, then knew that grace, love, and reconciliation were now close at hand, and he began to tell of his own wayfarings as if of those of another man. He spoke of Heart-ache, Parsival's mother. He named her as though illumined of the spirit, the All-Mother.

Blancheflour, too, he said, no less than Parsival, would have been of Heartache's stock. He made an end of speaking. "Thou and I, we two, are of Heartache's stock, my son."

And the knight now learnt the nearer hap and mishap of Parsival, how he set forth to avenge his mother on his father; he heard tell of the Grail that Parsival found and lost again, of Gornemant and of the sick Amfortas, who was Parsival's father, and therewith Lohengrin's grandsire. It was revealed to him what had befallen Parsival at the hands of the fisherman and of the Sable Knight; how his father's loving-kindness had striven first by counsel and then by force to set his feet in the right way.

"My hour hath now come," quoth Parsival, Bearer of Burdens. "Meseemeth, as if I had ever had Heartache encompassing me round about unseen, and I shall furthermore fall in with her over yonder whither I shall fare. And if she was stark and stern and oft-times dealt harshly with me, yet she brought me into the world, and what man is there that would not love his mother? Heartache, Heartache every-

where! I have sought for her, and have found her in full measure. But Salvator is yonder, the Castle of the Grail with its paladins, and the secret dome that is made two-fold in the broad stream of life. Salvator is there, where God-like beings of their own free will suffer torment to the end that they may release the world from its burden, and yet are immortal in the light of their near-by Paradise."

Lohengrin gave thanks to the old man, whose avowal had moved him deeply, and rode off thence into solitary places.

## XVI

 UT Parsival, Bearer of Burdens, did not cease to hear the bells of the Grail pealing louder, and ever louder. He smiled quietly, and thought within himself: "Now get thee gone. Thy time hath now come, serf Parsival."

And the aged messenger of the Grail, Gornemant, followed by a little knightly train, was bending low, even now entering, into the hut. One and all within that wretched hovel they bent the knee before Parsival, the poor Bearer of Burdens, who rose to his feet to greet them, and awaited their embassage.

"Amfortas, thy father, the twenty and first keeper of the Grail, hath sent us. Twenty have passed before him in the world, and of them more than half have passed before him into the Kingdom of Heaven. This day Amfortas hath doffed the crown of Salvator from his head. His

piercing cry of pain is likewise stilled. Never more will he offer up the godlike sacrifice.

"He sends thee greeting, and bids me deliver this embassage: 'My son, Parsival, the Grail is in the world an alien miracle. Many say Salvator is a realm founded in the air, because, so they say, peace dwells above the clouds but war upon earth. Now, Parsival, in the air are lightnings, the fruitful rain, the radiance of the light, of the stars, of the moon, of the dawn, and of the sunset. What man could live and not drink air? Who without air could see and hear? Who could think, believe, know aught of God and of the world, were his playground not the free realm of the spirit? So deem, and thou wilt, the world, the Grail, peace and Salvator, to be no more than a realm of the air, if but we believe that with its secret churches, its peace, its bliss, and its shining paladins, it is. The world is Heartache's. Salvator belongs to bliss. But even as bliss hath come into the world in the guise of heavenly faith, so Heartache, too, has ever been a guest in Salvator.'

"Dost thou believe in reconciliation by the

Grail, in Salvator, and in the secret church, Parsival?"

"I do believe therein," quoth the Bearer of Burdens with shining eyes.

"Then fall down upon thy knees," Gornemant went on, "that at thy sire's behest we may set upon thy head the crown of joy and sorrow of the Grail."

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