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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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King Arthur: How Sir Launcelot Saw The Holy Grail (13/15)

For many days after he had left the hermitage, Sir Launcelot rode through the forest, but there came to him no such adventures as had befallen him on other quests to the increase of his fame. At last, one night-tide, he came to the shores of a great water and there he lay down to sleep; but as he slept, a voice called on him: "Launcelot, arise, put on thine armor and go on thy way until thou comest to a ship. Into that thou shalt enter."

Immediately, Sir Launcelot started from his sleep to obey, and, riding along the shore, came presently to a ship beached on the strand; no sooner had he entered it, than the ship was launched—how, he might not know. So the ship sailed before the wind for many a day. No mortal was on it, save only Sir Launcelot, yet were all his needs supplied. Then, at last, the ship ran ashore at the foot of a great castle; and it was midnight. Sir Launcelot waited not for the dawn, but, his sword gripped in his hand, sprang ashore, and then right before him, he saw a postern where the gate stood open indeed, but two grisly lions kept the way. And when Sir Launcelot would have rushed upon the great beasts with his sword, it was struck from his hands, and

a voice said: "Ah! Launcelot, ever is thy trust in thy might rather than thy Maker!"

Sore ashamed, Sir Launcelot took his sword and thrust it back into the sheath, and going forward, he passed unhurt through the gateway, the lions that kept it falling back from his path. So without more adventure, Launcelot entered into the castle; and there he saw how every door stood open, save only one, and that was fast barred, nor, with all his force, might he open it. Presently from the chamber within came the sound of a sweet voice in a holy chant, and then in his heart Launcelot knew that he was come to the Holy Grail. So, kneeling humbly, he prayed that to him might be shown some vision of that he sought. Forthwith the door flew open and from the chamber blazed a light such as he had never known before; but when he made to enter, a voice cried: "Launcelot, forbear;" and sorrowfully he withdrew. Then where he knelt, far even from the threshold of the wondrous room, he saw a silver table and, on it, covered with red samite, the Holy Grail. At sight of that which he had sought so long, his joy became so great that, unmindful of the warning, he advanced into the room and drew nigh even to the table itself. Then on the instant there burst between him and it a blaze of light, and he fell to the ground. There he lay, nor might he move nor utter any sound; only he was aware of hands busy about him which bore him away from the chamber.

For four-and-twenty days Sir Launcelot lay as in a trance. At the end of that time he came to himself, and

found those about him that had tended him in his swoon. These, when they had given him fresh raiment, brought him to the aged king—Pelles was his name—that owned that castle. The king entertained him right royally, for he knew of the fame of Sir Launcelot; and long he talked with him of his quest and of the other knights who followed it, for he was of a great age and knew much of men. At the end of four days he spoke to Sir Launcelot, bidding him return to Arthur's court:

"For," said he, "your quest is ended here, and all that ye shall see of the Holy Grail ye have seen." So

Launcelot rode on his way, grieving for the sin that hindered him from the perfect vision of the Holy Grail, but thanking God for that which he had seen. So in time he came to Camelot, and told to Arthur all that had befallen him.

