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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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King Arthur: Merlin The Magician (3/15)

Of Merlin and how he served King Arthur, something has been already shown. Loyal he was ever to Uther Pendragon and to his son, King Arthur, and for the latter especially he wrought great marvels. He brought the king to his rights; he made him his ships; and some say that Camelot, with its splendid halls, where Arthur would gather his knights around him at the great festivals of the year, at Christmas, at Easter, and at Pentecost, was raised by his magic, without human toil. Bleise, the aged magician who dwelt in Northumberland and recorded the great deeds of Arthur and his knights, had been Merlin's master in magic; but it came to pass in time that Merlin far excelled him in skill, so that his enemies declared no mortal was his father, and called him devil's son.

Then, on a certain time, Merlin said to Arthur: "The time draws near when ye shall miss me, for I shall go down alive into the earth; and it shall be that gladly would ye give your lands to have me again." Then Arthur was grieved, and said: "Since ye know your danger, use your craft to avoid it." But Merlin answered: "That may not be."

Now there had come to Arthur's court, a damsel of the Lady of the Lake—her whose skill in magic, some say,

was greater than Merlin's own; and the damsel's name was Vivien. She set herself to learn the secrets of Merlin's art, and was ever with him, tending upon the old man, and with gentleness and tender service, winning her way to his heart; but all was a pretence, for she was weary of him and sought only his ruin, thinking it should be fame for her, by any means whatsoever, to enslave the greatest wizard of his age. And so she persuaded him to pass with her over seas into King Ban's land of Benwick, and there, one day, he showed her a wondrous rock formed by magic art. Then she begged him to enter into it, the better to declare to her its wonders; but when once he was within, by a charm that she had learned from Merlin's self, she caused the rock to shut down that never again might he come forth. Thus was Merlin's prophecy fulfilled, that he should go down into the earth alive. Much they marvelled in Arthur's court what had become of the great magician, till on a time, there rode past the stone a certain Knight of the Round Table and heard Merlin lamenting his sad fate. The knight would have striven to raise the mighty stone, but Merlin bade him not waste his labor, since none might release him save her who had imprisoned him there. Thus Merlin passed from the world through the treachery of a damsel, and thus Arthur was without aid in the days when his doom came upon him.

