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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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King Arthur: The Adventures Of Sir Launcelot (12/15)

After Sir Launcelot had parted from his fellows at the Castle of Vagon, he rode many days through the forest without adventure, till he chanced upon a knight close by a little hermitage in the wood. Immediately, as was the wont of errant knights, they prepared to joust, and Launcelot, whom none before had overthrown, was borne down, man and horse, by the stranger knight. Thereupon a nun, who dwelt in the hermitage, cried: "God be with thee, best knight in all this world," for she knew the victor for Sir Galahad. But Galahad, not wishing to be known, rode swiftly away; and presently Sir Launcelot got to horse again and rode slowly on his way, shamed and doubting sorely in his heart whether this quest was meant for him.

When night fell, he came to a great stone cross which stood at the parting of the way and close by a little ruined chapel. So Sir Launcelot, being minded to pass the night there, alighted, fastened his horse to a tree and hung his shield on a bough. Then he drew near to the little chapel, and wondered to see how, all ruinous though it was, yet within was an altar hung with silk and a great silver candlestick on it; but when he sought entrance, he could find none and, much troubled in his mind, he returned to his horse where he had left it, and

unlacing his helm and ungirding his sword, laid him down to rest.

Then it seemed to Sir Launcelot that, as he lay between sleeping and waking, there passed him two white palfreys bearing a litter wherein was a sick knight, who cried: "Sweet Lord, when shall I be pardoned all my transgressions, and when shall the holy vessel come to me, to cure me of my sickness?" And instantly it seemed that the great candlestick came forth of itself from the chapel, floating through the air before a table of silver on which was the Holy Grail. Thereupon, the sick knight raised himself, and on his bended knees he approached so nigh that he kissed the holy vessel; and immediately he cried: "I thank Thee, sweet Lord, that I am healed of my sickness."

And all the while Sir Launcelot, who saw this wonder, felt himself held that he could not move. Then a squire brought the stranger knight his weapons, in much joy that his lord was cured. "Who think ye that this knight may be who remains sleeping when the holy vessel is so near?" said the knight. "In truth," said the squire, "he must be one that is held by the bond of some great sin. I will take his helm and his sword, for here have I brought you all your armor save only these two." So the knight armed him from head to foot, and taking Sir Launcelot's horse, rode away with his squire. On the instant, Sir Launcelot awoke amazed, not knowing whether he had dreamed or not; but while he wondered, there came a terrible voice, saying: "Launcelot, arise and leave this holy place." In shame,

Sir Launcelot turned to obey, only to find horse and sword and shield alike vanished. Then, indeed, he knew himself dishonored.

Weeping bitterly, he made the best of his way on foot, until he came to a cell where a hermit was saying prayer. Sir Launcelot knelt too, and, when all was ended, called to the hermit, entreating him for counsel. "With good will," said the hermit. So Sir Launcelot made himself known and told the hermit all, lamenting how his good fortune was turned to wretchedness and his glory to shame; and truly, the hermit was amazed that Sir Launcelot should be in such case. "Sir," said he, "God has given you manhood and strength beyond all other knights; and more are ye bounden to his service." "I have sinned," said Sir

Launcelot; "for in all these years of my knighthood, I have done everything for the honor and glory of my lady and naught for my Maker; and little thank have I given to God for



all his benefits to me." Then the holy man gave Sir Launcelot good counsel and made him rest there that night; and the next day he gave him a horse, a sword and a helmet, and bade him go forth and bear himself knightly as the servant of God.