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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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## King Arthur: The Adventures Of Sir Percivale (10/15)

After he had left his fellows, Sir Percivale rode long through the forest until, one evening, he reached a monastery where he sought shelter for the night. The next morning, he went into the chapel to hear mass and there he espied the body of an old, old man, laid on a richly adorned couch. At first it seemed as if the aged man were dead, but presently, raising himself in his bed, he took off his crown and, delivering it to the priest, bade him place it on the altar. So when the service was concluded, Sir Percivale asked who the aged king might be. Then he was told that it was none other than King Evelake who accompanied Joseph of Arimathea to Britain. And on a certain occasion, the king had approached the Holy Grail nigher than was reverent and, for his impiety, God had punished him with blindness. Thereupon he repented and, entreating God earnestly, had obtained his petition that he should not die until he had seen the spotless knight who should be descended from him in the ninth degree. (This his desire was fulfilled later when Sir Galahad came thither; after which, he died and was buried by the good knight.) The next day, Sir Percivale continued his journey and presently met with twenty knights who bore on a bier the body of a dead knight. When they espied Sir

Percivale, they demanded of him who he was and whence he came. So he told them, whereupon they all shouted, "Slay him! slay him!" and setting upon him all at once, they killed his horse and would have slain him but that the good knight, Sir Galahad, passing that way by chance, came to his rescue and put his assailants to flight. Then Galahad rode away as fast as he might, for he would not be thanked, and Sir Percivale was left, horseless and alone, in the forest.

So Sir Percivale continued his journey on foot as well as he might; and ever the way became lonelier, until at last he came to the shores of a vast sea. There Sir Percivale abode many days, without food and desolate, doubting whether he should ever escape thence. At last it chanced that, looking out to sea, Sir Percivale descried a ship and, as it drew nearer, he saw how it was all hung with satin and velvet. Presently it reached the land and out of it there stepped a lady of marvellous beauty, who asked him how he came there; "For know," said she, "ye are like to die here by hunger or mischance."

"He whom I serve will protect me," said Sir Percivale.

"I know well whom ye desire most to see," said the lady. "Ye would meet with the Red Knight who bears the red-cross shield."

"Ah! lady, I pray you tell me where I may find him," cried Sir Percivale.

"With a good will," said the damsel; "if ye will but promise me your service when I shall ask for it, I will

lead you to the knight, for I met him of late in the forest."

So Sir Percivale promised gladly to serve her when she should need him. Then the lady asked him how long he had fasted. "For three days," answered Sir Percivale. Immediately she gave orders to her attendants forthwith to pitch a tent and set out a table with all manner of delicacies, and of these she invited Sir Percivale to partake, "I pray you, fair lady," said Sir Percivale, "who are ye that show me such kindness?" "Truly," said the lady, "I am but a hapless damsel, driven forth from my inheritance by a great lord whom I have chanced to displease. I implore you, sir knight, by your vows of knighthood, to give me your aid." Sir Percivale promised her all the aid he could give, and then she bade him lie down and sleep, and herself took off his helmet, and unclasped his sword-belt. So Sir Percivale slept, and when he waked, there was another feast prepared, and he was given the rarest and the strongest wines that ever he had tasted. Thus they made merry, and, when the lady begged Percivale to rest him there awhile, promising him all that ever he could desire if he would vow himself to her service, almost he forgot the quest to which he was vowed, and would have consented, but that his eye fell upon his sword where it lay. Now in the sword-hilt there was set a red cross and, seeing it, Percivale called to mind his vow, and, thinking on it, he signed him with the cross on his forehead. Instantly, the tent was overthrown and vanished in thick smoke; and she who had appeared a

lovely woman disappeared from his sight in semblance of a fiend.

Then was Sir Percivale sore ashamed that almost he had yielded to the temptings of the Evil One and earnestly he prayed that his sin might be forgiven him. Thus he remained in prayer far into the night, bewailing his weakness; and when the dawn appeared, a ship drew nigh the land. Sir Percivale entered into it, but could find no one there; so commending himself to God, he determined to remain thereon, and was borne over the seas for many days, he knew not whither.

