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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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King Arthur: The Round Table (2/15)

Thus Arthur was made King, but he had to fight for his own; for eleven great kings drew together and refused to acknowledge him as their lord, and chief among the rebels was King Lot of Orkney, who had married Arthur's sister, Bellicent.
By Merlin's advice, Arthur sent for help overseas, to Ban and Bors, the two great kings who ruled in Gaul. With their aid, he overthrew his foes in a great battle near the river Trent; and then he passed with them into their own lands and helped them drive out their enemies. So there was ever great friendship between Arthur and the Kings Ban and Bors, and all their kindred, and afterward some of the most famous Knights of the Round Table were of that kin.
Then King Arthur set himself to restore order throughout his kingdom. To all who would submit and amend their evil ways, he showed kindness; but those who persisted in oppression and wrong he removed, putting in their places others who would deal justly with the people. And because the land had become overrun with forest during the days of misrule, he cut roads through the thickets, that no longer wild beasts and men, fiercer than the beasts, should lurk in their gloom, to the harm of the weak and defenceless. Thus it

came to pass that soon the peasant plowed his fields in safety, and where had been wastes, men dwelt again in peace and prosperity.

Among the lesser kings whom Arthur helped to rebuild their towns and restore order, was King Leodegrance of Cameliard. Now Leodegrance had one fair child, his daughter Guenevere; and from the first he saw her, Arthur gave her all his love. So he sought counsel of Merlin, his chief adviser. Merlin heard the king sorrowfully, and he said: "Sir king, when a man's heart is set, he may not change. Yet had it been well if ye had loved another."

So the king sent his knights to Leodegrance, to ask of him his daughter; and Leodegrance consented, rejoicing to wed her to so good and knightly a king. With great pomp, the princess was conducted to Canterbury, and there the king met her, and they two were wed by the archbishop in the great cathedral, amid the rejoicings of the people.

On that same day did Arthur found his Order of the Round Table, the fame of which was to spread throughout Christendom and endure through all time. Now the Round Table had been made for King Uther Pendragon by Merlin, who had meant thereby to set forth plainly to all men the roundness of the earth. After Uther died, King Leodegrance had possessed it; but when Arthur was wed, he sent it to him as a gift, and great was the king's joy at receiving it. One hundred and fifty knights might take their places about it, and for them Merlin made sieges or seats. One

hundred and twenty-eight did Arthur knight at that great feast; thereafter, if any sieges were empty, at the high festival of Pentecost new knights were ordained to fill them, and by magic was the name of each knight found inscribed, in letters of gold, in his proper siege. One seat only long remained unoccupied, and that was the Siege Perilous. No knight might occupy it until the coming of Sir Galahad; for, without danger to his life, none might sit there who was not free from all stain of sin.

With pomp and ceremony did each knight take upon him the vows of true knighthood: to obey the king; to show mercy to all who asked it; to defend the weak; and for no worldly gain to fight in a wrongful cause: and all the knights rejoiced together, doing honor to Arthur and to his queen.

Then they rode forth to right the wrong and help the oppressed, and by their aid, the king held his realm in peace, doing justice to all.