

CHAPTER II

*The Miracle of the Sword and Stone,
and the Coronation of King Arthur —
The Sword Excalilur — The War with
the Eleven Kings*

Now Arthur the prince had all this time been nourished in Sir Ector's house as his own son, and was fair and tall and comely, being of the age of fifteen years, great in strength, gentle in manner, and accomplished in all exercises proper for the training of a knight.

But as yet he knew not of his father; for Merlin had so dealt, that none save Uther and himself knew aught about him. Wherefore it befell, that many of the knights and barons who heard King Uther speak before his death, and call his son Arthur his successor, were in great amazement; and some doubted, and others were displeased.

Anon the chief lords and princes set forth each to his own land, and, raising armed men and multitudes of followers, determined every one to gain the crown for himself; for they said in their hearts, "If there be any such a son at all as he of whom this wizard forced the king to speak, who are we that a beardless boy should have rule over us?"

So the land stood long in great peril, for every lord and baron sought but his own advantage; and the Saxons, growing ever more adventurous, wasted and overran the towns and villages in every part.

Then Merlin went to Brice, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and advised him to require all the earls and barons of the realm and all knights and gentlemen-at-arms to come to him at London, before Christmas, under pain of cursing, that they might learn the will of Heaven who should be king. This, therefore, the archbishop did, and upon Christmas Eve were met together in London all the greatest princes, lords, and barons; and long before day they prayed in St. Paul's Church, and the archbishop besought Heaven for a sign who should be lawful king of all the realm.

And as they prayed, there was seen in the churchyard, set straight before the doorways of the church, a huge square stone having a naked sword stuck in the midst of it. And on the sword was written in letters of gold, "Whoso pulleth out the sword from this stone is born the rightful King of Britain."

At this all the people wondered greatly; and, when Mass was over, the nobles, knights, and princes ran out eagerly from the church to see the stone and sword; and a law was forthwith made that whoso should pull out the sword should be acknowledged straightway King of Britain.

Then many knights and barons pulled at the sword with all their might, and some of them tried many times, but none could stir or move it.

When all had tried in vain, the archbishop declared the man whom Heaven had chosen was not yet there. "But God," said he, "will doubtless make him known ere many days."

So ten knights were chosen, being men of high renown, to watch and keep the sword; and there was proclamation made through all the land that whosoever would, had leave and liberty to try and pull it from the stone. But though great multitudes of people came, both gentle and simple, for many days, no man could ever move the sword a hair's breadth from its place.

Now, at the New Year's Eve a great tournament was to be held in London, which the archbishop had devised to keep together lords and commons, lest they should grow estranged in the troublous and unsettled times. To the which tournament there came, with many other knights, Sir Ector, Arthur's foster-father, who had great possessions near to London; and with him came his son, Sir Key, but recently made knight, to take his part in the jousting, and young Arthur also to witness all the sports and fighting.

But as they rode towards the jousts, Sir Key found suddenly he had no sword, for he had left it at his father's house; and turning to young Arthur, he prayed him to ride back and fetch it for him. "I will with a good will," said Arthur; and rode fast back after the sword.

But when he came to the house he found it locked and empty, for all were gone forth to see the tournament. Whereat, being angry and impatient, he said within himself, "I will ride to the churchyard and take with me the sword that sticketh in the stone, for my brother shall not go without a sword this day."

So he rode and came to the churchyard, and alighting from his horse he tied him to the gate, and went to the pavilion, which was pitched near the stone, wherein abode the ten knights who watched and kept it; but he found no knights there, for all were gone to see the jousting.

Then he took the sword by its handle, and lightly and fiercely he pulled it out of the stone, and took his horse and rode until he came to Sir Key and delivered him the sword. But as soon as Sir Key saw it he knew well it was the sword of the stone, and, riding swiftly to his father, he cried out, "Lo! here, sir, is the sword of the stone, wherefore it is I who must be king of all this land."

When Sir Ector saw the sword, he turned back straight with Arthur and Sir Key and came to the churchyard, and there alighting, they went all three into

the church, and Sir Key was sworn to tell truly how he came by the sword. Then he confessed it was his brother Arthur who had brought it to him.

Whereat Sir Ector, turning to young Arthur, asked him—“How gottest thou the sword?”

“Sir,” said he, “I will tell you. When I went home to fetch my brother’s sword, I found nobody to deliver it to me, for all were abroad to the jousts. Yet was I loath to leave my brother swordless, and, bethinking me of this one, I came hither eagerly to fetch it for him, and pulled it out of the stone without any pain.”

Then said Sir Ector, much amazed and looking steadfastly on Arthur, “If this indeed be thus, ’tis thou who shalt be king of all this land—and God will have it so—for none but he who should be rightful Lord of Britain might ever draw this sword forth from that stone. But let me now with mine own eyes see thee put back the sword into its place and draw it forth again.”

“That is no mystery,” said Arthur; and straightway set it in the stone. And then Sir Ector pulled at it himself, and after him Sir Key, with all his might, but both of them in vain: then Arthur reaching forth his hand and grasping at the pommel, pulled it out easily, and at once.

Then fell Sir Ector down upon his knees upon the ground before young Arthur, and Sir Key also with him, and straightway did him homage as their sovereign lord.

But Arthur cried aloud, “Alas! mine own dear father and my brother, why kneel ye thus to me?”

“Nay, my Lord Arthur,” answered then Sir Ector, “we are of no blood-kinship with thee, and little though I thought how high thy kin might be, yet wast thou never more than foster-child of mine.” And then he told him all he knew about his infancy, and how a stranger had delivered him, with a great sum of gold, into his hands to be brought up and nourished as his own born child, and then had disappeared.

But when young Arthur heard of it, he fell upon Sir Ector’s neck, and wept, and made great lamentation, “For now,” said he, “I have in one day lost my father and my mother and my brother.”

“Sir,” said Sir Ector presently, “when thou shalt be made king be good and gracious unto me and mine.”

“If not,” said Arthur, “I were no true man’s son at all, for thou art he in all the world to whom I owe the most; and my good lady and mother, thy wife, hath

ever kept and fostered me as though I were her own; so if it be God's will that I be king hereafter as thou sayest, desire of me whatever thing thou wilt and I will do it; and God forbid that I should fail thee in it."

"I will but pray," replied Sir Ector, "that thou wilt make my son Sir Key, thy foster-brother, seneschal of all the lands."

"That shall he be," said Arthur; "and never shall another hold that office, save thy son, while he and I do live."

Anon, they left the church and went to the archbishop to tell him that the sword had been achieved. And when he saw the sword in Arthur's hand he set a day and summoned all the princes, knights, and barons to meet again at St. Paul's Church and see the will of Heaven signified. So when they came together, the sword was put back in the stone, and all tried, from the greatest to the least, to move it; but there before them all not one could take it out save Arthur only.

But then befell a great confusion and dispute, for some cried out it was the will of Heaven, and, "Long live King Arthur," but many more were full of wrath and said, "What! would ye give the ancient sceptre of this land unto a boy born none know how?" And the contention growing greatly, till nothing could be done to pacify their rage, the meeting was at length broken up by the archbishop and adjourned till Candlemas, when all should meet again.

But when Candlemas was come, Arthur alone again pulled forth the sword, though more than ever came to win it; and the barons, sorely vexed and angry, put it in delay till Easter. But as he had sped before so he did at Easter, and the barons yet once more contrived delays till Pentecost.

But now the archbishop, fully seeing God's will, called together, by Merlin's counsel, a band of knights and gentlemen-at-arms, and set them about Arthur to keep him safely till the feast of Pentecost. And when at the feast Arthur still again alone prevailed to move the sword, the people all with one accord cried out, "Long live King Arthur! we will have no more delay, nor any other king, for so it is God's will; and we will slay whoso resisteth Him and Arthur;" and wherewithal they kneeled down all at once, and cried for Arthur's grace and pardon that they had so long delayed him from his crown. Then he full sweetly and majestically pardoned them; and taking in his hand the sword, he offered it upon the high altar of the church.

Anon was he solemnly knighted with great pomp by the most famous knight there present, and the crown was placed upon his head; and, having taken oath to all the people, lords and commons, to be true king and deal in justice only unto his life's end, he received homage and service from all the barons

who held lands and castles from the crown. Then he made Sir Key, High Steward of England, and Sir Badewaine of Britain, Constable, and Sir Ulfius, Chamberlain: and after this, with all his court and a great retinue of knights and armed men, he journeyed into Wales, and was crowned again in the old city of Caerleon-upon-Usk.

Meanwhile those knights and barons who had so long delayed him from the crown, met together and went up to the coronation feast at Caerleon, as if to do him homage; and there they ate and drank such things as were set before them at the royal banquet, sitting with the others in the great hall.

But when after the banquet Arthur began, according to the ancient royal custom, to bestow great boons and fiefs on whom he would, they all with one accord rose up, and scornfully refused his gifts, crying that they would take nothing from a beardless boy come of low or unknown birth, but would instead give him good gifts of hard sword-strokes between neck and shoulders.

Whereat arose a deadly tumult in the hall, and every man there made him ready to fight. But Arthur leaped up as a flame of fire against them, and all his knights and barons drawing their swords, rushed after him upon them and began a full sore battle; and presently the king's party prevailed, and drove the rebels from the hall and from the city, closing the gates behind them; and King Arthur brake his sword upon them in his eagerness and rage.

But amongst them were six kings of great renown and might, who more than all raged against Arthur and determined to destroy him, namely, King Lot, King Nanter, King Urien, King Carados, King Yder, and King Anguisant. These six, therefore, joining their armies together, laid close siege to the city of Caerleon, wherefrom King Arthur had so shamefully driven them.

And after fifteen days Merlin came suddenly into their camp and asked them what this treason meant. Then he declared to them that Arthur was no base adventurer, but King Uther's son, whom they were bound to serve and honour even though Heaven had not vouchsafed the wondrous miracle of the sword. Some of the kings, when they heard Merlin speak thus, marvelled and believed him; but others, as King Lot, laughed him and his words to scorn, and mocked him for a conjurer and wizard. But it was agreed with Merlin that Arthur should come forth and speak with the kings.

So he went forth to them to the city gate, and with him the archbishop and Merlin, and Sir Key, Sir Brastias, and a great company of others. And he spared them not in his speech, but spoke to them as king and chieftain telling them plainly he would make them all bow to him if he lived, unless they

choose to do him homage there and then; and so they parted in great wrath, and each side armed in haste.

“What will ye do?” said Merlin to the kings; “ye had best hold your hands, for were ye ten times as many ye should not prevail.”

“Shall we be afraid of a dream-reader?” quoth King Lot in scorn.

With that Merlin vanished away and came to King Arthur.

Then Arthur said to Merlin, “I have need now of a sword that shall chastise these rebels terribly.”

“Come then with me,” said Merlin, “for hard by there is a sword that I can gain for thee.”

So they rode out that night till they came to a fair and broad lake, and in the midst of it King Arthur saw an arm thrust up, clothed in white samite, and holding a great sword in the hand.

“Lo! yonder is the sword I spoke of,” said Merlin.

Then saw they a damsel floating on the lake in the Moonlight. “What damsel is that?” said the king.

“[The lady of the lake](#),” said Merlin; “for upon this lake there is a rock, and on the rock a noble palace, where she abideth, and she will come towards thee presently, thou shalt ask her courteously for the sword.”

Therewith the damsel came to King Arthur, and saluted him, and he saluted her, and said, “Lady, what sword is that the arm holdeth above the water? I would that it were mine, for I have no sword.”

“Sir King,” said the lady of the lake, “that sword is mine, and if thou wilt give me in return a gift whenever I shall ask it of thee, thou shalt have it.”

“By my faith,” said he, “I will give thee any gift that thou shalt ask.”

“Well,” said the damsel, “go into yonder barge, and row thyself unto the sword, and take it and the scabbard with thee, and I will ask my gift of thee when I see my time.”

So King Arthur and Merlin alighted, and tied their horses to two trees, and went into the barge; and when they came to the sword that the hand held, King Arthur took it by the handle and bore it with him, and the arm and hand went down under the water; and so they came back to land, and rode again to Caerleon.

On the morrow Merlin bade King Arthur to set fiercely on the enemy; and in the meanwhile three hundred good knights went over to King Arthur from the rebels' side. Then at the spring of day, when they had scarce left their tents, he fell on them with might and main, and Sir Badewaine, Sir Key, and Sir Brastias slew on the right hand and on the left marvellously; and ever in the thickest of the fight King Arthur raged like a young lion, and laid on with his sword, and did wondrous deeds of arms, to the joy and admiration of the knights and barons who beheld him.

Then King Lot, King Carados, and the King of the Hundred Knights—who also rode with them—going round to the rear, set on King Arthur fiercely from behind; but Arthur, turning to his knights, fought ever in the foremost press until his horse was slain beneath him. At that, King Lot rode furiously at him, and smote him down; but rising straightway, and being set again on horseback, he drew his sword Excalibur that he had gained by Merlin from the lady of the lake, which, shining brightly as the light of thirty torches, dazzled the eyes of his enemies. And therewith falling on them afresh with all his knights, he drove them back and slew them in great numbers, and Merlin by his arts scattered among them fire and pitchy smoke, so that they broke and fled. Then all the common people of Caerleon, seeing them give way, rose up with one accord, and rushed at them with clubs and staves, and chased them far and wide, and slew many great knights and lords, and the remainder of them fled and were seen no more. Thus won King Arthur his first battle and put his enemies to shame.

But the six kings, though sorely routed, prepared for a new war, and joining to themselves five others swore together that, whether for weal or woe, they would keep steadfast alliance till they had destroyed King Arthur. Then, with a host of 50,000 men-at-arms on horseback, and 10,000 foot, they were soon ready, and sent forth their fore-riders, and drew from the northern country towards King Arthur, to the castle of Bedgraine.

But he by Merlin's counsel had sent over sea to King Ban of Benwick and King Bors of Gaul, praying them to come and help him in his wars, and promising to help in return against King Claudas, their foe. To which those kings made answer that they would joyfully fulfil his wish, and shortly after came to London with 300 knights, well arrayed for both peace and war, leaving behind them a great army on the other side of the sea till they had consulted with King Arthur and his ministers how they might best dispose of it.

And Merlin being asked for his advice and help, agreed to go himself and fetch it over sea to England, which in one night he did; and brought with him

10,000 horsemen and led them northward privately to the forest of Bedgraine, and there lodged them in a valley secretly.

Then, by the counsel of Merlin, when they knew which way the eleven kings would ride and sleep, King Arthur with Kings Ban and Bors made themselves ready with their army for the fight, having yet but 30,000 men, counting the 10,000 who had come from Gaul.

“Now shall ye do my advice,” said Merlin; “I would that King Ban and King Bors, with all their fellowship of 10,000 men, were led to ambush in this wood ere daylight, and stir not therefrom until the battle hath been long waged. And thou, Lord Arthur, at the spring of day draw forth thine army before the enemy, and dress the battle so that they may at once see all thy host, for they will be the more rash and hardy when they see you have but 20,000 men.”

To this the three knights and the barons heartily consented, and it was done as Merlin had devised. So on the morrow when the hosts beheld each other, the host of the north was greatly cheered to find so few led out against them.

Then gave King Arthur the command to Sir Ulfius and Sir Brastias to take 3000 men-at-arms, and to open battle. They therefore setting fiercely on the enemy slew them on the right hand and the left till it was wonderful to see their slaughter.

When the eleven kings beheld so small a band doing such mighty deeds of arms they were ashamed, and charged them fiercely in return. Then was Sir Ulfius' horse slain under him; but he fought well and marvellously on foot against Duke Eustace and King Clarience, who set upon him grievously, till Sir Brastias, seeing his great peril, pricked towards them swiftly, and so smote the duke through with his spear that horse and man fell down and rolled over. Whereat King Clarience turned upon Sir Brastias, and rushing furiously together they each unhorsed the other and fell both to the ground, and there lay a long time stunned, their horses' knees being cut to the bone. Then came Sir Key the seneschal with six companions, and did wondrous well, till the eleven kings went out against them and overthrew Sir Griflet and Sir Lucas the butler. And when Sir Key saw Sir Griflet unhorsed and on foot, he rode against King Nanters hotly and smote him down, and led his horse to Griflet and horsed him again; with the same spear did Sir Key smite down King Lot and wounded him full sore.

But seeing that, the King of the Hundred Knights rushed at Sir Key and overthrew him in return, and took his horse and gave it to King Lot. And when Sir Griflet saw Sir Key's mischance, he set his spear in rest, and riding at a

mighty man-at-arms, he cast him down headlong and caught his horse and led it straightway to Sir Key.

By now the battle was growing perilous and hard, and both sides fought with rage and fury. And Sir Ulfius and Sir Brastias were both afoot and in great danger of their death, and foully stained and trampled under horses' feet. Then King Arthur, putting spurs to his horse, rushed forward like a lion into the midst of all the *mêlée*, and singling out King Cradlemont of North Wales, smote him through the left side and overthrew him, and taking his horse by the rein he brought it to Sir Ulfius in haste and said, "Take this horse, mine old friend, for thou hast great need of one, and charge by side of me." And even as he spoke he saw Sir Ector, Sir Key's father, smitten to the earth by the King of the Hundred Knights, and his horse taken to King Cradlemont.

But when King Arthur saw him ride upon Sir Ector's horse his wrath was very great, and with his sword he smote King Cradlemont upon the helm, and shore off the fourth part thereof and of the shield, and drave the sword onward to the horse's neck and slew the horse, and hurled the king upon the ground.

And now the battle waxed so great and furious that all the noise and sound thereof rang out by water and by wood, so that Kings Ban and Bors, with all their knights and men-at-arms in ambush, hearing the tumult and the cries, trembled and shook for eagerness, and scarce could stay in secret, but made them ready for the fray and dressed their shields and harness.

But when King Arthur saw the fury of the enemy, he raged like a mad lion, and stirred and drove his horse now here, now there, to the right hand and to the left, and stayed not in his wrath till he had slain full twenty knights. He wounded also King Lot so sorely in the shoulder that he left the field, and in great pain and dolour cried out to the other kings, "Do ye as I devise, or we shall be destroyed. I, with the King of the Hundred Knights, King Anguisant, King Yder, and the Duke of Cambinet, will take fifteen thousand men and make a circuit, meanwhile that ye do hold the battle with twelve thousand. Then coming suddenly we will fall fiercely on them from behind and put them to the rout, but else shall we never stand against them."

So Lot and four kings departed with their party to one side, and the six other kings dressed their ranks against King Arthur and fought long and stoutly.

But now Kings Ban and Bors, with all their army fresh and eager, broke from their ambush and met face to face the five kings and their host as they came round behind, and then began a frantic struggle with breaking of spears and clashing of swords and slaying of men and horses. Anon King Lot, espying in the midst King Bors, cried out in great dismay, "Our Lady now defend us from

our death and fearful wounds; our peril groweth great, for yonder cometh one of the worshipfullest kings and best knights in all the world.”

“Who is he?” said the King of the Hundred Knights.

“It is King Bors of Gaul,” replied King Lot, “and much I marvel how he may have come with all his host into this land without our knowledge.”

“Aha!” cried King Carados, “I will encounter with this king if ye will rescue me when there is need.”

“Ride on,” said they.

So King Carados and all his host rode softly till they came within a bow-shot of King Bors, and then both hosts, spurring their horses to their greatest swiftness, rushed at each other. And King Bors encountered in the onset with a knight, and struck him through with a spear, so that he fell dead upon the earth; then drawing his sword, he did such mighty feats of arms that all who saw him gazed with wonder. Anon King Ban came also forth upon the field with all his knights, and added yet more fury, sound, and slaughter, till at length both hosts of the eleven kings began to quake, and drawing all together into one body, they prepared to meet the worst, while a great multitude already fled.

Then said King Lot, “Lords, we must take yet other means, or worse loss still awaits us. See ye not what people we have lost in waiting on the footmen, and that it costs ten horsemen to save one of them? Therefore it is my counsel to put away our footmen from us, for it is almost night, and King Arthur will not stay to slaughter them. So they can save their lives in this great wood hard by. Then let us gather into one band all the horsemen that remain, and whoso breaketh rank or leaveth us, let him be straightway slain by him that seeth him, for it is better that we slay a coward than through a coward be all slain. How say ye?” said King Lot; “answer me, all ye kings.”

“It is well said,” replied they all.

And swearing they would never fail each other, they mended and set right their armour and their shields, and took new spears and set them steadfastly against their thighs, waiting, and so stood still as a clump of trees stands on the plain; and no assaults could shake them, they held so hard together; which when King Arthur saw he marvelled greatly, and was very wroth. “Yet,” cried he, “I may not blame them, by my faith, for they do as brave men ought to do, and are the best fighting men and knights of most prowess that I ever saw or heard tell of.” And so said also Kings Ban and Bors, and praised them greatly for their noble chivalry.

But now came forty noble knights out of King Arthur's host, and prayed that he would suffer them to break the enemy. And when they were allowed, they rode forth with their spears upon their thighs, and spurred their horses to their hottest. Then the eleven kings, with a party of their knights, rushed with set spears as fast and mightily to meet them; and when they were encountered, all the crash and splinter of their spears and armour rang with a mighty din, and so fierce and bloody was their onset that in all that day there had been no such cruel press, and rage, and smiting. At that same moment rode fiercely into the thickest of the struggle King Arthur and Kings Ban and Bors, and slew downright on both hands right and left, until their horses went in blood up to the fetlocks.

And while the slaughter and the noise and shouting were at their greatest, suddenly there came down through the battle Merlin the Wizard, upon a great black horse, and riding to King Arthur, he cried out, "Alas, my Lord! will ye have never done? Of sixty thousand have ye left but fifteen thousand men alive. Is it not time to stay this slaying? for God is ill pleased with ye that ye have never ended, and yonder kings shall not be altogether overthrown this time. But if ye fall upon them any more, the fortune of this day will turn, and go to them. Withdraw, Lord, therefore, to thy lodging, and there now take thy rest, for to-day thou hast won a great victory, and overcome the noblest chivalry of all the world. And now for many years those kings shall not disturb thee. Therefore, I tell thee, fear them no more, for now they are sore beaten, and have nothing left them but their honour; and why shouldest thou slay them to take that?"

Then said King Arthur, "Thou sayest well, and I will take thy counsel." With that he cried out, "Ho!" for the battle to cease, and sent forth heralds through the field to stay more fighting. And gathering all the spoil, he gave it not amongst his own host, but to Kings Ban and Bors and all their knights and men-at-arms, that he might treat them with the greater courtesy as strangers.

Then Merlin took his leave of Arthur and the two other kings, and went to see his master, Blaise, a holy hermit, dwelling in Northumberland, who had nourished him through all his youth. And Blaise was passing glad to see him, for there was a great love ever between them; and Merlin told him how King Arthur had sped in the battle, and how it had ended; and told him the names of every king and knight of worship who was there. So Blaise wrote down the battle, word for word, as Merlin told him; and in the same way ever after, all the battles of King Arthur's days Merlin caused Blaise, his master, to record.