

1

Sipen þe sege and þe assaut watz sessed at Troye,
 þe borȝ brittened and brent to brondez and askez,
 þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wroȝt
 Watz tried for his tricherie, þe trewest on erthe.
 Hit watz Ennias þe aþel, and his highe kynde,
 þat sipen depeced prounces, and patrounes bicom
 Weheȝe of al þe wele in þe west illes.

5

Fro riche Romulus to Rome richis hym swyþe,
 With gret bobbaunce þat burȝe he biges vpon fyrst,
 And neuenes hit his aune nome, as hit now hat;
 Tirus to Tuskan and teldes bigynnes,
 Langaberde in Lunbardie lyfres vp homes,
 And fer ouer þe French flod Felix Brutus
 On mony bonkes ful brode Bretayn he setteȝ

10

wyȝ wynnne,

15

Where werre and wreke and wonder
 Bi syþeȝ hatȝ wont þerinne,
 And oft boþe blysse and blunder
 Ful skete hatȝ skyfted synne.

Ande quen þis Bretayn watz bigged bi þis burn ryȝh,

20

Bolde bredden þerinne, baret þat lofden,
 In mony turned tyme tene þat wroȝten.
 Mo ferlyes on þis folde han fallen here oft
 þen in any oper þat I wot, syn þat ilk tyme.
 Bot of alle þat here buit of Breitayne kynges
 Ay watz Arthur þe hendest, as I haf herde telle;
 Forþi an aunter in erde I artle to schawe,
 þat a selly in sizȝ summe men hit holden,
 And an outrage aventure of Arthureȝ wonderȝ;
 If ȝe wyl lysten þis laye bot on littel quile,
 I schal telle hit as-tit, as I in toun herde,

25

30

with tonge;

As hit is stad and spoken
 In stori stíf and stronge,
 With lel letteres loken,
 In londe so hatȝ ben longe.

35

11 Tirus: ms Ticius

1

After the siege and the assault had ended at Troy, and the city
 had been broken down and burnt to charred beams and ashes, the
 man who wove the web of treason there was tried for his deceit,
 yet famed as the truest of men. It was the prince Aeneas, and
 his noble race, who later conquered other kingdoms, and became
 the lords of almost all the wealth in the lands to the west. When
 the mighty Romulus has quickly made his way to Rome,
 straightway he builds that city with great magnificence, and
 names it with his own name, as it is still called; Tirus goes to
 Tuscany and founds settlements, Langobard raises homesteads in
 Lombardy, and far away across the English Channel Felix Brutus
 on many a broad hill happily establishes Britain, where from age
 to age there has been war and misery and distress, and prosperity
 and disaster have constantly and quickly succeeded one another
 ever since.

And when this Britain had been founded by that prince of men,
 bold warriors were bred there, lovers of strife, who in many a
 troubled age made mischief. In this land greater wonders have
 repeatedly occurred than in any other that I know of, ever
 since that time. But of all who lived here, of the kings of Britain,
 Arthur, as I've heard tell, was the noblest ever. And so I mean to
 unfold an actual adventure, such that some men consider it a
 veritable marvel, and an extraordinary episode from the strange
 tales of Arthur. If you will listen to this lay for just a little while,
 I will recite it here and now, as I have heard it publicly, and as it
 is recorded and set down in a bold and powerful story, expressed
 in fitting words, as it has long been in this land.

Enbrawdē and bounden wyth þe best gemmez
 On brode sylkyn borde, and bryddez on semez,
 As papiyez paynted peruyng biwene,
 Tortors and trulofez entayled so pyk
 As mony burde þeraboutē had ben seuen wynter
 in tounē.

þe cerde watz more o prys
 þat vmbeclippyd hys croun,
 Of diamantez a deus,
 þat boþe were bryzt and broun.

Then þay schewed hym þe schelde, þat was of schyr gouldez
 Wyth þe pentangel depaynt of pure golde hwez.
 He braydez hit by þe bauderyk, aboute þe hals kestes,
 þat bisemē þe segge semlyly fayre.

And guy þe pentangel apendez to þat prynce noble
 I am in tent yow to telle, þof tary hyt me schulde:
 Hit is a syngne þat Salamon set sunmyule
 In byroknyng of trawpe, bi tytle þat hit habbez,
 For hit is a figure þat haldez fyue poyntez,
 And vche lyne vmbelappez and loukez in oper,
 And ayquere hit is endelez; and Englych hit callen
 Oueral, as I here, þe endeles knot.

Forþy hit acordez to þis knyzt and to his cler armez;
 For ay faytful in fyue and sere fyue sybez,
 Gawan watz for gode knawen, and as golde pured,
 Voyded of vche vylany, wyth vertuez ennoured
 in mote.

Forþy þe pentangel nwe
 He ber in schelde and cote,
 As tulk of tale most trwe
 And gentylest knyzt of lote.

Fyrst he watz funden faultlez in his fyue wyntez,
 And effe fayled neuer þe freke in his fyue fyngres,
 And alle his afaunce vpon folde watz in þe fyue woundez
 þat Cryst katz on þe crows, as þe crede tellez.
 And quere-so-euer þys mon in melly watz stad,
 His þro þoȝt watz in þat, þurȝ alle oper þynggez,
 þat alle his fornes he fong at þe fyue joyez

neck-guard, embroidered and set with the best gems on its broad silken hem, and along the seams, birds such as parrots depicted amongst periwinkle plants, turtle-doves and true-love flowers embroidered as closely as if many ladies at court had been engaged on it for seven years. The circlet which encompassed his brow was more precious still, composed of flawless diamonds which were both clear and clouded.

Then they displayed for him the shield, which was of bright gules with the pentangle picked out in the colour of pure gold. He seized the shield by the baldric and slung it about his neck; it suited the knight fittingly and well. And just why the pentangle is appropriate to that noble lord I am bent on telling you, even though it should delay me: it is a symbol that Solomon devised once upon a time as a token of fidelity, appropriately, for it is a figure which contains five points, and each line overlaps and interlocks with another, and it is unbroken anywhere; and all over England, so I hear, it is called the endless knot. And so it is appropriate to this knight and to his unblemished arms; because he was always trustworthy in five respects and fivefold in each, Gawain was known to be a good knight, and like refined gold, free from every imperfection, graced with chivalric virtues. For this reason he bore the pentangle newly painted upon shield and surcoat, as being a man most true to his word and in bearing the noblest of knights.

First, he was proved faultless in his five senses, and secondly the knight was never at fault through his five fingers, and all his trust on this earth was in the five wounds which Christ received on the cross, as the Creed tells. And wherever this man was beset in battle, his steadfast thought was upon this, above all else—that he should draw all his fortune from the five joys which the gracious

Pat þe hende heuen-queene had of hir chyld;

At þis cause þe knyȝt comlyche hade

In þe more half of his schelde hir ymage depaynted,

Pat quen he blusched þerro his belde neuer payred.

þe fyft fyue pat I finde pat þe frek vved

Watȝ fraunchyse and felaschyp forbe al þyng.

His clannes and his cortaysye croked were neuer,

And pité, pat passeȝ alle poyntez, þyse pure fyue

Were harder happed on pat habel þen on any oper.

Now alle þese fyue sypez, for soþe, were fetled on þis knyȝt,

And vchone halched in oper, pat non ende hade,

And fychted vpon fyue poyntez pat fayld neuer,

Ne samned neuer in no syde, ne sundred nouþer,

Withouten ende at any noke I oquere fynde,

Whereneuer þe gomen bygan or glod to an ende.

þerfore on his schene schelde schapen watȝ þe knot

Ryally wyth red golde vpon rede gowlez,

Pat is þe pure pentangel wyth þe peple called

with lore.

Now grayped is Gawan gay,

And laȝt his launce ryȝt þore,

And gef hem alle goud day—

He wende for euernore.

He sperted þe sted with þe spureȝ and sprong on his way,
So stif pat þe ston-fyr stroke out þerafter. 670

Al pat sez pat semly syked in hert,

And sayde soþly al same segges til oper,

Carande for pat comly: 'Bi Kryst, hit is scape

Pat þou, leude, schal be lost, pat art of lyf noble!

To fynde hys fere vpon folde, in fayth, is not epe.

Warloker to haf wroȝt had more wyt bene,

And haf dyȝt zonder dere a duk to haue worped;

A lowande leder of ledez in londe hym wel semez,

And so had better haf ben þen brined to noȝt,

Hadet wyth an aluisch mon, for angardeȝ pryde.

Who knew euer any kyng such counsel to take

As knyȝtez in cauelaciounȝ on Crystmasse gommez!

Wel much watȝ þe warme water pat waltered of yȝen

When pat semly syre soȝt fro þo woneȝ

pad daye.

Queen of Heaven had in her child; for this reason the knight appropriately had her image depicted on the inner side of his shield, so that when he looked at it his courage never failed. The fifth group of five which I find the man displayed was generosity and love of his fellow men above all else, his purity and his courtesy were never at fault, and compassion, which surpasses all other qualities, these five virtues were more firmly attached to that man than to any other. Now all these five groups were, in truth, conjoined in this knight, each one linked to another, so that none had an end, established upon five points that were ever fixed, none coinciding anywhere nor separating either, and all without end at any place I can find anywhere, wherever the tracing process began or came to an end. Accordingly there was fashioned upon his bright shield, splendid in red gold upon the crimson gules, the device which is called by learned men the perfect pentangle. Now Gawain was finely arrayed, and there and then he took his lance and bade them all good day—for ever, as he thought.

He set spurs to the horse and sprang on his way, so vigorously that sparks were struck from the stones behind him. All who saw that splendid sight sighed in their hearts, and all the people alike said quietly to each other, grieving for that fair knight: 'By Christ, it is a pity that you, sir, who are so noble in your life are to perish! To find his equal on this earth, truly, is not easy. It would have been wiser to have acted with more caution, and to have appointed that noble man to be a duke; to be a brilliant leader of men in this land would well befit him, and he had better have been so than be destroyed utterly, beheaded by an elvish man because of excessive pride. Who ever knew any king to take such counsel as knights give in quibbling over Christmas games!' Much warm water gushed from their eyes when that fair knight went out from the castle that day. He made no delay, but went on

He made non abode,
Bot wyȝtly went hyȝ way;
Mony wyslum way he rode,
pe bok as I herde say.

690

Now rideȝ þis renk þurȝ pe ryalme of Logres,
Sir Gauan, on Godeȝ halue, þaȝ hym no gomen þoȝt.
Oft leudleȝ alone he lengeȝ on nyȝteȝ
per he fonde noȝt hym byfore þe fare þat he lyked.
Hade he no fere bot his fole bi frytheȝ and douneȝ,
Ne no gome bot God bi gate wyth to karp,
Til þat he neȝed ful neghe into pe Norþe Waleȝ.
Alle pe illes of Anglesay on lyft half he haldeȝ,
And fareȝ ouer pe fordeȝ by pe forlondeȝ,
Ouer at pe Holy Hede, til he hade eft bok
In pe wylðrenesse of Wyrale; wonde per bot lyte
þat auþer God oper gome wyth goud hert louied.
And ay he frayned, as he ferde, at frekeȝ þat he met,
If pay hade herde any karp of a knyȝt grene,
In any grounde perabout, of pe grene chapel;
And al nykked hym wyth nay, þat neuer in her lyue
pay seȝe neuer no segge þat watȝ of suche hweȝ
of grene.

700

pe knyȝt tok gates straunge
In mony a bok vnbene;
His cher ful oft con chaunge,
þat chapel er he myȝt sene.

710

Mony klyf he ouerclambe in contrayeȝ straunge;
Fer floeten fro his frendeȝ fremedly he rydeȝ.
At vche warpe oper water per þe wyȝe passed
He fonde a foo hym byfore, bot ferly hit were,
And þat so foule and so felle þat feȝt hym byhode.
So mony metnayl bi mount per þe mon fyndeȝ,
Hit were to tore for to telle of þe tenpe dole.
Sunwhyte wyth wormeȝ he werreȝ, and with wolues als,
Sunwhyte wyth wodwos þat woned in þe knarreȝ,
Boþe wyth bulleȝ and bereȝ, and boreȝ operquyle,
And etayneȝ þat hym anelede of þe heȝe felle;
Nade he ben duȝty and dryȝe, and Dryȝtyn had serued,

715

720

his way swiftly; he rode by many a devious path, as I have heard
the story say.

Now the knight goes riding through the realm of Logres, Sir
Gawain rides in God's name, though no mere game it seemed to
him. Often, companionless, he spent the night alone where he
found no food to his liking set before him. He had no company
save his horse among the woods and hills, and no one but God
to speak with by the way, till he drew very close to north Wales.
Keeping all the islands of Anglesey on his left hand, and passing
over the fords at the coastal promontories, he crossed over at the
Holy Head, till he gained the shore once more in the wilderness
of Wirral; few lived there who loved either God or man whole-
heartedly. And ever as he rode, he inquired of the people whom
he met whether they had heard any talk of a Green Knight of
the Green Chapel in any region thereabouts; and they all denied
it, saying no, that never in their lives had they seen any man who
was of such a colour as green. The knight took unfamiliar paths
among many dreary hills; his mood changed many times before
he came to see that chapel.

He clambered up many a cliff in strange regions; having
wandered far from his friends, he rode as a stranger. At every
ford or stream where the knight crossed over, it was a wonder if
he did not find a foe facing him, and one so evil and so fierce that
he was compelled to fight. The man encountered so many strange
things there among the hills, that it would be too difficult to re-
count the tenth part of them. Sometimes he fought with dragons,
and with wolves also, sometimes with forest trolls, who lived
in the rocks, with bulls and bears too, and at other times with
boars, and ogres who pursued him from the fells above; had he
not been bold and unflinching and served God, without doubt

Douteles he hade ben ded and dreped ful ofte. 725

For werre wrathed hym not so much, pat wynter was wors,
When þe colde cler water fro þe cloudez schadde,
And fies er hit falle myzt to þe fale erpe.

Ner slayn wyth þe slete he sleped in his ymes 730
Mo nyzteþ þen innoghe in naked rokkez,
Þer as claterande fro þe crest þe colde borne rennez,

And henged heze ouer his hede in hard iisse-ikkles,
Þus in peryl and payne and plytes ful harde
Bi contray caryez þis knyzt tyl Krystmasse euen,
al one. 735

Þe knyzt wel þat tyde
To Mary made his mone,
Þat ho hym red to ryde
And wyse hym to sum wone.

Bi a mounte on þe morne meryly he rydes 740
Into a forest ful dep, þat ferly waty wylyde,
Hiȝe hilleȝ on vche a halue, and holwodeȝ vnder

Of hore okeȝ ful hoge a hundreth togeder;
Þe hasel and þe hazborne were harted al samen,
With roȝe ragged mosse rayled aywhere, 745
With mony bryddeȝ vnþyþe vpon bare twyȝes,
Þat pitosly þer piped for pyne of þe colde.

Þe gome vpon Gryngolet glydeȝ hem vnder,
Þurȝ mony misy and myre, mon al hym one,
Carande for his costes, lest he ne keuet schulde 750
To se þe setryse of þat syre, þat on þat self myzt
Of a burde waty borne oure baret to quelle.

And þefore sykyng he sayde, 'I beseeche þe, lorde,
And Mary, þat is myldest moder so dere,
Of sum herber þer heȝly I myzt here masse 755
Ande þy matyneȝ to-morne, mekely I ask,
And þerto prestly I pray my pater and aue
and crede.'

He rode in his prayere
And cryed for his mysdede;
He sayned hym in sybes sere 760
And sayde, 'Cros Kryst me spede!'

he would have been struck down and killed many a time. Yet fighting did not so greatly trouble him, the winter weather was worse, when the cold, clear rain was shed from the clouds, and froze before it could fall on the faded earth. Almost slain by the sleet, he slept in his armour night after night amongst the naked rocks, where the cold burn came crashing down from the cliff-top, and hung high above his head in hard icicles. So through pain and peril and the greatest hardships this knight went riding across the country until Christmas Eve, all alone. Then the knight duly made his prayer to Mary, that she would direct his course and guide him to some dwelling.

On the morning of that day he rode in good heart over a mountain and deep into a forest that was wonderfully wild, with high hills on every side, and woods at their feet of hundreds of great, grey oaks; the hazel and the hawthorn were all tangled together, hung all over with rough, shaggy moss, with many mournful birds upon their bare branches, piping pathetically there, in pain from the cold. The knight upon Gryngolet passed beneath them, through many a bog and mire, a man all alone, concerned about his religious duties, lest he should not manage to see the service of the Lord, who on that very night was born of a virgin to end our troubles. And so, sighing, he said, 'I beseech you, Lord, and Mary, your most dear and gentle mother, for some shelter where I may devoutly hear Mass and the matins of your feast day to-morrow, meekly I ask it, and in preparation I here and now recite my Paternoster and Ave Maria and Creed.' He rode on as he prayed and lamented his sins; he crossed himself repeatedly and said, 'Christ's cross be my aid!'

'Nay, for soþe,' quop þe segge, and sesed hys helme
 And hatz hit of hendely and þe habel þonkkez,
 'I haf soioined sadly; sele yow bytyde,
 And he zelde hit yow zere þat zarkkez al menskes!
 And comandeþ me to þat cortays, your comlych fere,
 Boþe þat on and þat oper, myn honoured ladyez,
 þat þus hor knyzt wyth hor kest han konyntly bigyled.
 Bot hit is no ferty þaz a fole madde
 And þurz wyles of wymmen be wonen to sorze,
 For so watþ Adam in erde with one bygyled,
 And Salamon with fele sere, and Samson eftsones—
 Dalyda dalt hym hys wyrde—and Dauyth þerafter
 Watþ blended with Barsabe, þat much bale poled.
 Now þese were wrathed wyth her wyles, hit were a wyne huge
 To luf hom wel and leue hem not, a leude þat coupe.
 For þes wer forme þe freest, þat folzed alle þe sele
 Excellently of alle þyse oper, vnder heuenryche
 þat mused;
 And alle þay were biwyled
 With wymmen þat þay vsed.
 Þaz I be now bigyled,
 Me þink me burde be excused.

2410
2415
2421
2425

'Bot your gordel,' quop Gawain 'God yow forzelde!
 þat wyl I welde wyth gud wylle, not for þe wyne golde, 2430
 Ne þe saynt, ne þe sylk, ne þe syde pendaundes,
 For wele ne for worchyp, ne for þe wlonk werkkez,
 Bot in synne of my surfet I schal se hit ofte,
 When I ride in renoun, remorde to myseluen
 þe faut and þe fayntyse of þe flesche crabbed,
 How tender hit is to entyse teches of fylþe;
 And þus, quen pryde schal me pryke for prowes of armes,
 þe loke to þis luf-lace schal lepe my hert.
 Bot on I wolde yow pray, displeses yow neuer:
 Syn ze be lorde of þe zonder londe þer I haf lent inne
 Wyth yow wyth worschyp—þe wyze hit yow zelde
 þat vphaldeþ þe heuen and on hyz sittez—
 How nome ze yowre ryzt nome, and penne no more?
 'þat schal I telle þe trwly,' quop þat oper þenne;

2440

'No, indeed,' said the knight, and, seizing his helmet and courteously removing it, he thanked the lord, 'I have stayed long enough; good fortune befall you, and may He who bestows all honours reward you fully! And commend me to that gracious lady, your lovely wife, both to her and to the other also, those ladies whom I honour, who have so cleverly deceived their knight with their trickery. But it is no wonder if a fool behaves foolishly and is brought to grief through the wiles of women, for Adam while on earth was thus beguiled by one, and Solomon by many different women, and also Samson—Delilah dealt him his doom—and David was similarly deluded by Bathsheba and suffered great misery. Now since these were brought to grief by the wiles of women, it would be far better to love them well and trust them never, if one only could. For these were the noblest men of old, those who were pre-eminently favoured by fortune, above all others who lived beneath the heavens; and all these were deceived by women with whom they had relations. If now I am deluded, it seems to me I ought to be excused.

'As for your girdle,' said Gawain, 'God give you thanks for it! That will I keep willingly, not for the sake of its fair gold, nor for the belt itself, the silk, or the dangling pendants, nor for its costliness, for its worth, nor for its splendid workmanship, but in token of my transgression I shall often look at it, when I ride in honour, to remind myself with remorse of the sinfulness and the frailty of the erring flesh, how liable it is to catch the plague spots of sin; and so, when pride of my prowess in arms shall stir in me, one glance at this love-lace will humble my heart. But one thing I would beg of you, do not be offended at it: since you are the lord of that land in which I stayed with you and was honourably entertained—may the One who upholds the heavens and is throned on high reward you for it—how are you called by your proper name? and then I will ask you nothing more.' 'That I will tell you truly,' said the other in reply; 'in this country I am called

'Bertilak de Hautdesert I hat in pis londe.
 2445
 Purz myzt of Morgne la Faye, pat in my hous lenges,
 And koyntyse of clerye bi craftes wel lerned,
 pe maystrés of Merlyn mony hatz taken—
 For ho hatz dalt drwry ful dere sumtyme
 With pat conable klerk, pat knowes alle your knyztiez
 2450
 at hame;
 Morgne pe goddes
 perfore hit is hir name:
 Weldez non so hyze hawtesse
 pat ho ne con make ful tame—
 2455

'Ho wayned me vpon pis wyse to your wynnne halle
 For to assay pe surquidré, gif hit soth were
 Pat rennes of pe grete renoun of pe Rounde Table.
 Ho wayned me pis wonder your wytegez to reue,
 For to haf greued Gaynour and gart hir to dyze
 2460
 With glopnung of pat ilke gome pat gostlych speked
 With his hede in his honde bifore pe hyze table.
 Pat is ho pat is at home, pe auncian lady;
 Ho is euen pyn aunt, Arpurez half-suster,
 pe duches dozter of Tynntagelle, pat dere Ver after
 Hade Arpur vpon, pat apel is nowpe.
 2465

perfore I epe þe, hapel, to com to pyn aunt,
 Make myty in my hous; my meny þe louies,
 And I wol þe as wel, wyze, bi my faythe,
 As any gome vnder God, for þy grete traupe.
 2470
 And he nikked hym naye, he nolde bi no wayes.
 Pay acolen and kyssen, and kennen ayþer oþer
 To þe pryne of paradise, and parten ryzt þere
 on coolede;
 2475

Gawayn on blonk ful bene
 To þe kynges burz buskez bolde,
 And þe knyzt in þe enker-grene
 Whiderwarde-so-euer he wolde.

2448 hatz: MS ho
 2461 glopnung: MS gopnyng gome: MS gomen
 2472 and kennen supplied

Bertilak de Hautdesert. Through the power of Morgan le Fay,
 who dwells in my house, and by her wiles has learned much skill
 in magic lore, has acquired many of the miraculous powers of
 Merlin—for she once had very intimate love-dealings with that
 accomplished wizard, as all your knights at home will know; and
 so Morgan the goddess is her name; there is no one so arrogantly
 proud whom she cannot humble utterly—

'It was she who sent me to your splendid hall in this guise to put
 your presumption to the test, to see whether what is rumoured
 about the great renown of the Round Table were true. She sent
 this marvel to rob you all of your wits, in order to shock
 Guinevere and cause her to die of terror at that man who, like a
 phantom, stood talking before the high table with his head in his
 hand. That venerable lady in my home is she; she is actually your
 aunt, Arthur's half-sister, daughter of the Duchess of Tintagel,
 upon whom the noble Uther later begot Arthur, who is now
 king. And so I entreat you, sir, to come to your aunt, and make
 merry in my house; my household all love you, and I, sir, bear
 you as much good will, on my honour, as I do any man on
 earth, because of your great integrity.' But Gawain refused him,
 saying he would not on any account. Embracing and kissing,
 they commended each other to the Prince of Paradise and
 parted right there amidst the snow; Gawain on his fine steed
 quickly hastening to the king's castle, and the knight in green
 going wheresoever he wished.