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Percy Lubbock

Excerpt

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SIR THOMAS MALORY. 15th century

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

Leave this mourning and weeping, said the king, for all this will not avail me, for wit thou well an I might live myself, the death of Sir Lucan would grieve me evermore; but my time hieth fast, said the king. Therefore, said Arthur unto Sir Bedivere, take thou Excalibur, my good sword, and go with it to yonder water side, and when thou comest there I charge thee throw my sword in that water, and come again and tell me what thou there seest. My lord, said Bedivere, your commandment shall be done, and lightly bring you word again.

So Sir Bedivere departed, and by the way he beheld that noble sword, that the pommel and the haft was all of precious stones; and then he said to himself: If I throw this rich sword in the water, thereof shall never come good, but harm and loss. And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree. And so, as soon as he might, he came again unto the king, and said he had been at the water, and had thrown the sword in the water. What saw thou there? said the king. Sir, he said, I saw nothing

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but waves and winds. That is untruly said of thee, said the king, therefore go thou lightly again, and do my commandment; as thou art to me lief and dear, spare not, but throw it in. Then Sir Bedivere returned again, and took the sword in his hand; and then him thought sin and shame to throw away that noble sword, and so eft he hid the sword, and returned again, and told to the king that he had been at the water, and done his commandment. What saw thou there? said the king. Sir, he said, I saw nothing but the waters wap and the waves wan. Ah, traitor untrue, said King Arthur, now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have weened that, thou that hast been to me so lief and dear? and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the richness of the sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee, I shall slay thee with mine own hands; for thou wouldst for my rich sword see me dead.

Then Sir Bedivere departed, and went to the sword, and lightly took it up, and went to the water side; and there he bound the girdle about the hilts, and then he threw the sword as far into the water as he might; and there came an arm and an hand above the water and met it, and caught it, and so shook it thrice and brandished, and then vanished away the hand with the sword in the water. So Sir Bedivere came again to the king, and told him what he saw. Alas, said the king, help me hence, for I dread me I have tarried over long. Then Sir Bedivere took the king upon his back, and so went with

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him to that water side. And when they were at the water side, even fast by the bank hove a little barge with many fair ladies in it, and among them all was a queen, and all they had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur. Now put me into the barge, said the king. And so he did softly; and there received him three queens with great mourning; and so they set them down, and in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head. And then that queen said: Ah, dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me? alas, this wound on your head hath caught over-much cold. And so then they rowed from the land, and Sir Bedivere beheld all those ladies go from him. Then Sir Bedivere cried: Ah my lord Arthur, what shall become of me, now ye go from me and leave me here alone among mine enemies? Comfort thyself, said the king, and do as well as thou mayst, for in me is no trust for to trust in; for I will into the vale of Avilion to heal me of my grievous wound: and if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul. But ever the queens and ladies wept and shrieked, that it was pity to hear. And as soon as Sir Bedivere had lost the sight of the barge, he wept and wailed, and so took the forest; and so he went all that night, and in the morning he was ware betwixt two holts hoar, of a chapel and an hermitage.

Then was Sir Bedivere glad, and thither he went; and when he came into the chapel, he saw where lay an hermit grovelling on all four, there fast by a tomb was new graven. When the hermit saw Sir Bedivere he knew him well, for he was but little to-fore Bishop of Canterbury....Sir, said Bedivere, what man is there interred that

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ye pray so fast for? Fair son, said the hermit, I wot not verily, but by deeming. But this night, at midnight, here came a number of ladies, and brought hither a dead corpse, and prayed me to bury him; and here they offered an hundred tapers, and they gave me an hundred besants. Alas, said Sir Bedivere, that was my lord King Arthur, that here lieth buried in this chapel. Then Sir Bedivere swooned; and when he awoke he prayed the hermit he might abide with him still there, to live with fasting and prayers. For from hence will I never go, said Sir Bedivere, by my will, but all the days of my life here to pray for my lord Arthur. Ye are welcome to me, said the hermit, for I know ye better than ye ween that I do. Ye are the bold Bedivere, and the full noble duke, Sir Lucan the Butler, was your brother. Then Sir Bedivere told the hermit all as ye have heard to-fore. So there bode Sir Bedivere with the hermit that was to-fore Bishop of Canterbury, and there Sir Bedivere put upon him poor clothes, and served the hermit full lowly in fasting and in prayers.

Thus of Arthur I find never more written in books that be authorised, nor more of the very certainty of his death heard I never read, but thus was he led away in a ship wherein were three queens....Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say it shall be so, but rather I will say: here in this world he changed his life. But many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse: HIC JACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM, REXQUE FUTURUS.

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Thus leave I here Sir Bedivere with the hermit, that dwelled that time in a chapel beside Glastonbury, and there was his hermitage. And so they lived in their prayers, and fastings, and great abstinence.

(Morte Darthur, Bk XXI. c. v.)

**SIR JOHN BOURCHIER, LORD
BERNERS. 1467—1533**

**DEATH OF ROBERT BRUCE, KING OF
SCOTLAND, 1327**

The foresaid peace which was purchased between England and Scotland was to endure three years; and in the meantime it fortuneth that King Robert of Scotland was right sore aged and feeble; for he was greatly charged with the great sickness, so that there was no way with him but death. And when he felt that his end drew near, he sent for such barons and lords of his realm as he trusted best, and shewed them how there was no remedy with him, but he must needs leave this transitory life: commanding them on the faith and truth that they owed him, truly to keep the realm, and aid the young prince David his son, and that when he were of age, they should obey him, and crown him king, and to marry him in such a place as was convenient for his estate. Then he called to him the gentle knight Sir William Douglas, and said before all the lords, "Sir William, my dear friend, ye know well that I have had

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much ado in my days, to uphold and sustain the right of this realm; and when I had most ado, I made a solemn vow, the which as yet I have not accomplished, whereof I am right sorry: the which was, if I might achieve and make an end of all my wars, so that I might once have brought this realm in rest and peace, then I promised in my mind to have gone and warred on Christ's enemies, adversaries to our holy Christian faith. To this purpose mine heart hath ever intended, but our Lord would not consent thereto; for I have had so much ado in my days, and now in my last enterprise I have taken such a malady that I cannot escape. And sith it is so that my body cannot go, nor achieve that my heart desireth, I will send the heart instead of the body, to accomplish mine avow. And because I know not in all my realm no knight more valiant than ye be, nor of body so well furnished to accomplish mine avow instead of myself, therefore I require you, mine own dear especial friend, that ye will take on you this voyage, for the love of me, and to acquit my soul against my Lord God; for I trust so much in your nobleness and truth, that, an ye will take on you, I doubt not but that ye shall achieve it; and then shall I die in more ease and quiet, so that it be done in such manner as I shall declare unto you. I will that as soon as I am trespassed out of this world, that ye take my heart out of my body, and embalm it, and take of my treasure as ye shall think sufficient for that enterprise, both for yourself and such company as ye will take with you, and present my heart to the Holy Sepulchre, whereas our Lord lay, seeing my body cannot come there; and take with you such company and purveyance as shall be

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appertaining to your estate. And wheresoever ye come, let it be known how ye carry with you the heart of King Robert of Scotland, at his instance and desire, to be presented to the Holy Sepulchre." Then all the lords that heard these words, wept for pity. And when this knight, Sir William Douglas, might speak for weeping, he said, "Ah, gentle and noble king, a hundred times I thank your grace of the great honour that ye do to me, sith of so noble and great treasure ye give me in charge: and, sir, I shall do with a glad heart all that ye have commanded me, to the best of my true power; howbeit I am not worthy nor sufficient to achieve such a noble enterprise." Then the king said, "Ah, gentle knight, I thank you, so that ye will promise to do it." "Sir," said the knight, "I shall do it undoubtedly, by the faith that I owe to God and to the order of Knighthood." "Then I thank you," said the king, "for now shall I die in more ease of my mind, sith that I know that the most worthy and sufficient knight of my realm shall achieve for me, the which I could never attain unto." And thus, soon after this, noble Robert de Bruce, king of Scotland, trespassed out of this uncertain world, and his heart was taken out of his body and embalmed, and honourably he was interred in the abbey of Dunfermline, in the year of our Lord God MCCCXXVII, the seventh day of the month of November.

(*The Chronicle of Froissart*, c. xx.)

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THE SCHOOLMASTER

I do gladly agree with all good Schoolmasters in these points: to have children brought to good perfectness in learning: to all honesty in manners: to have all faults rightly amended: to have every vice severally corrected: but for the order and way that leadeth rightly to these points, we somewhat differ. For commonly, many schoolmasters,—some, as I have seen, more, as I have heard tell,—be of so crooked a nature, as, when they meet with a hard-witted scholar, they rather break him than bow him, rather mar him than mend him. For when the schoolmaster is angry with some other matter, then will he soonest fall to beat his scholar: and though he himself should be punished for his folly, yet must he beat some scholar for his pleasure: though there be no cause for him to do so, nor yet fault in the scholar to deserve so. These, ye will say, be fond schoolmasters, and few they be that be found to be such. They be fond indeed, but surely over many such be found everywhere. But this will I say, that even the wisest of your great beaters do as oft punish nature as they do correct faults. Yea, many times, the better nature is sorer punished; for if one by quickness of wit take his lesson readily, another by hardness of wit taketh it not so speedily: the first is always commended, the other is commonly punished; when a wise schoolmaster should rather discreetly consider the right disposition of both

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their natures, and not so much weigh what either of them is able to do now, as what either of them is likely to do hereafter. For this I know, not only by reading of books in my study, but also by experience of life abroad in the world, that those which be commonly the wisest, the best learned, and best men also, when they be old, were never commonly the quickest of wit when they were young.

SIR FRANCIS DRAKE. 1540?—1596

DRAKE AT NOMBRE DE DIOS

Presently after this, a mighty shower of rain, with a terrible storm of thunder and lightning, fell, which poured down so vehemently (as it usually doth in those countries) that before we could recover the shelter of a certain shade or pent-house at the western end of the King's Treasure House (which seemeth to have been built there of purpose to avoid sun and rain), some of our bow-strings were wet, and some of our match and powder hurt; which while we were careful of, to refurnish and supply, divers of our men harping on the reports lately brought us, were muttering of the forces of the town; which our Captain perceiving, told them that "he had brought them to the mouth of the Treasure of the World; if they would want it, they might henceforth blame nobody but themselves."

And therefore as soon as the storm began to assuage

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of his fury (which was a long half-hour), willing to give his men no longer leisure to demur of those doubts, nor yet allow the enemy farther respite to gather themselves together, he stepped forward, commanding his brother, with John Oxenham and the company appointed them, to break the King's Treasure House: the rest to follow him, to keep the strength of the Market Place, till they had despatched the business for which they came.

But as he stepped forward, his strength and sight and speech failed him, and he began to faint for want of blood, which, as then we perceived, had in great quantity issued upon the sand, out of a wound received in his leg in the first encounter; whereby, though he felt some pain, yet (for that he perceived divers of the company, having already gotten many good things, to be very ready to take all occasions of winding themselves out of that conceited danger) would he not have it known to any, till this his fainting against his will betrayed it: the blood having first filled the very prints which our footsteps made, to the greater dismay of all our company, who thought it not credible that one man should be able to spare so much blood and live.

And therefore, even they which were willing to have adventured the most for so fair a booty, would in no case hazard their Captain's life; but (having given him somewhat to drink wherewith he recovered himself, and having bound his scarf about his leg, for the stopping of the blood) entreated him to be content to go with them aboard, there to have his wound searched and dressed, and then to return on shore again if he thought good.

This when they could not persuade him unto (as