

ÉREC & ÉNIDE



CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES

A Translation into English by

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With Illustrations by

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POETRY IN TRANSLATION

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ABOUT THIS WORK

Chrétien de Troyes' Arthurian Romances, written in the late 12th-century, provide a vital link between the Classical Roman poets, Ovid in particular, and the later medieval world of Dante and Chaucer. The five major verse tales, namely Érec and Énide (c1170), Cligès (c1176), Yvain or the Knight of the Lion (before 1181) Lancelot or the Knight of the Cart (before 1181), and Perceval (before 1190), introduce motifs and plot elements that recur frequently in later literature. Well-structured, lively, and witty the tales were written for a sophisticated courtly audience, and the five stories considered together gave expression to the reality and the deeper ideals of French chivalry. Chrétien appears to have used themes culled from French and British sources, while characters such as Lancelot, and features such as the Holy Grail appear for the first time in European literature in his work. Here translated in rhyming couplets to mirror the original, rather than in unrepresentative prose, is a fresh treatment of one of France's and Europe's major poets.



LINES 1-26 CHRÉTIEN'S INTRODUCTION

THE rustic proverb says the wise
Know that many a thing's despised
That is far finer than is thought.
Therefore the wise man ought
To make best use of all he can,
For he who ignores that plan
May easily neglect a treasure
That would provide great pleasure.
Therefore, says Chrétien de Troyes,
It makes good sense that each employ
His wits to study, strives to excel
At learning well, and speaking well;
And he, from a tale of adventure,
Extracts an argument, at leisure,
Whereby it is proved and known
That he to wisdom cannot own
Who does not his skill embrace
As long as God grants him grace.
Of Érec, the son of Lac, the tale,
Marred and ruined, without fail,
Before kings and nobles though,
By those who'd earn a living so.
And now I will begin the story,
Twill live on in the memory,
As long as Christendom exists:
For boldly Chrétien so insists.

LINES 27-66 KING ARTHUR'S COURT

ONE Easter day, in springtime fair,
At Cardigan, his castle there,
King Arthur held his court, I own
Never one so rich was known;
Many a good knight all told,
Steadfast, and brave, and bold,
Rich ladies and fair young things,
Gentle, lovely daughters of kings.
But well before the court dispersed,
Arthur spoke of his longing, first,
To hunt the white stag, so maintain
The ancient customs in his domain.
My lord Gawain was sore displeased
When he heard the king's decree.
'Sire!' he said, 'from such a chase
You'll gain neither thanks nor grace.
We all know, for such are the tales,
What hunting the white stag entails.
Whoever can kill the white stag, his
Task, of necessity, is then to kiss
The fairest maiden the court knows,
Whatever the ill that from it flows.
And much trouble would come I fear,
For there are five hundred ladies here,
Maidens of high rank, I surmise,
Daughters of kings, gentle and wise,
And never a one that lacks a friend,
A valiant knight who would contend,
Since each man is a steadfast knight,
That, whether he be wrong or right,

She who's his lady is far the best
Of all, the gentlest and loveliest.'
'The king replied,' I know it well,
But I must still maintain my will.
For none should contradict a word
The king has spoken, once tis heard.
Tomorrow morning, in grand array,
We shall seek the white stag at bay,
In the forest of adventure, and see
As delightful a chase there as may be.'

LINES 67-114 THE HUNT FOR THE WHITE STAG

SO the meet was arranged, they say,
For the morrow, at break of day.
And on the morrow, when it was light,
The king arose, early and bright.
In a short hunting-coat he dressed
Ready to venture into the forest,
Ordering the knights to be present,
The horses, and their accoutrements.
Now all were mounted, and depart,
With every bow, and every dart.
After them, there came the queen,
A single lady with her was seen;
A maiden she, a king's daughter,
On a white palfrey went beside her.
And after them a lone knight came,
Riding full swiftly, Érec his name.
He was a knight of the Round Table,
Among those at court most notable.
Of all the knights assembled there,
None won more praise anywhere;

He was so handsome, fair to see,
None could be found fairer than he.
Handsome, courteous and brave,
Not yet twenty-five years of age;
Never, in all time, lived a greater
Flower of knighthood, then or later.
What shall I say of all his virtue?
Mounted on his steed he issued
Forth, clad in an ermine cloak,
Gallopng swiftly down the road,
Wearing his flowery tunic, noble
As any found in Constantinople.
He had hose fashioned of brocade,
Well cut, and beautifully made,
With golden spurs well-secured,
Tall in his stirrups, he rode abroad,
Weapon-less for what might befall,
Except a sword, and that was all.
At a turn of the road between,
There he came upon the queen:
'Lady', he said, 'if it should please,
Along this road I'll keep company,
I've no other role in this affair,
Than to follow you, here and there.'
And the queen thanked him freely:
'Fair friend, indeed your company,
Is what I like best, of all I see,
No better man could ride with me.'

LINES 115-124 ÉREC ACCOMPANIES THE QUEEN

THEN riding along at a fair rate,
They came upon the forest straight.
The party that had gone on before
Had started the White Stag for sure.
They blow the horn, raise the cry,
The hounds, after the stag, go by,
Baying, hurtling to the attack,
The archers running at their back.
Before them all there rides the king,
On a Spanish hunter, galloping.

LINES 125-154 THE KNIGHT, THE DAMSEL AND THE DWARF

QUEEN Guinevere, among the trees,
Listened for hounds running free,
Beside her Érec, and her maid there
Who was most courteous and fair.
But the hunters were now far away,
Striving to bring the stag to bay,
And nothing of them could be heard,
No horn, hound or huntsman stirred,
However intently they gave ear,
No hunting horn could they hear,
Never a hound gave voice again.
All three riders, as one, drew rein
Beside the roadway, in a clearing;
But they had not long been resting,

When they saw a knight appear,
Armed, astride his horse, draw near,
Shield upraised, and hand on lance.
The queen afar watched his advance.
Behind him, on his right, was riding
A fair lady of noble bearing,
And before him went a sorry hack
With a dwarf mounted on its back,
And in his hand the dwarf carried
A lash with every strand knotted.
Queen Guinevere at the sight
Of the fine and handsome knight,
Wished to know who he might be,
He himself, and his fair lady.
So she asked her maid to go,
And ask, swiftly, that she might know.

**LINES 155-274 ÉREC IS LASHED, AND VOWS
TO PURSUE THE KNIGHT**

MAIDEN,' the queen thus cried,
'That knight who there does ride,
Tell him now to attend on me,
And with him his fair lady.'
So the maiden, straight away,
Towards the knight, took her way,
The dwarf came on to meet her,
Wielding the lash to greet her.
'Halt, maiden,' the dwarf cried,
He being full of spite inside,
'What seek you of my master?
You shall advance no farther!
'Dwarf,' she cried, 'let me alight!

I would speak with yonder knight;
For I am sent here by the queen.’
The dwarf who was low and mean,
Opposed her passing by, instead,
‘You have no business here,’ he said,
‘Get you gone. You have no right
To speak with so fine a knight.’
The maiden, as a last recourse,
Tried to pass him by main force;
Holding the dwarf in low esteem,
Because he was so low and mean.
But the dwarf wielded his lash,
As she attempted to ride past;
He raised the lash towards her face,
She lifts her arm to shield the place,
He strikes again, the blows land
Quite openly on her bare hand;
Striking its back so fiercely too,
Her hand turns black and blue.
The maid, unable to do more,
Willing or no, returns full sore;
Returns to the queen and sighs,
Tears streaming from her eyes,
Pouring freely down her face.
The queen retreats a pace.
Seeing her maid in danger,
All turns to grief and anger.
‘Oh! Érec, good friend,’ she said,
‘I sorrow greatly for my maid;
The dwarf inflicted such pain,
That knight must be a villain,
Who lets harm befall so pure
Rare and beautiful a creature.
Eric, my good friend, go
To the knight, tell him, lo,

To come to me, and swiftly,
I would know him, and his lady.’
Érec sped away from her,
Giving his horse the spur,
Straight towards the knight.
The vile dwarf, full of spite,
Advances, so they must meet.
‘Vassal,’ the dwarf cries, ‘Retreat!
I know not what you do here,
Turn back, my advice is clear.’
‘Dwarf,’ Érec cried, ‘now flee,
Provoking, foul and contrary,
Let me pass!’ – ‘You shall not go!’
‘I will do so.’ – ‘I tell you, no!’
Érec thrusts the dwarf aside.
The dwarf filled with evil pride
With his lash, all knotted so,
Strikes Érec a mighty blow.
That blow wounds Érec badly
His neck and face scarred sadly,
Brow to chin, the marks show
Where Érec received the blow.
He knew he could take no action
And, in that way, win satisfaction;
For he saw the knight was armed,
Arrogant, and intent on harm;
Thinking he might swiftly fall,
Were he to touch the dwarf at all.
Rashness proves no good service.
Thus Érec was wise not to perish,
But retreat; he could do no more.
‘My lady, all’s worse than before,’
He cried, ‘this dwarf, this disgrace,
Has sadly scarred my whole face.
I dared strike him not; although

For that I merit no reproach,
Since I am not well-armed to fight,
And then I mistrust this knight,
Who seems both base and violent.
He'd not, to me, prove lenient,
But would slay me, out of pride,
Yet I promise that I shall try
To take vengeance on the same,
For my disgrace, or die of shame.
Arms and armour, too far distant,
Fail my need, at this instant,
For I left them at Cardigan,
This morning, when our ride began.
If I seek for them there, I might
Never meet more with this knight,
Who is riding away so swiftly,
Departing from us so speedily.
I must follow him, far or near,
Or fail to challenge him, I fear,
As soon as I find arms and armour,
Whether to purchase or to borrow.
If I find someone to equip me,
This knight will find me ready
To engage, and him assail.
And be certain, without fail,
That we will fight till either he
Is conquered, or conquers me;
And if I win, then I well may
Return to you, by the third day.
You will see me home again,
Whether in joy or in sad pain.
Lady, I can no more delay,
I must now be on my way.
I go. To God I commend you'
And the queen does likewise, too,

Five hundred times commend him
To God, that He might defend him.

**LINES 275-310 ARTHUR KILLS THE WHITE STAG:
GAWAIN IS TROUBLED**

ÉREC parts from the queen,
Pursues the knight morn and e'en.
In the wood, the queen remains
Where the king the stag attains.
At the taking of the creature
The king precedes every other;
The white stag is taken and slain.
And all proceed to return again.
Carrying the stag they ride along,
Until they come to Cardigan.
After supper, when the lords
Were all joyful, at the boards,
The king, as custom maintained,
Since the stag was duly slain,
Said he would bestow the kiss,
On which the custom did insist.
Through the court a murmur ran:
They swore and vowed, to a man,
That such could never be endured
Without use of ashen lance or sword.
Each vows, chivalrously, to contend
That his very own fair friend,
Is the loveliest in that place.
Thus evil words now flow apace.
And when Gawain heard them all,
Know that their speech did so appal,
He spoke to the king: 'Your knights,

Sire, are troubled, regarding this,
For all the talk is of that kiss,
That it shall not be given outright,
Without an outcry, and a fight.’
And thus the king wisely replies:
‘Fair nephew, Gawain, then, advise,’
Save my honour and dignity!
For I’ve no wish for savagery.

LINES 311-341 ARTHUR TAKES COUNSEL

TO the grand council Gawain brought
The finest nobles of the court,
And King Yder arrived also,
The first to be summoned so.
And after him King Coadalant,
Who was most wise and valiant.
Kay and Girflet, they came too,
King Amauguin, and a fair few
Other knights and nobles share,
With them, the gathering there.
The council had but thus begun
When the queen too made one.
She then did her adventure cite,
Whereby she met the armed knight,
In the forest, in plain sight,
And a dwarf, base and slight,
Who, with his lash, did land
Fierce blows on her maid’s bare hand,
And struck at Érec likewise,
Wounding him, before her eyes,
How he pursued that very same
To seek revenge, or die of shame,

Promising that return he should,
On the third day, if all proved good.
'Sire,' said the queen to the king,
Listen a while, advice I bring!
Should these lords not resist,
Postpone this matter of the kiss,
Until the third day, when he
Shall have returned.' None disagree.
And this the king approves also.

**LINES 342-392 ÉREC FOLLOWS THE KNIGHT
TO A WALLED TOWN**

ÉREC meanwhile made to follow
The armed knight, and his vile limb,
The dwarf who had wounded him,
Until they came to a fine town,
Well-sited, and walled around.
They entered the gate outright,
And found there many a knight
And full many a joyous lady,
A host of the fine and lovely.
Some were feeding, after the fashion,
Sparrow hawks and moulting falcons;
Others were airing on their walks,
Tercels, mewed birds, fledgling hawks;
Others played dice, games of chance,
Others tric-trac or chess advance,
In every place, where they are able.
And the grooms, before the stable,
Rub horses down, wield the combs.
Ladies are dressing in their rooms.
When they see approaching, though,

The armed knight, whom they know,
The dwarf, the lady, they all come
Three by three, to show welcome.
The knight they salute and greet,
Yet to Érec they pay no heed;
Not knowing who he might be.
Érec followed each step, closely,
The knight took through the town.
Until the knight a lodging found.
When Érec saw him lodged at last,
Then, joyously, he hurried past,
In a little while noting where
A freeman sat upon a stair,
A vassal, not young in years
Yet still handsome, it appears,
A comely man with white hair,
Pleasing, frank, and debonair.
There he reclined, on his own,
Deep in thought, and quite alone.
Érec took him for an honest man,
Who might lodge him near at hand.
He entered the yard through the gate,
The freeman did not hesitate;
Before Érec could say a word,
The freeman greeted him: 'Fair sir,
Welcome to my home! If you
Deign to lodge with me, then view
The house here, readily supplied.'
'My thanks to you,' Eric replied.
'For that sole reason did I come,
This night do I require a room.'

LINES 393-410 HIS HOST SUMMONS HIS WIFE

ÉREC descends from his steed,
His host grips the bridle and leads
The creature; Érec goes on before.
The man does his guest great honour.
He summons his wife, and calls
To his daughter, fairest among all,
Both were working in their room;
Though at what I dare not assume.
The lady then appeared to view,
With her lovely daughter, who
Dressed in a soft white under-robe,
Its wide skirts hanging in folds,
Had over it a white linen dress,
Such her attire no more no less.
But the dress was so very old
That its sides were full of holes.
Poor as her clothes were without,
She was lovely, without a doubt.

Érec and Énide



'The lady then appeared to view, with her lovely daughter'
Enid (p49, 1868) - Baron Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) and
Gustave Doré (1832-1883)
The Internet Archive

LINES 411-458 THE BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER

THIS daughter was very beautiful.
For Nature had used all her skill
When she had set to forming her.
Nature herself had marvelled more
Than five hundred times, at how
On this occasion she could endow
A living thing which such beauty.
She could never, as successfully,
Create such a sample of loveliness,
In any form she might now address.
Nature bore witness too that never
Had such a rare and lovely creature,
Been seen in all this world before.
Not Iseult the Fair owned to more
Radiant shining tresses than hers,
With which there was no compare.
Her face and brow brighter, paler
Than lily, yet by a marvel there
The pallor suffused with crimson,
A fresh and delicate vermilion,
Which Nature alone bestowed,
Lit her face, her features glowed.
Her eyes so radiant and fine
Like two stars appeared to shine.
God has never formed a better
Nose, or mouth, or eyes than hers.
What can I say of her beauty?
She was made, in all verity,
To be observed, for one might
Gaze at her as in mirror bright

One gazes at oneself, in truth.
So she issued forth, in sooth:
When she beheld this knight
Who had never met her sight,
She retreated one small pace,
For she did not know his face.
(Hers blushed and turned red,
Inclining, modestly, instead.)
Érec for his part was amazed
When such beauty met his gaze,
Seeing such beauty as was there,
While his host merely said to her:
'Fair daughter sweet! Lead away
This steed, and have him stay
In our stables along with mine.
Make sure he lacks for nothing fine.
Take off bridle and saddle; be sure
To give him plenty of oats and straw.
Care for him, and comb him neatly,
So he is fit and fine, completely.'

LINES 459-546 THE HOST EXPLAINS HIS POVERTY

THE girl then leads the horse away,
Unties the breast-strap, the array
Of bridle, saddle, leather bands:
Now the horse is in good hands.
For she takes care to strew his bed,
She throws a halter over his head,
Smooths, combs, settles the stranger,
Then she ties him to the manger,
Gives him plenty of oats and hay,
Fresh and sweet in every way,

Before returning to her father.
He cried: 'Dear, sweet daughter!
Take this knight by the hand,
Do him great honour, understand,
By that hand lead him upstairs!'
The maiden did not linger there,
And showing no lack of courtesy,
Led him upstairs, pleasantly.
His wife had already gone before,
To make the room ready, be sure.
Embroidered cushions and spreads,
She had laid on couches and beds.
Now they seat themselves, all three,
Érec and his host, knee to knee,
The maiden opposite their place,
The fire bright before every face.
The freeman no servant paid,
No chamber or kitchen maid,
Except one man-servant alone.
He was in the kitchen; known
For his skill in the art of cooking,
Fowls and roasts there preparing.
He knew full well how to treat
Meat in a pan, birds on the spit.
When all is good and ready,
According to his orders, he
Brings water before they dine.
Board and cloth, bread and wine,
Soon appear, and all's in place.
The supper table they now grace.
There they sit and eat their fill
Of all they might wish, until
Their hunger is quite satisfied,
The table cleared, and set aside.
Érec now directs a question

At his host, the honest freeman.
‘Tell me, good host,’ says he,
‘Why a daughter, who is lovely,
And has wit, whom all admire,
Is dressed in such poor attire?’
‘Good friend,’ the freeman replied,
‘Poverty harms men far and wide,
And even so am I distressed.
I grieve to see her poorly dressed,
Yet I’ve not the means you see,
To dress my daughter fittingly.
I was so long involved in war,
All my land I’ve lost and more,
Everything mortgaged or sold.
Yet she might be dressed in gold,
If I’d let her accept those offers
Others have wished to proffer.
The lord of this township, he
Would have dressed her fittingly,
Shown her every grace and kindness,
She, his niece, might be his countess;
There’s not a lord in this country
However powerful, or wealthy,
Would not take her as his bride,
Willingly, should I so decide;
Yet I await something better,
When God grants her greater honour,
When good fortune brings hither,
Some king or lord who asks for her.
Under heaven who could name
King or lord she would shame,
Who is so lovely none can find
Her peer among all humankind?
Lovely she is, and yet she’s blessed,
Her mind exceeds her loveliness.



*'I was so long involved in war,
all my land I've lost and more'*
Enid (p8, 1868) - Baron Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) and
Gustave Doré (1832-1883)
The Internet Archive

God never made one so clever,
With such an open heart, ever.
When I have my child beside me
I count the world a bauble merely.
She's my solace, and she's my joy,
She's my comfort, and my employ,
She's my wealth, she's my measure,
Nothing I love so, or so treasure.'

LINES 547-690 ÉREC PROPOSES TO CONTEST THE PRIZE

WHEN Érec had attention paid
To all that his host had to say,
He asked why there was found
So noble a crowd in that town,
For there was not a street so poor
It had not a knight at every door,
And there was never a hostelry
Of ladies and squires now free,
Not a place too poor or slight.
'Dear friend, these are the knights,'
His host replied, 'from all around,
All who are in this country found;
And all, whether young or old,
Are come to the feast we hold,
In this very town, tomorrow,
And never a room to beg or borrow.
Tomorrow the noise will be great,
When all are gathered at the fete;
For, before the crowd, is set,
On a silver perch, as fine as yet
A sparrow hawk as ever was seen,
Of five or six moults, I mean,

The best of creatures, I maintain.
He who the sparrow hawk would gain,
Must fight for some favoured lady,
Discreet, and courteous, and lovely.
And if there is a knight so bold
As to hope to win the prize, uphold
His lady's worth as the fairest there,
His lady the sparrow hawk may bear
From its perch, before all eyes,
Unless some other contest the prize.
This is the custom we maintain,
And that is why the nobles came.'
After him Érec spoke, and said:
'Dear host, be you not offended,
But tell me, if you are aware,
Who the armed knight is, there,
His coat of arms azure and gold,
Who passed by, not long ago,
A noble lady went by his side,
And before him there did ride
A crooked dwarf, full of pride.'
To these words his host replied:
'He will gain the sparrow hawk,
At countering him all others balk.
None to contest it will be found,
There'll be neither blow nor wound.
He has gained it the last two years,
And none will challenge him I fear.
And if this year he does so attain,
Ever more that prize he'll retain,
Every year, then, the prize he'll win
And never a knight to challenge him.'
Érec replied, as swift as thought:
'That armed knight, I like him not.
Know that if I had arms and armour

That hawk I'd vie for, on my honour.
Fair host, by your open-handedness,
Your love of battle, and kindness,
I beg you now to counsel me
As to where arms and armour, swiftly,
Might, either old or new, be sought,
Or fine or humble, it matters not.'
And his host answered him freely:
'To lack fair armour would be a pity!
I've arms and armour, rich and fine,
And I will willingly lend you mine;
A triple-linked mail shirt I harbour,
Choice, above five hundred others,
And greaves, fine and rich, to wear
Bright and handsome, light to bear.
The helmet shines brightly too,
And the shield is fresh and new.
Horse, sword, lance, it's my intention
To lend them to you without question;
Now we'll not say another word.'
'Thank you kindly, most gentle sir!
But no better sword do I need
Than that which I brought with me,
Nor another steed but mine own:
I shall do best with him alone.
If you will lend me all the rest
To true kindness that will attest.
Yet one more favour I would earn,
For which I'll render just return,
If God grant I escape, as I might,
With all honour from the fight.'
And his host replied, and freely:
'Demand of me, most certainly,
What your pleasure now may be!
Nothing I have I will deny thee.'

Érec said it would do him honour
To win the hawk for his daughter,
For surely there was never a lady
Showed a hundredth part as lovely;
And were he to attend with her,
He would possess just and proper
Reason to demonstrate, to all eyes,
Hers was the right to take the prize.
Then he said: 'You are unclear
Who it is you have lodging here,
What rank I hold; my birth is high,
The son of a powerful king am I:
My father is King Lac, by name,
As Érec receive Breton acclaim,
And I am of King Arthur's court,
Three years for him have I fought.
I know not if to this fair country
Any report has carried of me,
Of myself and my father too:
But I promise and vow to you,
If you lend me arms and armour,
And will grant me your daughter
When for the sparrow hawk I bid,
I will take her to my land to wed
If God the victory gives me there,
And she shall have a crown to wear.
She shall be queen of three cities.'
'Ah, dear sir! Now, in all verity,
Are you Érec, the son of Lac?'
'That I am,' he gave him back.
His host was filled with delight,
And said: 'Indeed, sir knight
We know of you in this country.
Now I think all the more of thee,
For you are both valiant and brave.'

I can refuse you nothing I have:
All I have is at your command,
I grant you my daughter's hand.'
And then he took her hand in his.
'To you,' he said, 'I grant this gift.'
Érec received her with delight,
Now he had all that he might.
They felt great joy together,
Much joy of it had her father,
And her mother wept with joy.
The maiden was quiet and coy;
But she was pleased and happy
Betrothed to such a man as he,
For he was courteous and brave:
He would reign as king one day,
And she, likewise duly honoured,
As his queen, rich and favoured.

LINES 691-746 ÉREC ARMS FOR THE FIGHT

THEY all sat up late that evening:
Their beds were ready and waiting,
With white sheets and soft pillows.
When conversation ceased to flow,
They went happily to their rest.
But Érec had little sleep at best.
The next day at the break of dawn
He rose swiftly to greet the morn,
And his host too rose with the day.
They both went to church to pray,
And there they listened to a hermit
Chant the mass of the Holy Spirit;
Nor did they neglect an offering.

After the mass sung in their hearing,
They both knelt before the altar,
Returning to the house thereafter.
Érec was eager for the contest,
Seeking his armour, and the rest.
The maiden armed him herself,
Working neither charm nor spell;
She straps the greaves of iron on,
Tightening the deer-hide thongs.
She fastens his coat of fine mail,
Laces the neckpiece without fail,
Sets the bright helm higher, so,
Arming him from head to toe.
She hangs his sword at his side,
Then orders his horse, his pride
And joy, to be brought, so it is:
He leaps up and mounts with ease.
The maiden brings him his shield,
His lance so strong, slow to yield,
Handing him the shield, which he
Hangs at his neck most carefully.
The lance she set in his grasp,
And when he had settled it at last,
To the gracious freeman, said he,
'Good sir, if you please, make ready,
Since your daughter and I must go,
And win the sparrow hawk or no,
As you and I have both agreed.'
His host now saddled a steed,
A bay palfrey, without delay,
To set his daughter on her way.
The harness was nothing much,
For the host's poverty was such
This was the best he could do.
Saddle and bridle he added too.

Freely, lightly dressed, the maid
Mounted her horse, all unafraid,
Without any man to prompt her.
Érec wished to wait no longer:
Off he goes, and both now ride,
The host's daughter at his side,
After him there rides the host,
He and his lady following close.

LINES 747-862 ÉREC ASSERTS HIS LADY'S RIGHT TO THE PRIZE

ÉREC rides with his lance raised,
The lovely girl beside him stays,
All gaze at them as they ride on
The greater and the lesser ones.
The people wonder as they go,
And murmur to each other, so:
'Who is this knight, who is he?
He must be valiant and hardy,
Who leads this maiden along.
His efforts will be worth a song
If he can prove she is of right
The loveliest, should they fight.'
One to another, such the talk:
'She must have the sparrow hawk.'
Here and there, they praise the maid,
While many a one there also said,
'Heavens! Who can this knight be,
That with him has a maid so lovely?'
'I know not' – 'No, nor can I tell.
But his bright helm suits him well,
His coat of mail and his shield,
And his sword of sharpened steel.

He handles his charger adroitly,
With a knight's air, completely.
Well-made, well-formed in limb,
Hand and foot and arm all trim.⁷
While the folk stood and gazed,
Érec and the maid without delay
Took their place before the prize;
The sparrow hawk was to one side,
Awaiting the knight it perched there.
The knight, the dwarf, the lady fair,
Behold, now, they come into view.
For the knight had heard the news,
That another knight was arrived
Who desired to claim the prize,
Though he thought that in that age
There was none with such courage
As to dare to contend with him;
For all believed he'd surely win.
To the people there he was known,
All welcome him, as if to his own,
After him a vast crowd follows:
Knights, squires and their fellows,
And ladies who all hastened on,
And maidens too, they ran along.
The knight, he rode on before,
With the maiden, and the dwarf,
Swiftly he went, in all his pride
Towards the sparrow hawk did ride,
But there was such a crowd about
Of commoners, who heave and shout,
That he could not touch the prize,
Nor even approach to stand beside.
The Count now sought his place,
Driving the people back a pace,
A riding-whip held in his hand;

The crowd part, there they stand,
Then the knight, advancing, said,
Speaking quietly to the maid:
‘My lady, this bird all so fine,
Well-moulted, is rightly thine,
Yours it must be, and justly;
Since you are of rarest beauty.
While I still live, it is for thee,
Come, sweet friend, and swiftly
Take the hawk from its stand.’
The maiden extends her hand
But Érec challenges her in this,
Thinking nothing of the risk.
‘Lady,’ he cries, ‘step aside!
Go seek another, far and wide,
You have no right to this prize.
Whoever may say otherwise,
You shall never have a feather,
The hawk belongs to one fairer,
More beautiful, more courteous.’
The other knight waxed furious;
But Érec minds him not a bit,
Rather bids his maid secure it.
‘Fair maid,’ he says, ‘advance!
Take the hawk from its stand,
For the bird is rightly yours.
My lady, advance our cause!
I will boldly come between,
If any man seek to intervene.
For you are surpassed by none,
(So the moon yields to the sun)
Not in beauty, not in candour,
Not in value, not in honour.’
The knight could no longer bear
To hear Érec so proclaim the fair,

And offer battle with such virtue.
‘Who’ he cried, ‘who then are you
To dispute, with me, the prize?’
Érec boldly thus replies:
‘A stranger from another land,
I come to take the hawk in hand,
For it is right, whate’er you say,
This maid should carry it away.’
‘Go, she shall not,’ said the other,
‘Folly alone has brought you here.
If you wish to take the sparrow-hawk
You must pay dearly, and less talk.’
‘Pay, you villain? And in what way?
You must needs fight with me today,
If you will not concede the prize,
Yours is the folly, and no disguise’
Érec cried, ‘if I grasp your meaning,
Your idle threats are worth nothing;
I fear your menaces not a whit.’
‘Then I defy you, and so be it;
The contest must now take place.’
Érec replied: ‘God grant me grace!
I sought nothing more from you.’
A furious battle will now ensue.

LINES 863-1080 THE KNIGHT, YDER, IS DEFEATED

AWIDE space was swiftly cleared,
On every side a crowd appeared.
To some distance they separate,
Then spur the horses to their fate,
Driving lance-tips at each other,
Striking hard, with such power,

The shields are both pierced through,
The lances split and shivered too,
Shattered behind, the saddle bows.
Their feet loosed from the stirrup so,
Both fall heavily to the ground,
While the horses away they pound.
Despite the lances inflicting pain,
They soon leap to their feet again,
The draw their swords and attack,
Defending fiercely, striking back.
Beating echoing helmets, they trade
Mighty ringing blows of the blade.
Loud the swords clash as they attack,
Raining blows on shoulder and back.
Nothing of all this is feigned; alike
They shatter whatever they strike,
Piercing shields, and coats of iron.
With crimson blood the swords run.
The battle continues a long while:
Fought with such valour and guile,
That they grow wearied and faint;
Both their ladies make complaint,
Each knight sees his lady weeping,
Raising her hands to heaven, praying,
That God grant the battle honours
To he who fights so hard for her.
'Ah! Sir,' cried the knight to Érec,
'Let's pause a while, there is merit
In our both commanding a little rest,
For our blows weigh less and less.
We should deal better than these.
Soon the light of day will cease.
It is shameful, a great disgrace,
To battle so long, in this place.
Now see the gentle maiden there

Who weeps for you, utters a prayer.
Full sweetly does she pray, I see,
For you, as my lady prays for me.
Our best efforts we should make,
With these blades, for our ladies' sake.'
Érec replied: 'You have spoken well.'
Then both retired, for a brief spell,
Érec looking towards his lady,
Who was praying for him sweetly.
While that she was in his view,
He felt greater strength accrue.
Both her love and her beauty
Served to enhance his bravery.
And memory of the queen stirred,
To whom he had pledged his word,
That he would avenge his disgrace,
Or die of shame in that very place.
'Ah, fool' he thought, 'why delay?
I have not yet my revenge today,
This knight allowed the injury;
In the wood his dwarf struck at me.'
His anger was swiftly renewed.
He called out to the other, anew.
'Sir Knight,' he cried, 'once more
I summon you to fight, as before.
We have had far too long a rest,
Let us recommence this contest!'
The other replied: 'Well, I agree.'
And they set on, right valiantly,
Both the best of fighting men:
If at the knight's first stroke, then,
Érec had not proved well-defended
He might well have been wounded;
Nevertheless the next blow fell
Over his shield, along his temple

Breaking a piece from his helmet;
Slicing his white cap, further yet,
That fell sword-stroke descends,
Along the shield which it rends;
Tearing across his chain-mail
More than a span it did impale.
At that sharp blow he did sigh,
The cold steel pierced his thigh,
Cutting deeply into the flesh.
God defend him in his distress!
If the blow had not gone askew,
It might have cut him through.
But Érec is no wise dismayed:
What he receives is well repaid;
He deals the knight a blow in kind
On his shoulder, and well-aligned;
Such a blow he gives the knight
As proves his shield far too light
Nor does his chain-mail survive
But to the bone the blade dives.
He made the crimson blood flow
Down to the knight's belt below.
Both of them were such warriors,
Both of them won equal honours,
For not a single foot could either
Of their ground win from the other.
Their mail torn, their shields hacked,
Little of either to defend their backs,
Their armour is little guarantee
Of their protection from injury;
Forced to fight as best they could,
Each man had lost a deal of blood.
Each enfeebled strives to win.
He strikes Érec, and Érec him:
Delivering the knight such a blow

On the helm he is stunned below;
Striking and striking with abandon,
Three times in swift succession.
The helm was split completely,
The cap beneath cut deeply.
The sword even reached the bone,
Though scoring the skull alone,
Not piercing to the brain.
He stumbles, once and again,
As he stumbles, Érec strikes,
So he falls on his right side,
Érec grasps his helm, instead,
And drags it from his head,
His chain mail does unlace,
And bares his head and face.
Remembering how, in the wood,
The dwarf acted, Érec would
Have severed head from body,
Had the knight not cried mercy.
'Ah!' he cried, 'you defeat me.
Have mercy, do not kill me!
Having beaten and subdued me,
You'll gain no praise or glory.
To wound and harm me more,
That all men would deplore.
Take my sword, I yield it thee.'
But Érec refused and simply
Said: 'See if I do not kill thee.'
'Ah, gentle knight, have mercy!
For what crime, for what error,
Do you hate me; why such anger?
I've not met you before, I think,
Nor wronged you in anything,
Nor ever shamed you, no, not I.'
'Indeed you have,' Érec replied.

‘Good sir, come tell me when!
I do not know you, yet, again,
If I’ve wronged you inadvertently,
I throw myself on your mercy.’
Then Érec answered: ‘Sir, I am
He of the forest, the very man
Who was with Queen Guinevere
When you let your vile dwarf here,
Strike her maid. Whate’er the case,
To strike a woman is a disgrace.
And after that he struck at me,
Thinking me some nonentity.
You displayed great insolence
To allow that, in your presence,
Permitting that monstrosity
To strike the maid, and strike at me.
In that outrage you acquiesced,
I must hate you for that excess.
Having given such great offence,
As my prisoner, get you hence,
And without respite, or delay,
Go seek my lady this very day,
Whom you are sure to discover
At Cardigan, if you travel there.
You will reach it this very night,
It is not seven leagues outright.
You, the dwarf, and the maiden,
Shall then do as you are bidden,
Delivering yourself into her hand;
Tell her I return as I had planned,
Tomorrow I come in joy arrayed,
Bringing with me a lovely maid,
So brave, so wise, and so fair,
She has no equal anywhere;
Repeat to her the very same.

Now, I would know your name.’
And he must speak, like it or not:
‘Sir, I am Yder, the son of Nut.
This morn I’d not have believed
That any man could conquer me
By force of arms. I am resigned;
Before me, a better man, I find.
You are a very valiant knight.
I pledge to you, honour bright,
That I will go without delay
To seek the queen this very day.
But, without reserve, now confess
By what name you are addressed.
Whom shall I say instructed me,
For I am ready to seek the queen?’
The other answered: ‘I say to you,
I will hide nothing, and this is true,
My name is Érec,’ and said further,
‘Say it is I who send you to her.’
‘I will go. And I promise, then,
Myself, the dwarf and my maiden,
I shall place at her disposal,
Have no fear, as indeed I shall;
Moreover I will bring her news
Of you and your maiden too.’
Érec accepted the pledge given.
The Count was a witness even,
And all the crowd about them,
A host of ladies and noblemen.
Some were happy, some were sad,
Some were sorry, and others glad.
Most rejoiced, in pure delight,
For the maiden dressed in white,
The gentle and honest daughter
Of a poor but courteous father;

Yet his lady, and the others there
Who loved him, grieved for Yder.

**LINES 1081-1170 YDER FULFILS HIS PLEDGE
TO RIDE TO CARDIGAN**

YDER, wishing no delay
In fulfilling his task that day,
Mounted his steed outright.
Why draw out the tale? The knight,
His lady, and the dwarf, his bane,
Traverse the woods and the plain,
Riding the shortest road they can,
Until they come to Cardigan.
On the balcony of the great hall,
Gawain, and Kay the Seneschal,
And other nobles gathered too,
A large group, to enjoy the view,
And watch the road, far and near.
Thus they saw the knight appear.
The Seneschal first sees him plain,
And, speaking to my lord Gawain,
Says: 'Sir, in this heart of mine,
That knight approaching I divine,
Is he whom the queen has said
Gave insult to her, and her maid.
I am certain that there are three,
For a lady and a dwarf I see.'
'You see aright,' replied Gawain,
There, the dwarf, and lady, plain,
Are with the knight, as you say,
And towards us make their way.
The knight is fully armed although



*'I am certain that there are three,
for a lady and a dwarf I see'*
Enid (p54, 1868) - Baron Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) and
Gustave Doré (1832-1883)
The Internet Archive

His shield appears less than whole.
If indeed the queen should see him,
Then, I think, she would know him.
Seneschal, go call her! And Kay
Went off to seek her, right away.
He found her there in her chamber.
'Lady', he said, 'do you remember,
That dwarf who offended you,
And wounded your maiden too?'
'Yes. I remember him full well,
What news of him, Seneschal?
Why do you speak of one so mean?'
'Lady, this moment, I have seen,
A knight errant near approaching,
Armed, a grey horse he is riding,
And if my eyes do not deceive me
Alongside him there rides the lady,
And it seems to me the dwarf as well,
And that knotted scourge so fell
Of which Érec felt the blows.'
Then the queen swiftly rose,
Saying: 'Let us go, Seneschal,
And see if this is that vassal.
If we go, then, my lord, be sure
If I have seen the man before,
As soon as I see him, you will know
And Kay said: 'Him, will I show.
Come, then, now to the balcony,
We knights were all in company,
And from there saw him coming,
And my lord Gawain is waiting
There to attend you. Lady, on,
For we linger here too long.'
Then the queen bestirred herself,
And to the balcony took herself,

And standing by my lord Gawain
From there saw the knight, plain.
'Ah, my lord,' she cried, 'tis he,
And he has been in some tourney,
And faced danger. I do not know
If Érec then has avenged me so,
Or if this knight has defeated him,
But his shield shows many a dint;
His coat of mail is stained rather
With red than any other colour.'
'You see, aright,' said lord Gawain,
'The coat of mail shows the stain,
And if nothing else revealed it,
His hauberk could not conceal it,
For it has been struck and scarred,
And it shows that he fought hard.
We can see then, without fail,
He has been in battle assailed.
Soon shall we hear such words said
As grant us joy or grief instead:
Whether Érec has sent him here
To seek your grace, as a prisoner,
Or whether he comes in his pride
To boast of a vengeance denied,
And Érec defeated now, or dead;
No other news he brings,' he said.
The queen replied: 'And so think I.'
'It may well be so,' the others cry.

LINES 1171-1243 YDER TELLS OF HIS DEFEAT AT ÉREC'S HANDS

MEANWHILE, Yder enters the gate,
Bringing the news they all await.
They come down from the balcony,
To meet the knight, courteously.
Yder approached the royal terrace,
There dismounting from his horse.
While Gawain helped the lady
To descend from her palfrey:
The dwarf then dismounted too,
A hundred knights, at least, in view.
All three, after dismounting,
Were led straight before the king.
As soon as Yder saw the queen,
He bowed to her feet, I ween,
Saluting her first, as of right,
Then the king and his knights.
'Lady,' he said, 'as your prisoner,
A gentleman has sent me here,
A knight, noble and valiant,
Whom yesterday my own servant,
The dwarf, wounded in the face;
The knight defeated me, your grace,
And so, I bring the dwarf to you,
He seeks your mercy as I do.
I, my dwarf and my lady fair,
Are here as your prisoners,
To be dealt with as you order.'
The queen could wait no longer,
And of Érec demands the news:
'Tell me,' she said 'do not refuse,

Say when Érec is like to arrive.’
‘Lady, tomorrow,’ he replied,
‘And by his side a fair lady,
The loveliest known to me.’
When he had made his replies,
The queen who was kind and wise,
Said to him courteously: ‘Friend,
Since on my mercy you depend,
Your punishment it shall be light:
For in suffering I take no delight.’
But now tell me, so God aid thee,
What is thy name?’ And then said he:
‘Yder is my name, the son of Nut.’
All recognised the note of truth.
Then the queen rose and went
To the king, with clear intent,
Saying ‘Sire, hear you what befell?
In waiting for Érec you did well,
For he is indeed a valiant knight.
The counsel I gave proves right,
Advising you wait for his return.
It is good to take advice, we learn.’
The king answered: ‘I agree,
Those words are true for, verily,
Who takes counsel is no fool.
Happily we took heed of you;
But if you care at all for me,
Let this knight now go free,
On the sole condition that he
Henceforth consents to be
Of my court, and of no other.
And if not, then let him suffer.’
Now the king had ceased,
And so the queen released
The prisoner immediately;

On the understanding solely
That he remained at court.
No more of him was sought,
And the knight thus agreed.
And of the court, as decreed,
He became a sworn knight.
And valets now hove in sight,
To relieve him of his armour.

LINES 1244-1319 ÉREC CELEBRATES HIS VICTORY

NOW we must speak of Érec further
Who was still present at that place
Where the contest he did embrace.
There was never more joy all told,
When Tristan killed fierce Morholt,
On Saint Samson's Isle, than we see
Here expressed for Érec's victory.
Much of him was made by all,
By slim and stout, large and small.
All there praised his chivalry,
Never a noble but cries loudly:
'God, there never was such a knight!
Off to his lodgings they go outright,
With many a fulsome word of praise,
Even the Count does him embrace,
Expressing more joy than all the rest,
And says: 'Sir, if you please, tis best,
And yours by right, to lodge with me
At my house, and rest there, presently,
Since you are the son of Lac, the king.
To me great honour you would bring,
By accepting my hospitality;

For I accept you as my liege.
Good sir, it if pleases you, so be
My guest, come lodge with me.’
Érec replied: ‘Be not displeased!
My host tonight I cannot leave,
Who has done me great honour
In granting me his daughter.
What say you, sir? Is that not
A rich and fair gift I have got?’
‘Why yes,’ the Count gave answer,
‘The gift indeed is rich and fair.
The girl is beautiful and wise,
And is of noble birth besides:
Know her mother is my sister,
It delights my heart the more,
That you deign to take my niece,
So once more, if you please,
Lodge, yourself, with me tonight.’
‘Ask me no more,’ Érec replied.
I cannot and I will not do so.’
Finding him set on saying no,
The Count said: ‘As you wish it!
Now, let us make no more of it;
But I and my knights will stay
With you this night if we may,
For solace and for company.’
At this, Érec thanked him warmly.
He then returned to his host,
The Count also, and then most
Of the knights and ladies too.
His host was delighted anew.
As soon as Érec had arrived
More than a score of squires
Ran to relieve him of his armour,
Whoever attended in his honour

Was witness to a joyful affair.
First Érec is swiftly seated there,
And then the rest in due order
On couches and benches gather.
The Count sat at Érec's side,
And his lady of the lovely eyes;
To the hawk, on her wrist, she fed
A plover's wing; that bird that led
To that fierce contest, a bold assay.
She had gained great joy that day,
Honour and prestige were assured,
She was heart-happy at her lord,
And pleased also with the bird;
She could not have been happier,
Showing it plainly, as she might,
Making no secret of her delight,
So that all who saw here there,
They rejoiced for that lady fair,
All it appears for love of her.

LINES 1320-1352 ÉREC PROMISES HIS HOST FINE GIFTS

ÉREC now addressed her father,
And he began his speech so:
'Good sir, good friend, good host,
You have done me great honour
And I on you shall gifts confer.
Tomorrow I lead your daughter
To the court of King Arthur,
Where I take to wife your child.
If you will wait but a little while,
I'll send for you; for, understand,
You will be escorted to that land

Which is my father's; later mine:
It is far from here, far yet fine.
There you'll be lord of two towns,
Each splendid, rich, and renowned.
You will be lord of Roadan,
That was built in days long gone,
And of another town close by,
The apple of my father's eye;
The people call it Montrevel:
My father has no finer castle.
And, before the third day's over,
I shall send you gold and silver
Grey and mottled furs, and cloth,
Of precious silks more than enough,
To adorn yourself and your wife,
Who is dear to me, upon my life.
Tomorrow at the break of day,
Your daughter and I are on our way;
Dress her in her present attire:
I would the queen dress her entire,
In finest silk and satin clothes
In samite, and crimson robes.'

**LINES 1353-1478 ÉREC AND THE MAIDEN
SET OUT FOR ARTHUR'S COURT**

AMAIDEN sat nearby,
Honest, virtuous and wise,
By the girl in the white dress,
On a bench; she was no less
Than her cousin though,
Niece to the Count also.
When she heard Érec say

The girl would take her way
To the court, to the queen,
In that dress, poor and mean,
She addressed the Count, thus:
'Sire,' she said, 'shame on us,
But on you more than others,
If they should depart together,
And your niece meanly dressed,
Not in her finest, nor the best.'
And he answered: 'I pray you,
My gentle niece, give her, do,
Of all the robes you possess,
What you deem is of the best.'
Érec heard them speaking though,
And said to him: 'Count, not so,
Of this I'd have you be aware,
No other would I have her wear,
Nor in any other dress be seen,
Till she receive it from the queen.'
Hearing that he did so decide
This matter, the niece replied:
'Alas, dear sir, since in such guise,
A white shift and chemise besides,
You'd lead my cousin to the court,
I'll give her another gift, in short,
Since you now deny her the best
Of all my robes in which to dress.
Three palfreys here are mine,
Better than king's or count's; a fine
Sorrel, a black, a dapple-grey.
Among a hundred more, I'd say,
You'd never find a better. Say I,
The birds that fly there in the sky,
Are not as swift as the dapple-grey.
He is no trouble in any way,

But fit for a fair lady to ride.
A child could ride him, besides
He's neither skittish nor balks,
Neither kicks, nor bites at all.
Who seeks a better has no idea;
Who rides him need have no fear;
They'll move gently and easily,
As if they sailed a tranquil sea.'
Then said Érec: 'My dear friend,
I'm not unhappy if you intend
To gift it her. I'm pleased rather.
I'd wish her to accept the offer.'
Then the maiden, straight away,
Calls a trusted servant, to say:
'Good friend, go, saddle for me
The fine dapple-grey palfrey,
And bring him here to hand.'
He soon obeyed her command,
Saddled and bridled it at once,
Took pains with its appearance,
And mounted the palfrey, ready
To be viewed; held him steady.
When Érec saw the dapple-grey,
He praised it with no small praise,
For he saw it was fine and gentle.
So he bid a servant stable
The dapple-grey there beside
The fine charger he did ride.
After which they separated,
All, on that joyous eve, elated.
The Count goes to his post,
Leaving Érec with his host,
Saying he'll keep him company,
In the morning when they leave.
They all slept the night away.

In the morning, at break of day,
Érec prepares to leave for court,
Orders his mount to be brought;
And his lovely sweetheart too,
Wakes and readies herself anew.
The freeman and his wife are there,
Never a knight or lady fair
That has not risen to ride beside,
The knight and his appointed bride.
The Count is mounted, all mount,
Érec rides beside the Count,
With his fair lady who has not
Her fine sparrow hawk forgot:
And with the hawk she toys,
No other wealth she deploys.
Great joy they all had at heart.
When the time came to depart,
The Count, of his chivalry,
Wished to detach a company,
To do Érec honour, and ride,
A knightly escort, at their side;
But Érec, replying, said that he
Wished for no other company
Than his lady at his right hand.
When they had crossed his land,
The Count said: Now, farewell!
He kisses his niece, Érec as well,
And to God commends them both.
Her father and mother are loth
To go, kiss them often, confess
Their tears they cannot suppress:
Her mother cries as they depart,
The girl, her father, sad at heart.
Such is love, such human nature,
Such the tenderness we nurture.

They shed tears from tenderness,
Love of their child, in their distress
At parting from her; yet they know,
Nevertheless, that she must go,
Their daughter is to take a place,
That with honour them will grace.
From love and tenderness, they cry,
Because they must part by and by,
But they cry for no other reason.
They know that, in due season,
They will receive great honour.
They weep at losing their daughter,
Commend each other to God always,
And then part, without more delay.

**LINES 1479-1690 ÉREC AND THE MAIDEN
MEET WITH THE QUEEN**

ÉREC parted from his host,
Filled with the desire to boast
Of his exploits, at the court;
Of the contest he had sought:
He has joy of his adventure,
For by him rides a lovely creature,
Wise, courteous and debonair.
He feasts his eyes, she is so fair;
The more he looks, the more she pleases,
He cannot help bestowing kisses.
He rides willingly at her side;
Seeing her fills him with pride.
He gazes at her blonde hair, and now
At her laughing eyes, her radiant brow,
Her nose, her mouth, all of her face,

And his heart is filled with grace.
He gazes at her from head to waist,
Her chin, her snowy neck, her laced
Breasts and flanks, arms and hands.
No less does she gaze at the man,
The knight riding at her side,
With loyal heart and clear eye.
As if they were in competition.
At no price, nor for any reason,
Would they have ceased to gaze!
Matched they were in all the ways
Of courtesy, and in handsomeness,
And every kind of pleasantness:
So alike were they in quality,
In good manners and civility,
None who viewed them could say
That one was the finer in any way,
Nor that one played the wiser part.
They were equal at the very heart,
And well suited to one another.
Each held the heart of the other.
Nor law nor marriage ever mated
Two creatures so sweetly fated.
So together they ride along,
Until at noon they come upon
The royal castle of Cardigan,
Where all await them, to a man.
To see if they can see them yet,
To the balcony, fine nobles get,
The finest members of the court,
With Queen Guinevere; in short,
Even the king himself that day,
And Perceval of Wales, and Kay,
And after them my lord Gawain,
Tor, King Ares son, and plain

Lucan, the cupbearer, him too,
And of true knights, not a few.
They saw Érec now approaching,
And the lady he was bringing.
From afar they recognised him
At the instant they first saw him.
Guinevere was filled with joy;
And all the court, without alloy,
Were joyful at his coming there,
For all loved him in equal share.
As soon as he had reached the hall,
The king, and the queen, and all,
Went to meet him and proclaim
Their greetings, in God's name;
Welcoming him and his lady,
And praising her for her beauty.
Then the king himself swiftly
Lifted her down from the palfrey.
The king was in his fine array,
And full of happiness that day.
The girl he showed much honour,
Took her by the hand and led her,
Up to the great stone hall; behind
Érec and the queen also climb
Hand in hand, following the king.
Érec said to her: 'Lady, I bring,
My sweetheart, my lovely maid,
To you, in humble dress arrayed;
Just as she was entrusted to me,
So I brought her here with me.
She is a poor freeman's daughter.
Poverty afflicts many another:
Her father's honest and courteous
Though he has little wealth, alas.
While a noble lady is her mother,

To whom a rich count is brother.
She lacks not beauty or lineage,
Whereby I should refuse marriage
With this maiden all so lovely;
Simply her father's poverty
Forces her to appear in white,
In linen garb torn at the side.
And yet, if it had been my wish,
She would be rich enough in dress,
Since a maid, who is her cousin,
Wished to robe her all in ermine,
And fine silk, dappled or grey;
But I insisted that thus she stay,
And dress in no other guise,
Until she was before your eyes.
Gentle lady, think on this kindly!
She has great need, you can see
For a fine and becoming dress.'
And the queen of her kindliness,
Said: 'Right well you have done,
For one of my robes is hers anon.
I will give her one rich and fair,
Fresh and new, for her to wear.'
Then the queen quickly led her
To her own private chamber,
Ordering them to bring as well
The new tunic and the mantle,
Purple and green, embroidered
With little crosses, meant for her.
He whom she had commanded
Brought the mantle as demanded,
And the tunic, all fully trimmed
To the sleeves with white ermine.
There was, if simple truth be told,
Half a mark or more of beaten gold,

At the wrists and on the neckband,
And precious stones too did stand,
Indigo, green, and blue and brown,
Set there, in the gold, all round.
And very fine the fabric too;
The mantle being of no less value,
As fine as any of which I know.
No ribbons adorned it though;
For it was all still fresh and new,
As the tunic was, bright to view.
The mantle was fine, front and back,
With two sable skins at the neck,
The tassels had an ounce of gold,
On the one a gem, a hyacinth bold,
On the other, pure as candlelight,
A ruby adorned the tassel bright;
The lining was white ermine fur,
And nothing finer or lovelier
Was to be seen or discovered.
With crosses it was embroidered,
Small, and of diverse colours,
Vermilion, blue-grey, and others;
White, green, yellow, and indigo.
Ribbons, of length four ells or so,
In silk and gold, a servant brought,
Obeying the queen's very thought.
The ribbons were placed in her hand,
Of equal length and finely planned.
Now she had them swiftly attached
To the mantle, carefully matched,
By one who clearly knew his part,
And was truly a master of his art;
When the mantle was all complete,
The queen, so gentle and discreet,
Clasped the maid in the white gown

And said to her, with nary a frown:
‘Mademoiselle, for this tunic here,
Worth a hundred marks of silver clear,
You must exchange the white gown;
So much at least I’d have you own.’
And this mantle, this fine apparel!
Later I’ll grant you more as well.’
She could not well refuse the queen,
So took the robe and said: ‘Merci.’
Then two maidens led her away
To a private chamber, to array
Herself, and herself divest
Of the now useless white dress;
Yet she requested it be given
For love of God, to some poor woman.
She dons the tunic, girds herself,
Fastening about her a golden belt,
And after it she dons the mantle;
Now she looks by no means ill.
For the robe so becomes her
She looks lovelier than ever.
The two maids wove a golden thread
Through the fair hair about her head;
Though her hair was brighter yet,
Then the finest golden thread.
Moreover a chaplet of flowers,
All woven of various colours,
The maids set upon her brow.
And they strove so that, of now,
She was adorned in such guise,
None could fault her any wise.
Two brooches of enamelled gold,
Tied to a ribbon, now they hold,
To fasten about the girl’s neck there.
She appears so charming and fair,

You would not find in any land,
Neither far off nor near at hand,
Any to equal the freeman's daughter,
So skilfully had Nature wrought her.
Then she issued from the chamber
And did before the queen appear:
The queen on seeing her was happy
(For she liked her, and she so lovely)
That she was beautiful and gentle.
Hand in hand, they walked until
They appeared before the king.
When the king saw them coming,
He rose and went to meet them;
Entering, there rose to greet them,
So many knights, in that great hall,
That I could never name them all,
Nor could recall a tenth of them,
A thirteenth or fifteenth of them;
Though many a name I can recite,
Of the best men, knight by knight,
The finest of the Round Table,
And in all the world the most able.

LINES 1691-1750 THE FINEST KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

AMONG the finest, it is plain,
The first of all was Gawain.
Érec the second place did take,
Third, was Lancelot of the Lake.
Fourth, Gornemant of Gohort,
Fifth, the Fair Coward fought.
Sixth, the Ugly Hero, I list,
Seventh, was Meliant of Liz,

Eighth, comes Maudit the Wise,
Ninth, Dodinel the Savage lies.
Let Gandelu as tenth be named,
A good man and rightly famed.
And the others without numbers
I will name, as such encumbers.
Eslit was there, beside Briien,
And Yvain the son of Uriien.
And Yvain of Leonel was there,
And then Yvain the Adulterer.
Beside Yvain of Cavaliot,
Was Garravain of Estragot.
Then, the Knight of the Horn, I sing;
Before the Youth of the Golden Ring.
And Tristan who never laughed,
Beside good Bliobleheris sat.
Comes next to Brun of Piciez
His brother Gru the Sullen, I say.
The Maker of Armour is next,
He thought war not peace was best.
After him Karadues Shortarm
A knight both cheerful and warm;
And Caveron of Robendic,
And the son of King Quenedic,
And the Youth of Quintareus,
And Yder of Mount Dolorous,
Gaheriet, Kay of Etraus, tall
Amauguin, and Gales the Bald,
Grain, Gornevain and Carabas,
And Tor the son of King Aras;
Girflet the son of Do, Taulas
Never tired if weapons clashed;
And then a youth of great virtue,
Loholt, son of King Arthur, too.
And Sagremor the Impetuous,

Who must not be forgot by us,
Nor Beduiers the Horse-Master,
At chess and tric-trac the smarter;
Nor Bravain, nor Lot, the king
Nor he of Wales, Galegantín.
Nor the son of Kay the Seneschal,
Gronosis, who knew much of evil,
Nor Labigodes the Courteous,
Nor Count Cadorcariois,
Nor Letron of Prepelesant,
Whose manners were so excellent,
Nor Breon, the son of Canedan
Nor the Count of Honolan,
With his fine fair hair unshorn;
He did the king's drinking horn
Receive, a cup of ill-adventure;
He the truth had cared for never.

**LINES 1751-1844 THE KING BESTOWS
THE KISS ON ÉREC'S LADY**

WHEN the maid from far away
Saw the knights in their array,
All gazing at her steadily,
Bowing her head most humbly,
She blushed, to scant surprise,
Her face crimsoned to her eyes;
But that blush was so becoming,
Her beauty seemed as if increasing.
When the king saw her so dyed,
He had no wish to leave her side.
He gently took her by the hand,
And seated her, at his command,

Beside him; on his left the queen,
 Who spoke to him: 'Sire I deem
 It right, it's my decided thought,
 He is well come to a royal court,
 Who wins afar, by dint of arms,
 A lady possessed of such charms.
 It was well we waited for Érec so:
 For now that kiss you can bestow
 On the fairest lady of the court.
 I believe none would find fault,
 With you, for none, unless he lie,
 That she's the fairest can deny,
 Of all the ladies present here,
 Or in the world, it would appear.'
 The king replied: 'That is no lie,
 The honour of the White Stag, I
 Confer on her, if none demur.'
 And asked of each knight: 'Sir,
 What say you? Do you not agree?
 That in whatever a girl should be,
 In form and face, is not she,
 The sweetest girl, the most lovely,
 To whom Nature has given birth,
 Between the heavens and the earth?
 And I think it right that I confer
 The honour of the white stag on her.
 What, my lords, have you to say?
 Do you disagree in any way?
 If any wishes to contradict me,
 Let him speak his mind, and swiftly.
 I am king, and must keep my word,
 And must let no evil be incurred,
 Nor arrogance, nor mendacity,
 I must guard the right, in verity:
 This the duty of a faithful king

The rule of law above everything,
With truth, loyalty, and justice.
I would on no occasion wish
To prove disloyal or to wrong
Any, whether weak or strong.
None shall of me complain,
For I seek always to maintain
The customs and the usages,
Practised by my ancestors.
You would call it sad abuse
Were I now to introduce
Other customs, other ways,
Not those of my father's days.
Those of King Pendragon,
My father, a just king and man,
I must protect and maintain,
Whatever fate I entertain.
Now tell me what you seek,
And let none be slow to speak
If he thinks that maiden there
Is not rightly judged most fair,
And so should receive the kiss:
I would know the truth of this.'
All then cried out, in unison:
'Sire, by God and by His Son,
You may rightly grant the kiss;
For she the fairest maiden is!
She shines with beauty bright
More than does the sun with light.
You may then kiss her freely,
We sanction it completely.'
Once the king had heard all this,
He swiftly bestowed the kiss,
Holding her in his embrace.
The maiden felt no disgrace:

It was right to grant the kiss,
Discourtesy should she resist.
He kissed her most courteously,
With all the nobles there to see.
And said to her: My sweet lady,
I show you affection honestly,
Without malice, without guile
With a true heart all the while.⁷
So the king through this venture,
Ensured the custom did endure
That the White Stag demanded.
And now the first part is ended.

LINES 1845-1914 ÉREC FULFILS HIS PROMISE TO HIS HOST

WHEN the kiss had been received,
As customary, and none aggrieved,
Érec, both kindly and courteous,
Now proved himself solicitous.
For he showed no wish to evade
The promises that he had made.
Right well he kept the covenant;
For to the freeman now he sent
Five sumpter mules, fat and strong,
Bearing clothes and goods along,
Buckrams, scarlets, robes of state,
Golden marks, and silver plate,
Furs of vair, of grey, and sable,
Purples, silks, the stuff of fable.
The mules loaded, as he'd agreed,
With all a gentleman might need,
He ordered a troop of ten knights,
And sergeants, his men by right,
To accompany the baggage train
To his host, and salute the same,
Greeting the man as he might do,
Showing him great honour too,
And honouring his wife equally,
As he would do, if it were he;
And when they had presented both
With the mules, the goods and cloth,
The gold and silver, and rich things,
With all the rest of the furnishings
That were in those bags and bales,
Into his new realm of Far Wales

They were to conduct the freeman,
And his wife, while honouring them.
He had promised them two towns,
Best situated and most renowned,
And the least likely to be assailed
In all that country of Far Wales.
Montrevel was the name of one,
And the other was called Roadan.
When they arrived in his kingdom,
Those two castles would become,
Theirs, with their rents, in law,
As he had promised them before.
And these things were done then,
As Érec had commanded them.
The mules, silver, and the gold,
With the robes, of which, all told,
There were a host, they presented
To the freeman as Érec intended;
Then escorted him swiftly there,
With no lack of thought or care.
They led him into Érec's realm,
And sought to attend him well,
Arriving there on the third day;
Now both towns his rule obey.
King Lac at this made no demur,
But welcomed him with honour,
Befriending him for Érec's sake,
Granting him title to his estates,
And thus establishing his rights
Over the burghers and the knights,
Who were to reverence him now
As their liege lord, and so did vow.
And when all was accounted for,
The escort returned once more,
To Érec, their own lord, and he,

Received them right joyfully;
Asked for news from his men,
Of the host, his wife, and then
Of his father and of the realm;
And they had only good to tell.

**LINES 1915-2024 ARTHUR SUMMONS THE
COUNTS AND KINGS TO COURT**

NOT long after, it would appear
An appropriate time drew near,
To celebrate the wedding day.
Érec had sorrowed at the delay;
He could not endure the waiting,
So sought audience of the king,
To ask him, if it pleased his lord,
To see them married at the court.
The king granted him that boon,
And sent messengers, full soon,
To all the counts and the kings
Who held land as his liegemen,
Saying it would be to their cost,
Not to be present at Pentecost.
None dared refuse the demand,
It being the king's command;
They must all attend the court.
Now, attend me, as you ought!
I will list the counts and kings:
There, with a wealthy gathering,
Brandes, Count of Gloucester,
And then a hundred followers.
After him came Menagormon,
Who was Count of Clivelon.

And he of the Haute Montaigne,
With his rich company he came;
The Count of Treverain, also,
With a hundred knights in tow;
And after him Count Godegrain
With no less numerous a train.
With those above I mentioned,
Came Maheloas, a great baron,
The Lord of the Isle of Voirre.
In that isle no tempests lower;
No thunder, no lightning there,
There no toads or serpents fare,
Nor does it ever freeze or burn.
Graislemier of Fine Posterne,
Brings, with twenty companions,
The Lord of the Isle of Avalon,
Who is his brother, Guigomar,
And of the latter, they said afar
He was friend to Morgan le Fay:
It was proven truth they say.
Davit of Tintagel, he was there,
Who never suffered grief or care.
The Duke of Haut Bois, Guergesin,
He brought gear of worth with him.
Dukes and counts, many they saw,
But of kings there were still more.
Garras of Cork, a king of might,
Came with five hundred knights,
In mantles and fine hose arrayed,
And tunics worked in silk brocade.
Riding a Cappadocian stallion,
Came Aguisel, King of Scotland;
Nor his two sons did he forget,
He brought both, Coi and Cadret,
Two knights both well-acclaimed.

Along with those I have named,
Came King Ban of Gomeret,
His company young men as yet;
All those with him appeared
Without moustache or beard;
Many a joyful youth he brought,
Two hundred from his court,
And each man had, so they tell,
A female falcon, or a tiercel,
A merlin or a sparrow hawk,
Or a fine mewed goshawk.
Kerrin, the old King of Riel,
Brought with him no youths at all,
But three hundred of his peers,
The youngest had seven score years.
Their hair was white as snow,
(For they were born long ago)
With beards down to their waists,
Arthur welcomed them with grace.
The Lord of the Dwarfs next he sees,
Bilis, the King of Antipodes.
That king, he was a dwarf also,
Yet the brother of Brien; though
Bilis was the smallest of all,
Brien was tallest of the tall,
A half-foot, or a hand, taller,
Was that knight than any other.
Showing wealth and authority,
Bilis brought, in his company,
Two kings, both dwarfs again,
Who held from him their terrain,
Named Grigoras and Glecidalan,
All marvelled at them, to a man.
When to the court they came,
They were treated just the same,

As kings; like kings at court,
All three esteemed, in short;
For they were true gentlemen.
When, in brief, Arthur, then
Saw his nobles play their part,
He felt great joy at heart.
Then to enhance his delight,
In order to dub each a knight
A hundred squires were bathed there.
Each of them had a robe *en vair*,
Rich brocade of Alexandria,
Each one choosing to appear
In whichever one took his fancy.
Yet in one coat of arms all agree,
And in horses swift, all aquiver,
The least worth a hundred livres.

LINES 2025-2068 ÉREC AND ÉNIDE ARE WED

NOW when his wife to Érec came,
He needs call her by her true name:
For a woman is not truly wed,
If her true name is left unsaid.
As yet her name was a mystery;
Now it was first known openly;
Her baptismal name was ÉNIDE,
The Archbishop of Canterbury,
Who had travelled to the court,
Blessed the couple, as he sought.
When they were gathered there,
No minstrel dwelling anywhere,
Who possessed a pleasing skill,
Came not to court of his own will.

In the great hall all were alight,
Each providing what he might;
Leaping, tumbling, conjuring,
One recites, while others sing,
One whistles, one sounds a note,
One on the harp, one the rote,
One the flute, and one the fiddle,
One the pipe, and one the viol.
All the girls there dance and sing,
Happily, with each other, vying.
There is naught that we employ
Of all that fills the heart with joy,
That was not performed that day.
Sounds the tabor, sounds away
The timbrel drum, the reed pipes,
Trumpets, horns, fifes, bagpipes.
What more is there to mention?
Every gate and door was open,
Every egress and every entry
Was free to all, squire or gentry,
Rich or poor, none turned away.
King Arthur, generous that day,
Gave it out that all the bakers,
All the cooks, and the butlers,
Should serve everyone freely
Whatever they wished for greatly;
Bread and wine and venison,
And no request from anyone
Without them being satisfied
And no wish of theirs denied.

LINES 2069-2134 THE WEDDING-NIGHT

GREAT the joy in the palace,
Yet over most of it I will pass,
And tell of the joy and delight
In the bed-chamber, that night.
Bishops, archbishops were there
On that night they spent together,
Their very first, and in their case,
No Brangien took Iseult's place,
All was as true as had gone before.
The queen herself, she oversaw
It all, in a manner most sincere,
For both to her were very dear.
The hunted stag whose thirst is sore
Does not desire the fountain more,
Nor does the sparrow hawk return
To hand, more swiftly, its food to earn,
Then did these two come together,
In close embrace, the naked lovers,
That single night compensating
For their long hours of waiting.
Once all depart their presence,
They gratify their every sense.
Their eyes delight in every gaze,
Being of love the true pathways,
Bearing a message to the heart:
Deeper the gaze, sharper the dart.
After the message of the eyes,
Comes the greater sweetness lies
In kisses, that to love invite.
Both in this sweetness delight,
And their hearts drink so deep,

They can barely think of sleep:
With kisses then at first they toy,
And the love that brings such joy,
Fills the maiden with boldness,
So that she, free of all coyness,
Bears all that she must suffer,
Before she wakes, as another.
She has lost the name of maid.
A woman, by the dawn, remade.
The minstrels were full of glee,
Rewarded, that day, handsomely,
Recompensed for all they played,
With many a fine gift well repaid;
With fair robes, ermine and vair,
With cony-skins, rich purple wear,
Scarlet cloth, and silken stuff:
Whether a horse, or coin enough,
Each man, according to his skill,
Was granted whatever he will.
Thus the court and wedding feast
Lasted a fortnight at the least,
Full of joy, and held at leisure.
For his glory and his pleasure,
And for Érec's greater honour,
The knights were told by Arthur
To stay a fortnight, at his command,
And when the third week began
All agreed, by common consent,
To enact a lavish tournament;
And my lord Gawain gave surety
On his side that the site would be
Between Evroic and Tenebroc;
While Meliz and Meriadoc
Gave surety on the other side.
All then dispersed, far and wide.

LINES 2135-2292 THE TOURNAMENT

ONE month after Pentecost
They assembled for the joust,
In the plain below Tenebroc,
Many a banner there *en bloc*,
Vermilion, white and blue,
Many a sleeve and veil too,
Bestowed as a love token;
Many a lance was broken,
With pennant argent seen,
Azure, gold, heraldic green;
And many a device there,
Some striped, some *en vair*.
Many a helmet was laced,
Gold or bright steel braced,
Green, yellow, red, I say,
Mirroring the sun that day;
So many swords tightly girt,
Scutcheons and white hauberks;
So many shields fresh and new,
Silver, green, and azure blue,
With buckles of solid gold;
So many steeds fine and bold,
Black, white, sorrel, and bay,
Gathered for the grand affray.
With arms the field is littered,
On either side the ranks quiver,
The roar not destined to abate.
The shock of the lance is great;
Shield pierced, lance shattered,
Iron mail is dented, battered;

Saddles empty, knights roam,
The horses sweat and foam.
Swords are swiftly directed
At all those noisily ejected.
Some seek to be ransomed,
By others that disgrace shunned.
Érec rode a white steed, his own,
At the head of the line, alone,
Ready to joust with any knight.
Against him, a splendid sight,
Came Orgueilleus de la Lande,
Astride his mount from Ireland,
Bearing him with fire and zest.
On the shield before his breast,
Érec struck him with such force
He knocked him from his horse.
He left him prone and passed on,
Then came against him Rindurant,
Son of the Old Dame of Tergalo;
He in blue candal silk was clothed,
A knight he was of great prowess.
Each one the other now addressed,
And dealt each other fierce blows
Where at the neck the shields rose.
Érec, from a lance's length, found
Strength to lay him on the ground.
As he rode slowly back then he
Met with the King of the Red City,
Who was both valiant and bold.
Of their reins they take tight hold,
Grasp their shields by the leather,
Both equipped with solid armour,
And fine horses, swift and strong,
The shields new, fresh the thongs.
With such force they dash together

That their two lances splinter;
Never was such a fierce clash seen:
Hurling over the ground between,
Went horses, shields, and weapons.
Not girth, breast-strap, reins, none
Could prevent the king, unhorsed,
Striking the ground, in his course.
Sent flying, thus, from his steed,
Saddle and stirrup and, indeed,
Even the reins of the bridle,
Are carried away in his fall.
All the crowd standing there,
Marvelling at the fall, declare,
It will cost him dear to fight
With such a skilful knight.
Érec wished to capture neither
The horse nor its fallen rider,
But to joust and win the field,
That his prowess be revealed.
Before him the lines tremble;
His prowess now heartens all
The men who fight on his side.
Knights, and the mounts they ride,
He takes, to his foe's discomfort.
Of how my lord Gawain fought,
I'd now speak, for he did well,
For he there unhorsed Guincel,
And took Gaudin of the Mount;
Captured both knight and mount:
He fought well, my lord Gawain.
Girflet, the son of Do, Yvain,
And Sagramor the Headstrong,
So drove their opponents along,
They harried them to the gate,
Capturing many, soon and late.

Before the entrance to the town
Fresh cause to fight they found,
Those inside fought those before,
And there unhorsed Sagramor,
Who was a very valiant knight.
He was near captured in the fight,
But Érec spurred on to the rescue,
Breaking a lance to save him too;
He strikes one on the breast so
He quits the saddle at the blow.
Then wields the sword, advances
Crushing helms, breaking lances.
Some flee, and some evade him;
For even the boldest fear him.
He deals many a thrust and blow,
Freeing Sagremor from the foe;
Into the town then drives them all.
Now, vespers done, shadows fall.
So well did Érec contest the affray,
He was the best who fought that day.
Yet on the morrow he did better,
Taking so many knights moreover,
Leaving so many saddles bare,
That none but those present there
Could believe how well he fought.
On both sides those of the court
Said that with sword and shield
He had conquered all the field.
Now Érec had won such honour,
That men murmured of no other,
Not one was held in such grace:
He resembled Absalom in face,
In wisdom seemed a Solomon,
In boldness a very Samson,
And in generosity and candour

The equal of King Alexander.
After the tournament, returning,
Érec had audience of the king.
He requested leave, humbly,
To travel to his own country;
But first he gave thanks to Arthur
For showing him such great honour,
As one frank, courteous and wise;
Deep was his gratitude likewise.
Then asked to be granted freedom
To go and visit his own kingdom,
And take his wife with him also.
To this the king could not say no;
Yet he wished Érec might stay.
He gave him leave, yet did pray
That he would return full soon;
For in his court there was none
Finer or more valiant, he knew,
Save Gawain, his dear nephew;
With whom none could compare.
After him the most prized there
Was Érec, who to him was dearer
Among his knights than any other.

LINES 2293-2764 ÉNIDE'S MISCHANCE

ÉREC stayed no longer there,
Telling his wife to prepare,
As soon the king gave leave;
Retaining in his company,
Sixty worthy mounted men,
Cloaked in vair or grey, and then
Once he was ready for the road

He tarried no more in that abode;
But took leave of the queen again,
Commending to God his men;
The queen grants leave to depart.
At the hour of prime they start,
From the heights of the palace.
Before all he mounts his horse,
And his wife mounts the palfrey
Ridden from her own country;
Then all his company mounted,
More than seven score all counted,
Of knights, and squires, and all.
After full four days of travel,
Over hill and dale and through
Forests, plains, and rivers too,
To Carnant on the fifth they came,
Which place King Lac had claimed
As his seat, a pleasant town.
None did a more pleasant own:
With forest and meadow-land,
Vineyards and farms to hand,
Fountains and orchards fair,
Knights and ladies everywhere,
And youths a plenty in fine fettle,
Well-mannered clerks and gentle,
Who spend their money freely;
Charming girls too, and lovely;
With prosperous burghers, also
The town and castle overflow.
Before Érec reached the site,
In advance he sent two knights,
To tell the king of his coming.
As soon as they gained a hearing,
He had knights, clerks, and damsels,
Mount their horses, while the bells

He promptly ordered to be rung,
And all the streets to be hung
With tapestries and silks bright,
To welcome his son with delight:
Then he himself mounts his steed.
Four score clerks of noble breed,
Honourable, gentle, and right able,
In grey cloaks trimmed with sable;
And five hundred knights that day,
On sorrels, bays, or dapple greys;
Burghers and their wives are there,
The crowd vast, beyond compare.
He and Érec advanced together,
Until each recognised the other,
Then dismounted to meet as one,
In fond embrace, father and son.
Long they embrace and do greet
In the place where they first meet,
Not stirring, clasping one another,
The father the son, the son the father.
In Érec the king does much delight,
Then he separates from the knight,
And turns his face towards Énide,
On either side on honey does feed.
Both he kisses and does embrace,
Which pleases more he cannot say.
They with pleasure enter the castle,
Advancing now to the peal of bells,
All in honour of Érec's presence.
Irises, reeds, mint, make pleasant,
The streets where they are strewn,
And overhead like sun and moon
Hang coverings and tapestries,
Bright silk and satin subtleties.
There was great joy on every side:

People gathered from far and wide,
To catch a sight of their new lord
And greater delight none ever saw,
Than shown here by old and young.
First to the church he walks along:
The people, in procession, express
All their devotion and devoutness.
At the Altar of the Crucifix, he
Made reverence, on his knees.
While Érec's lovely bride, she
Was led to the statue of Our Lady.
When she had offered up a prayer,
She stepped back, pausing there,
Crossing herself with her right hand,
In a manner the noble understand.
Then from the church they exited,
And entered the palace in its stead.
There the festivities began.
That day had Érec gifts in hand,
From the burghers and the lords,
From one a palfrey of the north,
From another a cup of gold;
One presents a goshawk bold,
One a greyhound, one a setter,
A sparrow-hawk, and a better
Gift still, a Spanish stallion;
One a shield, an ensign one,
One a helmet, one a sword.
Never a prince with such accord
To his realm was welcomed yet,
Nor with more delight was met;
All striving to serve him well.
But more was made, I must tell,
Of Énide, than was made of him,
For her beauty, without and in;

And still more for her openness.
She was seated, their royal guest,
On a brocaded cushion, brought
From Thessaly to King Lac's court;
Round her was many a lovely lady,
Yet she was many times more lovely:
As the brilliant gem that glows
Outshines dull flint, or as the rose
Exceeds the poppy, so lovelier
Was this Énide than any other
Woman or maid in all the world,
Wherever might dwell such a girl.
She was so gentle, so honourable,
So wise in speech, and so affable
Fine at heart, and fine in bearing,
No one could ever be so glaring
As to accuse her of any folly,
Malice, or scheme of villainy.
She had been so well schooled
That she had acquired all virtue,
All to which any girl might own,
With wisdom and kindness sown.
All loved her for her openness:
All felt themselves doubly blessed,
Who could serve her in any form.
None claimed she brought any harm;
For none knew of any harm to claim.
No woman with so virtuous a name
Lived in that realm, nor in any other.
But Érec with such a love loved her,
He cared for arms no more, nor went
Desiring the joys of tournament,
Nor wished to joust any longer,
Rather his love for her grew stronger.
She was his lover and his friend,

His heart was devoted to that end;
Kissing her oft, in fond embrace;
Seeking no other kind of solace.
His companions quietly grieved,
And among themselves believed
That he now loved her to excess.
It was afternoon before he dressed,
Before he chose to leave her side.
He was happy, none could deny.
He forever sought her society,
Yet nevertheless was still as free
And open-handed with his men,
Arming, clothing, enriching them.
There was never a tournament
To which the men were not sent,
Well-equipped, and finely dressed.
Whatever the cost they had the best;
Fresh horses he gave freely,
For the jousting and the tourney.
All the knights sang this tune,
It was sad, a misfortune,
That such a valiant man as he
Should turn away from chivalry.
On every side he was blamed
By knights and squires named,
Till Énide heard the murmur
That her lord desired no longer
To pursue his deeds of arms,
His mind averse to such charms.
She was grieved to know it,
Yet did not dare to show it;
Her lord might take a dim
View if she spoke to him.
So the thing lay hidden,
Until one morning when

They in their bed together
Had delighted one another,
Lip to lip had embraced,
So they true love did taste;
He half-asleep, she wakeful,
Thinking of all the shameful
Words said about her lord,
And all now bandied abroad.
So grieved was she by it all,
She allowed her tears to fall.
Such her chagrin, her sorrow,
She, by chance, spoke also
Words for which, in due course,
She would feel great remorse;
Though she had meant no ill.
She observed her lord until
Viewing his body head to toe,
His form, his honest face also,
Her tears fell so copiously
Over his chest they flowed free.
And she cried: 'Oh, woe is me,
That I ever left my own country!
What have I here to look for now?
Earth should swallow me, I vow,
When the very best of knights,
Strong and brave in every fight,
The fairest and most courteous
That ever king or baron was,
Has relinquished, and for me,
Every fine deed of chivalry?
Thus, on him, a shame I bring
I'd not have brought for anything.'
Then 'Unhappy man!' she said;
Then was silent as the dead.
Érec, though dozing there,

Half-awake, was yet aware
Of what she had said, and he
Marvelling her tears to see,
How she wept, spoke to her,
Spoke and sought an answer:
‘Tell me my sweet friend, my dear,
Why weep in this manner here!
Why now such grief and sorrow?
Surely it is my desire to know.
My sweet friend, come tell me,
Take care, hide naught from me.
Why did you say, “unhappy man”?
You said it of me, I understand.
I heard clearly the words you said.’
Then was Énide discomfited,
Most fearful, much dismayed.
‘Sir,’ she answers, ‘I am afraid
I know nothing of what you say.’
‘Lady, what are you hiding, pray?
Concealment is idle,’ he replies,
‘Tears are gleaming in your eyes,
Will you pretend you wept idly?
Though half-asleep, I stirred me,
And thus I have heard everything’
‘Oh, fair sire, you heard nothing,
I think perhaps it was a dream.’
‘Now you’re lying it would seem,
I hear the deceit in what you say,
But you’ll repent of it this day,
If you conceal the truth from me.’
‘Sire, you torment me so, I see
I must tell you the truth entire,
Hiding nothing, as you desire,
Yet it will trouble you I know.
Throughout the land men go,

The dark, the blonde, the tawny,
Saying how great the pity
That you renounce chivalry;
Your fame suffering equally.
They used to say, one and all,
In this world none could recall
A finer or more gallant knight;
There was no equal in might.
Now they go mocking at you, all,
Young and old, great and small,
Calling you recreant, plain coward,
Think you not it grieves me hard,
When I hear you slandered there?
It grieves me greatly everywhere
And it grieves me all the more
That all this they blame me for;
Yes they put all the blame on me,
Saying the reason's plain to see,
That I so trap you and enslave
That all your merit is decayed,
Seeking company in none but me.
Another course you must seek.
So you may now erase this stain,
And thus your former name regain;
For I have heard too much of this,
Yet dared not say aught was amiss.
Often when I think on it, you see,
My anguish forces tears from me.
Such chagrin I felt but now,
I could not help but speak aloud,
And there I said: 'Unhappy man!
'Lady,' he said, 'I understand,
You and they are right, and so,
Go dress yourself for the road,
Be ready to ride straight away!

Rise now, and dress you may
In your finest robe as yet.
And order your saddle set
There, on your finest palfrey!
Now rose Énide, all fearfully,
Very sad and pensive too,
Reproaching herself as a fool
For the words she'd said, afraid
She must lie in the bed she'd made.
'Ah,' she cried, 'my evil folly!
For now I was but too happy,
I lacked not a single thing,
God! Why did I risk everything,
Speaking to him in such a way?
God! Did he not love me always?
In faith, alas, he loved too well.
And now in exile I must dwell!
But of this I have greater grief,
No sight of him will bring relief,
Who loved me in such a manner
That none other he held as dear.
The finest man that ever was born
Held all others in such scorn
He looked only towards me.
I lacked for nothing equally;
Then did I live most happily,
But then my pride stirred in me,
And of my pride I suffer now
That I did such words allow
It is right I suffer, I don't deny:
None knows the good till the ill they try.'
So the lady sighed with distress,
While she was swiftly dressed
In the finest of robes, as we recall,
Yet nothing pleases her at all,

But simply adds to her chagrin.
Then she has her handmaiden,
Summon her squire, and she,
Bids him saddle her fine palfrey,
Born of northern stock, a mount
Finer than those of king or count.
As soon as her command is given
The squire runs to do as bidden,
Quickly saddles the dapple grey.
Érec calls his squire straight away
Orders him to bring his armour,
And with armour his body cover.
Then to a tower room he was led
A Limoges tapestry was spread
Before him there on the ground
And when the squire had found
The armour as commanded, he
Set it down on the tapestry.
Now Érec took his seat opposite,
A leopard woven where he did sit,
Clear on that tapestry portrayed,
And he prepared to be arrayed:
First he laced up his greaves,
Of polished steel their leaves,
Next he donned a coat of mail,
So finely made it could not fail.
This hauberk was so richly plied
That neither outward nor inside,
Was there iron to forge a needle,
Nor could aught rust the metal,
For all was wrought of silver,
Of close triple-weave all over;
And it was formed so subtly,
That I can swear most certainly
No man wearing it complete

Was troubled by it in the least:
No more a silken jacket hurt,
When worn atop an undershirt.
Every squire and every knight
Began to question at this sight,
Why Érec should his armour don,
But none dared ask why it was on.
When he was in his mail-coat,
A helmet with a band of gold,
Brighter than a glass, the said
Squire now laced upon his head.
Then he donned his sword, ordering
That they saddle for him and bring,
His bay-steed, reared in Gascony.
Then calling to a valet, said he:
'Valet, run to my lady's bower,
To the chamber beside the tower,
Which is my wife's room, and say
She is causing me much delay.'
She is taking too long to dress!
The need for haste on her impress,
For I am waiting here to mount.'
The valet goes, to render account,
Finds her ready, in tears and grief,
And addresses her immediately:
'Lady, why do you thus delay?
My lord is keen to be on his way,
He has his full armour on,
And would already be gone
Had you been ready to proceed.'
She marvelled at her sire indeed,
Wondering what was his design.
But of this she showed no sign,
Wisely choosing to appear
At her happiest, as she drew near.

She found him midst the courtyard,
Upon her King Lac followed hard.
The knights came too, as I am told.
There is neither young nor old
That fails to demand and know
If any of them might ride also;
Each himself offers and presents,
But he swore it was not his intent
To take with him any companion
Except his wife, and save her none;
For, as for others, they went alone.
The king, when this was known,
Said: 'Fair son, what do you there?
You must apprise me of this affair,
You should hide nothing from me.
Where do you go, to what country?
You wish it seems on no account
To have knight or squire go mount
And solace you with their company.
If you've undertaken to meet, you see,
In single combat with some knight,
Nevertheless you should of right
Take men to ride escort with you,
Many a knight and squire on view,
Both wealth and lordship showing.
For the son of a king, that is fitting.
Fair son, load the packhorses now,
And, as companions, then allow
Thirty or forty knights or more;
Of gold and silver carry a store,
Whatever a nobleman may need.'
Then Érec answered as he decreed,
And told him all he had planned
For the journey he had on hand.
'Sire,' he said, 'it must be so.

I take but one mount when I go,
Nor have I need of gold or silver,
Nor of squires or knights either;
Nor do I wish for company
Save my wife to go with me.
But I pray you, whate'er may pass,
Should she return, and I die alas,
That you love her, hold her dear,
For love of me, this is my prayer,
And grant her half of all your land,
With no contention from any man,
As long as she lives, as her share.'
The king, on hearing his prayer,
Said: 'I so promise, my fair son,
Yet it grieves me you go alone
Without company, all the day,
You'd not do so if I had my way.'
'Sire, it must be so, thus we two
Will go; to God I commend you.
But keep my companions in mind,
For them mounts and armour find,
And whatever a knight may need.'
The king could not keep, indeed,
From tears at parting from his son.
The people round him wept as one:
The ladies and the knights weeping,
Shedding tears and him bemoaning.
There were none that did not grieve:
Many swooned, as you may believe;
Weeping kissed him, and embraced;
With sorrow they were almost dazed.
I doubt they could have wept more,
If he'd been dead or wounded sore.
Then Érec said, to ease their sorrow:
'My lords, why are you grieving so?

I'm neither imprisoned nor in pain,
From this grief you've naught to gain.
Though I go today, I'll return to you,
If it pleases God and I can so do.
I'll commend you, one and all, also
To God, if you give me leave to go:
For far too long you keep me here.
I am sorry to see you shed a tear,
It brings me great distress and pain.'
Each commends each to God again.

LINES 2765-2924 ÉREC DEFEATS THE THREE ROBBERS

AMIDST great sorrow, are they gone,
With Érec leading his wife along,
Knowing not where, but at a venture.
'Come, ride,' says he, 'and be sure
Not to be so rash as to speak to me
Of anything you may chance to see:
Say nothing to me; be not heard.
Oh, take care never to say a word,
Unless a word to you I have said,
Now with confidence, ride ahead,
And swiftly for we must be gone.'
'Sire, she said, 'it shall be done.'
She rode ahead and held her peace.
Both of them travelled silently;
But Énide was troubled at heart,
And within herself grieved apart,
Soft and low, so he might not hear.
'Alas,' she said, 'to such joy I fear
Has God raised and exalted me,
He casts me down as suddenly;

Fortune, I thought to command,
Now silently withdraws her hand.
And alas, I mind it all the more,
That I dare not speak to my lord.
For I am distressed and mortified
That he will not ride at my side.
He has turned against me, I see,
Since he declines to speak to me.
And I myself am not so daring
As even to seek to look at him.
While she was lamenting deeply,
A knight who lived by robbery
Appeared from among the trees.
With him were two accomplices,
And all three armed in every way;
They coveted the dappled grey
That mount Énide was riding.
'Friends,' cried he, 'good tidings,'
Addressing his two companions,
'We are nothing but rapsCALLIONS
And are marvellously unlucky
If this haul we take proves puny.
Here comes a lady wondrous fair;
Married or not, that's her affair,
But very richly is she dressed.
And the palfrey and that harness,
And the saddle and the trappings
Worth easily a thousand shillings.
The palfrey I covet, I confess,
And you may have all the rest!
I desire no more for my share.
That knight who follows there
Shall not lead the lady away,
God save me, I'll see him pay;
Such a thrust I mean to deal him.

For was I not the first to see him?
Thus it must be my right as well,
Now to challenge him to battle.’
They consent, he takes the field,
Crouched low behind his shield,
While the others remain behind.
’Twas use and custom then, I find,
That two knights may not together
Join in attack against one other;
Thus if they had combined jointly,
It would have seemed pure treachery.
Énide had seen the robber knight,
And felt great fear at the sight,
‘God,’ she cried, ‘must I be dumb?
My lord will be taken or succumb;
Since they are three and he’s alone,
’Tis no fair conduct, and unknown,
For one man to contend with three.
He’ll strike now advantageously,
For my lord has not taken guard.
God, shall I prove now such a coward
As not to dare say a single thing?
I’ll not be a coward for anything;
I will speak to him without fail.’
Then she turned and did him hail,
Saying: ‘Fair sire, do you not see?
There come riding knights three,
Who will surely work you harm.
Their coming fills me with alarm.’
‘What,’ cried Érec, ‘do you speak?
Do you think me a fool and weak!
You must surely be more than bold
To scorn what you have been told,
My command and my prohibition.
On this occasion you are forgiven;



*'Fair sire, do you not see?
There come riding knights three'*
Enid (p82, 1868) - Baron Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) and
Gustave Doré (1832-1883)
The Internet Archive

But if you trespass a further time
You'll obtain no pardon of mine.'
Then, adjusting shield and lance,
Towards the robber he advanced,
Who challenged him, in an instant;
But Érec, hearing, remained defiant.
Both gave spur, and clashed together,
Their lances pointing at each other;
The knight failed to strike his man,
While Érec, whose was the better plan,
Dealt the robber a world of harm;
He aimed at the other's shield arm,
Splitting the knight's shield in two,
Piercing his chest through and through,
Nor was the chain-mail any defence;
He thrust the steel point of the lance
A foot and a half deep in his body;
Retreating, drew it forth completely,
The robber fell, and die he would,
For the steel had drunk of his blood.
But then a second knight advanced,
His companion staying at a distance,
He rode towards Érec, threateningly.
But Érec, grasping his shield firmly,
Attacked him, and put him to the test:
The knight held his before his breast;
They struck against the emblems there,
The knight's lance shattered in the air,
And into two separate pieces split.
Upon the breast Érec's weapon hit;
He drove that lance a quarter deep.
The knight no other harm could reap:
Érec, knocking him from his horse,
Towards the third knight set a course.
When the latter saw Érec advance,

His own escape he swiftly planned
Fearful, not daring to await him,
He fled to the woods to evade him.
But his flight did him little good,
Érec followed, seeking his blood:
Cried: 'Vassal, vassal, turn around,
And prepare to defend your ground,
Lest I should kill you as you flee!
Flight is in vain, as you can see.'
But the robber cares not to return;
To fly the field is his sole concern.
Érec follows, forcing him to yield,
Striking him on his painted shield,
Driving him into the earth full hard.
All three may Érec now disregard:
The first is dead, the second hurt,
And he has just unhorsed the third,
Forcing him swiftly from his steed.
He seizes the mounts of all three,
Tying them by the reins together:
Each from each in colour differ,
The first like milk shows pure white,
The second is fine, and black as night,
While the third is a dappled grey.
Back to the road Érec took his way,
Where Énide awaited his return.
He made the horses her concern,
He bade her drive them on ahead,
Warned her to heed what he said,
That she must not appear so bold,
As to let one single word unfold,
Save he gave her leave to do so.
She said: 'I'll not a word bestow,
Fair sir, if that is your solemn wish.'
They ride on, she holds her peace.

LINES 2925-3085 ÉREC DEFEATS THE FIVE KNIGHTS

BARELY a league had they gone
When before them, riding along
In a vale, were five knights, all
With their lance at the vertical,
Their shields up, and their bright
Helms on head, and enlaced tight.
They were all after plunder too.
Énide, approaching, they view,
Leading on those three horses,
And Érec after on his courser.
As soon as they both came in sight,
The five agreed what each knight
Should receive as his fair share,
As if they'd already seized the pair.
Covetousness is an evil thing;
Yet it gained them not a thing,
For they met with a stern defence.
Much of a fool's aims are nonsense,
Many a man fails of his intent:
And so it occurred in this attempt.
One declared he would possess
The lady or die, nothing less;
Another said the dappled grey
Should his own share defray
Of what was won in the attack.
The third said he'd take the black.
'And I the white,' cried the fourth.
The fifth, not shy in holding forth,
Claimed that he would seize indeed
The knight's armour and his steed.

In single combat he would conquer,
And would be the first to venture,
If they would only grant him leave;
Which they willingly agreed.
So they part, he rides forward;
On his fine and agile courser.
Érec saw him, yet he feigned,
Not to, and as yet disdained
To take guard. But when Énide
Saw him her heart beat indeed,
With dread and deep dismay.
'Alas,' she said 'I may not say
A single word, what shall I do?
My lord truly warned me too,
Swore to punish me severely,
If a single word escapes me.
But if my lord's life were over
No comfort might I discover:
I'd be mistreated, death my lot.
God! My lord sees them not!
Fool that I am, why hesitate?
I am too chary, the risk great,
In granting speech no room.
I well know those that come
Some vile wickedness do seek.
But Lord! How can I speak?
He'll slay me. Ah, let him so!
To warn him I cannot say no.'
Then she called softly: 'Sire!
'What,' he said, 'is your desire?'
'Sire, your mercy! I am afeared,
Five knights but now appeared
From that thicket, to my dismay.
Having seen them I have to say
They seem ready to attack you.

Four of them wait there 'tis true,
But the fifth knight comes on,
As fast as his courser can run;
I'm fearful of what he may do.
The other four await their cue,
But they remain not far away;
And will aid him if they may.
Érec replied: 'You thought ill
In disobeying my clear will,
A thing I had forbidden you.
Nevertheless I surely knew
You hold me in low esteem.
Your services go awry, I deem,
For I owe you no thanks for this,
Angry your tongue runs amiss;
I have told you, and do so again,
Once more my pardon you obtain,
But another time have a care,
Not to turn to watch me there;
You would be foolish so to do.
For a third speech you will rue.'
Then he spurred over the field,
Seeking to make the other yield.
They moved to attack one another.
Érec thrust so fiercely at the other
His shield flew, the neck uncovered,
And Érec the collar bone shattered;
The stirrup breaks, he falls, in pain,
Without the power to rise again;
For he is so wounded and battered;
One of the other four now appears,
And they attack each other fiercely.
Érec, with no great difficulty,
Thrusting his well-forged steel in
Pierces the throat beneath the chin,

Slicing through arteries and bone,
Beyond the neck the blade has flown.
See the hot blood crimson flow
Down on both sides from the blow,
The heart fails, and the spirit flies.
A third knight now met his eyes,
Advancing across the nearby ford,
From his steed the water poured.
Érec gave spur and met the knight
Before he had left the water quite;
Striking at him so hard, withal,
That both horse and rider fall.
The steed falls upon his master,
So the weight holds him under;
The horse seals his fate complete
Then struggles to regain its feet;
Thus has Érec conquered three.
The others take council, and flee,
Thinking they might outpace him,
Both unwilling now to face him;
They gallop along the river side.
Érec follows them as they ride,
Till he strikes one on the spine;
Over the saddle-blow he inclines.
All Érec's strength was in the blow,
And the lance shattered on his foe.
So that he fell head foremost there.
Érec pays him dearly for his share
In breaking the lance, there beneath,
Drawing his sword from its sheath:
The knight in folly reared up again,
Érec dealt him three strokes plain,
So that his steel sword drank deeply.
Slicing the shoulder from the body,
Such that it toppled to the ground.

Then sword drawn, at a bound,
He attacked the last who swiftly fled,
Leaving the others wounded or dead.
Finding Érec takes up the chase,
He is so afraid he dare not face
The knight, but cannot turn aside;
So he is forced to forgo his ride,
Not trusting in his mount that day.
His shield and lance he hurls away,
Slips from his steed to the ground.
Though Érec no longer felt bound
To pursue the knight, now on foot,
He yet seized the lance by the butt:
Not wishing to leave it lying there,
Given his own was beyond repair.
He took the lance, and rode away,
With the horses taken in that affray:
All five he seizes, a pleasant haul.
Énide is at pains to lead them all:
He hands her the five and three,
Tells her to ride along swiftly,
And keep from speaking a word,
Lest trouble and evil be incurred;
With nary a word does she reply,
Nor does she even utter a sigh,
Leading the horses on, all eight.

**LINES 3086-3208 ÉREC AND ÉNIDE
MEET A SQUIRE AND REACH A TOWN**

THEY rode along till it was late,
Without reaching town or shelter,
And at nightfall they took cover

In a near meadow, beneath a tree.
Érec bids his lady sleep while he
Undertakes to keep the watch.
She replies that she will not,
It is not right, should not be so;
He must sleep who needs it though.
Érec hears and is pleased to yield.
Under his head he sets his shield,
While his lady her cloak does put
Over her lord from head to foot.
He sleeps, she keeps watch in lieu,
Stays awake the whole night through,
Holding those horses' reins tight,
In her hands, till clear daylight.
And much she reproached herself,
Ashamed of those words that fell
From her lips, for acting badly,
Having been treated more kindly
Than she felt she deserved by right.
'Alas,' said she, 'revealed tonight,
Is all my pride and presumption!
I should know, without question,
There is no knight who is better
Than my lord, he's like no other.
I knew so, but know better now,
For my eyes have witnessed how
He has defeated three then five.
A plague on my tongue for I've
Spoken with outrageous pride,
And thus of shame almost died!
So she grieved the night through
Till dawn brought the day anew.
Érec rose with the dawn amain,
And they took to the road again,
She in front and he behind her.

At noon they see a squire appear,
Before them in a little valley.
And with him are two lackeys
Bearing along bread and wine,
And good cheese, rich and fine,
To the fields of Count Galoain,
For his haymakers in the plain.
The squire was awake, indeed,
For seeing Eric and Énide
Coming from the woods behind,
It immediately sprang to mind
They must have sojourned there,
No food or water for their share,
Since that way, for many an hour,
Neither castle, town nor tower
Stood, nor stronghold, nor abbey,
Hospice, nor place of sanctuary.
So setting an honest aim in play
He turned his steps their way,
Saluting them politely and then
Said: 'Sir, I believe it is plain
That you have spent the night
In those woods, until daylight,
Sleepless, thirsting and unfed.
I offer some of this white bread,
If you to eat of such are fain.
I say it not in hopes of gain;
For I do request naught of you,
The bread is of good grain too,
And I've good wine and cheese,
Fine jugs, and a cloth to please.
If you would like to eat there,
You need not seek elsewhere.
Under this beech, on green turf,
Lay your armour on the earth.



*'Under this beech, on green turf
lay your armour on the earth'*

Enid (p91, 1868) - Baron Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) and
Gustave Doré (1832-1883)
The Internet Archive

And rest yourself a while here.
Dismount, I say, without fear.’
Érec set foot on the ground
Saying: ‘A fair friend found!
I will eat, and my thanks to you,
Without seeking to ride anew.’
The squire, well-bred of course,
Helped the lady from her horse
And the lads accompanying him
Tethered their mounts for them.
Then they are seated in the shade.
The squire Érec’s helm now laid
On the grass, so he might unlace
The ventail from before his face.
The tablecloth then he spread,
Before them, on the grassy bed;
He handed them bread and wine,
Served the cheese, sliced it fine.
Hungry, they ate, and drank until
Of the wine they’d had their fill.
The squire served them readily,
With every care that might be.
Having drunk and eaten enough,
Érec proved kind and generous:
‘Friend,’ said he, ‘in gratitude,
A horse of mine I give to you.
Take the one you like best of all;
And if it prove not too much trouble,
Return to the town that lies ahead,
And find me good board and bed.’
The squire then replied that he,
Would do Érec’s will, right gladly.
So of the horses he made assay,
Choosing with thanks the dapple grey,
For that seemed best. He sprang up

Mounting then by the left stirrup,
And leaving them both behind
Rode swiftly to the town to find
And reserve fine lodgings there.
Behold, to them he again repairs;
'Now, mount sir, swiftly,' says he,
You'll have good lodging presently.
Érec mounted, and his lady after;
The town being not much farther,
To their lodgings soon they came.
They were welcomed to the same,
By their new host, whose pleasure,
It was to meet, and in full measure,
All their wishes, and with goodwill,
And all delight, their needs fulfil.

**LINES 3209-3458 THE COUNT DESIRES ÉNIDE:
SHE DECEIVES HIM**

WHEN the squire has done them all
The honour he can, then to their stall
He would lead their horses; mounts,
Passes a window-room, the Count's,
To reach the stables, as he desires.
The Count and three other squires
Are leaning from the window there.
The Count seeing his squire appear,
And mounted on the dapple grey,
Asks of him: 'Who owns it, pray?'
The squire replied that it was his.
The Count marvelled much at this.
'How is this?' he said, 'Do tell me.'
'A knight whom I esteem greatly,

Sire,' he said, 'gave me the palfrey,
I've brought him to town with me,
Found him lodgings for the night.
And he is a most courteous knight,
The handsomest I have ever seen.
Upon my oath indeed I ween.
I could not convey half of how
Handsome he is to you, I avow.
The Count asked him in reply:
'He cannot be more so than I?'
'By my faith, Sire,' said the squire,
'You are as fine as one may desire,
There is no knight in this country,
No noble born in your territory,
Whom you do not in looks excel;
But this knight, I say, looks well;
He'd outdo yourself, I tell no tale,
If he were not, beneath his mail,
Bruised and sore, black and blue.
In those woods did battle ensue,
He fought with eight knights alone,
And took their mounts for his own.
And with him there rides a lady,
So fair that no other, it may be,
Is even half as lovely as she is.'
When the Count heard of this,
His pride prompted him to see
Whether it were truth or falsity.
'I never heard of such', said he,
'Lead me then to this hostelry;
For certain, I desire to know
Whether you lie or it is so.'
He replied: 'Sire, willingly,
Here lies the way, follow me,
The lodgings are not far away.'

Said the Count: 'I'll brook no delay'.
From his window-room, the Count
Descended, as did from his mount
The squire, so the Count might ride;
Then ran on, to Érec and his bride,
To tell them of the Count's visit.
Érec's lodgings were of great merit,
The kind that a nobleman prefers.
There were a great host of tapers
And fine candles spaced around.
Three companions only, they found,
Attended the Count and no more.
Érec rose now to greet the four,
Being a man of gracious manner,
Saying: 'My lord, be welcome here!'
The Count in like terms replied.
Then they sat down side by side,
On a couch that was soft and white,
So to converse, the Count and knight.
The Count offers, states his intent,
Begging him, pray, to give consent
To his providing for all they need;
But Érec does not deign to accede,
Saying he has much coin to hand;
Needs naught the Count may command.
They talk awhile of many a thing,
But the Count restlessly viewing
All, and glancing here and there,
Casts his eyes on the lady fair.
Seeing her beauty he is caught,
On her he fixes all his thought,
Gazes at her, as best he might;
He covets her, she does so delight
That he is in love with her beauty.
He asks permission, most slyly,

Of Érec to converse with her.
‘May I ask a favour, dear sir,
If it be not displeasing to you,
Of courtesy, and for pleasure too,
I would sit beside your lady.
Out of kindness I came to see
Both, you must no harm expect:
I wish to offer, with all respect,
Whatever service I might pay her.
Know, I would obey her pleasure,
For the love you inspire in me.’
Érec saw no cause for jealousy,
Suspecting no treachery or ill.
‘Sir,’ he said, ‘such is my will.
You may sit and speak together.
Do not think it displeases, rather,
My permission I freely grant you.’
The lady was sitting about two
Lance-lengths away from them;
So, there, the Count then came;
Sat on a low stool at her side.
The lady turned to him beside,
She being wise and courteous.
‘Ah,’ said he, ‘It grieves me thus
To see you in such humble state!
My sadness and distress is great.
Yet, if you but believe me, you
May have honour and riches too,
Great advantage would be yours.
To such beauty indeed of course
Are honour and distinction due.
My lady, I would wish to see you
The mistress of all I possess.
When, out of love, I make request,
You ought not to disdain my suit;

Your lord I know beyond dispute
Does not love and prize you so.
A worthy lord you shall know
If you remain with me, my dear.’
‘Sir, all this is nothing, I fear!
For better I had not been born,
Or been burnt on a pile of thorn
And my ashes scattered abroad,
Than ever I was false to my lord,’
Said Énide, ‘for it cannot be,
That I should think treachery
Towards my lord, or any ill.
You would err toward me still,
If you insisted on such a thing.
I’ll not behave so for anything.’
But now the Count waxed angry.
‘So, you do not deign to love me,
Lady,’ said he, ‘Your pride is great.
You will not deign to capitulate
To flattery, nor prayers, you say.
The more one begs and flatters today,
The more a woman’s pride grows;
Insult and wrong her, I suppose,
And she’ll prove more tractable.
I swear if you are not pliable,
If you will not obey my will,
I will have my swordsmen kill
Your lord, now, without a fight,
Whether that be wrong or right,
And here, before your very eyes.’
‘Ah no, my lord,’ Énide cries,
‘Seek to act more honourably;
You would work vile treachery,
Should his death here ensue.
Restrain yourself, I beg of you;

I will do your pleasure, hear me.
As your own you may take me:
Since I am yours, and wish it so.
My words not from pride did flow,
But I sought, and would prove,
Whether you indeed might love
My very self with a true heart.
But I would not, for any part,
Wish you to commit a treason.
My lord has not a single reason
To mistrust you, so that, if you
Slay him, treason you would do,
And I would be blamed entirely.
They would say in all this country
That it was done with my consent.
Go rest yourself then for the present;
In the morning my lord will rise,
And his harm you may devise
Without blame or reproach, you see.’
Her thoughts and words do not agree.
‘Sire,’ she cries, ‘believe me now,
Do not thus furrow your brow,
But send here, in the dawn light,
Your squires and your knights
To carry me away by force:
He will defend me, in due course;
He’s a proud and courageous man.
Then by intent, but as if unplanned,
Have him seized and treated ill,
Or even beheaded if you will.
I’ve led this manner of life too long,
I like not to trail, in this way, along
Behind my lord. I would no longer;
With you I would rather linger;
In your bed, naked to naked go.

Since this is the course we follow,
Of my love you may rest assured.'
The Count replied: 'Lady, for sure,
You were born in a propitious hour:
And you will be held in great honour.'
'Sire,' she replied: 'I so believe;
Yet your word I would receive,
That you will ever hold me dear,
Or I should not trust you, I fear.'
Glad and joyful the Count replied,
'Here I will pledge that, on my side,
Faithfully, as a count, my lady,
I will do all you wish, entirely;
And you need have no fear of that.
All that you wish for you shall have.'
Now she has won from him his word
Of little worth, though little she cared
Except as a way to save her lord.
She knows how to snare with words
Any fool, when she gives it thought;
Better that he with lies were caught
Than that her lord should be slain.
The Count stands at her side again,
Commends her to God a hundredfold;
Small value however shall it hold
The pledge to him that she has made.
Érec hears nothing of what they say,
That they are speaking of his death,
But God will aid his every breath,
As I believe He will so do now.
Érec is in great danger, I allow,
Knows not that he must beware,
That the Count plots evil there,
Thinks to steal his wife away,
And Érec, all defenceless, slay.

The Count slyly takes his leave:
‘To God I commend you,’ says he.
‘So do I you, Sir,’ Érec replies,
Taking leave of him likewise.
The night was already part over.
There, in a secluded chamber,
Two beds were set on the ground.
On one of them Érec lay down,
Énide retired to the other bed,
Filled with anxiety and dread.
She slept not at all that night,
Keeping good watch till daylight,
For she knows the Count to be,
As it has been given her to see,
A man filled with wickedness.
And knows too that if in duress
He holds her lord, he will not fail
To do him harm, and her assail;
Surely he will slay her knight,
For whom she wakes this night.
Distressed she guards her man;
But before dawn, if she but can
Bring it about, and he believe,
They may be full ready to leave.

**LINES 3459-3662 ÉREC ESCAPES AND
DEFEATS THE COUNT, WHO RECANTS**

ÉREC slumbered long and deep,
Securely, all that night, in sleep,
Until the dawn light drew near.
Then Énide realised, in fear,
That she must delay no longer.

Her heart toward him was tender,
Like a true and loyal wife,
Free of deceit, as was her life.
She rose, made ready to ride abroad,
Then she went to wake her lord:
'Ah, Sire,' she cried, 'forgive me!
You must arise now, instantly,
For you are beset by treachery,
Though you of any guilt are free.
The Count is a proven traitor,
And if he comes upon you here
You will not escape this place,
He'll slay you before my face.
He desires me, and thus hates you,
But if God pleases, who sees the true,
You will not now be taken or slain.
Last night he sought your life to gain,
But I this Count truly deceived:
I'd wed and love him he believed.
Soon you will see him reappear:
He wishes to seize and keep me here,
And slay you if he finds you too.'
Now is it proven to Érec how true
His wife is and how loyal a lady.
'Wife,' he cried, 'run, instantly,
Have our mounts saddled, then away
And go summon our host, and say
That he must his presence afford:
For treason is but now abroad.'
Soon the horses are made ready,
And the host summoned swiftly.
Érec is now armed and dressed.
The host has run to attend his guest.
'Sire,' he cries, 'why such haste!
Why do you your sleep thus waste,

Surely the night is not yet done?’
Érec replies: he must be gone,
The road is long, long the journey,
And therefore he has made all ready,
It being for some time in his thought.
‘Sir,’ he added, ‘you’ve not yet brought
Me any account of my expenses:
You’ve shown me honour and kindness,
And that redounds to your great merit,
The seven horses will settle the debt,
The mounts I brought along with me.
Don’t disdain them, take them of me!
I could not increase my gift further,
Not even by adding a single halter.’
His host, delighted with every steed,
Bowed low, to his very feet indeed,
Expressing his deepest gratitude.
Then Érec mounted, and so issued
His farewells, and was on his way.
While often to Énide, he did say,
That if anything she should see
She should not thus, so daringly,
Speak to him of it, but be silent.
Meanwhile, possessed of ill intent,
A hundred armed knights entry made
To the lodgings, and were dismayed
To find that Érec was no more there.
Thus the Count found that the fair
Lady had tricked him completely.
Their horses’ hoof prints they see,
And all at once follow the trail.
The Count against Érec doth rail,
And declares that if he finds him,
Nothing indeed will restrain him
From beheading him there and then.

‘A curse on whoever slows again,’
He cries, ‘or fails to spur instead.
Whoever shall bring me the head
Of this knight, whom I hate, I say,
Will have served me well this day.’
Then they drove onward swiftly
All filled with a deep hostility
Towards a man they had never
Seen, nor had he hurt them ever.
They rode on till they saw him,
Even at the woodland margin,
Before he was lost in the trees.
Not one of them but in rivalry
Charges onwards; Énide hears
The sound as the force appears,
The noise of horses and arms,
Filling the vale, to her alarm.
Now Énide could not, on seeing
Them, stop herself from speaking.
‘Alas, Sire,’ she cried, ‘Alas!
See what a force the Count has
Brought, a very host attacks you!
Sire, ride faster now, till you
And I are hidden by the trees.
I think we can escape with ease,
For they are yet far behind us.
If you continue to amble thus,
Death will prove hard to evade;
Both are not equally arrayed.’
‘Little it is you think of me,
You neglect my orders utterly’
Érec replied. ‘My kind prayers
Cannot restrain you it appears.
But if God is merciful and I
Escape from this, by and by,

You'll pay dearly for speaking,
Unless I feel more forgiving.'
Then Érec promptly turning
Sees the Seneschal nearing,
On a steed swift and strong.
Before them all he rides on
Four crossbow lengths away.
Érec was armed for the fray,
And thus well-set to fight.
He assesses the foe's might,
And sees a full hundred there.
Then the Seneschal prepares
To attack him, swift he rides.
Soon together they collide,
Striking each other's shield
With blows from their steel,
Érec with his trenchant blade
Does the other's guard invade,
Whose shield and coat of mail
No more than blue silk doth avail.
Now the Count spurs to the fight,
Who was a fine and sturdy knight,
So the tale goes, but the Count
Had been ill-advised to mount
With only his shield and lance,
Seeing his prowess as his defence,
Thinking he needs naught else.
He shows his bravery, himself
Racing ahead, and at a distance,
A dozen rods or so in advance.
When Érec saw him riding clear
He turned; the Count, lacking fear,
Charged, and they met violently.
The Count struck Érec so fiercely,
With such force against his chest,

That if he had not been well-set
He would yet have been unhorsed.
The wood of his shield was forced
And split, the lance pierced through.
But Érec's defences were proof
Against all, saving him from hurt
Without harm to his mail shirt.
The Count was strong, his lance broke:
Then Érec dealt him such a stroke
On his shield, all painted yellow,
More than a yard into the fellow
Driving his lance, so deep indeed
The Count toppled from his steed.
Then Érec turned and rode away,
Not wishing to prolong his stay:
Into the forest, straight, he rode,
Spurring his horse along the road.
Now Érec is amongst the trees,
Leaving the field to his enemies,
Who tend to those who have fallen,
And swear to follow him, and then,
By every solemn oath ensure,
After two or three days, or more,
They will capture him, and slay.
The Count, hearing what they say,
Though he is wounded grievously,
Draws himself up, most carefully,
And opens his eyes a little way.
He sees the ill begun that day,
All the evil wrought, complete:
He asks the knights to retreat,
Saying: 'My lords, let no soul
Strong or weak, high or low,
Be so rash as to dare advance
A single step, at this instance.

Return now, all, immediately!
I have behaved most villainously:
But of my villainy I now repent.
Courteous, honourable, prudent,
Is that lady who deceived me.
I fell in love so with her beauty,
She so filled me with desire,
To slay her lord did I aspire,
And so by force possess her.
I deserved ill and found no other:
For see how ill has come to me.
What bad faith, what treachery,
How vile I was in my madness!
Never was knight born who less
Deserved it, nor any man better.
He'll have no harm of me, rather
I'd seek to prevent it now alway.
I demand you return: now obey.'
Back they all went, disconsolate,
Bearing the Seneschal, whom fate
Had dealt his death, upon his shield
Reversed. The Count too from the field
They bore, yet not wounded mortally:
Thus was Érec delivered, as we see.



'Back they all went, disconsolate, bearing the Seneschal'
Enid (p111, 1868) - Baron Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) and
Gustave Doré (1832-1883)
The Internet Archive

LINES 3663-3930 ÉREC DEFEATS GUIVRET LE PETIT

ÉREC, galloping swiftly, goes
Down a lane twixt two hedgerows.
He rides, with his wife in the lead,
Each spurring on their steed.
They ride on; the lane they follow,
Till they reach a mown meadow.
Leaving the field they found
A drawbridge, which was down,
Not far away from a tall keep,
Ringed by a moat, wide and deep,
And encircled by a solid wall.
No obstacle that bridge at all,
But only a little further they trace
Before being seen from a high place
By the knight who owns the keep.
Of whom I tell you, truth I speak,
That he was very small in stature,
Though brave-hearted by nature.
He, spying Érec, once across,
Descended quickly, had his horse,
A sorrel charger, in saddle arrayed;
Upon that a golden lion portrayed.
Then he had them bring his shield
And his long lance, to take the field,
His keen blade, whetted for fighting,
His helmet, all bright and shining,
Gleaming mail, and plated greaves;
For in his lists now he perceives
This armed knight go riding by,
With whom his arms he would try,

One who must fight, yet swiftly
Be compelled to yield completely.
His orders were soon acted upon.
Behold the horse, its saddle on,
Is led forth, with bridle and rein,
By a squire; while, in his train,
Another squire brings the armour.
The knight passes the tower door,
Riding swiftly, all on his own,
With nary a single companion.
Érec trots all along the hillside:
Behold the knight quickly ride
Over the hilltop, swift indeed,
Mounted on his powerful steed,
Galloping on at such a speed
It ground the stones without heed,
Finer than any millstone will
Grind the corn there in the mill;
While on every side there flew
Glittering sparks, of fiery hue,
So that its four hooves seemed
As if bolts of lightning gleamed.
Énide heard the sound and fury,
And almost fell from her palfrey,
Struck helpless and in a faint.
In all her body was not a vein
In which the blood did not chill.
She looked white, pale and ill,
Her face as lifeless as the dead.
Great was her dismay and dread:
She dared not address her lord,
Who had oft warned her before,
Ordering her to hold her peace.
Between two paths, ill at ease,
She wavers, uncertain of intent:

Should she speak or stay silent.
Within herself she counsel seeks,
Often readying herself to speak,
So that her lips are in a flutter,
Yet not a word can she utter;
Her teeth are so clenched in fear,
That her speech cannot win clear.
So she chides at herself, yet still
Her teeth clenched, mouth still,
Not a sound has yet emerged,
The struggle is within, unheard.
‘Surely my hurt would be grievous
If I were to lose my dear lord thus.
Shall I speak all then openly?
No. Why? I dare not, lest he
Is enraged at my audacity.
And if my lord is angered he
Will abandon me completely,
Alone, wretched and ignored.
All will be worse than before.
Worse then, but what care I?
May grief and sorrow, say I,
While I live, be mine forever,
If my lord I cannot deliver
In some way from this place,
Ere he look death in the face.
If I do not swiftly warn him,
The Knight who is upon him
Will slay him ere he’s aware,
Seeming intent on evil there.
Behold, now I delay too long,
Lest I might work more wrong!
But I’ll no longer hesitate.
I see he doth so meditate
His very self he has forgot;

It is right I speak my thought.⁷
She speaks. He threatens her,
Yet with no wish to harm her:
He admits and knows full well
She loves him above all else,
And he her as much as one can.
He rides towards the armed man
Who summons him to the fight.
Below the hill he meets the knight,
Where they attack one another.
The steel lance-tips strike, together,
Both men exerting all their force,
Their shields worth less perforce
Than the bark the woodsman bears.
The wood splits, and leather tears,
And they pierce the iron mail;
Almost the innards they assail,
Lances strike, mail coats sound,
Their horses slide to the ground.
The knights are hurt, and sorely,
But neither is wounded mortally,
For both of them are valiant men.
Leaping to their feet again
Their lances they then review,
Which, unbroken, are still true,
But cast them to the ground.
Drawing swords, at a bound,
They lay on in great anger.
Each wounds and harms the other,
Without mercy on either side,
From their helms the sparks fly,
Whenever their swords recoil,
And those fierce blows they foil.
The shields are split and shattered,
The mail-coats scored and battered.

In four places, the blades have gone
Right through to the flesh beyond,
So both men are tired and wasted.
And if both their swords had lasted
Longer, and one not broken quite,
Neither would have left the fight,
They would have battled on instead,
Until the one of them was dead.
Énide, watching them struggle so,
Was beside herself with sorrow.
Whoever witnessed her grief there,
Wringing of hands, tearing of hair,
And the tears that from her stream,
Her a most loyal lady would deem;
And that man a wretch who saw
Her, and pitied her not the more.
But the two knights battled on as yet,
Knocking gems from each helmet,
Dealing each other fearsome blows.
Tierce to nigh on nones I suppose,
The fight continued, so fierce none
Could divine of them which one,
Of the two, had proved the better;
Or not in any certain manner.
Érec strove hard to win the contest,
Bringing his sharp sword to rest
On his foe's hem, without fail,
Piercing its lining of fine mail:
He staggered, yet still he stood.
He attacked Érec, and made good
Such a blow on Érec's shield,
That his precious sword did yield,
Broke in two, and him dismayed,
A sword he valued, a fine blade.
Seeing it shattered in the fight,

He hurled away, in savage spite,
The part remaining in his hand,
Far off from where he did stand.
Now fearful, he's forced to retire,
For no knight indeed can aspire
To fight a battle, launch an attack,
Whenever he his sword doth lack.
Érec harries him, till plea he make,
That Érec not kill him, for God's sake,
'Peace,' he cries, 'noble knight,
Be not so cruel, forgo the fight!
Now that my good sword fails me,
Now you have me at your mercy;
Yours the power and means here,
To kill me, or take me prisoner.'
Érec replied: 'Since you beg me,
Let me hear you state willingly,
And outright, you are defeated.
Of me you need feel no dread,
If you surrender on my terms.'
The knight begins to squirm.
Érec, on seeing him waver,
To dismay him even further,
Rushes at him, once again,
With drawn sword amain,
Until he cries in his dismay:
'Mercy sire, yours is the day,
Since it cannot be otherwise!
'More is needed,' Érec replies,
'You are not quit so easily.
Title and name, yield them me,
And I, in turn, mine will tell.'
'Sire,' he says, 'you speak well.
I am the king of this country,
My liegemen are the Irishry,

None but pays his rent to me;
My name is Guivret le Petit.
I am both rich and powerful,
For in this land on every side
There is no baron who defies
My strict instructions ever,
Or fails to do my pleasure,
Nor in the lands bordering mine;
For every neighbour I outshine,
However proud and bold he is,
But nevertheless it is my wish
To be your friend from now on.’
‘I too am noble, I am the son
Of King Lac.’ Érec thus far unveils:
‘My father is King of Far Wales.
Except indeed for King Arthur,
None owns more than my father;
Rich cities and halls, no emperor,
Of towns or castles, possesses more.
Of King Arthur I make exception,
Seek as you may in each direction,
No ruler with him can compare.’
Guivret marvels at this and stares:
‘Sire,’ he says, ‘I hear and wonder,
I was never so glad to meet another,
As to make your acquaintance.
You may rely on my allegiance!
And if it should please you to rest
In this country and be my guest,
You will do me a great honour.
As long as you wish to linger here,
You will be treated as my lord.
Now, a physician I would afford
You, and myself; there is a fine
One, at a nearby castle of mine,

Not eight leagues away, so wend
Our way, these wounds he'll tend.'
Érec said: 'Thanks, to you I pay,
For those words I hear you say.
Yet I'll not go along with you:
And this I solemnly ask of you,
If I should find myself in need
And news reaches you, indeed,
That I require your timely aid,
Do not forget what you have said.'
'Sire, you have my sure promise,'
He replied, 'that, never in this
Life, shall you need me to ride
But I will hasten to your side,
With all that are mine, for sure.'
'Then I can ask nothing more,'
Érec said, 'you promise much'
As my lord and friend, let such
Be the words, the deeds better.
Then they embraced each other
And kissed; never was there,
After so harsh a battle, so fair
A parting, for in brotherly love
Long white strips they remove
From the edges of their shirts,
To bind the flesh where it hurts.
After each has tended his brother,
To God they commend one another.

LINES 3931-4280 ÉREC'S ENCOUNTERS WITH
KAY AND GAWAIN

In such manner they now depart;
Guivret returned by a road apart,
While Érec continued on his way,
In dire need, after that affray,
Of treatment his wounds to heal.
He passed on by wood and field
Until he came to a wide plain
Below a lofty wooded domain
Full of stags, hinds, does; deer
Of every kind, did there appear.
All manner of game was seen,
And there Arthur and his queen
Met his noblest lords that day,
The king wishing to display
His prowess for three or four
Days, in the forest, or more.
There are pavilions, canopies:
Into the king's tent is pleased
To enter Sir Gawain, now tired
By a long ride, as it transpired.
A beech-tree was before the tent,
On which he his shield leant,
Leaving his ashen lance hard by,
And to a branch his mount did tie
Saddled and bridled, by the rein,
Till he should need to ride again.
There the horse stood, till Kay,
The Seneschal, came that way.
He strode swiftly to the steed;

As if to pass the time indeed,
Loosed and mounted the horse,
With no man to stay his course.
And seized the lance and shield
Where they rested in the field.
Gallop on that lively steed
Along a valley did Kay recede,
Until by chance it came about
That Érec met him riding out.
Érec recognised the Seneschal,
The armour and mount and all,
But Kay knew not the knight,
For from his armour no right
Knowledge of him could accrue,
So many sword blows and true,
With like blows of the lance,
Had from his shield glanced,
And effaced the design there;
While his lady, as from the glare
Of the sun and the dust, she
Had veiled her face closely,
Not wishing there to be seen
By Kay, or recognised I mean.
Kay, now riding forward swiftly,
Seized Érec's reins officiously,
Without giving him welcome,
And before he could ride on
Demanded proudly, as of right,
'I would know now Sir Knight,
Whence you ride, and who you are.'
'You must be mad, my path to bar,'
Cried Érec, 'you shall not know.'
The other replied: 'Do not say so;
I only ask it for your own good,
I see you wounded, here is blood

I am sure; for certain Sir Knight,
You'll have good lodging tonight,
For I'll see you well cared for,
Set at ease and with honour,
If you will ride along with me.
For you are in need of rest, I see.
King Arthur and Guinevere
Are close by in a grove here,
With their tents and pavilions.
In good faith, I press it upon
You, come ride along with me,
The king and queen you shall see,
Who in you will much delight
And grant you honour, Sir Knight.'
Érec replied: 'You speak well;
Yet I will not, for I must tell
You, in this you have no say;
I must be riding on my way.
Let me go, who delay too long,
The daylight will soon be gone.'
Kay replied: 'This is pure folly,
To refuse to come with me,
I trust you will repent of it.
However much you resent it,
Both you and your lady still
Must go to court as a priest will
Whether he wishes to or no.
You will be served badly though,
(If you ignore my counsel here)
As strangers should you appear.
Come quickly, I will escort you.'
But Érec spurned this demand too.
'Vassal,' he cried, 'this is madness,
To drag me with you, under duress.
I am come here in all innocence:

I say you commit a dire offence;
I deemed me safe in every sense,
So against you made no defence.’
Then he laid hands on his sword,
Crying: ‘Vassal, here is my word,
Loose my reins, and draw aside,
I find you insolent, full of pride,
Try and drag me one foot more,
And I will strike you, for sure.
Leave me be.’ Now Kay let go,
Then rode a dozen rods or so,
Turned, and his challenge sent,
Like one possessed of ill intent.
They charge fiercely at one another;
But Érec courteous towards the other,
Since Kay is without his armour,
Turns his lance, as a point of honour,
Presenting the butt end towards Kay,
Yet he gave him such a blow, I say,
High on his shield, and at an angle
That it struck Kay on the temple,
And, pinning his arm to his chest,
Felled him, and ended the contest.
Érec went and seized the steed,
And handed the reins to Énide.
It was about to be led away,
When the lightly wounded Kay
With every kind of flattery,
Begged Érec to return the steed.
‘God help me, Vassal,’ he said,
‘The mount is not mine, instead
It belongs to that knight whom
The greatest prowess now illumines,
That is my lord Gawain the Bold.
On his behalf this have I told,

So you may return it to him,
And thus great honour may win.
Then will you prove courteous
And wise, and I'll relay it thus.'
Érec replied: 'Take it I pray,
Take it, Vassal, lead it away!
It belongs to my lord Gawain,
It is not meet I the steed retain.'
Kay seizes the horse and mounts,
At the king's tent, there recounts
The truth, all of it must explain.
So the king summons Gawain.
'Fair nephew Gawain,' said the king,
'True and courteous in everything,
Go after him, as swift as thought,
Ask him sweetly, offend in naught,
Ask who he is, and his intent,
And if to our will he can be bent,
If you can persuade him to appear,
Then do not fail to lead him here.'
Gawain leaps on his lively steed;
While him two squires succeed.
They soon make out the knight,
Yet they know him not on sight.
He and Gawain greet each other,
Mutually salute one another.
Then says my lord Gawain,
His words as ever open and plain:
'Sire, King Arthur sends me here,
To welcome and lead you near.
The king and queen send to you
Greetings, and pray and request you,
To pass some time with the court,
(It may help you and cannot hurt)
They are hunting not far away.'

Érec replied: 'My thanks relay,
To both the king and his queen,
And my thanks to you who seem
Debonair and of gentle estate;
No, I am not in a perfect state,
With many a wound to my body,
Nevertheless, I must journey,
And will not turn aside to rest.
So wait no longer, that is best.
Go; my thanks, and no offence!
Now Gawain was a man of sense,
He retreated a little and spoke
In the ear of one of his folk,
Telling him: speed to the king,
Order the tents and everything
To be removed, re-sited further,
Three or four leagues from where
They now are Érected, and so
Block that road Érec must go.
The king must lodge there tonight,
If he wishes to know this knight,
And would offer his hospitality
To the best he might hope to see,
One who will turn aside for none,
Not for any lodging under the sun.
Swiftly, the message he did relay;
Then the king asked without delay
That all those tents be packed away.
It being done, they took their way.
On his horse, Aubagu, the king
Mounted, the queen after him,
On her white Nordic palfrey.
Meanwhile, Gawain quietly
Detained Érec, till Érec said:
'Yesterday I was well ahead,

Today am delayed endlessly.
Sire, you begin to trouble me.
Let me depart for, of my day,
The greater part it slips away!
To this my lord Gawain replied:
‘A little way I’d wish to ride
Beside you, unless you object,
For the night is still far off yet.’
While they are there talking
The tents are already rising
Before them, which Érec sees,
His lodgings, as he now perceives.
‘Aha Gawain, aha!’ cries he,
‘Cleverly you’ve outwitted me.
Cunningly have you delayed us,
Yet since events turn out thus
My name I will tell you straight,
For hiding it can only frustrate:
I am Érec; you did once condescend
To accept me as your true friend.’
Gawain hears and embraces him
Raises his helmet, and at the rim
He begins the ventail to unlace;
Clasps him again in his embrace
With joy, and Érec him in turn.
Gawain then sets out to return
To the king, saying: ‘This word
Will certainly delight my lord.
He and the queen will be happy,
And so I must ride on swiftly.
But, ere I do, I must embrace
And welcome, and so solace
Your wife, My Lady Énide.
My Lady the Queen, indeed
Has a great desire to see her,

But yesterday she spoke of her.
Then towards Énide he paced
And asked how she was placed,
Whether she did well abide,
And she courteously replied:
‘I would indeed know no pain,
Were it not that, Lord Gawain,
I grieve for my lord, seeing him
Wounded in almost every limb.’
Gawain answered: ‘So I fear,
For in his visage I see it clear,
Which is pale, most unhealthy.
I could weep myself to see
So pale and colourless a face;
But my joy my grief effaced;
For such joy sight of him brings
I had forgot all grievous things.
Now ride on at your own pace,
I shall you swiftly now outrace,
So I may tell the king and queen
That you now follow me, I ween.
I am sure of their both expressing
Great delight at the news I bring.’
Then off he rode to the king’s tent.
‘Sire,’ he cried, ‘here’s excellent
News, joy for you and your lady,
For here is Érec and his fair lady.’
The king leapt to his feet in joy:
‘Indeed,’ he said, ‘without alloy
Is this news, no rarer a measure
Could give me greater pleasure.’
The queen and all the court rejoice,
Expressing delight with one voice.
The king himself left his tent,
To welcome Érec was his intent.

When Érec beheld the king appear
He swiftly dismounted, and here
Énide dismounted too. The king
Embraced them, all welcoming,
And the queen most courteously
Kissed, embraced them tenderly;
Not a soul but felt great delight.
At once they divested the knight,
Of his arms and his armour too,
But with all his wounds in view,
All their delight turned to pain.
Arthur sighed, their distress plain,
And called for a salve most rare,
Morgan, his sister, had prepared.
This salve Morgan gave the king,
Full of great virtue in its working
That no harm to muscle or tendon
Was such that, ere a week was done,
The hurt was not completely healed,
Provided that the wound was sealed
With this ointment every day,
Which would thus the hurt allay.
The salve, now brought to the king,
To Érec proved an easeful thing.
When his wounds they had bathed,
Dried, and in bandages swathed,
The king led Érec and Énide
Into his tent, and there decreed
That, for love of that dear pair,
He'd remain in the forest there,
For the whole of one fortnight,
Until Érec was healed outright.
For this Érec thanked the king:
'Sire, wounds are a small thing;
The pain is not such that I wish



*'But with all his wounds in view,
all their delight turned to pain'*
Enid (p117, 1868) - Baron Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) and
Gustave Doré (1832-1883)
The Internet Archive

To fail my task to accomplish.
Nothing at all could restrain me:
Tomorrow (naught shall detain me)
I must depart here in the morn,
As soon as I behold the dawn.’
The king shook his head at this,
And said: ‘A great error this is,
Not to desire with us to remain.
I see you are still in much pain.
Stay; wisdom’s course pursue;
Sorrow and misery would ensue
Were you to die on the forest trail,
Fair gentle friend, let me prevail,
Until you are yourself once more!’
Érec replied thus: Sire, no more!
This journey I have undertaken,
And it cannot now be forsaken.’
The king realised in no manner
Would Érec stay, at his prayer,
So he set all the matter aside,
Ordering all their effort applied
To supper, all the tables spread,
The servants running on ahead.
It was the evening of Saturday,
They ate fish and fruit that day,
Pike, perch, salmon and trout,
Pears, raw, or baked without.
And after supper without delay
Ordered the beds in good array.
The king, who held Érec dear,
Had his bed made not too near,
So none might close to him lay,
And touch his wounds in any way.
He was well lodged in sight.
And in another bed, that night,

The queen and Énide slept
Under an ermine coverlet,
And all slept in deep repose
Until the morning sun arose.

LINES 4281-4307 ÉREC AND ÉNIDE DEPART ONCE MORE

NEXT day, when it was dawn,
Érec arose with the morn,
Had his horses saddled, all taut,
And his arms and armour brought.
Valets run and bring them him,
While he's exhorted to remain
By the king and all the knights:
But this he does reject outright,
And will not stay for anything.
Then you may see the weeping,
With such deep grief exhibited
As if they had found him dead.
He armed himself, Énide arose;
The knights their sorrow showed,
Thinking never to see them more.
Out of their tents they all pour,
Summoning their own steeds,
To ride with them in company.
Érec cried: 'Do not be angry!
But you shall not ride with me.
Stay, and my thanks receive!
Érec then prepares to leave,
Mounting, adopts his stance,
Grasping both shield and lance;
To God he commends them then,
While they commend him again.
Énide mounts and they are gone.

LINES 4308-4380 THE MAIDEN IN DISTRESS

THE forest path they rode along,
Without halting, until prime.
And riding onwards at that time,
They heard a maiden in distress
Cry, as she were under duress.
When Érec heard that cry
He felt no man could deny
It was the very voice of grief,
One demanding swift relief.
Quickly he called to Énide:
'Lady, some damsel in need
In this wood goes crying aloud.
By that I deduce, and so avow,
She requires swift assistance.
I will hasten there, and at once
Her trouble seek to discover:
Do you dismount, I yonder
Will ride, wait here for me.'
'Sire,' she replied, 'willingly.'
Leaving her alone, he went,
Until he found the innocent,
Lamenting, among the trees,
Her lover, two giants had seized,
The pair had reft him from her
Treating him in a cruel manner.
The maid tore her hair, her dress,
Her gentle face in deep distress:
Érec saw her, and wondered
Why her poor eyes were red,
Begged her to tell him why

She wept, what made her sigh.
The maid wept and sighed again,
Sobbing said: 'Fair sir, my pain
And grief naught wondrous is,
That I were dead is all my wish.
My life I neither love nor prize,
My lover was caught by surprise,
Taken by two giants, his mortal
Enemies, both vile and cruel.
Oh God, what shall I do, alas!
The best knight that ever was,
Most honest, and most noble
Is now in the deepest peril!
This day, for no good reason,
To some vile death is he gone.
True knight, for God's sake, pray
You, aid my lover in any way
That you might bring him aid.
No great distance have they made,
They cannot yet be far away.'
'Maid, I shall do as you say,'
Érec said: 'since you beg me.
Be sure, I will follow swiftly
And do all that is in my power.
With him I'll be taken prisoner,
Or restore him to you alive.
If the giants let him survive
Till I can approach their lair,
I'll try my strength with theirs.'
'Noble knight', said the maid,
'I'll be your servant all my days,
If you restore my friend to me:
To God now I commend thee!
Oh, make haste is my prayer.'
'Which way?' 'Sire, over there,

There is their path, there the trail.
She is to await him without fail,
To God commends him, as she
Prays to God now, most fervently,
Érec spurring his mount at pace,
That He might give, of His grace,
Érec the strength to curb at will
Those who intend her lover ill.

LINES 4381-4579 ÉREC DEFEATS THE TWO GIANTS

ÉREC followed the tree-lined vale,
Spurring along the giants' trail.
He followed in pursuit, the knight,
Until he found the giants in sight,
Before they left the wooded ground.
He discovered their victim bound,
Naked, on a broken-down pony,
As if arraigned for some robbery,
Bound and tied both hand and foot.
The giants lacked sharp blades to cut,
Or shields or lances, yet possessed
Clubs and whips, and had with zest
Beaten their prisoner so cruelly,
So violently and so mercilessly,
They already from his back, I own,
Had stripped the flesh to the bone.
Down his flanks and over his hips
The crimson blood slowly drips,
So the pony he is forced to ride
Is stained down to its underside.
Érec followed alone, after this,
Filled with great grief and anguish

For the knight, whom he could see
They had treated most spitefully.
On open ground, between two tracts
Of woodland he came near and asked:
'My lords, for what crime, tell me,
Do you handle this man harshly,
Leading him along like a robber?
You treat him in too cruel a manner.
You drive him along in this fashion
Just as a common thief is driven.
It is vile to so strip a knight
Bind him naked, out of spite,
Then to beat him shamefully.
I ask that you render him to me,
Of your goodwill and courtesy:
I'd not wish to act presumptuously.'
'Vassal,' they cried, 'by what right?
You must be plain mad, Sir Knight,
To make such a demand of us.
If it annoys you so, then try us.'
Érec replied: 'It does annoy me,
And you'll not leave so easily.
Since you grant me to decide,
He shall belong to the better side.
Take your stand. I defy you now.
Not one more step you go, I vow,
Until some blows have been laid.'
'Vassal, you are stark mad,' they said.
To wish with us to provoke a fight.
If you were fourfold the knight,
You'd be no more likely to win
Than a lamb two wolves between.'
'Who knows?' Érec replied, 'Should
The sky now fall, and the earth flood,
Many a lark no doubt would perish!

Many who boast fade ere the finish.
On your guard. For I challenge you.’
The giants were fierce and strong too,
And both held, in their gnarled grip,
Great clubs with iron spikes at the tip.
With lance levelled Érec draws near,
For neither of the giants does he fear,
Despite their air of pride and menace.
He strikes the foremost in the face,
Piercing the eyeball and the brain;
Behind the skull the point shows plain.
Brain and blood spurt from the head,
The giant’s heart fails, he lies dead.
The other giant, seeing him fall,
Was plainly filled with bitter gall.
He rushed to avenge him in fury,
Thinking to catch Érec squarely,
Raising his club towards the sky,
To strike his head from on high.
But Érec anticipates the blow,
And takes it on his shield below,
Nevertheless it jars the knight
And almost stuns him quite,
Delivered with such mighty force,
It almost knocks him from his horse.
He covers himself with his shield
The giant recovers, and now wields
The club to strike a second blow
On Érec’s defenceless head below;
But Érec has now drawn his blade,
An attack on the giant has made,
And mauls his enemy severely:
Striking the bare neck so fiercely,
He splits him to the saddle-bow,
Slicing the innards from his foe;

The body falls to the ground below
Severed in two parts by the blow.
Their prisoner now weeps aloud
To God raises thanks and vows,
For bringing Érec to his side.
Now Érec his bonds untied,
Had him dress and arm at need,
Mount one of the giants' steeds,
And take in hand the other's reins,
Then he asked the knight his name.
He replied: 'Most noble knight,
You are my liege lord of right,
I wish to regard you as my lord,
For with true justice tis in accord.
You won my life, my spirit nearly
Parted, as it was, from my body,
With great cruelty and torment.
Fair Sir, what chance or intent,
In God's name, guided you here,
To free me from all pain, all fear,
And my foes, by your courage?
Sire, I would do you homage.
I will accompany you always,
I shall serve you all my days.'
Érec finding him most ready
To serve him, and willingly,
In any manner, to any end,
Replied: 'Service, my friend,
From yourself I do not need,
But you should know indeed,
That I come here to your aid
At a request the maiden made,
Whom I found among the trees;
For you she weeps grievously,
Her heart is so full of sorrow.

I wish to take you to her now.
Once you are returned to her,
I will alone my path recover;
You have no call to go with me:
For I have no need of company;
Yet I would fain know thy name.’
‘Sire,’ he said, ‘as you wish the same,
As you desire my name be told,
I must not that name withhold.
Thus, I am Cadoc of Tabriol,
Such the name by which I’m called.
But since you and I must part,
I would wish to know, for your part,
Who you are, and of what country,
Where I may sometime find thee,
After I have gone from here.’
‘Friend, I will not tell you ever,
Érec said: ‘Speak of it not again!
But if you would know my name,
And in some way do me honour,
Ride to the court of King Arthur,
Go journey there without delay,
For he and all the court do stay
To hunt the stag in this forest,
With might and main; at best
It is but five short leagues away.
Go at a good pace, there do say,
To present yourself you are sent,
By one whom yesterday in his tent,
He received and lodged joyfully.
And then relate to him openly,
From what danger I set you free
Both to your life and your body.
For I am dearly loved at court:
If you present yourself, in short,

In my name, you'll do me honour.
You can ask for my name there,
You will not know it otherwise.'
'Sire, your command,' Cadoc replies,
'I will perform in every way.
You need have no fear, I say,
That I will not do so willingly.
This encounter in all its verity
I shall describe, yes everything,
Recounting it fully to the king.'
So saying they took their way,
Till they came, not far away,
To where Érec left the maiden.
Great was her rejoicing when
She saw her lover, not thinking
Ever to see his form returning.
Érec now took her by the hand,
And said: 'At your command,
Behold, lady, I bring to you
Your lover free and joyful too.'
And she courteously replied:
'Sir, you win both him, and I,
Rightly both have conquered;
Yours both, to do you honour
And to serve you, together.
But who could repay, ever,
Half the debt that we now owe?'
Érec replied: 'Sweet friend, know
There is naught I require of you.
To God I commend both, for too
Long have I tarried here indeed.'
Then he turned about his steed,
Quick as he could, rode off again.
Cadoc of Tabriol, with the maid,
In the other direction, riding,

Was soon to be heard recounting
His tale to Arthur and the queen.

LINES 4580-4778 ÉNIDE AND THE FORCED MARRIAGE

ÉREC galloped the woods between,
Towards the spot, at greatest speed,
Where, awaiting him, stood Énide,
She, filled with great anxiety,
Now dreaded the possibility
That he had abandoned her.
And Érec too feels great fear,
That someone, finding her alone,
Might have seized her for his own;
And so he hastens to return.
But so fierce does the sun burn,
His armour gives him such pain,
That all his wounds open again,
The bandages all unwinding,
His wounds profusely bleeding,
While he journeys straight
To where his Énide awaits.
She beheld him with delight,
Not realising that her knight
Was suffering, nor how he stood,
With all his body bathed in blood,
And his heart scarcely beating.
As the hill he was descending,
Upon his horse's neck he fell,
Tried his weakness to dispel,
But, attempting to rise again,
His saddle slipped, he lost the rein,
And he fell fainting, as if dead.

Énide was seized with great dread,
Seeing him fall from his steed.
Great was her distress indeed:
She ran then swiftly to his side,
Feeling that grief one cannot hide.
She wrings her hands, cries aloud,
Not a piece of her robe is now
Left untorn before her breast,
Her hair she tears, alike her dress.
'Oh God,' she cries, 'sweet noble sire,
Why leave me here, still to suspire?
Come Death, and kill me swiftly!
Then tears at her face all fiercely.
With this she faints upon his body.
When she revives, reproachfully
She cries: 'Alas! Wretched Énide,
I have murdered my lord indeed,
Killed him by my speech, I avow.
For he would still be living now,
If I, in my madness and my folly,
Had not thus spoken outrageously,
And to this venture spurred him on.
For silence never harmed anyone,
While speaking will oft bring pain.
I have tried that truth oft and again,
And proven it, in many a manner.'
She sat down, her lord beside her,
And took his head upon her knees.
Then she sorrowed without cease:
'Alas, my lord, now brought to ill,
One who never knew his equal;
For in you was beauty known,
Prowess displayed and shown,
Wisdom dwelt in your heart,
Largesse crowned you apart,

Without which none is prized.
Too great is the error, say I,
I made in uttering that word
That now has killed my lord.
The word poisonous and fatal,
For which I prove accountable.
And I know and admit it freely,
That none but myself am guilty;
I alone must take the blame.’
She fell to the ground in pain;
Reviving, grieved as before,
And only sorrowed the more:
‘Oh God, why do I live on?
Death, why hesitate to come
And seize me? Grant no respite!
Death scorns me, out of spite!
Since Death will not take me,
It is I myself must, willingly,
Take vengeance for my deed.
Though Death pays no heed,
In spite of Death I shall die.
I cannot die from a mere sigh,
Nor of a complaint, or wish.
The sword my lord wore, this
Should avenge his death by right.
Sorrow shall not be my plight,
Nor prayer nor idle sighing.’
Forth the sword she brings,
And gazes on it steadily.
God, who is full of mercy,
Makes her a moment linger.
And, while she doth consider
Her sorrow and misadventure,
A Count the glade doth enter,
With his knights in company;

Hearing her lamenting sadly
From afar, he galloped apace.
God spared her of His grace,
For she would thus have died
If she had not been surprised
By those who seize the sword
And sheathe it beside her lord.
The Count, then dismounting,
Now addressed her concerning
The knight, as to whether she
Was his wife or his fair lady.
'One and the other,' she replied,
'My sorrow is not to be denied.
Alas, Sir, I am not yet dead.'
She by the Count was comforted:
'Lady' he said, 'By God I pray,
Show mercy to yourself, this day!
It is right that you should mourn
But let not yourself be overborne;
You may yet prosper, tis my belief.
Do not burden yourself with grief,
Comfort yourself! That is wise,
God will grant fresh joy arise.
Your beauty, which is so great,
Destines you for high estate:
For I will have you to marry,
And make of you a noble lady:
All this ought to comfort you.
And I will take his body too
And bury him with great honour.
Set aside this sorrow of yours,
Which you in frenzy display.'
She responded: 'Sir, away!
For God's sake, let me be!
Nothing here concerns thee.

Naught any could do or say
Shall ever my grief allay.’
The Count retires a little way,
To his knights he doth say:
‘Make a bier to carry the body,
We will escort it, with the lady,
Straight to the castle at Limors;
There we shall inter the corpse.
Then I would espouse the lady,
Whether she agree willingly
Or not; never saw I one so fair,
Nor so desired her, as I do her.
Happy I am that we did meet.
Now swiftly make, as is meet,
A fit bier for this dead knight,
Spare no pains, labour aright!’
Some of the men drew a blade,
Cut two saplings in the glade,
With the branches a litter made.
Érec on this they gently laid,
Hitching two horses to his bier,
Énide rides beside her lover,
Never ceasing in her lament.
Often fainting, failed of intent,
The knights keeping her from harm,
Supporting her with their arms,
So as to raise and comfort her.
To Limors they escort the bier,
Straight to the palace of the Count,
All the people after them mount,
All the burghers, knights, ladies,
Enter the hall, and to a dais,
In its midst, they Érec yield,
The knight, his lance and shield.
The hall is full, great the crowd,

All are anxious, they ask aloud,
What this wondrous matter is.
Meanwhile the Count in council is
With his barons, privately.
'My lords' he says, 'this fair lady,
I would marry, without delay.
We can see that she, I say,
Being beautiful and prudent,
Must be a lady of high descent.
Her beauty and bearing show
That on her one might bestow
Either a kingdom or an empire.
She will never disgrace her sire;
Rather I will win more honour.
Now summon my chaplain here,
And let the lady by me stand.
I will grant her half my land,
Give it all to her as a dower,
If she fulfil my wish this hour.'
They bid the chaplain appear
As the Count ordered and, I fear,
There they brought the lady too,
Who forcibly was married anew,
Though she refused steadfastly.
Despite all, the Count, wilfully,
Married her, as was his desire.
And once they were wed entire,
The Constable, at once had laid
Tables in the palace, and made
His preparations for them to eat,
For the day was nigh complete.

LINES 4779-4852 ÉNIDE RESISTS THE COUNT

AFTER the tables had been laid,
Énide was yet much dismayed.
None of her sorrow had ceased.
And the Count was still pleased
To urge her to make her peace,
By his prayers and persuasion.
He made her sit before him on
A chair, though against her will.
Willing or no, he made her sit,
And placed a table in front of it.
The Count sat on the other side,
Angered, for hurt was his pride,
That he could not comfort her.
'Lady, you should no longer
Grieve so,' he said, 'you must
In my own self place your trust;
Honours and riches shall be yours.'
Surely you must know, no course
Of mourning can revive the dead.
A thing none ever saw or read.
Remember whatever your poverty
Great wealth now accrues to thee.
Poor you were; now rich you are,
Fortune will make you and not mar,
In granting you the honour no less
Of being acclaimed as countess.
Your lord is dead, that is true;
I cannot think it strange if you
Grieve that he no longer lives.
Nay. But counsel now I give,

The best counsel that I know:
That since we are wedded so,
You should now contented be.
Beware then of angering me!
Now eat, for I command it so!
She said: 'Sire, I will not, no,
While I live it is not meet
For me to drink, nor to eat,
I will not till I see my lord
Eat, who lies on that board.'
'Lady, that can never be,
If you speak so foolishly
People will think you mad.
A harsh reward will be had
By you if you stir my anger.'
To this she gave no answer,
Scorning his every menace.
The count struck her in the face:
She cried out, the barons there
Condemned the whole affair.
They cried: 'Hold, sire! To you
Much shame shall now accrue;
Striking a lady is not meet,
Because she will not eat.
A vile deed have you done:
None can call it wrong
Should this lady weep instead
At seeing her husband dead.'
'Be silent, all,' the Count replies,
The lady is mine, and hers am I,
I will do with her as I please.'
She, unable to hold her peace,
Swears she never shall be his.
The Count leaps to his feet at this,
And strikes her again. She cries:

'Ah, wretched man, I despise
All you say and all you do!
I fear not blows or threats, for you
May strike me, beat me, as you will,
Yet I shall despise you still,
And obey not your commands,
Even if, with your own hands,
To blind my eyes you strive,
Or seek to flay me, now, alive!'

LINES 4853-4938 ÉREC REVIVES AND KILLS THE COUNT

AMIDST her words of complaint
Érec revived from his faint,
Like a man from sleep aroused.
If he was amazed by the crowd,
Around him, it is no wonder.
But great was his grief and anger
As his wife's complaint ended.
From the dais he descended,
Drawing his sword swiftly,
Anger gave him strength; he
Drew on his love for Énide.
He rushed to her, with speed,
Struck the Count on the head
Leaving him as if for dead,
Senseless, speechless; a gout
Of blood and brains flowed out.
The knights rise from the table,
Thinking this is the very Devil
Who has entered into the fold.
Not one of them, young or old,
But is filled with great dismay.



*'He...struck the Count on the head
leaving him as if for dead'*

Enid (p132, 1868) - Baron Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) and
Gustave Doré (1832-1883)
The Internet Archive

One after the other runs away,
However he can, right speedily.
Out from the palace they all flee,
Strong or weak, cry out in dread:
'Flee, flee! Here comes the dead!'
At the door the crowd is great,
Each one, seeking to escape,
Pushes and shoves as best he may.
He who is last man in the fray,
Seeks to become the first in line,
Thus they all in flight combine,
Not one delaying for another.
Érec ran, his shield to recover,
Defended himself, in defiance,
While Énide retrieved his lance.
When they step into the court,
Not a man dare offer aught,
For not one of them can believe
Any could such a rout achieve
Except it be some fiend or devil,
Entering the corpse to work evil.
Érec pursues, while they all flee,
And once in the yard he sees
A lad leading his noble mount,
To water the steed at the fount,
Equipped with saddle and halter.
Nary a moment does Érec falter,
This chance will serve him well,
He runs, to his horse, pell-mell,
The lad in fear yields it and goes.
Érec mounts astride the saddle-bow,
Énide seizes the stirrup, and then
Climbs to the horse's neck when
Érec who bids her mount decrees,
Instructing her most carefully.

The horse bears them both away,
The gates open, none bar their way,
And they depart, free of constraint.
In the castle now they make plaint
For the Count who had fallen there,
But none, however brave, now care
To follow Érec, and vengeance win.
The Count is dead at his table within,
While Érec, in bearing his wife away,
Clasps and kisses her, as well he may;
Twixt his arms, against his heart, he
Holds her tight, says: Sister, sweet,
I've proven you true in every way,
Let nothing hereafter you dismay,
For I love you more than before,
And of this I am now assured,
That you love me to perfection.
All will be at your direction,
I wish it so and for evermore,
Just as I wished it so before.
If you misspoke to me a whit,
I forgive you, and call you quit
Of the offence and the speech.'
Then again he kissed her cheek.
Now was Énide full reassured,
Clasped and kissed by her lord,
Told by him how he loved her.
All the night they ride together
And the moon doth them delight
That upon them shines so bright.



*'The horse bears them both away,
the gates open, none bar their way'*
Enid (p132, 1868) - Baron Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) and
Gustave Doré (1832-1883)
The Internet Archive

**LINES 4939-5058 ÉREC MISTAKENLY FIGHTS WITH
GUIVRET IN THE DARKNESS**

Now the news has travelled quickly,
Than which naught speeds more swiftly.
The word has reached Guivret le Petit,
Borne him tidings, that recently
A knight, with wounds by arms made,
Has been found dead in a forest glade;
And beside him a lady so beautiful
Merely her maid might seem Iseult,
And she wept in wondrous lament.
They were found, so the tidings went,
By Count Oringle of Limors,
Who had carried away the corpse,
And desired to wed the lady;
Though she was most unhappy.
When Guivret heard the news
He was by no means amused.
He thought of Érec, for his part,
The idea filling mind and heart,
To go and seek out the lady,
And to bury the corpse nobly
With all honour, if it were he.
A thousand men in company
He assembled to take the town:
Thus if he had not of the Count
Both the corpse and the lady,
Fire and flame it would see.
Under the moon shining clear,
Towards Limors they drew near,
Helmets laced, all clad in mail,
Shields raised, ready to assail,

Under arms they rode thereon,
Until midnight was nearly gone,
When Érec spied the men there.
Now he thought to be ensnared,
Killed, or taken most certainly.
So he commanded his fair lady
To dismount by the hedgerow.
No wonder he was troubled so.
'Lady, remain here,' he told her,
'A little while till the men there,
In company, have all gone by,
For them to see you, care not I;
Since I know not who they are,
Nor their errand, for my part;
Let us hope we are not seen,
Since there is no place between,
That would refuge to us allow,
Should they wish to harm us now.
I know not what threat may appear,
But I'll not stay here from fear,
Or fail to receive them all;
And if any threaten me withal,
I'll not fail to attack fiercely.
Though I am so sore and weary,
No wonder if I feel sorrow.
Now to the encounter I must go:
You must stay, keep silence too,
Take care none catch sight of you,
Before I have led them far away.'
Behold now, from afar, Guivret
With lance extended, sees a knight,
But knows him not at first sight,
Since the shadow of a cloud
Doth the bright moon enshroud.
Érec trembles and feels weak;

Guivret, who doth Érec seek,
No sign of hurt doth disclose.
Now Érec most unwise shows
In not making himself known.
He steps from the hedge alone:
Guivret towards him spurs,
Not uttering a single word.
Nor does Érec speak at all,
Thinking himself still powerful.
Who would run faster than he can
Must rest or relinquish his plan.
One against the other they fight:
But they prove unequal in might;
One now weak, the other strong;
Guivret strikes Érec hard and long,
So hard that from his horse's back
To the ground he doth him hack.
Énide, who is in hiding still,
Seeing her lord may be killed,
Thinks to be harmed or slain.
From the hedgerow she is fain
To emerge, runs to aid her lord.
If she grieved, she grieves the more.
To Guivret comes, seeks to restrain
His steed, and seizes it by the rein;
Crying: 'Curses on you, Sir Knight,
Who the weary and enfeebled fight,
A man in pain who is near to death,
So wrongheaded, you, in a breath,
Could not tell me the reason why.
If here there were only you and I,
And you alone without company,
You would now rue the day had he
But his health and strength, I avow.
Be courteous and generous, now,

And end now, of your courtesy,
This battle begun so violently;
None would think better of you
For taking or slaying a man who
Lacks the very strength to rise,
As you may right well surmise;
He has suffered many a blow,
And many a wound can show.’
Guivret replied: ‘Fear not, lady!
I see you love him most faithfully,
And you for that I must commend.
Naught fearful do we portend,
Neither I nor my company;
But say, do not hide it from me,
By what name your lord is called.
By doing so you’ll lose not at all.
Whatever his name, tell me now,
He’ll go safe and sound, I vow.
You and he have naught to fear,
You both may rest in safety here.’

**LINES 5059-5172 GUIVRET OFFERS
ÉREC AND ÉNIDE HIS HOSPITALITY**

ONCE she finds herself in safety,
Énide replies in a word, briefly:
‘Érec he is named, I’ll tell no lie,
For honest and kind you are, say I.’
Guivret dismounted, with delight,
And knelt at the feet of the knight,
There where he lay on the ground.
Said he: ‘To Limors I was bound,
Sire, there I went to seek for you,

Expecting but your corpse to view.
For it had been relayed to me
That Count Oringle there did carry
A knight he had wounded fatally,
And that he had, most heinously,
Sought to marry the knight's lady
Who kept that knight company;
But she would have naught of him.
Thus it was that I came riding
To grant her aid and deliver her.
If he had refused to surrender her,
And you yourself, without demur,
Little indeed would I be worth,
Had I left him an inch of earth.
Know I'd not have ridden forth,
If love to you I did not extend.
For I am Guivret, your friend;
If I have given you any pain,
In not knowing you again,
You must surely pardon me.'
At this Érec sat up right slowly,
For he could achieve little more;
And said: 'Friend, rise! As before,
Be quit of any guilt, momentarily,
You had no way of knowing me.'
Guivret arose, and gave account
Of how he had slain the Count,
While he was seated at his table,
And how, before the very stable,
He had recovered his mount,
And he also rendered account
Of how the knights, in their fear,
Fled, crying: 'The corpse is here!'
Then how he was nearly caught,
And how he escaped the court,

Through the town, pell-mell,
And bearing his wife as well,
Clinging to the horse's neck:
Of his adventure every aspect.
Then Guivret to him replied:
'Sire, I have a castle nearby,
Well sited in a healthy spot.
For ease and comfort, I wot
It were best you were there,
So that you might have care
Of those wounds. I have two
Charming lively sisters who
Would heal you of your pain.
In the meadow tonight, I'd fain
Lodge this host, Sir Knight;
Rest would ease you tonight,
I think, and do you much good.
Here we may lodge, if you would.'
Érec replied: 'Here shall I stay.'
There they lodged till break of day.
They were not averse in mind
To being there, but scarce could find
Sufficient space for that company,
Among the bushes as best could be:
Guivret had his pavilion pitched,
And ordered wood to be fetched,
To give them both heat and light.
Candles then he ordered bright,
And had them lit within the tent.
Énide is sad no longer; content
That all has now turned out well.
She undresses her lord herself,
Washes his wounds and then
Dries and re-bandages them;
She will let none other near.

No reproach hath she to fear:
Érec, has tested her and proved
How greatly by her he is loved.
While Guivret, kindness itself,
Prepares, of quilted coverlets
A couch both deep and long,
Grasses and reeds laid upon.
They settled Érec, covered him,
Then Guivret brought to them
Two cold pies in a little basket,
'Friends,' said he, 'here is yet
A little cold pie for you to eat!
Drink some wine, yet not neat,
I have six good casks of it here;
But neat it might do harm, I fear.
To Érec, wounded and in pain,
Fair sweet friend, I say again,
Do but eat, twill do you good.
And your lady, if she would,
Who today has feared for you,
She has felt great sorrow too;
Yet for that you had full redress.
You have escaped, eat, no less,
And, sweet friend, so shall I.'
Guivret sat down at Érec's side:
So did Énide, delighting again.
In all Guivret had done for them.
Both now urge Érec to eat,
Giving him wine, yet not neat:
For pure wine's like to overheat.
Érec ate, as those ill must eat,
And drank a little, all he dared;
Then he reposed, in comfort there,
Sleeping soundly, till it was light.
All kept silent, for him, that night.

**LINES 5173-5366 ÉREC RECOVERS AT
GUIVRET'S CASTLE OF PENEVRIC**

AT daybreak they are both awake,
Soon dressed, and ready to take
To the road on their mounts again.
Érec's horse was so dear to him
That he cared for no other steed,
While they gave a mule to Énide,
As she had lost her dappled grey.
Yet she showed no care that day,
Seemed to give it never a thought;
Her fine mule, at an easy trot,
Carrying her along quite easily.
And she was comforted you see
In that Érec was not dismayed,
But would soon be fine, he said.
Before tierce they had reached
The stronghold of Penevric,
A fair and a well-placed site,
Where on a pleasant height,
Dwelt the sisters of Guivret,
For it was a delightful place.
Guivret led Érec to a fine room,
Well-aired, and distant from
Any noise, and at his request
His two sisters did their best
To cure Érec of all his hurt.
Placed in their hands, as it were,
He felt great confidence therein.
First they removed the dead skin,
Then applied salves and plasters,
Devoting their care to him after,

Women confident of their skill;
Many times bathed him still,
And reapplied the plasters, then
Four times a day or more, again,
They would have him eat and drink,
Yet no garlic or pepper I think;
And whoever went in or out
Énide was always there about,
Beside him, for she cared the most.
Guivret proved an attentive host,
Often visiting there to enquire
If there was aught Érec might desire.
He was cared for, and well-served,
Nothing omitted, as was deserved,
That he expressed a wish to see,
But all done freely and willingly.
The sisters indeed took such pains
That he, in a fortnight, well again,
Felt no illness nor soreness either.
Then so as to revive his colour,
They bathed him, and frequently,
For no instruction did they need,
Knowing the treatment full well.
When to walk freely he was able,
Guivret had two loose gowns made,
Of two silks of differing grade,
One with ermine trim, one *en vair*,
The former a purple dyed affair,
The latter striped in dappled grey,
The silk the gift of another day,
Sent to him by a Scottish cousin.
Énide had the purple and ermine,
The most valuable, Érec the vair,
The dappled grey stripe, less rare,
And therefore not worth as much.

Now was Érec rested, and such,
Now was he fit, recovered fully.
Now was Énide more than happy,
Now she had all that she desired,
Now was her beauty fresh admired;
For she had seemed faint and pale,
So fiercely her troubles did assail.
Now she is embraced and kissed,
Now with all good things blessed,
Now has her joy and her delight;
Naked to naked, in bed at night,
Embracing, kissing one another,
Naught more pleasing to these lovers.
Theirs such pain, mind and limb,
He for her, and she for him,
That now they find a recompense.
Each seeks to please every sense,
Vying the more where they do seek;
Of aught further I must not speak.
They have so reaffirmed belief,
And have so erased their grief,
They can scarce recall it more.
Now they must journey as before.
Of Guivret they take their leave,
In whom they found a friend indeed.
He had served them, in every manner,
And had treated them with honour.
Érec said, in ending their stay:
‘Sir, I no longer wish to delay
My departure for my own land.
Order all things to be on hand,
So that I have all that I need.
In the morning we proceed,
Tomorrow, at the break of day.
So long has it been this stay,

I feel strong and am recovered.
May it please God, moreover,
That I live to meet you again,
When I have the power regained
To serve you, and show you honour!
I have no wish though to linger,
If I am not delayed by aught,
Until I have reached the court
Of King Arthur, whom I may
Seek now at Carduel or Robais.’
Guivret replied, in a brisk tone:
‘Sire, you shall not go alone!
For I myself will go with you,
And bring some company too,
If that should be your pleasure.’
Érec, acceding to this measure,
In accord with his wishes, says
Would that they were on their way.
That night they make all ready,
Not wanting to delay the journey;
With all ready, their road to take,
In the morning, when they awake,
They promptly saddle their steeds,
Then Érec goes, before he leaves,
To say farewell to the two sisters,
In their rooms, and Énide after,
Who was full of joy and delight.
When all had been readied quite,
Of the sisters they took leave:
Érec did so most courteously,
Offering the sisters a wealth,
Of thanks for his life and health,
Pledging his service ever after.
The hand of the nearest sister
He took in his, while Énide

Took the other's hand to lead
Her from that inner chamber,
And all, hand in hand together,
They proceed to the castle hall.
Guivret then bids them all
Mount at once without delay.
Énide thinks that, in this way,
Perhaps, they may never depart.
Yet at last, that they might start,
A fine palfrey, of gentle temper,
Well-made, they now bring her,
A handsome horse, fine boned,
Of no less worth than her own,
The bay, she had left at Limors.
This instead was a sorrel horse;
Though the head was not so,
But marked it was as follows,
One cheek was of raven black,
The other white, front to back.
Between the two there ran a line,
Greener than is the grape-vine,
Separating the black and white.
Of saddle and bridle one might
Say, the work was rich and fine,
The leather straps too, I'd opine.
The breast-strap and the bridle
Were set with gold and emerald.
The saddle was of another form,
With fine purple cloth adorned,
Saddle-bows wrought in ivory,
On which were carved the story
Of how Aeneas came from Troy,
And at Carthage, with great joy,
Was welcomed to Dido's bed;
How by him she was misled,

How she killed herself for him,
How Aeneas then came to win
Laurentum, and all Lombardy,
Of which through all his life he
Was king. All cunningly told,
Well-carved, adorned with gold.
The craftsman who made the piece
Spent seven years on it, at least,
And on naught else till it was done.
I know not if he sold it anon,
But it made a gift most worthy.
Now Énide's loss of her palfrey,
Was fully repaid, in this manner;
And was well-received by her.
So the well-apparelled palfrey
Was gifted to her, which she
Mounted, filled with delight.
Soon every squire and knight
On their steeds were mounted.
Many a falcon, young or moulted,
Many a female-hawk and tiercel,
Many a setter and hound, as well,
Guivret took with him from court,
For their pleasure and their sport.

**LINES 5367-5446 THE ISLAND STRONGHOLD
OF BRANDIGANT**

FROM morn to vespers they rode on,
The straightest of roads along,
Thirty Welsh leagues or more,
Until they came to the tower
Of a stronghold, fine and tall,

Circled by a new-made wall;
And below that wall, around,
A deep stream did it surround,
Roaring, flowing in a torrent.
Érec halting, gazed, his intent
To ask, so that he might know,
If any could tell, truly though,
Who was the lord of this castle.
‘Friend, to me would you tell,’
He said to his good companion,
‘By what name this is known,
And whose it is. Does everything
Belong to some count or king?
You have brought me here, so
Now tell me of it, if you know.’
‘Sire,’ he said, ‘I know it well,
And to you the truth I’ll tell:
Brandigant is the castle called,
So fine, and strongly walled,
It fears not king or emperor.
If France and England, in force,
With those from here to Liege,
Laid siege to its walls, I pledge,
Never in their lives would they
Take it; the isle stretches away
A good four leagues or more,
On which it stands, therefore
Within is all a rich town needs,
Orchards, vines, fields of wheat,
Nor does it lack wood or water,
So can’t be reduced by hunger;
Nor is it open to fierce assault.
King Evrain did build the wall,
Who has dwelt there all his life,
And will do so, without strife,

Until his days are ended.
Yet it is not so well-defended,
Through fear of any man, no,
But because it is pleasing so.
Had it neither wall nor tower
But only the stream, its power
Would keep the castle so secure
The whole world it might ignore.’
‘By God,’ said Érec, ‘such riches!
Let us go, then, see this fortress,
And, if we can, take lodgings here,
I wish to stay, and view it near.’
‘Sire,’ he said, in much dismay,
‘Though displease you I may,
I would not seek to linger here,
For evil is its passage, I fear.’
‘Evil?’ said Érec, ‘how so?
Tell me then what you know.
For I would hear all, gladly.’
‘Sire,’ he replied, ‘I foresee
There you must suffer much.
I know your courage is such,
And you so noble at heart,
That if I relate, for my part,
What I know of that venture,
So harsh and perilous, I fear
You would seek to enter in.
I’ve heard the tale oft again:
Seven years are past, I confess,
Since any who sought the quest
Have returned from that island;
Yet from many a distant land
Came knights proud and bold;
Sire, no jest is this, I hold!
You will learn nothing more

Of its danger, till you've sworn,
By the love you promised me,
You'll not adventure, foolishly,
In this, from which none return
And but shameful death do earn.'

**LINES 5447-5492 THE ADVENTURE CALLED
'THE JOY OF THE COURT'**

NOW was Érec well pleased,
Praying Guivret to be at ease,
Saying: 'Ah, fair sweet friend,
Let us lodge there; to it wend
Our way, and be troubled not;
It is high time a bed we sought
For the night, so be glad of it,
For if any honour comes of it,
You should be joyful this day,
Of the adventure, I only pray
You will tell me of its name,
And then no more of the same.'
'Sire,' he said, 'I will tell you,
So as not to displease you.
The name is a fair one to say,
But the task grievous to assay;
None escape alive from there.
The adventure, so I do swear,
Is called: 'The Joy of the Court.'
'By God, joy is a fine thought!'
Cried Érec: 'tis what I go to find.
From this do not divert my mind,
Fair sweet friend, toward aught else.
Let us find lodgings for ourselves,

For great good may come of this.
Naught could turn me from my wish
That I should go and seek this Joy.’
He said: ‘Sire, may God employ
His grace to bring joy to you,
And return you unscathed too.
We must enter in, I surmise,
Since it cannot be otherwise,
Let us go! Our lodging is secure,
For no high and puissant lord
(So I hear, for so they tell me)
Can enter in this castle we see,
With intent to find safe shelter,
But King Evrain must it offer.
So gentle and courteous, the king
Has declared, in all men’s hearing,
To his people who hold him dear,
That any knight from far or near,
Should not be lodged with them,
So that he might offer the same,
And do those knights full honour,
Who in truth there wish to linger.’

**LINES 5493-5668 ÉREC ASKS PERMISSION
TO UNDERTAKE THE VENTURE**

THUS towards the castle they go,
Past the lists and the bridge also.
When the lists they had passed,
The crowds who had amassed
Along the streets to view them,
Finding Érec was so handsome,
Seemed to judge and consider,

The others to be his followers.
Wonderingly they gazed at him;
The whole town talked of him,
Stirred and moved, took counsel;
Even the maidens at their carols,
Left their songs, ceased as one,
Then gazed at him in unison,
Crossing themselves at his beauty,
And pitying him most wondrously,
Whispering to each other: 'Alas!
This knight who here doth pass,
Seeks for the Joy of the Court.
Sorrow is his if it be sought;
None comes from a far country
The Joy of the Court to seek,
But has shame and hurt of it,
And leaves his head as a forfeit.'
Then so he might hear, they say:
'God protect thee, chevalier,
From harm and misadventure!
For handsome is thy measure,
And thy beauty to be pitied;
Tomorrow will see it wasted.
Tomorrow thy death will come,
Death, surely, strike you dumb,
If God doth not your life defend.'
Érec hears them foretell his end,
As he rides on through the town;
Two thousand pity him, I own;
But nothing doth him dismay.
He rides steadily on his way,
Saluting, most debonairly,
Men and women equally.
While they, saluting him also,
Anticipate, in fear and sorrow,

More than he does, the sum
Of hurt and shame to come.
The mere sight of his countenance,
His bearing and fair semblance,
Have won the hearts of all so,
That knights, ladies, maidens go
In fear, lest his death ensues.
King Evrain had heard the news,
Of those arriving at his court
Who a large company brought,
And it seemed from his trappings
The leader was some count or king.
King Evrain rides down the street,
This company to know and greet,
'Welcome,' he cries, 'fair and true,
To your leader as to all of you!
Welcome gentlemen, dismount!'
They do so; the squires account
For the horses, stabled swiftly.
Neither was King Evrain tardy,
Who, seeing Énide approaching,
Salutes her and gives her greeting.
And hastens to help her descend,
To her soft white hand extends
His own, leads her to the palace,
Since courtesy demands no less,
Honouring her in every way
For he knew just what to say,
Nothing foolish or ill-bred.
He ordered the hall scented,
With incense, aloes and myrrh.
On entering all of them refer
To the beauty of that hall.
Hand in hand they enter, all
Escorted therein by the king,

Who delights in everything,
How to describe to you, fully,
The paintings, the silk drapery,
With which the hall was adorned?
A foolish waste, I am warned,
Of time that I would not waste.
Rather I would proceed in haste;
For he who goes the direct way
Overtakes him who doth delay;
And thus I do not wish to linger.
When the time came for supper,
The king ordered it to be served,
Though I would equally prefer
To pass over all of that, directly.
That night they partook of every
Single thing the heart might wish.
Fowl and venison, fruit and fish,
And wines in all their variety.
But better still was the company!
For the very sweetest dish of all
Is good cheer and a merry hall.
They were served most richly,
When Érec turned, suddenly,
From the fine food and wine,
And began to speak his mind,
On what was dear to his heart:
Namely the Joy of the Court,
And he a conversation coined
In which King Evrain joined.
'Sire, 'tis time to tell you now,'
He said, 'of my intent, I trow,
And the reason that I came.
Too long have I refrained,
Now I cannot hide my task.
The Joy of the Court, I ask,

I covet naught so greatly.
Grant me this, whate'er it be,
If the thing be in your power.'
'In truth, fair friend, this hour
You speak vain foolishness,
Perilous it is, and to excess,'
Said the king, 'sorrow to many,
And you yourself, eventually,
Will find death, in your folly,
If you take not counsel of me.
But if of me you counsel take,
I should advise you to forsake
All thought of aught so grievous,
In which you would be lost to us.
Speak not of it! But silent be!
It would be most unwise of thee
To disregard my counsel here.
Tis no great surprise or wonder,
That you seek fame and honour,
But if I should see you suffer,
Or see you injured in any part,
It would trouble me at heart.
Know full well that I have seen
Many a man fall, who has been
Desirous of this Joy, yet none
Has benefited by it, no, not one;
So do they all fall and perish,
So tomorrow, if you so wish,
You may expect a like reward.
If the Joy you would strive for,
You shall do so, though I grieve.
Yet it is something, I believe,
From which you may withdraw,
And in your safety feel secure.
For it would show treachery,

And I would wrong you utterly,
If the truth I chose to hide.’
Érec hears, and cannot deny
The king gives him good counsel,
But the greater seems the peril,
The more menacing the danger,
The more he covets the adventure;
‘Sire, ‘he says, ‘say this I can,
You prove a true and worthy man.
And you shall carry no blame.
I wish to undertake this same,
Whatever it may bring to me.
The die is cast, none shall see
Me withdraw from anything
I undertake without exerting
All my strength ere I yield
And retreat from the field.’
‘That I know,’ said the king,
‘Against my will you do this thing.
You may try the Joy you wish,
Though I much despair of this,
I fear it brings great harm to you.
Yet your wish, I grant it too,
Of my permission be assured.
If you have joy of your venture,
You will achieve such honour,
Never did any man win more;
And may God, as is my wish,
Grant that in joy you may end this.’

LINES 5669-5738 ÉREC PROCEEDS TO HIS TASK

All that eve, of it they gladly
Spoke, till the beds were ready
And they parted for the night.
In the morn, when it was light,
Érec who'd not closed his eyes
Saw at dawn, a bright sun rise,
And swiftly rose and dressed.
Again Énide was much distressed.
Sad at heart and ill at ease;
All night she had grieved,
Full of care and fear also
For her lord who must go
And encounter great peril.
Yet he equips himself still,
For none can say him nay.
The king to arm him that day
Had sent him when he arose,
All that you might suppose
Which Érec did not refuse;
His own arms were ill-used,
Badly damaged, and worn.
His thanks indeed were warm,
As he donned them in the hall.
Once he is thus armed withal,
He descends the steps swiftly
Finds his mount saddled ready,
And the king already mounted,
And every subject he counted,
In the castle and in the town;
None remains to be found,

Man or woman, true or awry,
Great or small, feeble or spry,
Who is able, and doth not go.
Great noise and clamour, though,
Through all the streets doth flow,
For everyone, both high and low,
Cries out, alike: 'Alas! Alas!
Chevalier! That Joy thou hast
Sought to win betrays you now,
'Tis death you seek, we do avow.'
Not a soul there doth not shout:
'This Joy, let God curse it now,
That brings death to many a man;
Today twill work the worst it can,
The worst that ever was wrought.
Érec listens and takes thought,
Hearing them say, far and near:
'Alas! Alas! Ill-starred, we fear,
Fair, fine and gentle knight,
Are you, for it cannot be right
Your life should end so soon,
Or that any ill should wound
You, harm you, and do injury.'
He hears what they say indeed,
Yet nevertheless he rides on,
Not lowering his gaze, is gone,
With never a hint of cowardice.
He hears, and his dearest wish
Is to see, know, and understand,
Why they grieve, on either hand,
Why such woe weighs them down.
The king leads him from the town,
To a garden that lies close by,
And all the crowd gather nigh,
Praying that of this trial of his,

God grant him joy at the finish;
But tis not meet that I pass on,
Despite a dry and weary tongue,
Without the whole truth as well,
Of this garden, as stories tell.

LINES 5739-5826 THE GARDEN

THE garden all unfenced there,
Lacked any wall save that of air:
Yet, by a spell, on every side,
With air all access was denied
To it, so naught might go there,
Unless all winged it flew there,
No more than if by iron barred.
In icy winters, however hard,
It bore ripe fruit and flowers;
This fruit possessed the power
That it might be eaten inside
The garden, yet never outside
Could it be taken, for the gate
Was then lost and any inmate
Could not exit from the place
Until he did that fruit replace.
There is no bird beneath the sky
Pleasing to man that did not vie
To sing within, and give delight,
Such that one might hear aright
Many a chorus of every kind;
And whatever on earth we find
Of root or spice that doth avail
In healing, grows within its pale,
And is in numbers planted there,

All that is needed, and to spare.
Through a narrow entrance now,
Into the garden, goes the crowd.
As King Evrain had intended;
Érec riding, his lance extended,
Into the garden's very centre,
Greatly delights as he doth enter
At the song of the birds within;
Of his Joy they make him think,
That for which he most yearns;
But a wondrous thing he discerns,
Which might strike with fear
Even the greatest warrior here,
The finest amongst all men,
Be it Tiebaut the Saracen,
Or Opinel or Fernagu;
For, exposed to their view,
Sharp stakes held each a bright
Helm, that revealed the sight
Of a severed head inside.
Yet, at the row's end, one beside
Upon which there was borne
Naught as yet, except a horn.
He knew not what it signified,
But for that drew not aside,
Rather he questioned the King,
Who on his right side was riding.
The king answered his demand:
'Friend, do you not understand
The meaning of what you see?
Most fearful you should be,
If for your own self you care,
For the stake you see there,
On which is hung that horn,
Has long awaited this morn,

Waiting for whom we knew
Not, for another or for you.
Take care your head is not
Set there, such end is what
It was made for; I told you
Great danger might ensue.
I think no man can escape,
His head severed at the nape;
For the stake awaits we know
A head, whether yours or no.
And if yours is placed there
As it must be, should you dare,
Then as soon as yours is here
Another stake will appear,
By its side, and there await,
The next one to pass the gate.
Of the horn I will say no more,
But none has sounded it before.
Yet he who sounds it, know,
His honour and fame will grow
Above all those in his country,
And such honour he'll receive
All to honour him will come,
Holding him the best, in sum.
Now no more of this affair:
Have your men retire there;
For the Joy will soon be here,
And bring you sorrow, I fear.'

LINES 5827-6410 THE KNIGHT MABONAGRAIN AND HIS LADY

Now King Evrain leaves his side,
Érec bows toward Énide with pride,

Who is herself in great distress
Yet keeps silence nonetheless;
Grief that to the lips doth start,
Means naught if it touch not the heart.
And he, who knew her heart complete,
Said to her: 'Dear sister sweet,
Gentle lady, true and wise,
Your heart's truth I surmise.
Your fear is great, I well see,
Yet you know not what may be.
All for naught is your dismay,
Unless you are to see, this day,
My shield all shattered,
My flesh all wounded,
Red my bright hauberk here,
Drenched in blood all my gear,
And my helm broke in two,
And I tired and broken, who
Can himself no more defend,
But begs for mercy to attend
Him, much against his will:
Then you may lament my ill,
Who now too soon begin.
For, sweet lady, you know nothing
Of what shall be, no more do I.
Nothing – gives you grief, say I!
But know this to be true,
If I had only the courage you
And your love inspire in me,
I would fear, of a surety,
No man alive, as my foe.
Folly it is to boast so,
But not from pride do I speak,
It is to comfort you I seek.
So comfort take! Let it be!

Here no longer can I tarry,
Nor can you accompany me.
So the king commanded me,
I can take you no further.'
He kisses and to God commends her,
And she commends him in turn.
But troubled is she now to learn
She cannot ride on at his side,
To see and know what will betide,
What this adventure may bring,
How he will master everything;
But since she must remain,
And cannot go, as is plain,
She is left sadly to lament.
He along the path now went,
Alone, without companion:
A silver bed he came upon,
With a cover of gold brocade,
Beneath a sycamore's shade,
And on the bed was a maid;
All beauty, richly displayed,
Her face and form did own;
And she sat there all alone.
I had wished to say no more,
But whoever of her saw
Her attire and her beauty
Would say, in all verity,
Laurentum's Lavinia,
Who was so wondrous fair,
Had not a quarter of her beauty.
Érec drew near, to more closely
View her face. Meanwhile the king,
And all, viewed the scene, sitting,
In an orchard, beneath the trees.
Then, behold, a knight they see,

All clad in vermilion armour,
Possessed of wondrous stature,
And, but for his tallness, nigh
The finest knight under the sky;
For he was fully a foot taller
As all the world might aver,
Than any other that they knew.
Before Érec had him in view,
‘Vassal, Vassal,’ the other cried,
‘You are mad, upon my life,
To approach my lady there.
You are unworthy to dare,
I judge, to draw nigh her.
Dearly now you will suffer
For your folly, by my head!
Draw back!’ Érec stops dead
And gazes, so does the other.
Neither man advances further,
Till Érec has to him replied,
With all he wishes to confide:
‘Friend, one can speak nonsense
He says, ‘as well as talking sense.
Threaten as much as you desire,
I am a man who holds his fire;
Those who threaten are unwise.
Do you know why? The prize
He oft loses who thinks he’s won;
So he’s a fool who threatens one
Too much, and too much presumes.
Some may flee, others spell doom.
I feel too little fear since we met,
To be quite ready to flee as yet;
I am full ready with my defence;
If any would show me offence,
He will have to force the issue,

Escape is what no man shall do.’
‘Nay,’ he cried, ‘God help me!
Battle you’ll have, and swiftly,
You I challenge now, and defy.’
You must know, for truth say I,
Neither then reined himself in,
The lances neither light nor thin,
But square-sectioned, and heavy,
Nor planed smooth were they
But both were rough and strong.
Both the shields they glanced along,
With their sharp tips they smote,
So that more than a good foot
Of their lance passed through
Each bright shield, yet the two
Received no hurt, neither man,
Nor did either break a lance;
But each withdrew his weapon
Swiftly, and again they set on;
Each knight returns to his post,
And then once more they joust,
Striking home with such power,
That both their lances shatter,
And both their horses stumble.
Both men survive the tumble
Neither suffering any harm,
And immediately they re-arm,
Each proving strong and lithe.
Amidst the garden they scythe
At each other, with their blades
Of fresh steel, German made,
Striking blows of great might
On each other’s helmet bright,
Their gleaming helms shattering,
While their eyes shoot lightning;

No greater effort could they make
No greater blows could they take,
Striving, toiling with each other,
To wound and harm one another,
With cold edge, or gilded pommel.
So hard did the fighters pummel,
Face and teeth and noses test,
Hands and arms, and all the rest,
Necks, throats and temples rake,
That their very bones did ache.
Much wearied and sore are they;
Nevertheless will not give way,
But only toil and strive the more,
Eyes dimmed by sweat and gore,
That flow down so, together,
They can barely see each other;
Thus their blows are often lost,
Like men blinded who accost
The foe with swords uselessly;
They cannot see, can scarcely
Harm each other, none the less,
They do not fail to do their best,
Putting forth all their strength.
Their eyes dimmed, at length,
They lose their sight completely,
And, seizing each other angrily,
Let their shields fall to the ground,
Pull and drag each other around,
Until they fall to their knees.
So they fight on without cease
Until the hour of noon is past,
The tall knight so tired at last
That, his breath failing wholly,
Érec has him at his mercy,
And drags and pulls him so

The lacing of his helm below
Breaks, and he leans his breast,
Head bowed, on Érec's chest,
The power lost to rise again.
And though it gives him pain,
He has to speak and confess:
'I cannot hide my sore distress,
You conquer, against my will.
Nevertheless, you may be still
A knight of such rank and fame,
Credit will accrue to my name;
And I would ask, in earnest, pray,
If I might be honoured this day,
And thus your true name know,
So that I might be solaced so.
If a better man has defeated me,
I will be glad, I promise thee;
But if it has happened to occur
That I've lost to an inferior,
Then I shall feel great sorrow.'
'Friend, my name you would know?'
Said Érec: 'I shall tell you plain
Before I leave this place again,
But it will be on one condition,
That you say why in this garden
You reside, and say so swiftly.
I wish you to reveal completely,
What is your name, what the Joy;
I am anxious that you employ
Truth entire, from start to end.'
'Sire,' said he, 'God forbend,
I will tell you all you wish.'
Érec reveals his name, at this:
'Have you heard from any man,
Of King Lac, and Érec his son?'

‘Yes Sire, I know of Érec all,
For I was in his father’s hall,
Ere as a knight I was hailed,
And if his wish had prevailed,
I’d not have left him for aught.’
‘Then if you were at the court,
You will know of me indeed,
I, being of my father’s breed.’
‘By my faith, then all is well;
Now hear by whom it befell,
That I so long am held here;
For I’ll tell all, true and clear,
As you ask, whate’er the pain.
That lady, seated, you see plain,
Loved me from childhood, and I her;
It delighted both of us, I aver,
And our love thus increased,
Until a boon she was pleased
To ask: of its nature saying naught.
Who can deny his lover aught?
Never a lover who would deny
Aught to his sweetheart, say I,
Without fail and without deceit,
Whenever he can and it is meet.
I then agreed to her dear wish,
But, once I had agreed to this,
She would have me swear it so.
I’d have done far more, I know,
At her will; my vow now stood,
To perform whatever she would.
In time, then, I became a knight,
King Evrain’s nephew I am hight;
Many saw me dubbed before them
Here where we are, in this garden.
My lady, seated there, I heard

At once recall me to my word,
Saying that I had sworn to her
That I would not go from there,
Until there came some knight
Who could defeat me by might.
It was right that I should remain,
If I my word I did not maintain,
It should never have been given.
Since I knew all the good within
Her, I could not to my treasure
Show any sign of displeasure,
Which if she had perceived
And in my reluctance believed,
She would have denied her heart,
Which I'd not desire for aught
That might ever come to me.
Thus was I brought by my lady
To sojourn here for many a day,
No man would make his way,
She thought, here to this garden,
Who might challenge me and win.
So she thought to render me
All the days of my life, you see,
A captive with her in this prison;
And it would be seen as treason,
If I by cunning seemed to retreat,
And did not those vassals defeat
Over whom I'd power to prevail;
To evade it would shame entail.
And, indeed, I tell you, here,
That I hold no friend so dear
I would merely feign to fight.
I fought with all my might,
Never a combat did I refuse.
The helmets you may view,

Of those I defeated and killed;
But mine is not the guilt still,
When one thinks of it aright:
I had no choice but to fight,
Unless I would prove untrue,
And base, and disloyal too.
Now the truth I have told;
No small honour, behold,
Is this you here have won.
Great joy have you given,
To my uncle and my friends;
With you my task here ends,
And, since joy it must give
To all who at the court live,
Joy of the Court is it named,
By all who await the same.
Long have they waited too;
Now it is rendered by you,
Defeating, as if by sorcery,
My prowess and my chivalry,
Since you have won the fight.
Now I must tell, for it is right,
What you desired: my name.
I am called, then, Mabonagrain;
Yet none by that name hold me
In remembrance, in any country
Where I may have been known,
Except it be in this sole region;
For never, when I was a squire,
Did I speak or declare it. Sire,
The truth you have from me,
That you did request of me;
But I must remind you yet,
In this garden a horn is set,
Which, I think, you have seen,

I cannot issue forth, I ween,
Until that horn is sounded;
Then Joy will be unbounded,
And I'll be released by you.
Whoever hears and heeds it too,
No obstacle can them impede
From heading here, at speed,
As soon as its note they hear.
Rise up, Sire! Swiftly, appear!
Seize the horn right joyfully.
You have no reason to tarry.
So do what you must today.⁷
Now Érec rises and is away,
And so, in a moment, is the other,
Both approach the horn together.
Érec takes it, and blows a note,
Issuing strongly from his throat,
So it is heard both far and wide.
Her delight Énide cannot hide,
At the sound of the horn's note,
And Guivret too, at that *mote*.
The king is glad, and his people,
There is not one who is not well
Suited, and pleased, by all of this.
No one rests, none can desist,
From song and joyful display.
Érec could vaunt himself that day,
For never was there such joy.
No words could I employ
Nothing made by human tongue,
To describe it, yet here is the sum,
In a few choice words, and briefly.
The news flew about the country,
As to how the affair had ended.
Then there was none but wended

Their way, unrestrained, to court.
All the people the palace sought,
Some on foot, on horseback others,
Without waiting for one another.
Those who are in the garden,
Érec now of his arms unburden,
And all vie themselves among
To sing of all the joy in song.
For the ladies composed a lay,
Named the Lay of Joy, that day:
Though that lay is little known.
Érec was full indeed of his own
Joy, as happy as he'd desired;
Yet displeased by what transpired
Was she who sat on the silver bed,
The joy she witnessed, instead,
Gave her not a moment's pleasure;
Yet many must in silence measure
The depth of what gives them pain.
Énide proved courteous again:
For seeing the lady seated there
Alone and pensive, full of care,
She felt moved to sit with her
And talk, and so speak to her
Of herself, and of her affairs,
Enquiring of the other's cares,
And situation, if she might,
If it did not distress her quite.
Énide thought to go alone,
Leaving the rest on their own,
But the noblest and most lovely
Of the maidens, and the ladies,
Followed her, from loyalty,
And to bear her company,
And to comfort the other

Whom the joy had made to suffer,
Since that lady must expect
That her lover would see her less
Than when bound by his vow,
Eager to leave the garden now.
However painful it might prove
None could prevent his remove,
For that certain hour had come.
So it was that her tears did run
Down her face, from her eyes.
More than I could e'er surmise,
Was her sorrow and her distress,
Yet she sat proudly, nonetheless,
Not known enough to those who
Sought to bring her comfort to
Ease all her sorrow and care.
Yet Énide with her kindly air,
Greeted her, though the other
Could not awhile reply to her,
Since by sobs and sighs she
Was distressed most cruelly.
It was a long while before
The lady could reply at all,
But when she viewed Énide
And gazed at her, then indeed
She felt that she had seen her
Long before, and so knew her.
Being uncertain of her name,
She was not slow to ascertain
Who she was, of what country
And who her knight might be;
Asking of both their identity;
Énide then responded briefly,
Replying, with utmost verity:
'I am,' she said, 'a Count's niece;

He holds Lalut, there keeps order,
And I am his sister's daughter,
At Lalut both born and raised.'
The lady smiled, half-amazed,
Ere Énide spoke another word,
So delighted at what she heard,
That all her sorrow she forgot.
Her heart leapt at the thought;
To her grief she gave no heed:
She ran to kiss and hug Énide:
'Your own cousin then am I,
It is the very truth,' she cried:
'You are niece to my father;
For he is your father's brother.
But I doubt you have heard,
None perhaps has said a word
Oh how I came to this country:
Well, the Count, your uncle, he
Made war, and many a knight
Came from afar, for pay, to fight.
Thus, fair cousin, one of these,
Among the many mercenaries,
Nephew to Brandigant's king,
Spent a year with him warring.
That was but twelve years ago:
And I was still a child almost,
He was handsome and elegant,
And we had forged a covenant,
Between us, that pleased us both.
Naught I wished if he was loth,
Until he began to love me too,
Promised me, and swore it true,
He would be my lover always,
And, with me, here would stay;
Which pleased me, and him also.

He was ready, and I longed so
To dwell here with my lover;
So we came here both together,
And only the two of us knew.
At that time, you and I were two
Young girls, mere children only.
Now I have spoken true, tell me
As I have told you, all the story
Of you and your lover, in verity,
By what adventure he won you.
'Fair cousin! He wed me, in truth
With my father's clear consent;
My mother had joy of the event.
My kin knew, and were happy,
As all ones family ought to be.
Even the Count felt delight.
For my love is so fine a knight,
That none better is living now,
With no need to prove, I trow,
His honour or his knighthood;
And his lineage proves good:
I think there is none his peer.
He loves me, I hold him dear;
Our love could not be greater.
I've never denied my love ever,
To him, nor should, for anything.
Is not my lord the son of a king?
Did he not take me, poor and lowly?
Such honour now has come to me,
As never so freely has been given,
In that way, to a helpless maiden.
And, if it please, I shall tell to you,
And every word of it prove true,
How I came to acquire such merit.
For I will never be slow to tell it.'

Then she told the history true,
Of how Érec had come to Lalut;
Not caring a single thing to hide,
All the adventure, naught denied,
Word for word, without omission;
Yet I'll not, with your permission,
For he his story doth render stale,
Who twice over relates his tale.
While they were speaking together,
One lady stole away to the others,
And went and told the gentlemen,
So as to heighten the joy again.
All those who heard the thing,
Were filled with fresh rejoicing.
When Mabonagrain heard her,
He felt great joy for his lover,
In that she had comfort found.
She who sent the news around,
Though she delivered it hastily,
Brought pleasure to all swiftly.
Even the king delighted more,
Though he felt great joy before,
Yet now he was still happier,
Showing Érec much honour.
Énide leads her cousin away,
Lovelier than Helen, this day,
More graceful and more charming.
Now to them come hastening,
Érec and Mabonagrain,
Guivret and King Evrain,
And the others come to them,
To salute and honour them,
For none of the lords retreat.
Mabonagrain, his joy complete,
Makes much of Énide, she of him.

Érec and Guivret, honour him,
Taking fresh delight in the lady,
Great joy they have of he and she,
Kissing and clasping one another.
To the castle now they'd wander,
In the garden they'd stayed too long.
Ready to leave, that whole throng
Issues forth together, joyfully,
Kissing each other tenderly.
All follow the king together;
But long before they all enter
The castle, the lords they see,
Gathered from the whole country;
For all who of the Joy had heard
Set out, upon hearing that word;
Great the assembly and the crowd,
All wished to see Érec if allowed,
Both high and low, rich and poor,
One after another, on they pour,
To acclaim him, bow full low,
While uttering, in endless flow:
'God save him who hath brought
Joy and delight to all our court!
God save the noblest man living,
To whom God e'er granted being!
On to the court they lead him so,
All their joy they strive to show;
As their hearts dictate, they sound
Lyres and harps, the viols abound,
Fiddles, psalteries, hurdy-gurdies,
Whatever makes fine melodies,
That anyone could say or name.
But I would wish to end the same
Briefly, and brook no more delay.
The king fetes Érec in every way,

As do the others, unstintingly.
None there is but most willingly
Offers to do him good service.
Three days of the Joy there is,
Before Érec can depart again.
On the fourth, he will not remain,
For any reason they can suggest.
A vast crowd accompany their guest,
Surround him as he takes his leave.
More than half a day, I believe,
It would have taken, one by one,
To say farewell to everyone.
The nobles he salutes as friends,
The others to God he commends
And in a word salutes them all.
Nor is Énide silent as, in the hall,
She bids the noblemen farewell,
Saluting them by name as well,
And they salute her, mutually.
Before leaving, she most tenderly
Clasps her cousin, so to kiss her.
They are gone, the Joy is over.

**LINES 6411-6509 ÉREC, ÉNIDE AND GUIVRET
REACH KING ARTHUR'S COURT**

THE crowd returns, they ride away.
Thus Érec, Énide, and Guivret,
For nine days, pass on joyfully,
Till once more Robais they see,
Where they are told lies the king,
Who had, on the day preceding,
Been bled in his room, privately.

And gathered there he had only
Five hundred nobles of his court.
Never before had he, in short,
Been found so unaccompanied,
Such that he was most displeased,
To have so few companions there.
Of a messenger he became aware,
Whom Érec had sent, in advance,
To announce all the circumstance
Of their approach: he came before
The gathering, the king to the fore,
Saluted the king most correctly,
Saying: 'Sire! I am sent to thee
By Érec and Guivret le Petit.'
Then he said the king would see
Them shortly arrive at the court.
'Welcome are they,' was his retort,
'Both valiant knights, gallant men!
I know not two finer gentlemen.
My court will be enhanced by both.'
Then he sent for the queen, not loth
To tell her all the welcome news.
The nobles their mounts go choose,
To advance and greet the gentlemen,
And all without their spurs they went,
Being in such great haste to mount.
Briefly I should, for you, recount
That already to the town had come,
A train of people, of whom some,
Squires, cooks, butlers, were there
Their masters' lodgings to prepare.
The main party, they came later,
But had already, drawing nearer,
Nigh on made entry to the town.
Now, the nobles all gather round,

And mutually salute and embrace,
They come to their lodgings apace;
At ease can change their clothes,
Before they don their rich robes.
When they were finely attired,
To the court they then retired.
By the king there were seen;
All impatient was the queen,
To meet with Érec and Énide.
To their seats the king doth lead
Them, kisses Érec and Guivret;
Énide's neck his arms embay,
He kisses her with great joy;
Nor is the queen slow to deploy
Her kisses too; Érec and Énide
She embraces; a joy indeed,
To see her so filled with joy.
All do such delights enjoy.
The king quiet doth command,
Enquires of Érec, and demands
News of all his late adventure.
When all ceased their murmur,
Érec thus commenced his tale,
Recounting now, in fine detail,
Every aspect of his adventures.
Do you think I'd dare venture
To repeat again each in and out?
Nay! For you know all about
Érec's design and actions too,
As I've disclosed them to you.
To retell it would burden me,
For the tale's not told so briefly
Any would wish to re-create,
What Érec chose now to relate,
In the very words he uttered:

Of the three knights he conquered,
Then the five, and the Count too,
Who had tried great harm to do
Him, then the two giants later.
In due order, one after another,
His adventures he recounted
To the point where he encountered
The Count Oringle of Limors.
'Many a peril has been yours,
My noble friend' the king said,
'Now tarry in this land instead,
At my court, as you used to do.'
'Sire, if you would wish me to,
I will remain most willingly,
Three years in their entirety,
Or four, but ask Guivret also,
And I'll join you in doing so.'
The king asks Guivret to stay,
And he agrees and doth obey.
So they remain, nothing loth,
The king thus retaining both,
Honoured by him and held dear.

LINES 6510-6712 ÉREC SUCCEEDS HIS FATHER AS KING

ÉREC did thus at court appear
With Guivret, Énide at his side,
Until the king, his father, died,
An old man, advanced in years:
And now the messengers appear,
Those lords who Érec would see,
The greatest men of his country,
Who enquire and search for him,

Until, at Tintagel, they find him,
Three weeks ere Christmas Day.
And all the true facts they relay,
Of what had chanced to occur,
Anent his white-haired father,
Who they said had passed away.
Érec grieved much more that day
Than he showed, but in a king
A show of grief is unbecoming,
Nor is it meet he should mourn.
There at Tintagel, eve and morn,
He had masses sung, vigils kept,
Promised, and his promises kept,
As he had vowed a host of vows
To many a church and godly house;
He did all he ought to have done;
Clothing the poverty-stricken one;
A hundred and sixty nine he chose
Cladding them all in new clothes;
The poor clerks and the priors
He in new black cloaks attires,
All with warm linings beneath;
For God's sake he grants relief,
A barrel of copper coin indeed,
To all those in greatest need.
After granting them their share,
He did a wise thing, seeking there
The title to his lands, of the king,
And then spoke again, requesting
That Arthur crown him at court.
The king told him: prepare, in short,
For both should be crowned together,
He and his wife, one with the other,
On Christmas day, which was nigh,
And said: 'You must go, by and by,

From here to Nantes in Brittany;
There you shall bear, as royalty,
Crown on head, sceptre in hand,
This I grant to honour your land.’
Érec thanked the king once more,
Calling the gift a noble favour.
At Christmas the King gathers
All of his noblemen together.
Making of each man the demand
To come to Nantes, at his command;
All will obey him, and none remain,
Of his own men Érec asks the same.
Many journey at his right hand,
And more than he doth demand,
To serve and show him honour.
I could not tell you who was there,
What each man was and his name;
But whoever or not it was who came,
Énide’s father, and her mother,
Were not forgotten, for her father
Indeed was asked, among the first,
And on his way his role rehearsed,
Of the great lord and chatelaine.
Here was no crowd of mere chaplains,
Nor a gaping crowd of commoners,
But of fine knights, his noble peers
A host, dressed all in their finery.
Each day saw a lengthy journey,
For they rode all day, every day,
With great delight and grand display,
Till, on the Eve of the Nativity,
They came to Nantes’ fair city.
They make no halt but canter
On to the great hall, and enter,
Where the king and courtiers are,

Érec and Énide see them afar:
Know now what joy they share.
They run to greet them there,
To salute them and embrace,
Meeting tenderly, face to face,
Showing their joy as they ought.
Now Énide's parents are at court,
They take each other by the hand,
All four before the king now stand,
Saluting him right joyfully,
And the queen, likewise, for she
Was seated there at his left hand.
Taking Énide's father by the hand,
Érec said: 'Sire, here you see
Her father, a dear friend to me,
He who showed me such honour,
Of his house he made me master.
Before he knew aught about me,
He lodged me right comfortably,
Whatever he had he gave to me,
Bestowing his daughter freely.
Without others' advice and counsel.'
'And friend, who is she, now tell,'
Said the king, 'the lady at his side?'
Érec speaks, and naught doth hide.
'Sire,' said he, 'of that lady there
I may say she is my wife's mother.'
'Her mother is she?' – 'Truly, Sire!'
'I might say then, and prove no liar,
That fair and lovely ought to be
The flower born of such beauty,
And sweeter the fruit we choose,
For sweetness comes of our virtues.
Fair is Énide as fair she must be,
By right and reason, as we see,

For a lovely lady is her mother,
And a noble knight has she for father.
Nor does she fail them in anything.
For she comes of them, inheriting
Full many a virtue from these two.
Then the king falls silent anew.
They all sit, at a wave of his hand,
All quick to obey his command.
Once all are seated, immediately
Énide looks about her joyfully,
Delighted to see her parents there,
Much time has passed, she is aware,
Since of them she has had sight;
Greatly increased is her delight,
Greatly her joy and happiness,
Which she is at pains to express
All she can, though ever shows
Less than the joy that she knows.
Yet I will speak of that no more,
My heart turns towards the court,
Assembled there, all the nobility.
Here, of many a diverse country,
Counts, dukes and kings we see;
Normans, Bretons, Scots, Irishry.
From England and Cornwall too
A wealthy gathering is on view,
For from Far Wales to Anjou,
And from Maine and Poitou,
Not a knight of substance there,
Nor gentle lady with fine airs,
But the best and most elegant
Were at that court in Nantes,
At King Arthur's command.
Now give ear, and understand,
The grandeur and joy that day,

The great wealth and display,
 That at that court was shown.
 For, before the hour of nones,
 King Arthur dubbed, as it saw,
 Four hundred knights or more,
 All sons of counts and kings.
 He gave each three yearlings,
 Fine bred, of new robes four,
 So they might not seem poor:
 Great and lavish was the king,
 The robes, not of rabbit-skin,
 Nor of serge, nor brown fur,
 But of samite and ermine were;
 Of vair, of flowered silk made,
 Trimmed with stiff and heavy braid.
 Alexander who so conquered
 That a whole world he mastered,
 Who was so wealthy and lavish,
 Showed poor and mean next to this.
 Caesar, the master of all Rome,
 And every king who is known
 From tales and *chansons de geste*,
 Never shared among his guests
 As much as Arthur handed round
 When Érec as king was crowned;
 Nor dared Caesar or Alexander
 Spend the wealth he squandered
 On his court, midst that event.
 Robes from his chests were sent
 To be scattered through the halls
 All can take them, naught befalls;
 And wear them without restriction.
 And thirty bushels of silver coin,
 In their midst, on a carpet, set,
 Good currency in all Britain yet,

As from the very time of Merlin,
The bright silver penny sterling.
From it, all took what they might,
Carrying it away, all that night,
To their lodgings, till the dawn.
At tierce on Christmas Morn,
All at the court assembled, where
The great joy that awaited there
Filled Érec's heart, completely.
The tongue of no man could fully,
However skilful might be his art,
Describe the third or fourth part,
Or even the fifth, of the display
Marking his coronation day.
So I am subject to great folly,
In seeking to describe it truly;
Yet since the effort I must make,
Come what may, I'll undertake
To render some part of it all,
As best I can, what e'er befall.

**LINES 6713-6809 THE GREAT DISPLAY
AT ÉREC'S CORONATION**

THE king had two thrones on view,
Of white ivory, fine and new,
Of like pattern and like size.
He who made them, I surmise
Was subtle and ingenious too;
He so precisely matched the two,
In height, width and decoration,
You could not, in any fashion,
Distinguish between the pair,

Or find a single feature there
In the one, and not the other.
Naught was of wood either,
But all was gold and ivory;
And all was carved skilfully,
For each on one limb did yield
The form of a leopard revealed,
On the other a winged dragon.
Bruiant of the Isles had given
Them to Arthur, he a knight,
To his and his queen's delight.
King Arthur occupying the one,
Made Érec take the other one.
Érec was clothed in watered silk;
Reading, we find such of that ilk
In the histories, as reported by
Macrobius, lest any claim I lie,
Who treats of it most carefully,
And who is here my authority.
Macrobius it is who teaches me
How to describe it, just as I see
It in his book, cloth and imagery.
For is was made by four faeries,
With perfect skill and mastery.
One faery depicted Geometry,
How it measures earth and sky,
Their extent and where they lie,
Such that naught is lost to sight,
And the depth and the height,
The width and length, and then,
How it, by measuring again,
How deep the sea is and wide,
To the whole world is applied.
Such was the first faerie's design,
While the second spent her time

In portraying Arithmetic there
Taking pains to show with care
How it cleverly could number
The days and hours of slumber,
And drop by drop the seawater,
And the sand grains tell over,
And the stars, one by one,
(Knowing how truth is won)
And the leaves on the trees:
Treating number with such ease,
It can never be deceived,
Nor by error e'er be grieved,
Such the skill of Arithmetic;
The third's work was of Music,
Which with all delight accords,
Melody, descant, and chords,
Harp, viol, and bowed lyre;
Work as fine as men desire,
For upon it were portrayed,
All the instruments e'er played.
The fourth, who worked it last,
Well she performed her task,
For the greatest art was seen,
Astronomy that is, I mean,
Which doth many a wonder show,
And from the stars doth know,
And from the moon and sun,
For it seeks counsel of none
But them, all it ought to do.
They give counsel good and true.
Regarding all that will be seen,
And what is now, and has been,
They give sure information,
Without falsehood or deception.
On the fabric was this portrayed,

Of which Érec's robe was made.
Worked, woven in gold thread.
But the lining revealed, instead,
Strange creatures there applied,
With white heads, on its inside,
With necks black as mulberries,
Vermilion backs, green bellies,
And tails of dark blue, as well.
In India these creatures dwell,
They are named 'barbiolets',
Naught but spices eat all day,
Cloves and fresh cinnamon.
What of the mantle he had on?
It was rich and fine as well:
Four gems the tassels held,
Two chrysolites on one side,
Two amethysts the other side,
And mounted in gold all four.

LINES 6810-6946 ÉREC IS CROWNED

ÉNIDE they now are waiting for,
For she has not yet made her way
To the palace. Arthur at this delay,
At once requests Gawain to go
And bring her, and the queen also.
Gawain went swiftly at his command,
And with him went King Cadoalant
And the generous King of Galloway,
And, accompanying them, Guivret,
Along with Yder the son of Nut.
So many other knights went, on foot,
To escort the two ladies though,

They made a very warlike show;
There were a thousand or more.
The queen had sought to ensure
That Énide was richly arrayed.
Into the palace they now parade,
Gawain the courteous on her right,
On her left, that generous knight
The King of Galloway, and he too
Held her dear, for his own nephew
Was Érec; and when they all enter
There to meet them is King Arthur,
And swiftly and courteously,
Beside Érec he seats Énide;
Wishing to show her great honour.
Then, from amongst his treasure,
Two crowns he orders brought,
Weighty, of fine gold wrought.
As soon as he did so command,
The crowns were there on hand,
Both carried in, without delay,
Their garnets made a fine display;
Four, adorning each, shone bright.
Naught appears the moon's light
Compared to the brightness then
Of even the least of those gems.
And through their radiance, also
All in the palace are dazzled, so
Completely, so intense they find
The light, a while they are blind.
Even King Arthur was surprised,
Yet overjoyed, with his own eyes
To view them, so clear and bright.
One was raised by two knights,
The other held by two maidens.
He commands the bishops then

And the priors to advance slow,
The abbots of the church also,
To anoint the new king, which is
In accord with Christian practice.
And there step forward, all told
Many a prelate, young and old;
For a great number had come,
Of abbots and bishops, a sum.
The Bishop of Nantes, indeed,
Worthy and saintly, did lead;
Anointed the new-made king,
In a manner holy, and fitting,
And set a crown on Érec's head.
King Arthur himself added
A sceptre which was very fine.
Hear me tell of it, line by line:
For it is clearer than glass,
Solid emerald green as grass,
Fully as large as is your fist.
I tell you truly, some artist
Has traced and carved there,
Of our world, every manner
Of fish or wild beast he can;
Every bird, and form of man,
And each there figured truly.
And so the sceptre is duly
Carried to King Arthur who,
Wondering at the thing anew,
Places it in Érec's right hand:
Now rightful king of his land.
Then Arthur crowns Énide,
And the bells sound indeed.
To the main church they go,
For mass, and a service also
At the cathedral go to hear.

Weeping with joy, appear
The father of Queen Énide,
And her mother, Carsenafide,
The true name of her mother,
And Liconal that of her father;
Most joyful were those two.
At the cathedral, came in view,
A procession, for their pleasure,
Of the holy relics and treasure,
Brought forth for them to see;
Crosses, texts, and reliquaries,
Holding the sacred remains,
A quantity of which it claims.
All were brought to greet them,
With many a chant to meet them.
Never were so many lords praying,
So many counts, dukes and kings,
Seen at mass, all those noblemen:
The crowd was so great that when
All were in the church was filled.
Outside, the lowly people milled,
All barred, but knights and ladies;
Even of them there were many
Who remained outside the door
So great a crowd to it did pour,
Who still could not gain entry.
When the mass ends, quietly
They all return to the palace.
Where everything is in place,
Cloths spread and tables set;
Five hundred tables; and yet,
I'd not have you credit a word
Of anything that seems absurd.
It might seem far too great a lie
To claim five hundred tables vie

To feed a gathering, these days;
And in one place, so I'll rephrase,
Thus; they were set in five halls,
So one could navigate them all,
Only with difficulty, and at
Every table, in truth, there sat
A king, or duke perhaps, or count.
A hundred knights, by all account,
At each table there, head by head.
A thousand knights serve the bread,
A thousand meat, a thousand wine,
In ermine robes, all fresh and fine.
Of dishes, were served a variety,
And though I was not there to see
I could well describe each plate;
Yet, instead of whatever they ate,
I must attend to something other:
They had plenty, not wanting other,
For joyfully, generously were they
Served with all they wished that day.

LINES 6947-6958 THE CONCLUSION

WHEN all the feasting was done,
The king dismissed everyone,
All the kings and dukes and counts,
A mighty number, by all accounts,
And the humble commoners, all
Who had come to that festival.
He gave out presents lavishly,
Horses, silver, and weaponry,
Robes, brocades of many a kind,
Because he was of generous mind,

And for love of Érec his friend.
Here, at last, the tale doth end.

The End of the Tale of Érec and Énide



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chrétien, likely a native of Troyes in north-eastern France, served at the court of his patroness, Marie of France, Countess of Champagne and daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine, between 1160 and 1172. Hers was a literate court, and she herself knowledgeable in Latin as well as French texts, and Chrétien used the legendary court of King Arthur as an analogue for the French and Angevin courts of his own day. Marie's mother Eleanor became Queen of England, in 1154, as the spouse of Henry II, following annulment of her marriage to Louis VII of France, thus Chrétien was able to blend French and British traditions in his works. Between 1170 and 1190, Chrétien, writing in fluent octosyllabic couplets, developed and transformed the narrative verse tradition, and laid the foundations for the plot-driven prose narratives of later times.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Anthony Kline lives in England. He graduated in Mathematics from the University of Manchester, and was Chief Information Officer (Systems Director) of a large UK Company, before dedicating himself to his literary work and interests. He was born in 1947. His work consists of translations of poetry; critical works, biographical history with poetry as a central theme; and his own original poetry. He has translated into English from Latin, Ancient Greek, Classical Chinese and the European languages. He also maintains a deep interest in developments in Mathematics and the Sciences.

He continues to write predominantly for the Internet, making all works available in download format, with an added focus on the rapidly developing area of electronic books. His most extensive works are complete translations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*.