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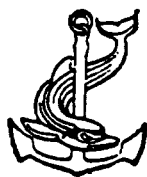
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WACE and LAYAMON

# Arthurian Chronicles

TRANSLATED BY  
EUGENE MASON

INTRODUCTION BY  
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1962

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Leir, the earl, men carried into Boulogne; and Arthur then hereafter dwelt in a land in Burgundy, that to him seemed best; he land he all ruled, and all the castles appointed; and said hat he would himself hold the land. And afterwards he made is threat, that he would in summer march into Rome, and cquire all the realm, and himself be emperor where Lucus ere welt. And many of the Rome-folk would that it so should be, or they were adread to their bare death, so that many away here fled, and their castles abandoned; and many sent mes- engers to Arthur the strong; and many spake with him, and earned Arthur's peace, and some they would against Arthur old, and hold Rome against him, and defend the réalm. And evertheless they were afraid for their destruction, so that they new not under Christ any good counsel. Then was it there ome to pass, what Merlin said erewhile, that Rome-walls should ll down before Arthur; that was fulfilled there by the emperor, ho fell there in the fight, with fifty thousand men; there sank to he ground the rich Rome-people! Then Arthur weened in sooth o win all Rome, and dwelt in Burgundy, noblest of all kings.

Then came there on a time a brave man riding, and brought riding to Arthur the king, from Modred, his sister's son; to Arthur he was welcome, for he weened that he brought news most good. Arthur lay all the night long, and spake with the young knight; so never would he say to him sooth how it fared. When it was day on the morrow, and people gan to stir, Arthur then up arose, and stretched his arms; he arose up, and sate fown, as if he were exceeding sick. Then asked him a fair knight: "Lord, how hast thou fared to-night?" Arthur then answered—in mind he was uneasy: "To-night in my sleep, where I lay in chamber, I dreamt a dream—therefore I am full sorry. I dreamt that men raised me upon a hall; the hall I gan bestride, as if I would ride; all the lands that I possessed, all I there overlooked. And Walwain sate before me; my sword he bare in hand. Then approached Modred there, with innumerable folk; he bare in his hand a battle-axe strong; he began to hew exceeding hardily; and the posts all hewed in pieces, that held up the hall. There I saw Wenhaver eke,

dearest of women to me; all the mickle hall roof with her hand she drew down; the hall gan to tumble, and I tumbled to the ground, so that my right arm brake in pieces,—then said Modred, 'Have that!' Down fell the hall; and Walwain gan to fall, and fell on the earth; his arms both brake. And I grasped my dear sword with my left hand, and smote off Modred his head, so that it rolled on the field. And the queen I cut all in pieces with my dear sword, and afterwards I set her down in a black pit. And all my good people set to flight, so that I knew not under Christ, where they were gone. But myself I gan stand upon a weald, and I there gan to wander wide over the moors; there I saw gripes, and grisly fowls! Then approached a golden lion over the down;—a beast most fair, that our Lord made;—the lion ran towards me, and took me by the middle, and forth gan her move, and to the sea went. And I saw the waves drive in the sea; and the lion in the flood went with myself. When we came in the sea, the waves took her from me; but there approached a fish, and brought me to land;—then was I all wet, and weary from sorrow, and sick. When I gan to wake, greatly gan I to quake; then gan I to tremble as if I all burnt with fire. And so I have all night of my dream much thought; for I wot with certainty, gone is all my bliss, for ever in my life sorrow I must endure! Alas! that I have not here Wenhaver, my queen!"

Then answered the knight: "Lord, thou hast wrong; men should never a dream with sorrow interpret. Thou art the mightiest man, that reigneth in land, and the wisest of all that dwelleth under heaven. If it were befallen—as will it not our Lord!—that Modred, thy sister's son, had taken thy queen, and set all thy royal land in his own hand, that thou to him committedest, when thou thoughtest to go to Rome; and had he done all this with his treachery, the yet thou mightest thee avenge with weapon worthily, and est thy land hold, and govern thy people, and thine enemies fell, who did evil to thee, and slay them all clean, that there remain not one."

Arthur then answered, noblest of all kings: "So long as is ever, weened I that never, that ever Modred, my relative, who is man dearest to me, would betray me, for all my realm, nor Wenhaver, my queen, weaken in thought; would it not begin, for any worldly man!"

Even with the words forth-right then answered the knight: "I say thee sooth, dear king, for I am thy underling. Thus hath Modred done; thy queen he hath taken, and thy fair land

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set in his own hand. He is king, and she is queen; of thy coming is there no expectation, for they ween not ever in sooth, that thou shalt come back from Rome. I am thine own man, and saw this treason; and I am come to thyself, to say thee sooth. My head be in pledge, that I have said thee sooth, without leasing, of thy loved queen, and of Modred, thy sister's son, how he hath taken Britain from thee."

Then sate it all still in Arthur's hall; then was there sorrow with the good king; then were the British men therefore exceedingly dispirited. Then after a while voices there stirred; wide men might hear the Britons' clamour, and gan to tell in speeches of many kind, how they would destroy Modred and the queen, and slay all the people that held with Modred.

Arthur then called, fairest of all Britons: "Sit ye down still, knights in hall, and I will you tell strange discourse. Now to-morrow, when it is day, and the Lord it sendeth, forth I will march in toward Britain; and Modred I will slay, and burn the queen; and all I will destroy, that approved the treachery. And here I will leave the dearest of men to me, Howel, my loved relative, noblest of my kin; and half my army I will leave in this land, to maintain all this kingdom, that I have in my hand. And when these things are all done, back I will come to Rome, and deliver my fair land to Walwain my relation; and afterwards perform my threat, by my bare life; all my enemies shall be destroyed!"

Then stood him up Walwain, who was Arthur's relative, and said these words,—the earl was incensed: "Almighty God! ruler of dooms, guardian of all middle-earth! Why is it befallen, that my brother Modred this sin has wrought? But to-day I forsake him here, before this assembly; and I will him destroy with the Lord's will; myself I will him hang, highest of all wretches; the queen I will, with God's law, draw all in pieces with horses. For may I never be blithe, the while I am alive, until I have avenged mine uncle with the best!"

Then answered the Britons with bold voice: "All our weapons are ready; now to-morrow we shall march!" On the morrow when it was day, and the Lord it sent, Arthur forth him moved, with his good folk; half he it left, and half it forth led. Forth he marched through the land until he came to Whitsand; ships he had soon, many and excellent; but full a fortnight there lay the host, abiding the weather, deprived of wind (becalmed).

Now was there some wicked knight in Arthur's army, anon as he heard it determined of Modred's death, he took his swain

quickly, and sent to this land; and sent word to Wenhaver, how it had happened, and how Arthur was on his march, with a great host; and how he would take on, and all how he would do. The queen came to Modred, who was to her dearest of men, and told him tiding of Arthur the king, how he would take on, and all how he would do.

Modred took his messengers, and sent to Saxland, after Childrich, who was king most powerful; and bade him come to Britain—thereof he should have possession. Modred bade Childrich, the strong and the rich, to send messengers wide, on the four sides of Saxland, and bid all the knights that they might get, that they should come soon to this kingdom; and he would to Childrich give part of his realm, all beyond the Humber; because he should him help to fight against his uncle King Arthur. Childrich proceeded soon into Britain. When Modred had assembled his host of men, then were there told sixty thousand hardy warriors of heathen folk, when they were come hither, for Arthur's harm, and to help Modred, wickedest of men! When the army was gathered of each people, then were they there in a heap an hundred thousand, heathens and christians, with Modred the king.

Arthur lay at Whitsand; a fortnight seemed to him too long; and Modred knew all what Arthur there would; each day came messengers to him from the king's army. Then befell it on a time, much rain it gan to rain, and the wind it gan to turn, and stood from the east end. And Arthur proceeded to ship with all his host, and ordered that his shipmen should bring him to Romney, where he thought to come up into this land. When he came to the haven, Modred was opposite to him; as the day gan light, they began to fight, all the day long; many a man dead there lay! Some they fought on land, some by the strand; some they let fly sharp spears out of the ships. Walwain went before, and cleared the way; and slew there soon eleven thanes; he slew Childrich's son, who was come there with his father. To rest went the sun; woe was then to the men! There was Walwain slain, and deprived of life-day, through a Saxish earl—sorry be his soul! Then was Arthur sorry, and sorrowful therefore in heart; and these words said, mightiest of all Britons: "Now I have lost my loved swains! I knew by my dream, what sorrow were given to me! Slain is Angel the king, who was mine own darling, and Walwain, my sister's son—woe is me that I was born man! Up now from ship, quickly, my brave knights!"

Even with the words sixty thousand good warriors pressed anon to the fight, and brake Modred's ranks, and well nigh himself was taken. Modred began to flee, and his folk to follow after; they fled exceedingly, the fields eke trembled; the stones jar with the blood-streams! There would have been all the fight ended, but the night came too soon; if the night had not been, they all would have been slain!

The night separated them over slades and over downs; and Modred came so far forth, that he was at London. The burghmen heard how it had all fared, and denied him entry, and all his folk. Modred thence went toward Winchester; and they him received, with all his men. And Arthur pursued after, with all his might, until he came to Winchester, with a mickle host, and the burgh all besieged; and Modred therein abode. When Modred saw that Arthur was so nigh to him, oft he bethought him what he might do. Then on the same night, he ordered all his knights, with all their weapons, to march out of the burgh; and said that he would with fight there make a stand. He promised the burghmen free law evermore, on condition that they should help him at his great need.

When it was daylight, then ready was their fight. Arthur that perceived—the king was enraged; he caused trumpets to be blown, and men to be assembled to battle; he commanded all his thanes, and his noble knights, together to take the fight, and fell his enemies, and the burgh all to destroy, and hang the burgh-folk. They stept together, and sternly fought. Modred then thought what he might do; and he did there as he did elsewhere, treachery with the most! For ever he did wickedly; he betrayed his comrades before Winchester, and caused his dearest knights to be called to him anon, and his dearest friends all, of all his folk; and stole away from the fight—the fiend him have!—and let the good folk all there perish. They fought all day; they weened that their lord there lay, and were near them at their great need. Then bent he the way that toward Hampton lay; and bent toward the haven—wickedest of men—and took all the ships that there good were, and all the steersmen, to the need of the ships; and proceeded into Cornwall—wickedest of kings in those days! And Arthur besieged well firnly Winchester the burgh; and slew all the people—there was sorrow enow—the young and the old, all he killed. When the folk was all dead, and the burgh all burnt, then caused he withal all the walls to be broken in pieces.

Then was it there come to pass, that Merlin whilom said:

“Wretched shalt thou be, Winchester! the earth shall thee swallow!” So Merlin said, who was a great prophet.

The queen lay in York; never was she so sorrowful; that was Wenhaver the queen, most miserable of women! She heard say sooth words, how often Modred fled, and how Arthur him pursued; woe was to her the while, that she was alive! Out of York she went by night, and toward Kaerleon drew, as quickly as she might; thither she brought by night two of her knights; and men covered her head with a holy veil, and she was there a nun; woman most wretched! Then men knew not of the queen, where she were gone, nor many years afterwards man knew it in sooth, whether she were dead, or whether she herself were sunk in the water.

Modred was in Cornwall, and gathered many knights; to Ireland he sent his messengers quickly; to Saxland he sent his messengers quickly; to Scotland he sent his messengers quickly; he ordered them all to come anon, that would have land, or silver, or gold, or possessions, or land; in each wise he warned himself each man;—so doth each prudent man upon whom cometh need.

Arthur that heard, wrathest of kings, that Modred was in Cornwall with a mickle army, and there would abide until Arthur approached. Arthur sent messengers over all his kingdom, and bade all to come that was alive in land, that to fight were good, weapons to bear; and whoso it neglected, that the king commanded, the king would him all consume alive in the land. Innumerable folk it came toward the host, riding and on foot, as the rain down falleth!

Arthur marched to Cornwall, with an immense army. Modred heard that, and advanced against him with innumerable folk—there were many fated! Upon the Tambre they came together; the place hight Camelford, evermore lasted the same word. And at Camelford was assembled sixty thousand men, and more thousands thereto; Modred was their chief. Then thitherward gan ride Arthur the mighty, with innumerable folk—fated though it were! Upon the Tambre they encountered together; elevated their standards; advanced together; drew their long swords, and smote on the helms; fire out sprang; spears splintered; shields gan shiver; shafts brake in pieces! There fought all together innumerable folk! Tambre was in flood with blood to excess; there might no man in the fight know any warrior, nor who did worse, nor who did better, so was the conflict mingled! For each slew downright, were he swain,

were he knight. There was Modred slain, and deprived of life-day, and all his knights slain in the fight. There were slain all the brave, Arthur's warriors, high and low, and all the Britons of Arthur's board, and all his dependants, of many kingdoms. And Arthur himself wounded with a broad slaughter-spear; fifteen dreadful wounds he had; in the least one might thrust two gloves! Then was there no more remained in the fight, of two hundred thousand men that there lay hewed in pieces, except Arthur the king alone, and two of his knights.

Arthur was wounded wondrously much. There came to him a lad, who was of his kindred; he was Cador's son, the Earl of Cornwall; Constantine the lad hight, he was dear to the king. Arthur looked on him, where he lay on the ground, and said these words, with sorrowful heart: "Constantine, thou art welcome; thou wert Cador's son. I give thee here my kingdom, and defend thou my Britons ever in thy life, and maintain them all the laws that have stood in my days, and all the good laws that in Uther's days stood. And I will fare to Avalun, to the fairest of all maidens, to Argante the queen, an elf most fair, and she shall make my wounds all sound; make me all whole with healing draughts. And afterwards I will come again to my kingdom, and dwell with the Britons with mickle joy."

Even with the words there approached from the sea that was a short boat, floating with the waves; and two women therein, wondrously formed; and they took Arthur anon, and bare him quickly, and laid him softly down, and forth they gan depart.

Then was it accomplished that Merlin whilom said, that mickle care should be of Arthur's departure. The Britons believe yet that he is alive, and dwelleth in Avalun with the fairest of all elves; and the Britons ever yet expect when Arthur shall return. Was never the man born, of ever any lady chosen, that knoweth of the sooth, to say more of Arthur. But whilom was a sage hight Merlin; he said with words—his sayings were sooth—that an Arthur should yet come to help the English.

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