

# DREAM OF FORTUNE

## Arthur Has a Terrible Dream

To avenge that valiant One who died on the Cross.'

Then according to the chronicle, this comely king  
Went briskly to bed with a blithe heart.

He hurriedly undressed and undid his girdle

And languid with sleep slipped into slumber.

But by an hour after midnight his mood quite changed;  
Towards morning he met most marvellous dreams.

When his dreadful dream had driven to its end,

Arthur quaked with horror as if he would die,

And sent for his sages to tell them of his terror:

'In faith since I was formed I never felt such fright!

So search swiftly to make sense of my dream,

And I shall readily and rightly recount it truly.

It seemed I was in a wood, wandering alone,

Bewildered as to which way I should go,

For wolves and wild boars and wicked beasts

Stalked that sterile land slaving for prey;

Loathsome lions were licking their fangs

And longing to lap the blood of my loyal knights.

I fled through the forest to where flowers grew high,

In horror at those hideous things, to hide from them,

And emerged in a meadow by mountains enclosed,

The happiest place on earth men ever could see.

The enclosure was covered in its entire compass

With clover and clerewort which clothed it completely.

The vale was environed with silvery vines

Bearing golden grapes, the greatest ever,

And edged with arbours and all kinds of trees

Fair of foliage with flocks feeding under them.

All fruits earth provides were flourishing there,

Harmoniously hedged in, hanging on noble boughs.

No dank dewfall there could damage anything,

For in the heat of the day, all dry were the flowers.

'Then descended to that dale, down from the clouds,

A duchess richly dressed in decorated robes,

why mention the  
source here, right  
before an  
interpolation  
of 3440

3230

3240

3250

## The Goddess Fortune Appears to Arthur

A surcoat of silk exotically coloured

All overlaid with otter fur right to the hems,

And ladylike lappets at least a yard long,

And revers all trimmed with ribbons of gold,

With brooches and besants and other bright jewels.

Her back and her breast were embroidered all over,

And she carried her caul and coronet perfectly.

On lovelier looks no light ever fell.

She whirled a wheel about with her white hands,

Turning it intrepidly as she was tasked to do.

This round was red gold, set with royal gems

And richly arrayed with rubies in plenty.

The spokes were all plated with slats of silver,

Their splendid span a spear's length from the hub.

A seat of sparkling silver was set on top,

Chequered with carbuncle rubies of changing colours.

On the circumference clung kings in succession,

Their crowns of clear gold all cracking to pieces.

From that seat six of them had suddenly fallen,

Each sovereign separately, saying these words:

"How I regret that I ever ruled on this round wheel!

Never was royal king so rich, reigning on earth!

When horsed at the head of all I had no thought

But hunting, having pleasure and holding folk to ransom.

Thus did I with my days, enduring while I could,

And so to dire perdition I am damned for ever."

The lowest was a little man, lying below:

Lean were his loins and loathsome to look at,

His locks a yard long, and lank and grey,

And his features were foul, his frame crippled.

One brilliant eye blazed as bright as silver;

The other was yellower than the yolk of an egg.

"I was lord of limitless lands," said he,

"And low in allegiance to me all living men bowed,

But now I've not a rag to nurture my body

3260

3270

Alexander the  
lowest + 3280  
most broken

And I am swiftly struck down – let all see the truth!"

"The second lord, I say, who was strung next after,  
Seemed to me much stronger and stalwart for fighting,  
But often sighing in his suffering he spoke these words: 3290

"I have sat on that seat as sovereign and lord,  
And ladies most loving clasped me in their arms,  
But now lost are my lordships, laid low for ever!"

"The third was a thrustful man with thickset shoulders,  
So thoroughly fierce that thirty would scarcely threaten  
him.

His diadem, indented with diamonds all over  
And adorned and decorated with jewels, had slipped  
down.

"I was dreaded in my day in different kingdoms:  
Now I am doomed to be damned in death," grieved he.

"The fourth was a fair man, forceful in arms, 3300  
His figure the finest ever framed on earth.

Said he, "I firmly defended my faith when king;  
I won fame in far lands and was flower of all kings.  
Now my face is faded and foul fate has struck me,  
For I have fallen far, and am friendless abandoned."

"The fifth was yet finer than the four others,  
A fiery and forceful fellow who foamed at the lips.  
He crooked his arms round the rim, gripping it grimly,  
Yet he faltered and fell fully fifty feet.

Still he sprang up sprinting and spread his arms, 3310  
And from the spear's-length spokes spat out these words:

"I was a sovereign in Syria, and sole in eminence  
As monarch and master of many kings' lands.  
Now sunk from that sweetness, I have suddenly fallen,  
Struck from that seat for the sins I committed."

"The sixth held a psalter sumptuously bound  
With a silk cover sewn in a stylish way,  
And a harp and a handsling with hard flint stones;  
The disasters he had suffered, he spoke of at once:

"In my days I was deemed, for deeds of arms, 3320  
One of the doughtiest who ever dwelt on earth.  
But my martial might was marred and spoiled  
By this maiden so meek who moves us all."

"Two kings<sup>1</sup> were clambering, clawing their way up,  
Craving to come to the crest of the wheel.

"This ruby throne," they ranted, "we shall rightly claim  
As two of the noblest ever known on earth."

Both warriors went white, wan-cheeked with the effort, <sup>both</sup>  
But they were never to attain that topmost throne.

The foremost made a noble figure, with his fine forehead, 3330  
The fairest of face who was ever formed,

And he was clothed in the colour of courtly blue,  
Flourished all over with fleur-de-lys in gold.

His co-peer was clad in a coat of pure silver  
Engraved in gold with a graceful cross,

And so I could see that the king was a Christian, <sup>as if it were a difference</sup>

"I went to the lovely woman and warmly greeted her.  
"Welcome!" was her word, "it is well that you have come.

Were you wise enough, my wishes you should respect 3340  
Above all heroes who were ever on earth,

For all your war honours you have won through me.  
I have befriended you, fine Sir, and been a foe to others.

In faith you have so found it, and not a few of your men,  
For I felled Sir Frollo<sup>2</sup> and his fierce knights,

Whence the foison of France is all freely yours.  
You shall achieve this chair, I choose you myself,

1. 3324–9 These last two worthies, Charlemagne and Godfrey de Bouillon, are represented as future subjects of Fortune, because historically Arthur antedates them. The sage refers to them in the future tense (ll. 3422–37).

2. 3345 Sir Frollo was the ruler of Gaul under the Emperor Leo. In a previous campaign, Arthur had won France by killing Frollo in single combat, so Geoffrey of Monmouth recorded (ix. 12).

Over all the emperors honoured on earth."

"Then she lifted me lightly in her slender hands  
And set me softly on the seat, sceptre in my grasp, 3350  
And skilfully with a comb she combed my hair  
So that the crisping locks curled up to my crown.  
Then she dressed me in a diadem decorated most  
beautifully

And offered me an orb set full of fine stones,  
And enamelled in azure, with the earth painted on it,  
Encircled with the salt sea on all sides  
As a certain sign that I was Sovereign of the World.  
Then she handed me a sword with scintillating hilts  
And bade me, "Brandish this blade! The sword is my own;  
Many have lost their life-blood with the slash of it, 3360  
And while you work with this weapon it will never fail  
you."

"Then peacefully she departed to rest at her pleasure  
In the fringes of that forest of foison unparalleled.  
No orchard on earth was ever so planted for prince,  
Or apparelled so proudly but in Paradise itself.  
She bade the branches bend down and bring to my hands  
The best fruit they bore on the boughs above,  
And they held to her behest, all together,  
The greatest in each grove, I give you my word.  
She told me to stint not, and take what fruit tempted me. 3370  
"Make free with the finest, noble fighting man!  
Reach for the ripest, and revel in it.

Now rest, royal king, for Rome is your own,  
And I shall willingly whirl the wheel at once  
And bring you rich wine in rinsed goblets."  
Then she went to the well by the wood's edge,  
Where the wine welled up, wondrously flowing,  
Caught up a cupful and cleverly raised it  
And tenderly told me to take some, toasting her.  
In such style she solaced me for the space of an hour 3380

With all the liking and love a man could long for.  
But at midday exactly her mood quite changed,  
And she menaced me much with marvellous words.  
When I beseeched her, she bent her brows on me:  
"King, you can claim nothing, by Christ who made  
me!

For you shall lose this pleasure, and your life later:  
You have delighted long enough in lands and lordliness!"  
Then she whirled the wheel about, whipping me  
downwards,  
Which promptly pounded to pieces all my limbs,  
And by that seat my spine was smashed asunder. 3390  
And I have shivered with chill since that ill-chance befell  
me;

Thus weary with wild dreaming, I awoke, truly.  
You understand my distress now, so speak as you wish.  
'Sire,' said the sage, 'Fortune is finished with you.' *the*  
You shall find she is your foe, force it how you will. *inter*  
You are at the height, have it truly from me.  
Chance and challenge as you will, you will achieve no  
more.

You have destroyed sinless men and spilled much blood *the*  
In vainglory in your victories in various kings' lands. *the re*  
Take shrift for your shames and shape up for death! 3400  
Be advised by the vision vouchsafed you, Sir King, *vunglen*  
For fearsome shall be your fall within five winters.  
Found abbeys in France – the fruits shall be yours –  
For Frolo and Feraunt and their fierce knights  
To whom you dealt dreadful death in France.  
Think of those other kings and ask your heart about them,  
Who were acclaimed as conquerors and crowned on earth.  
The most ancient was Alexander, to whom all the world  
bowed;

Next in time was Troy's Hector, sweet-tempered knight;  
Julius Caesar, who was judged a knight, was third, 3410

Well-bred and bold in battle, as barons agree;  
 Sir Judas, a jousting of gentle birth, was fourth,  
 A masterful Maccabee, mightiest in strength;  
 Joshua, who made joy for Jerusalem's host,  
 Was the fifth, and a fine fighter was he;  
 The sixth, dauntless David, was deemed by kings  
 One of the worthiest warriors ever to wear knight-hood,  
 For he slew with a sling by sleight of hand  
 The great man Goliath, grimmest in the world,  
 Then spent his time composing all the precious psalms 3420  
 Which are set down in the Psalter in striking words.

a giant

One of the kings clambering, I can truly tell,  
 Shall be called Charlemagne, son of the French king;  
 He shall be accounted a conqueror cruel and keen,  
 Who will acquire by conquest countries in plenty;  
 He will capture the crown that Christ himself wore,  
 And the very same spear that struck to his heart  
 When He was crucified on the Cross; and all the cruel  
 nails

He will recover with courage for Christian men to keep.  
 The other will be Godfrey, who will avenge God 3430  
 On Good Friday, going to it with gallant knights;  
 He will be Lord of Lorraine by leave of his father,  
 And revel in rapture in Jerusalem later,  
 For he will recover the Cross by skill in battle  
 And then be crowned king with consecrated oil.  
 Such destiny no other duke in his day shall have,  
 Nor undergo such harm when the whole truth is told.

4, when  
 Fortune  
 turns on him  
 too

So Fortune has fetched you to fulfil the number  
 Of nine for the noblest ever named on earth.  
 This shall be read in romance by royal knights:  
 By acclaim you shall be accounted among conquering  
 kings, 3440

And on Doomsday deemed, for your deeds of arms,  
 One of the worthiest warriors ever to dwell on earth.

Accordingly many clerics and kings shall recount your  
 exploits  
 And keep your conquests in the chronicles for ever.  
 But the wolves in the woods and the wild beasts in your  
 dream

Are the wicked men who wage war on your realm,  
 Having entered in your absence to harry the people  
 With hosts of aliens from uncouth lands.  
 You will have tidings, I tell you, within ten days,  
 Of the trouble that has overtaken you since you turned  
 from home.

I advise you to confess your flagrant misdeeds,  
 Or most promptly you will repent your pitiless acts.  
 Amend your mood, man, before misfortune strikes,  
 And meekly beg mercy for the merit of your soul.'

Then the royal king rose and reached for his clothes:  
 A red jerkin with roses, the richest of flowers,  
 A neck-piece, a paunch protector and a precious girdle,  
 And put on a hood of exquisite scarlet,  
 And over it a fur hat ornamented beautifully  
 With pearls from the orient and precious stones.  
 His gloves were gaily gilded and engraved round the  
 borders

With miniature rubies much to be admired.  
 Then taking only a hunting hound and his sword,  
 With anger in his heart he hurried over a broad field,  
 Taking a track by the still edge of a wood  
 To a highway, where he halted, ~~actually musing~~  
 As the sun was ascending he saw approaching,  
 Walking the swiftest of ways towards Rome,  
 A man in a capacious cloak and clothes all baggy,  
 With hat and high boots of homely style.  
 The fellow was adorned with flat farthings all over,  
 And shaggy shredded ends showed at his skirts.  
 With his money-bag and mantle and many scallop shells,