

Arthur
Becomes
King of
Britain

from
The Once
and Future King

T.H. White





King Pellinore arrived for the important weekend in a high state of flurry.

“I say,” he exclaimed, “do you know? Have you heard? Is it a secret, what?”

“Is what a secret, what?” they asked him.

“Why, the King,” cried his majesty. “You know, about the King?”

“What’s the matter with the King?” inquired Sir Ector. “You don’t say he’s comin’ down to hunt with those darned hounds of his or anythin’ like that?”

“He’s dead,” cried King Pellinore tragically. “He’s dead, poor fellah, and can’t hunt any more.”

Sir Grummore stood up respectfully and took off his cap of maintenance.

“The King is dead,” he said. “Long live the King.”

Everybody else felt they ought to stand up too, and the boys’ nurse burst into tears.

“There, there,” she sobbed. “His loyal highness dead and gone, and him such a respectful gentleman. Many’s the illuminated picture I’ve cut out of him, from the Illustrated Missals,¹ aye, and stuck up over the mantel. From the time when he was in swaddling bands,² right through them world towers till he was a-visiting the dispersed areas as the world’s Prince Charming, there wasn’t a picture of ’im but I had it out, aye, and give ’im a last thought o’ nights.”

“Compose yourself, Nannie,” said Sir Ector.

“It is solemn, isn’t it?” said King Pellinore, “what? Uther the Conqueror, 1066 to 1216.”

1. **Missals** (mis’ əlz) *n.* books produced by the Roman Catholic Church for solemn religious purposes.

2. **swaddling** (swād’lɪŋ) **bands** in former times, long, narrow bands of cloth wrapped around a newborn baby.

“A solemn moment,” said Sir Grummore. “The King is dead. Long live the King.”

“We ought to pull down the curtains,” said Kay, who was always a stickler for good form, “or half-mast³ the banners.”

“That’s right,” said Sir Ector. “Somebody go and tell the sergeant-at-arms.”

It was obviously the Wart’s⁴ duty to execute this command, for he was now the junior nobleman present, so he ran out cheerfully to find the sergeant. Soon those who were left in the solar⁵ could hear a voice crying out, “Nah then, one-two, special mourning fer `is lite majesty, lower awai on the command Two!” and then the flapping of all the standards, banners, pennons, pennoncells, banderolls, guidons, streamers and cognizances⁶ which made gay the snowy turrets of the Forest Sauvage.

“How did you hear?” asked Sir Ector.

“I was pricking through the purlieus⁷ of the forest after that Beast, you know, when I met with a solemn friar of orders gray, and he told me. It’s the very latest news.”

“Poor old Pendragon,” said Sir Ector.

“The King is dead,” said Sir Grummore solemnly. “Long live the King.”

“It is all very well for you to keep on mentioning that, my dear Grummore,” exclaimed King Pellinore petulantly, “but who is this King, what, that is to live so long, what, accordin’ to you?”

“Well, his heir,” said Sir Grummore, rather taken aback.

“Our blessed monarch,” said the Nurse tearfully, “never had no hair. Anybody that studied the loyal family knowed that.”

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Sir Ector. “But he must have had a next-of-kin?”

“That’s just it,” cried King Pellinore in high excitement. “That’s the excitin’ part of it, what? No hair and no next of skin, and who’s to succeed to the throne? That’s what my friar was so excited about, what, and why he was asking who could succeed to what, what? What?”

“Do you mean to tell me,” exclaimed Sir Grummore indignantly, “that there ain’t no King of Gramarye?”

“Not a scrap of one,” cried King Pellinore, feeling important. “And there have been signs and wonders of no mean might.”

3. **half-mast** *v.* lower a flag halfway down a pole as a sign of mourning.

4. **the Wart’s** In this novel, Arthur’s childhood nickname is the Wart.

5. **solar** (sō’ lər) *n.* sun room.

6. **standards . . . cognizances** (käg’ nə zən’ sēz) banners or flags.

7. **purlieus** (purl’ yōōz’) *n.* outlying part of a forest, in which forest laws were not enforced.

“I think it’s a scandal,” said Sir Grummore. “God knows what the dear old country is comin’ to. Due to these lollards and communists, no doubt.”

“What sort of signs and wonders?” asked Sir Ector.

“Well, there has appeared a sort of sword in a stone, what, in a sort of a church. Not in the church, if you see what I mean, and not in the stone, but that sort of thing, what, like you might say.”

“I don’t know what the Church is coming to,” said Sir Grummore.

“It’s in an anvil,”⁸ explained the King.

“The Church?”

“No, the sword.”

“But I thought you said the sword was in the stone?”

“No,” said King Pellinore. “The stone is outside the church.”

“Look here, Pellinore,” said Sir Ector. “You have a bit of a rest, old boy, and start again. Here, drink up this horn of mead⁹ and take it easy.”

“The sword,” said King Pellinore, “is stuck through an anvil which stands on a stone. It goes right through the anvil and into the stone. The anvil is stuck to the stone. The stone stands outside a church. Give me some more mead.”

“I don’t think that’s much of a wonder,” remarked Sir Grummore. “What I wonder at is that they should allow such things to happen. But you can’t tell nowadays, what with all these Saxon agitators.”¹⁰

“My dear fellah,” cried Pellinore, getting excited again, “it’s not where the stone is, what, that I’m trying to tell you, but what is written on it, what, where it is.”

“What?”

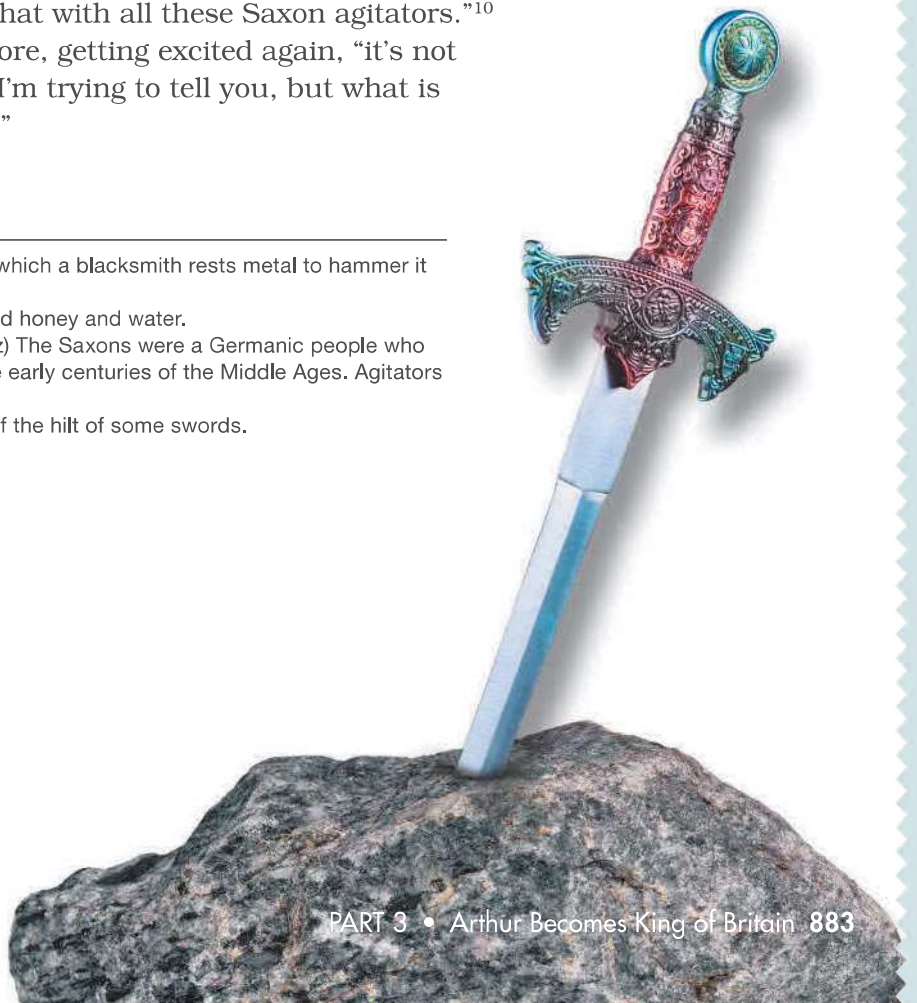
“Why, on its pommel.”¹¹

8. **anvil** (an’ vəl) *n.* iron or steel block on which a blacksmith rests metal to hammer it into shape.

9. **mead** (mēd) *n.* drink made of fermented honey and water.

10. **Saxon** (sak’ sən) **agitators** (aj’ i tāt’ ərz) The Saxons were a Germanic people who conquered parts of England during the early centuries of the Middle Ages. Agitators are people who stir up trouble.

11. **pommel** (pām’ əl) *n.* knob at the end of the hilt of some swords.



skeptically ►

(skep' ti kəl lē)
adv. with doubt;
questioningly

“Come on, Pellinore,” said Sir Ector. “You just sit quite still with your face to the wall for a minute, and then tell us what you are talkin’ about. Take it easy, old boy. No need for hurryin’. You sit still and look at the wall, there’s a good chap, and talk as slow as you can.”

“There are words written on this sword in this stone outside this church,” cried King Pellinore piteously, “and these words are as follows. Oh, do try to listen to me, you two, instead of interruptin’ all the time about nothin’, for it makes a man’s head go ever so.”

“What are these words?” asked Kay.

“These words say this,” said King Pellinore, “so far as I can understand from that old friar of orders gray.”

“Go on, do,” said Kay, for the King had come to a halt.

“Go on,” said Sir Ector, “what do these words on this sword in this anvil in this stone outside this church, say?”

“Some red propaganda, no doubt,” remarked Sir Grummore.

King Pellinore closed his eyes tight, extended his arms in both directions, and announced in capital letters, “Whoso Pulleth Out This Sword of this Stone and Anvil, is Rightwise King Born of All England.”

“Who said that?” asked Sir Grummore.

“But the sword said it, like I tell you.”

“Talkative weapon,” remarked Sir Grummore **skeptically**.

“It was written on it,” cried the King angrily. “Written on it in letters of gold.”

“Why didn’t you pull it out then?” asked Sir Grummore.

“But I tell you that I wasn’t there. All this that I am telling you was told to me by that friar I was telling you of, like I tell you.”

“Has this sword with this inscription been pulled out?” inquired Sir Ector.

“No,” whispered King Pellinore dramatically. “That’s where the whole excitement comes in. They can’t pull this sword out at all, although they have all been tryin’ like fun, and so they have had to proclaim a tournament all over England, for New Year’s Day, so that the man who comes to the tournament and pulls out the sword can be King of all England forever, what, I say?”

“Oh, father,” cried Kay. “The man who pulls the sword out of the stone will be the King of England. Can’t we go to the tournament, father, and have a shot?”

“Couldn’t think of it,” said Sir Ector.

“Long way to London,” said Sir Grummore, shaking his head.

“My father went there once,” said King Pellinore.

Kay said, “Oh, surely we could go? When I am knighted I shall have to go to a tournament somewhere, and this one happens at just

the right date. All the best people will be there, and we should see the famous knights and great kings. It does not matter about the sword, of course, but think of the tournament, probably the greatest there has ever been in Gramarye, and all the things we should see and do. Dear father, let me go to this tourney, if you love me, so that I may bear away the prize of all, in my maiden fight.”

“But, Kay,” said Sir Ector, “I have never been to London.”

“All the more reason to go. I believe that anybody who does not go for a tournament like this will be proving that he has no noble blood in his veins. Think what people will say about us, if we do not go and have a shot at that sword. They will say that Sir Ector’s family was too vulgar and knew it had no chance.”

“We all know the family has no chance,” said Sir Ector, “that is, for the sword.”

“Lot of people in London,” remarked Sir Grummore, with a wild **surmise**. “So they say.”

He took a deep breath and goggled at his host with eyes like marbles.

“And shops,” added King Pellinore suddenly, also beginning to breathe heavily.

“Dang it!” cried Sir Ector, bumping his horn mug on the table so that it spilled. “Let’s all go to London, then, and see the new King!”

They rose up as one man.

“Why shouldn’t I be as good a man as my father?” exclaimed King Pellinore.

“Dash it all,” cried Sir Grummore. “After all, it is the capital!”

“Hurray!” shouted Kay.

“Lord have mercy,” said the nurse.

At this moment the Wart came in with Merlyn, and everybody was too excited to notice that, if he had not been grown up now, he would have been on the verge of tears.

“Oh, Wart,” cried Kay, forgetting for the moment that he was only addressing his squire, and slipping back into the familiarity of their boyhood. “What do you think? We are all going to London for a great tournament on New Year’s Day!”

“Are we?”

“Yes, and you will carry my shield and spears for the jousts, and I shall win the palm¹² of everybody and be a great knight!”

◀ **surmise**
(sər mīz’) *n.* guess; idea based on evidence that is not conclusive

“**W**hoso
Pulleth Out This
Sword of this
Stone and Anvil,
is Rightwise
King Born of
All England.”



12. **win the palm** be the winner. A palm leaf is a symbol of victory.

“Well, I am glad we are going,” said the Wart, “for Merlyn is leaving us too.”

“Oh, we shan’t need Merlyn.”

“He is leaving us,” repeated the Wart.

“Leavin’ us?” asked Sir Ector. “I thought it was we that were leavin’?”

“He is going away from the Forest Sauvage.”

Sir Ector said, “Come now, Merlyn, what’s all this about? I don’t understand all this a bit.”

“I have come to say Goodbye, Sir Ector,” said the old magician. “Tomorrow my pupil Kay will be knighted, and the next week my other pupil will go away as his squire. I have outlived my usefulness here, and it is time to go.”

“Now, now, don’t say that,” said Sir Ector. “I think you’re a jolly useful chap whatever happens. You just stay and teach me, or be the librarian or something. Don’t you leave an old man alone, after the children have flown.”

“We shall all meet again,” said Merlyn. “There is no cause to be sad.”

“Don’t go,” said Kay.

“I must go,” replied their tutor. “We have had a good time while we were young, but it is in the nature of Time to fly. There are many things in other parts of the kingdom which I ought to be attending to just now, and it is a specially busy time for me. Come, Archimedes,¹³ say Goodbye to the company.”

“Goodbye,” said Archimedes tenderly to the Wart.

“Goodbye,” said the Wart without looking up at all.

“But you can’t go,” cried Sir Ector, “not without a month’s notice.”

“Can’t I?” replied Merlyn, taking up the position always used by philosophers who propose to dematerialize. He stood on his toes, while Archimedes held tight to his shoulder—began to spin on them slowly like a top—spun faster and faster till he was only a blur of grayish light—and in a few seconds there was no one there at all.

“Goodbye, Wart,” cried two faint voices outside the solar window.

“Goodbye,” said the Wart for the last time—and the poor fellow went quickly out of the room.

The knighting took place in a whirl of preparations. Kay’s sumptuous bath had to be set up in the box room, between two towel-horses and an old box of selected games which contained a wornout straw dart-board—it was called *fléchette* in those days—because all the other rooms were full of packing. The nurse spent the whole time constructing new warm pants for everybody, on the

13. **Archimedes** (är' kə mē' dēz') Merlyn's owl, who is able to talk.

principle that the climate of any place outside the Forest Sauvage must be treacherous to the extreme, and, as for the sergeant, he polished all the armor till it was quite brittle and sharpened the swords till they were almost worn away.

At last it was time to set out.

Perhaps, if you happen not to have lived in the Old England of the twelfth century, or whenever it was, and in a remote castle on the borders of the Marches at that, you will find it difficult to imagine the wonders of their journey.

The road, or track, ran most of the time along the high ridges of the hills or downs, and they could look down on either side of them upon the **desolate** marshes where the snowy reeds sighed, and the ice crackled, and the duck in the red sunsets quacked loud on the winter air. The whole country was like that. Perhaps there would be a moory marsh on one side of the ridge, and a forest of a hundred thousand acres on the other, with all the great branches weighted in white. They could sometimes see a wisp of smoke among the trees, or a huddle of buildings far out among the impassable reeds, and twice they came to quite respectable towns which had several inns to boast of, but on the whole it was an England without civilization. The better roads were cleared of cover for a bow-shot on either side of them, lest the traveler should be slain by hidden thieves.

They slept where they could, sometimes in the hut of some cottager who was prepared to welcome them, sometimes in the castle of a brother knight who invited them to refresh themselves, sometimes in the firelight and fleas of a dirty little hovel with a bush tied to a pole outside it—this was the signboard used at that time by inns—and once or twice on the open ground, all huddled together for warmth between their grazing chargers. Wherever they went and wherever they slept, the east wind whistled in the reeds, and the geese went over high in the starlight, honking at the stars.

London was full to the brim. If Sir Ector had not been lucky enough to own a little land in Pie Street, on which there stood a respectable inn, they would have been hard put to it to find a lodging. But he did own it, and as a matter of fact drew most of his dividends from that source, so they were able to get three beds between the five of them. They thought themselves fortunate.

On the first day of the tournament, Sir Kay managed to get them on the way to the lists at least an hour before the jousts could possibly begin. He had lain awake all night, imagining how he was going to beat the best barons in England, and he had not been able to eat his breakfast. Now he rode at the front of the cavalcade, with pale cheeks, and Wart wished there was something he could do to calm him down.

◀ **desolate**
(des' ə lit) *adj.*
empty; solitary

For country people, who only knew the dismantled tilting ground¹⁴ of Sir Ector's castle, the scene which met their eyes was ravishing. It was a huge green pit in the earth, about as big as the arena at a football match. It lay ten feet lower than the surrounding country, with sloping banks, and the snow had been swept off it. It had been kept warm with straw, which had been cleared off that morning, and now the close-worn grass sparkled green in the white landscape. Round the arena there was a world of color so dazzling and moving and twinkling as to make one blink one's eyes. The wooden grandstands were painted in scarlet and white. The silk pavilions of famous people, pitched on every side, were azure and green and saffron and checkered. The pennons and pennoncells which floated everywhere in the sharp wind were flapping with every color of the rainbow, as they strained and slapped at their flagpoles, and the barrier down the middle of the arena itself was done in chessboard squares of black and white. Most of the combatants and their friends had not yet arrived, but one could see from those few who had come how the very people would turn the scene into a bank of flowers, and how the armor would flash, and the scalloped sleeves of the heralds jig in the wind, as they raised their brazen trumpets to their lips to shake the fleecy clouds of winter with joyances¹⁵ and fanfares.

"Good heavens!" cried Sir Kay. "I have left my sword at home."

"Can't joust without a sword," said Sir Grummore. "Quite irregular."

"Better go and fetch it," said Sir Ector. "You have time."

"My squire will do," said Sir Kay. "What an awful mistake to make! Here, squire, ride hard back to the inn and fetch my sword. You shall have a shilling¹⁶ if you fetch it in time."

The Wart went as pale as Sir Kay was, and looked as if he were going to strike him. Then he said, "It shall be done, master," and turned his ambling palfrey¹⁷ against the stream of newcomers. He began to push his way toward their hostelry¹⁸ as best he might.

"To offer me money!" cried the Wart to himself. "To look down at this beastly little donkey-affair off his great charger and to call me Squire! Oh, Merlyn, give me patience with the brute, and stop me from throwing his filthy shilling in his face."

When he got to the inn it was closed. Everybody had thronged to see the famous tournament, and the entire household had followed after the mob. Those were lawless days and it was not safe to leave your house—or even to go to sleep in it—unless you were certain that

14. **tilting ground** ground on which a joust takes place.

15. **joyances** (joi' ens iz) *n.* old word meaning "rejoicing."

16. **shilling** (shil' in) *n.* British silver coin.

17. **palfrey** (pôl' frē) *n.* old term for a saddle horse, especially one for women.

18. **hostelry** (häs' tel rē) *n.* inn.

it was impregnable.¹⁹ The wooden shutters bolted over the downstairs windows were two inches thick, and the doors were double-barred.

“Now what do I do,” asked the Wart, “to earn my shilling?”

He looked ruefully at the blind little inn, and began to laugh.

“Poor Kay,” he said. “All that shilling stuff was only because he was scared and miserable, and now he has good cause to be. Well, he shall have a sword of some sort if I have to break into the Tower of London.

“How does one get hold of a sword?” he continued. “Where can I steal one? Could I waylay some knight, even if I am mounted on an ambling pad, and take his weapons by force? There must be some swordsmith or armorer in a great town like this, whose shop would be still open.”

He turned his mount and cantered off along the street. There was a quiet churchyard at the end of it, with a kind of square in front of the church door. In the middle of the square there was a heavy stone with an anvil on it, and a fine new sword was stuck through the anvil.

“Well,” said the Wart, “I suppose it is some sort of war memorial, but it will have to do. I am sure nobody would grudge Kay a war memorial, if they knew his desperate straits.”

He tied his reins round a post of the lych gate,²⁰ strode up the gravel path, and took hold of the sword.

“Come, sword,” he said. “I must cry your mercy and take you for a better cause.

“This is extraordinary,” said the Wart. “I feel strange when I have hold of this sword, and I notice everything much more clearly. Look at the beautiful gargoyles²¹ of the church, and of the monastery which it belongs to. See how splendidly all the famous banners in the aisle are waving. How nobly that yew²² holds up the red flakes of its timbers to worship God. How clean the snow is. I can smell something like fetherfew and sweet briar—and is it music that I hear?”

It was music, whether of pan-pipes or of recorders, and the light in the churchyard was so clear, without being dazzling, that one could have picked a pin out twenty yards away.

“There is something in this place,” said the Wart. “There are people. Oh, people, what do you want?”

19. **impregnable** (im preg' nə bəl) *adj.* not capable of being captured or entered by force.

20. **lych** (lich) **gate** roofed gate at the entrance to a churchyard.

21. **gargoyles** (gär' goilz') *n.* grotesque sculptures of animals or fantastic creatures decorating a building.

22. **yew** (yū) *n.* type of evergreen tree with red cones.

“Well,”
said the Wart,
“I suppose it is
some sort of war
memorial, but it
will have to do.”



Nobody answered him, but the music was loud and the light beautiful.

“People,” cried the Wart, “I must take this sword. It is not for me, but for Kay. I will bring it back.”

There was still no answer, and Wart turned back to the anvil. He saw the golden letters, which he did not read, and the jewels on the pommel, flashing in the lovely light.

“Come, sword,” said the Wart.

He took hold of the handles with both hands, and strained against the stone. There was a melodious consort²³ on the recorders, but nothing moved.

The Wart let go of the handles, when they were beginning to bite into the palms of his hands, and stepped back, seeing stars.

“It is well fixed,” he said.

He took hold of it again and pulled with all his might. The music played more strongly, and the light all about the churchyard glowed like amethysts; but the sword still stuck.

“Oh, Merlyn,” cried the Wart, “help me to get this weapon.”

There was a kind of rushing noise, and a long chord played along with it. All round the churchyard there were hundreds of old friends. They rose over the church wall all together, like the Punch-and-Judy²⁴ ghosts of remembered days, and there were badgers and nightingales and vulgar crows and hares and wild geese and falcons and fishes and dogs and dainty unicorns and solitary wasps and corkindrills and hedgehogs and griffins and the thousand other animals he had met. They loomed round the church wall, the lovers and helpers of the Wart, and they all spoke solemnly in turn. Some of them had come from the banners in the church, where they were painted in heraldry, some from the waters and the sky and the fields about—but all, down to the smallest shrew mouse, had come to help on account of love. Wart felt his power grow.

“Put your back into it,” said a Luce (or pike) off one of the heraldic banners, “as you once did when I was going to snap you up. Remember that power springs from the nape of the neck.”

“What about those forearms,” asked a Badger gravely, “that are held together by a chest? Come along, my dear embryo,²⁵ and find your tool.”

A Merlin sitting at the top of the yew tree cried out, “Now then, Captain Wart, what is the first law of the foot? I thought I once heard something about never letting go.”

23. **consort** (kän' sôt') *n.* piece of music composed for a small group.

24. **Punch-and-Judy** puppets of the quarrelsome Punch and his wife, Judy, who fight constantly in a comical way.

25. **embryo** (em' brē ō) *n.* anything in an early stage of development.

“Don’t work like a stalling woodpecker,” urged a Tawny Owl affectionately. “Keep up a steady effort, my duck, and you will have it yet.”

A White-Front said. “Now, Wart, if you were once able to fly the great North Sea, surely you can coordinate a few little wing-muscles here and there? Fold your powers together, with the spirit of your mind, and it will come out like butter. Come along, *Homo sapiens*,²⁶ for all we humble friends of yours are waiting here to cheer.”

The Wart walked up to the great sword for the third time. He put out his right hand softly and drew it out as gently as from a scabbard.

There was a lot of cheering, a noise like a hurdy-gurdy²⁷ which went on and on. In the middle of this noise, after a long time, he saw Kay and gave him the sword. The people at the tournament were making a frightful row.

“But this is not my sword,” said Sir Kay.

“It was the only one I could get,” said the Wart. “The inn was locked.”

“It is a nice-looking sword. Where did you get it?”

“I found it stuck in a stone, outside a church.”

Sir Kay had been watching the tilting nervously, waiting for his turn. He had not paid much attention to his squire.

“That is a funny place to find one,” he said.

“Yes, it was stuck through an anvil.”

“What?” cried Sir Kay, suddenly rounding upon him. “Did you just say this sword was stuck in a stone?”

“It was,” said the Wart. “It was a sort of war memorial.”

Sir Kay stared at him for several seconds in amazement, opened his mouth, shut it again, licked his lips, then turned his back and plunged through the crowd. He was looking for Sir Ector, and the Wart followed after him.



26. *Homo sapiens* (hō' mō sā' pē enz') scientific name for human beings.

27. *hurdy-gurdy* (hər' dē gur' dē) *n.* musical instrument played by turning a crank.

“Father,” cried Sir Kay, “come here a moment.”

“Yes, my boy,” said Sir Ector. “Splendid falls these professional chaps do manage. Why, what’s the matter, Kay? You look as white as a sheet.”

“Do you remember that sword which the King of England would pull out?”

“Yes.”

“Well, here it is. I have it. It is in my hand. I pulled it out.”

Sir Ector did not say anything silly. He looked at Kay and he looked at the Wart. Then he stared at Kay again, long and lovingly, and said, “We will go back to the church.”

“Now then, Kay,” he said, when they were at the church door. He looked at his firstborn kindly, but straight between the eyes. “Here is the stone, and you have the sword. It will make you the King of England. You are my son that I am proud of, and always will be, whatever you do. Will you promise me that you took it out by your own might?”

Kay looked at his father. He also looked at the Wart and at the sword.

Then he handed the sword to the Wart quite quietly.

He said, “I am a liar. Wart pulled it out.”

As far as the Wart was concerned, there was a time after this in which Sir Ector kept telling him to put the sword back into the stone—which he did—and in which Sir Ector and Kay then vainly tried to take it out. The Wart took it out for them, and stuck it back again once or twice. After this, there was another time which was more painful.

He saw that his dear guardian was looking quite old and powerless, and that he was kneeling down with difficulty on a gouty²⁸ knee.

“Sir,” said Sir Ector, without looking up, although he was speaking to his own boy.

“Please do not do this, father,” said the Wart, kneeling down also. “Let me help you up, Sir Ector, because you are making me unhappy.”

“Nay, nay, my lord,” said Sir Ector, with some very feeble old tears. “I was never your father nor of your blood, but I wote²⁹ well ye are of an higher blood than I wend³⁰ ye were.”

“Plenty of people have told me you are not my father,” said the Wart, “but it does not matter a bit.”

28. **gouty** (gout' ē) *adj.* having gout, a disease causing swelling and severe pain in the joints.

29. **wote** (wōt) *v.* old word meaning “know.”

30. **wend** (wend) *v.* thought (past tense of ween, an old word meaning “think”).

“Sir,” said Sir Ector humbly, “will ye be my good and gracious lord when ye are King?”

“Don’t!” said the Wart.

“Sir,” said Sir Ector, “I will ask no more of you but that you will make my son, your foster-brother, Sir Kay, seneschal³¹ of all your lands?”

Kay was kneeling down too, and it was more than the Wart could bear.

“Oh, do stop,” he cried. “Of course he can be seneschal, if I have got to be this King, and, oh, father, don’t kneel down like that, because it breaks my heart. Please get up, Sir Ector, and don’t make everything so horrible. Oh, dear, oh, dear, I wish I had never seen that filthy sword at all.”

And the Wart also burst into tears.

31. **seneschal** (sen’ ə shəl) *n.* steward, or manager, in the house of a medieval noble.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

T. H. White (1906–1964)

Terence Hanbury White was born in Bombay (now Mumbai) when India was still a British colony. He returned to England for his education, later attending Queens College, Cambridge, where he received first-class honors in English. After graduation, White went to work as a teacher. Following the critical success of his memoir *England Have My Bones* (1936), the thirty-year-old White left teaching to become a full-time writer. His best known work, *The Once and Future King*, is a cycle of four novels largely based on *Le Morte d’Arthur*, the prose version of the Arthurian legends written by Sir Thomas Malory around 1470. The first novel, *The Sword in the Stone*, was published in 1938 and the final novel was published in 1958. White’s version of the legends has inspired movies, as well as the musical *Camelot*. White also wrote poetry, short stories, detective and fantasy fiction, historical novels, and social history. He died in 1964. His headstone reads, “T. H. White, 1906–1964, Author Who from a Troubled Heart Delighted Others Loving and Praising This Life.” A conclusion to *The Once and Future King* was found among White’s papers after his death. This fifth novel was published in 1977 as *The Book of Merlyn*.



Close Reading Activities

READ

Comprehension

Reread all or part of the text to help you answer the following questions.

1. What has happened to the king?
2. What will the sword in the stone reveal?
3. Why do Sir Ector, Kay, and the Wart go to London?
4. Who pulls the sword out of the stone?
5. What does that action reveal about the Wart's true identity?

Research: Clarify Details This text may include references that are unfamiliar to you. Choose at least one unfamiliar detail and briefly research it. Then, explain how the information you learned from research sheds light on an aspect of the text.

Summarize Write an objective summary of the text. Remember that an objective summary is free from opinion and evaluation.

Language Study

Selection Vocabulary The following sentences appear in the selection. Define each boldfaced word. Then, use it in a sentence of your own.

- "Talkative weapon," remarked Sir Grummore **skeptically**.
- "Lot of people in London," remarked Sir Grummore, with a wild **surmise**.
- The road, or track, ran most of the time along the high ridges of the hills or downs, and they could look down on either side of them upon the **desolate** marshes...

Diction and Style Study the passage from the novel that appears below. Then, answer the questions that follow.

"Nay, nay, my lord," said Sir Ector, with some very feeble old tears. "I was never your father nor of your blood, but I wote well ye are of an higher blood than I wend ye were."

1. **(a)** Identify the words that are forms of the Middle English verbs *witen*, which means "know," and *wenen*, which means "suppose." Explain your choices. **(b)** What does Sir Ector mean by "blood"? Explain.
2. Why do you think the author chose to weave archaic terms into Sir Ector's dialogue? Explain.

Conventions Read this passage from the selection in which Sir Kay anticipates the fun of participating in a real tournament. Identify the dependent and independent clauses. Then, explain how the use of clauses adds to the excited flow of Sir Kay's speech.

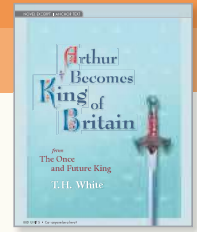
When I am knighted I shall have to go to a tournament somewhere, and this one happens at just the right date. All the best people will be there, and we should see the famous knights and great kings. It does not matter about the sword, of course, but think of the tournament, probably the greatest there has ever been in Gramarye, and all the things we should see and do.

Academic Vocabulary

The following words appear in blue in the instructions and questions on the facing page.

implicit **alternative** **complexity**

Categorize the words by deciding whether you know each one well, know it a little bit, or do not know it at all. Then, use a print or online dictionary to look up the definitions of the words you are unsure of or do not know at all.



Literary Analysis

Reread the identified passages. Then, respond to the questions that follow.

Focus Passage 1 (pp. 881–882)

“There, there,” she sobbed ... Forest Sauvage.”

Key Ideas and Details

- 1. Interpret:** What information about the King does the reader learn from the nurse and from King Pellinore’s dialogue?
- What do Kay, Sir Ector, and the Wart do in honor of the king’s death?

Craft and Structure

- 3. (a) Interpret:** An anachronism is a detail that does not belong in the time period of a setting. In what ways is the nurse’s description of cutting pictures from missals anachronistic? Explain. **(b) Connect:** To what type of modern person and behavior is the author likening the nurse? **(c) Analyze:** What is the effect of this **implicit** comparison? Explain.
- 4. (a)** Cite an example of dialogue from the passage in which the speaker has a strong accent. **(b) Deduce:** How does the author indicate that accent? Explain. **(c) Analyze:** Explain how this detail adds to the portrayal of the Forest Sauvage and its inhabitants.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- 5. Synthesize:** How does the author create a humorous tone about a topic that is normally serious? Cite examples from the text.

Dialogue

Dialogue refers to characters’ spoken words and the conversations they share. Reread the selection, and take notes on how the author uses dialogue to develop characters and advance the plot of the story.

- 1. (a)** Identify two examples of Sir Grummore’s dialogue in the excerpt. **(b)** What does each example suggest about his character? Explain.
- What character trait does the Wart’s dialogue at the end of the selection reveal? Explain, citing details that support your answer.

Focus Passage 2 (p. 888)

For country people ... You have time.”

Key Ideas and Details

1. What setting does this passage describe?
- 2. (a)** What has Kay forgotten? **(b) Infer:** What does this mistake suggest about his character? Explain.

Craft and Structure

- 3. (a) Distinguish:** What **alternative** words does the author use to identify the colors red, blue, and yellow? **(b) Interpret:** How does this word choice add a sense of luxury and **complexity** to the description? Explain.
- 4. (a) Analyze:** In what ways does the description of the setting highlight the differences between Sir Ector and his party and the king’s court? Explain, citing specific details that support your response. **(b) Connect:** How does Kay’s exclamation add to that portrayal? Explain.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- 5. Synthesize:** In what ways does this passage both reflect and undermine the noble qualities of the Arthurian legend and its characters?

- 3. The Arthurian Legend:** How does the dialogue help to establish a specific tone, or attitude, toward Arthurian legend and medieval tradition? Explain, citing details from the selection to support your ideas.



RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.3, RL.9-10.4, RL.9-10.6; L.9-10.1.b, L.9-10.4, L.9-10.5, L.9-10.6

[For full standards wording, see the chart in the front of this book.]