

BOOK VIII

Chap. I — Vortigern asks Merlin concerning his own death.

Merlin, by delivering these and many other prophecies caused in all that were present an admiration at the ambiguity of his expressions. But Vortigern above all the rest both admired and applauded the wisdom, and prophetic spirit of the young man: for that age had produced none that ever talked in such a manner before him. Being therefore curious to learn his own fate, he desired the young man to tell him what he knew concerning that particular. Merlin answered: — “Fly the fire of the sons of Constantine, if you are able to do it: already are they fitting out their ships: already are they leaving the Armorican shore: already are they spreading out their sails to the wind. They will steer towards Britain: they will invade the Saxon nation: they will subdue that wicked people; but they will first burn you being shut up in a tower. To your own ruin did you prove a traitor to their father, and invite the Saxons into the island. You invited them for your safeguard; but they came for a punishment to you. Two deaths instantly threaten you; nor is it easy to determine, which you can best avoid. For on the one hand the Saxons shall lay waste your country, and endeavour to kill you: on the other shall arrive the two brothers, Aurelius Ambrosius and Uther Pendragon, whose business will be to revenge their father’s murder upon you. Seek out some refuge if you can: tomorrow they will be on the shore of Totness. The faces of the Saxons shall look red with blood, Hengist shall be killed, and Aurelius Ambrosius shall be crowned. He shall bring peace to the nation; he shall restore the churches; but shall die of poison. His brother Uther Pendragon shall succeed him, whose days also shall be cut short by poison. There shall be present at the commission of this treason your own issue, whom the boar of Cornwall shall devour.” Accordingly, the next day early, arrived Aurelius Ambrosius and his brother, with ten thousand men.

Chap. II — Aurelius Ambrosius, being anointed king of Britain, burns Vortigern besieged in a tower.

As soon as the news of his coming was divulged, the Britons, who had been dispersed by their great calamities, met together from all parts, and gaining this new accession of strength from their countrymen, displayed unusual vigour. Having assembled together the clergy, they anointed Aurelius king, and paid him the customary homage. And when the people were urgent to fall upon the Saxons, he dissuaded them from it, because his desire was to pursue Vortigern first. For the treason committed against his father so very much affected him, that he thought nothing done till that was first avenged. In pursuance therefore of this design, he marched with his army into Cambria, to the town of Ganarew, whither Vortigern had fled for refuge. That town was in the country of Hergin, upon the river Gania, in the mountain called Cloarius. As soon as Ambrosius was arrived there, bearing in his mind the murder of his father and brother, he spake thus to Eldol, duke of Gloucester.

“See, most noble duke, whether the walls of this city are able to protect Vortigern against my sheathing this sword in his bowels. He deserves to die, and you cannot, I suppose, be ignorant of his desert. Oh, most villainous of men, whose crimes deserve inexpressible tortures! First, he betrayed my father Constantine, who had delivered him and his country from the inroads of the Picts; afterwards my brother Constans whom he made king on purpose to destroy him. Again, when by his craft he had usurped the crown, he introduced pagans among the natives, in order to abuse those who continued steadfast in their loyalty to me: but by the good providence of God, he unwarily fell into the snare, which he had laid for my faithful subjects. For the Saxons, when they found him out in his wickedness, drove him from the kingdom; for which nobody ought to be concerned. But this I think matter of just grief, that this odious people, whom that detestable traitor invited over, has expelled the nobility, laid waste a fruitful country, destroyed the holy churches, and almost extinguished Christianity over the whole kingdom. Now, therefore, my countrymen, show yourselves men; first revenge yourselves upon him that was the occasion of all these disasters; then let us turn our arms against our enemies, and free our country from their brutish tyranny.”

Immediately, therefore, they set their engines to work, and laboured to beat down the walls. But at last, when all other attempts failed, they had recourse to fire, which meeting with proper fuel, ceased not to rage, till it had burned down the tower and Vortigern in it.

Chap. III — *The praise of Aurelius’s valour. The levity of the Scots exposed. Forces raised against Hengist.*

Hengist, with his Saxons, was struck with terror at this news, for he dreaded the valour of Aurelius. Such was the bravery and courage this prince was master of, that while he was in Gaul, there was none that durst encounter with him. For, in all encounters, he either dismounted his adversary, or broke his spear. Besides, he was magnificent in his presents, constant at his devotions, temperate in all respects, and above all things hated a lie. A brave soldier on foot, a better on horseback, and expert in the discipline of an army. Reports of these his noble accomplishments, while he yet continued in Armorican Britain, were daily brought over into the island. Therefore, the Saxons, for fear of him, retired beyond the Humber, and in those parts fortified the cities and towns; for that country always was a place of refuge to them; their safety lying in the neighbourhood of Scotland, which used to watch all opportunities of distressing the nation; for that country being in itself a frightful place to live in, and wholly uninhabited, had been a safe retreat for strangers. By its situation it lay open to the Picts, Scots, Danes, Norwegians, and others, that came to plunder the island. Being, therefore, secure of a safe reception in this country, they fled towards it, that, if there should be occasion, they might retreat into it as into their own camp. This was good news to Aurelius, and made him conceive greater hopes of victory. So, assembling his people quickly together, he augmented his army, and made an expeditious march towards the north. In his passage through the countries, he was grieved to see the desolation made in them, but

especially that the churches were levelled with the ground; and he promised to rebuild them, if he gained the victory.

Chap. IV — *Hengist marches with his army against Aurelius, into the field of Maisbeli.*

But Hengist, upon his approach, took courage again, and chose out the bravest of hismen, whom he exhorted to make a gallant defence, and not be daunted at Aurelius, who, he told them, had but few Armorican Britons with him, since their number did not exceed ten thousand. And as for the native Britons, he made no account of them, since they had keen so often defeated by him. He therefore promised them the victory, and that they should come off safely, considering the superiority of their number, which amounted to two hundred thousand men in arms. After he had in this manner animated his men, he advanced with them towards Aurelius, into a field called Maisbeli, through which Aurelius was to pass. For his intention was to make a sudden assault by a surprise, and fall upon the Britons before they were prepared. But Aurelius perceived the design, and yet did not, on that account, delay going to the field, but rather pursued his march with more expedition. When he was come within sight of the enemy, he put his troops in order, commanding three thousand Armoricans to attend the cavalry, and drew out the rest together with the islanders into line of battle. The Demetians he placed upon the hills, and the Venedotians in the adjacent woods. His reason for which was, that they might be there ready to fall upon the Saxons, in case they should flee in that direction.

Chap V — *A battle between Aurelius and Hengist.*

In the meantime, Eldol, duke of Gloucester, went to the king, and said, "This one day should suffice for all the days of my life, if by good providence I could but get an opportunity to engage with Hengist; for one of us should die before we parted. I still retain deeply fixed in my memory the day appointed for our peaceably treating together, but which he villainously made use of to assassinate all that were present at the treaty, except myself only, who stood upon my defence with a stake which I accidentally found, until I made my escape. That very day proved fatal, through his treachery, to no less than four hundred and sixty barons and consuls, who all went unarmed. From that conspiracy God was pleased to deliver me, by throwing a stake in my way, wherewith I defended myself and escaped." Thus spoke Eldol.

Then Aurelius exhorted his companions to place all their hope in the Son of God, and to make a brave assault with one consent upon the enemy, in defence of their country. Nor was Hengist less busy on the other hand in forming his troops, and giving them directions how to behave themselves in the battle; and he walked himself through their several ranks, the more to spirit them up. At last, both armies, being drawn out in order of battle, began the attack, which they maintained with great bravery, and no small loss of blood, both to the Britons and Saxons. Aurelius animated the Christians, Hengist the pagans; and

all the time of the engagement, Eldol's chief endeavour was to encounter Hengist, but he had no opportunity for it. For Hengist, when he found that his own men were routed, and that the Christians, by the especial favour of God, had the advantage, fled to the town called *Caer Conan*, now *Conisbrough*. Aurelius pursued him, and either killed or made slaves of all he found in the way. When Hengist saw that he was pursued by Aurelius, he would not enter the town, but assembled his troops, and prepared them to stand another engagement. For he knew the town would not hold out against Aurelius, and that his whole security now lay in his sword. At last, Aurelius overtook him, and after marshalling his forces, began another most furious fight. And here the Saxons steadily maintained their ground, notwithstanding the numbers that fell. On both sides there was a great slaughter, the groans of the dying causing a greater rage in those that survived. In short, the Saxons would have gained the day, had not a detachment of horse from the Armorican Britons come in upon them. For Aurelius had appointed them the same station which they had in the former battle; so that, upon their advancing, the Saxons gave ground, and, when once a little dispersed, were not able to rally again. The Britons, encouraged by this advantage, exerted themselves, and laboured with all their might to distress the enemy. All the time Aurelius was fully employed, not only in giving commands, but encouraging his men by his own example; for with his own hand, he killed all that stood in his way, and pursued those that fled. Nor was Eldol less active in all parts of the field, running to and fro to assault his adversaries; but still his main endeavour was to find opportunity of encountering Hengist.

Chap. VI — *Hengist, in a duel with Eldol, is taken by him. The Saxons are slain by the Britons without mercy.*

As there were therefore several movements made by the parties engaged on each side, an opportunity occurred for their meeting, and briskly engaging each other. In this encounter of the two greatest champions in the field, the fire sparkled with the clashing of their arms, and every stroke in a manner produced both thunder and lightning. For along time was the victory in suspense, as it seemed sometimes to favour the one, sometimes the other. While they were thus hotly engaged, Gorlois, duke of Cornwall, came up to them with the party he commanded, and did great execution upon the enemies' troops. At the sight of him, Eldol, assured of victory, seized on the helmet of Hengist, and by main force dragged him in among the Britons, and then in transports of joy cried out with a loud voice, "God has fulfilled my desire! My brave soldiers, down, down, with your enemies the Ambrons*. The victory is now in your hands: Hengist is defeated, and the day is your own."

In the meantime, the Britons failed not to perform every one his part against the pagans, upon whom they made many vigorous assaults; and though they were obliged sometimes to give ground, yet their courage did not fail them in

* The meaning of this word is doubtful; it is applied to the Saxons, and probably is descriptive of their fierce and savage character.

making a good resistance; so that they gave the enemy no respite till they had vanquished them. The Saxons therefore fled whithersoever their consternation hurried them, some to the cities, some to the woods upon the hills, and others to their ships. But Octa, the son of Hengist, made his retreat with a great body of men to York: and Eosa, his kinsman, to the city of Alclud, where he had a very large army for his guard.

Chap. VII — *Hengist is beheaded by Eldol.*

Aurelius, after this victory, took the city of Conan above mentioned, and stayed there three days. During this time, he gave orders for the burial of the slain, for curing the wounded, and for the ease and refreshment of his forces that were fatigued. Then he called a council of his principal officers, to deliberate what was to be done with Hengist. There was present at the assembly Eldad, bishop of Gloucester, and brother of Eldol, a prelate of very great wisdom and piety. As soon as he beheld Hengist standing in the king's presence, he demanded silence, and said, "Though all should be unanimous for setting him at liberty, yet would I cut him to pieces. The prophet Samuel is my warrant, who, when he had Agag, king of Amalek, in his power, hewed him in pieces, saying, 'As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women.' Do therefore the same to Hengist, who is a second Agag."

Accordingly, Eldol took his sword, and drew him out of the city, and then cut off his head. But Aurelius, who showed moderation in all his conduct, commanded him to be buried, and a heap of earth to be raised over his body, according to the custom of the pagans.

Chap. VIII — *Octa, being besieged in York, surrenders himself to the mercy of Aurelius.*

From hence Aurelius conducted his army to York, to besiege Octa, Hengist's son. When the city was invested, Octa was doubtful whether he should give him any opposition, and stand a siege against such a powerful army. After consultation upon it, he went out with his principal nobility that were present, carrying a chain in his hand, and sand upon his head, and presented himself to the king with this address: "My gods are vanquished, and I doubt not that the sovereign power is in your God, who has compelled so many noble persons to come before you in this suppliant manner. Be pleased therefore to accept of us, and of this chain. If you do not think us fit objects of your clemency, we here present ourselves ready to be fettered, and to undergo whatever punishment you shall adjudge us to."

Aurelius was moved with pity at the spectacle, and demanded the advice of his council what should be done with them. After various proposals upon this subject, Eldad the bishop rose up, and delivered his opinion in these words: "The Gibeonites came voluntarily to the children of Israel to desire mercy, and

they obtained it. And shall we Christians be worse than the Jews, in refusing them mercy? It is mercy which they beg, and let them have it. The island of Britain is large, and in many places uninhabited. Let us make a covenant with them, and suffer them at least to inhabit the desert places, that they may be our vassals for ever." The king acquiesced in Eldad's advice, and suffered them to partake of his clemency. After this Eosa and the rest that fled, being encouraged by Octa's success, came also, and were admitted to the same favour. The king therefore granted them the country bordering upon Scotland, and made a firm covenant with them.

Chap. IX — *Aurelius, having entirely routed the enemies, restores all things in Britain, especially ecclesiastical affairs, to their ancient state.*

The enemies being now entirely reduced*, the king summoned the consuls and princes of the kingdom together at York, where he gave orders for the restoration of the churches, which the Saxons had destroyed. He himself undertook the rebuilding of the metropolitan church of that city, as also the other cathedral churches in that province. After fifteen days, when he had settled workmen in several places, he went to London, which city had not escaped the fury of the enemy. He beheld with great sorrow the destruction made in it, and recalled the remainder of the citizens from all parts, and began the restoration of it. Here he settled the affairs of the whole kingdom, revived the laws, restored the right heirs to the possessions of their ancestors; and those estates, whereof the heirs had been lost in the late grievous calamity, he distributed among his fellow soldiers. In these important concerns, of restoring the nation to its ancient state, repairing the churches, reestablishing peace and law, and settling the administration of justice, was his time wholly employed. From hence he went to Winchester, to repair the ruins of it, as he did of other cities; and when the work was finished there, he went, at the instance of bishop Eldad, to the monastery near Caer Caradauc, now Salisbury, where the consuls and princes, whom the wicked Hengist had treacherously murdered, lay buried. At this place was a convent that maintained three hundred friars, situated on the mountain of Ambrius, who, as is reported, had been the founder of it. The sight of the place where the dead lay, made the king, who was of a compassionate temper, shed tears, and at last enter upon thoughts, what kind of monument to erect upon it. For he thought something ought to be done to perpetuate the memory of that piece of ground, which was honoured with the bodies of so many noble patriots, that died for their country.

Chap. X — *Aurelius is advised by Merlin to remove the Giant's Dance from the mountain Killaraus.*

For this purpose, he summoned together several carpenters and masons, and commanded them to employ the utmost of their art, in contriving some new

* The conquest of England was achieved slowly by the Saxons, yet it was sure and permanent: the assertion in the text is untrue. There was no expulsion or subjugation of the invaders when they were once landed.

structure, for a lasting monument to those great men. But they, in diffidence of their own skill, refusing to undertake it, Tremounus, archbishop of the City of Legions, went to the king, and said, "If any one living is able to execute your commands, Merlin, the prophet of Vortigern, is the man. In my opinion there is not in all your kingdom a person of a brighter genius, either in predicting future events, or in mechanical contrivances. Order him to come to you, and exercise his skill in the work which you design." Whereupon Aurelius, after he had asked a great many questions concerning him, despatched several messengers into the country to find him out, and bring him to him. After passing through several provinces, they found him in the country of the Gewisseans, at the fountain of Galabes, which he frequently resorted to. As soon as they had delivered their message to him, they conducted him to the king, who received him with joy, and, being curious to hear some of his wonderful speeches, commanded him to prophesy. Merlin made answer:

"Mysteries of this kind are not to be revealed but when there is the greatest necessity for it. If I should pretend to utter them for ostentation or diversion, the spirit that instructs me would be silent, and would leave me when I should have occasion for it." When he had made the same refusal to all the rest present, the king would not urge him any longer about his predictions, but spoke to him concerning the monument which he designed. "If you are desirous," said Merlin, "to honour the burying place of these men with an everlasting monument, send for the Giant's Dance, which is in Killaraus, a mountain in Ireland. For there is a structure of stones there, which none of this age could raise, without a profound knowledge of the mechanical arts. They are stones of a vast magnitude and wonderful quality; and if they can be placed here, as they are there, round this spot of ground, they will stand for ever."

Chap. XI — *Uther Pendragon is appointed with Merlin to bring over the Giant's Dance.*

At these words of Merlin, Aurelius burst into laughter, and said, "How is it possible to remove such vast stones from so distant a country, as if Britain was not furnished with stones fit for the work?"

Merlin replied, "I entreat your majesty to forbear vain laughter; for what I say is without vanity. They are mystical stones, and of a medicinal virtue. The giants of old brought them from the farthest coast of Africa, and placed them in Ireland, while they inhabited that country. Their design in this was to make baths in them, when they should be taken with any illness. For their method was to wash the stones, and put their sick into the water, which infallibly cured them. With the like success they cured wounds also, adding only the application of some herbs. There is not a stone there which has not some healing virtue."

When the Britons heard this, they resolved to send for the stones, and to make war upon the people of Ireland if they should offer to detain them. And to accomplish this business, they made choice of Uther Pendragon, who was to be attended with fifteen thousand men. They chose also Merlin himself, by whose

direction the whole affair was to be managed. A fleet being therefore got ready, they set sail, and with a fair wind arrived in Ireland.

Chap. XII — *Gillomanus being routed by Uther, the Britons bring over the Giant's dance into Britain.*

At that time Gillomanus, a youth of wonderful valour, reigned in Ireland; who, upon the news of the arrival of the Britons in his kingdom, levied a vast army, and marched out against them. And when he had learned the occasion of their coming, he smiled, and said to those about him, "No wonder a cowardly race of people was able to make so great a devastation in the island of Britain, when the Britons are such brutes and fools. Was ever the like folly heard of? What are the stones of Ireland better than those of Britain, that our kingdom must be put to this disturbance for them? To arms, soldiers, and defend your country; while I have life they shall not take from us the least stone of the Giant's Dance."

Uther, seeing them prepared for a battle, attacked them; nor was it long ere the Britons had the advantage, who, having dispersed and killed the Irish, forced Gillomanus to flee. After the victory they went to the mountain Killaraus, and arrived at the structure of stones, the sight of which filled them both with joy and admiration. And while they were all standing round them, Merlin came up to them and said, "Now try your forces, young men, and see whether strength or art can do the most towards taking down these stones."

At this word they all set to their engines with one accord, and attempted the removing of the Giant's Dance. Some prepared cables, others small ropes, others ladders for the work, but all to no purpose. Merlin laughed at their vain efforts, and then began his own contrivances. When he had placed in order the engines that were necessary, he took down the stones with an incredible facility, and gave directions for carrying them to the ships, and placing them therein. This done, they with joy set sail again, to return to Britain; where they arrived with a fair gale, and repaired to the burying-place with the stones. When Aurelius had notice of it, he sent messengers to all parts of Britain, to summon the clergy and people together to the mount of Ambrius, in order to celebrate with joy and honour the erection of the monument. Upon this summons appeared the bishops, abbots, and people of all other orders and qualities; and upon the day and place appointed for their general meeting, Aurelius placed the crown upon his head, and with royal pomp celebrated the feast of Pentecost, the solemnity whereof he continued the three following days. In the meantime, all places of honour that were vacant, he bestowed upon his domestics as rewards for their good services. At that time the two metropolitan sees of York and Legions were vacant; and with the general consent of the people, whom he was willing to please in this choice, he granted York to Sanxo, a man of great quality, and much celebrated for his piety; and the City of Legions to Dubricius, whom divine providence had pointed out as a most useful pastor in that place. As soon as he had settled these and other affairs in the kingdom, he ordered Merlin to set up the stones brought over from Ireland, about the sepulchre;

which he accordingly did, and placed them in the same manner as they had been in the mountain Killaraus, and thereby gave a manifest proof of the prevalence of art above strength*.

Chap. XIII — *Pascentius brings in the Saxons against the Britons.*

At the same time Pascentius, the son of Vortigern, who had fled over into Germany, was levying all the forces of that kingdom against Aurelius Ambrosius, with a design to revenge his father's death; and promised his men an immense treasure of gold and silver, if with their assistance he could succeed in reducing Britain under his power. When he had at last corrupted all the youth of the country with his large promises, he prepared a vast fleet, and arrived in the northern parts of the island, upon which he began to make great devastations. The king, on the other hand, hearing this news, assembled his army, and marching against them challenged the enraged enemy to a battle; the challenge was accepted, and by the blessing of God the enemy was defeated and put to flight.

Chap. XIV — *Pascentius, assisted by the king of Ireland, again invades Britain. Aurelius dies by the treachery of Eopa, a Saxon.*

Pascentius, after this flight, durst not return to Germany, but shifting his sails, went over to Gillomanius, in Ireland, by whom he was well received. And when he had given him an account of his misfortune, Gillomanius, in pity to him, promised him his assistance, and at the same time vented his complaint of the injuries done him by Uther, the brother of Aurelius, when he came for the Giant's Dance. At last, entering into confederacy together, they made ready their fleet, in which they embarked, and arrived at the city of Menevia. This news caused Uther Pendragon to levy his forces, and march into Cambria to fight them. For his brother Aurelius then lay sick at Winchester, and was not able to go himself. When Pascentius, Gillomanius, and the Saxons heard of it, they highly rejoiced, flattering themselves, that his sickness would facilitate to them the conquest of Britain. While this occurrence was the subject of the people's discourse, one of the Saxons, named Eopa, came to Pascentius, and said, "What reward will you give the man that shall kill Aurelius Ambrosius for you?"

To whom Pascentius answered, "O that I could find a man of such resolution! I would give him a thousand pounds of silver, and my friendship for life; and if by good fortune I can but gain the crown, I promise upon oath to make him a centurion."

To this Eopa replied, "I have learned the British language, and know the manners of the people, and have skill in physic. If, therefore, you will perform

* This is the venerable monument of antiquity, now called Stonehenge, of the origin of which we know no more than we know of the solid framework of the globe itself. It was certainly erected by a people who lived long before the beginning of authentic history.

this promise, I will pretend to be a Christian and a Briton, and when, as a physician, I shall be admitted into the king's presence, I will make him a potion that shall despatch him. And to gain the readier access to him, I will put on the appearance of a devout and learned monk."

Upon this offer, Pascentius entered into covenant with him, and confirmed what he had promised with an oath. Eopa, therefore, shaved his beard and head, and in the habit of a monk hastened to Winchester, loaded with vessels full of medical preparations. As soon as he arrived there, he offered his service to those that attended about the king, and was graciously received by them; for to them nobody was now more acceptable than a physician. Being introduced into the king's presence, he promised to restore him to his health, if he would but take his potions. Upon which he had his orders forthwith to prepare one of them, into which when he had secretly conveyed a poisonous mixture, he gave it the king. As soon as Aurelius had drunk it up, the wicked Ambron ordered him presently to cover himself close up, and fall asleep, that the detestable potion might the better operate. The king readily obeyed his prescriptions, and in hopes of his speedy recovery fell asleep. But the poison quickly diffused itself through all the pores and veins of his body, so that the sleep ended in death. In the meantime, the wicked traitor, having cunningly withdrawn himself first from one and then from another, was no longer to be found in the court. During these transactions at Winchester, there appeared a star of wonderful magnitude and brightness, darting forth a ray, at the end of which was a globe of fire in form of a dragon, out of whose mouth issued forth two rays; one of which seemed to stretch out itself beyond the extent of Gaul, the other towards the Irish Sea, and ended in seven lesser rays.

Chap. XV — *A comet presignifies the reign of Uther.*

At the appearance of this star, a general fear and amazement seized the people; and even Uther, the king's brother, who was then upon his march with his army into Cambria, being not a little terrified at it, was very curious to know of the learned men, what it portended. Among others, he ordered Merlin to be called, who also attended in this expedition to give his advice in the management of the war; and who, being now presented before him, was commanded to discover to him the signification of the star. At this he burst out into tears, and with a loud voice cried out, "O irreparable loss! O distressed people of Britain! Alas! the illustrious prince is departed! The renowned king of the Britons, Aurelius Ambrosius, is dead, whose death will prove fatal to us all, unless God be our helper. Make haste, therefore, most noble Uther, make haste to engage the enemy: the victory will be yours, and you shall be king of all Britain. For the star, and the fiery dragon under it, signifies yourself, and the ray extending towards the Gallic coast, portends that you shall have a most potent son, to whose power all those kingdoms shall be subject over which the ray reaches. But the other ray signifies a daughter, whose sons and grandsons shall successively enjoy the kingdom of Britain."

Chap. XVI — *Pascentius and Gillomanus are killed in battle.*

Uther, though he doubted of the truth of what Merlin had declared, pursued his march against the enemy, for he was now come within half a day's march of Menevia. When Gillomanus, Pascentius, and the Saxons were informed of his approach, they went out to give him battle. As soon as they were come within sight of each other, both armies began to form themselves into several bodies, and then advanced to a close attack, in which both sides suffered a loss of men, as usually happens in such engagements. At last, towards the close of the day, the advantage was on Uther's side, and the death of Gillomanus and Pascentius made a way for complete victory. So that the barbarians, being put to flight, hastened to their ships, but were slain by their pursuers. Thus, by the favour of Christ, the general had triumphant success, and then with all possible expedition, after so great a fatigue, returned back to Winchester: for he had now been informed, by messengers that arrived, of the king's sad fate, and of his burial by the bishops of the country, near the convent of Ambrius, within the Giant's Dance, which in his lifetime he had commanded to be made. For upon hearing the news of his death, the bishops, abbots, and all the clergy of that province, had met together at Winchester, to solemnise his funeral. And because in his lifetime he had given orders for his being buried in the sepulchre which he had prepared, they therefore carried his corpse thither, and performed his exequies with royal magnificence.

Chap. XVII — *Uther Pendragon is made king of Britain.*

But Uther his brother, having assembled the clergy of the kingdom, took the crown, and by universal consent was advanced to the kingdom. And remembering the explanation which Merlin had made of the star above-mentioned, he commanded two dragons to be made of gold, in likeness of the dragon which he had seen at the ray of the star. As soon as they were finished, which was done with wonderful nicety of workmanship, he made a present of one to the cathedral church of Winchester, but reserved the other for himself, to be carried along with him to his wars. From this time, therefore, he was called Uther Pendragon, which in the British tongue signifies the dragon's head; the occasion of this appellation being Merlin's predicting, from the appearance of a dragon, that he should be king.

Chap. XVIII — *Octa and Eosa are taken in battle.*

In the meantime, Octa the son of Hengist, and his kinsman Eosa, seeing they were no longer bound by the treaty which they had made with Aurelius Ambrosius, began to raise disturbances against the king, and infest his countries. For they were now joining with the Saxons whom Pascentius had brought over, and sending messengers into Germany for the rest. Being therefore attended with a vast army, they invaded the northern provinces, and in an outrageous manner destroyed all the cities and fortified places, from Albany to York. At last, as he was beginning the siege of that city, Uther

Pendragon came upon him with the whole power of the kingdom, and gave him battle. The Saxons behaved with great gallantry, and, having sustained the assaults of the Britons, forced them to fly; and upon this advantage pursued them with slaughter to the mountain Damen, which was as long as they could do it with daylight. The mountain was high, and had a hazel wood upon the top of it, and about the middle broken and cavernous rocks, which were a harbour to wild beasts. The Britons made up to it, and stayed there all night among the rocks and hazel bushes. But as it began to draw towards day, Uther commanded the consuls and princes to be called together, that he might consult with them in what manner to assault the enemy. Whereupon they forthwith appeared before the king, who commanded them to give their advice; and Gorlois, duke of Cornwall, had orders to deliver his opinion first, out of regard to his years and great experience.

“There is no occasion,” said he, “for ceremonies or speeches, while we see that it is still night: but there is for boldness and courage, if you desire any longer enjoyment of your life and liberty. The pagans are very numerous, and eager to fight, and we much inferior to them in number; so that if we stay till daybreak, we cannot, in my opinion, attack them to advantage. Come on, therefore, while we have the favour of the night, let us go down in a close body, and surprise them in their camp with a sudden assault. There can be no doubt of success, if with one consent we fall upon them boldly, while they think themselves secure, and have no expectation of our coming in such a manner.”

The king and all that were present, were pleased with his advice, and pursued it. For as soon as they were armed and placed in their ranks, they made towards the enemies’ camp, designing a general assault. But upon approaching to it, they were discovered by the watch, who with sound of trumpet awaked their companions. The enemies being hereupon put into confusion and astonishment, part of them hastened towards the sea, and part ran up and down whithersoever their fear or precipitation drove them. The Britons, finding their coming discovered, hastened their march, and keeping still close together in their ranks, assailed the camp; into which when they had found an entrance, they ran with their drawn swords upon the enemy; who in this sudden surprise made but a faint defence against their vigorous and regular attack; and pursuing this blow with great eagerness they destroyed some thousands of the pagans, took Octa and Eosa prisoners, and entirely dispersed the Saxons.

Chap. XIX — *Uther, falling in love with Igraine, enjoys her by the assistance of Merlin’s magical operations.*

After this victory Uther repaired to the city of Alclud, where he settled the affairs of that province, and restored peace everywhere. He also made a progress round all the countries of the Scots, and tamed the fierceness of that rebellious people, by such a strict administration of justice, as none of his predecessors had exercised before: so that in his time offenders were everywhere under great terror, since they were sure of being punished without mercy. At last, when he

had established peace in the northern provinces, he went to London, and commanded Octa and Eosa to be kept in prison there. The Easter following he ordered all the nobility of the kingdom to meet at that city, in order to celebrate that great festival; in honour of which he designed to wear his crown. The summons was everywhere obeyed, and there was a great concourse from all cities to celebrate the day.

So, the king observed the festival with great solemnity, as he had designed, and very joyfully entertained his nobility, of whom there was a very great muster, with their wives and daughters, suitably to the magnificence of the banquet prepared for them. And having been received with joy by the king, they also expressed the same in their deportment before him. Among the rest was present Gorlois, duke of Cornwall, with his wife Igraine, the greatest beauty in all Britain. No sooner had the king cast his eyes upon her among the rest of the ladies, than he fell passionately in love with her, and little regarding the rest, made her the subject of all his thoughts. She was the only lady that he continually served with fresh dishes, and to whom he sent golden cups by his confidants; on her he bestowed all his smiles, and to her addressed all his discourse. The husband, discovering this, fell into a great rage, and retired from the court without taking leave: nor was there anybody that could stop him, while he was under fear of losing the chief object of his delight. Uther, therefore, in great wrath commanded him to return back to court, to make him satisfaction for this affront. But Gorlois refused to obey; upon which the king was highly incensed, and swore he would destroy his country, if he did not speedily compound for his offence.

Accordingly, without delay, while their anger was hot against each other, the king got together a great army, and marched into Cornwall, the cities and towns whereof he set on fire. But Gorlois durst not engage with him, on account of the inferiority of his numbers; and thought it a wiser course to fortify his towns, till he could get succour from Ireland. And as he was under more concern for his wife than himself, he put her into the town of Tintagel*, upon the sea shore, which he looked upon as a place of great safety. But he himself entered the castle of Dimilioc, to prevent their being both at once involved in the same danger, if any should happen. The king, informed of this, went to the town where Gorlois was, which he besieged, and shut up all the avenues to it. A whole week was now past, when, retaining in mind his love to Igraine, he said to one of his confidants, named Ulfin de Ricaradoch: "My passion for Igraine is such, that I can neither have ease of mind, nor health of body, till I obtain her: and if you cannot assist me with your advice how to accomplish my desire, the inward torments I endure will kill me."

"Who can advise you in this matter," said Ulfin, "when no force will enable us to have access to her in the town of Tintagel? For it is situated upon the sea, and on every side surrounded by it; and there is but one entrance into it, and that through a straight rock, which three men shall be able to defend against the whole power of the kingdom. Notwithstanding, if the prophet Merlin would

* The ruins of this castle denote that it must have been a place of great strength.

in earnest set about this attempt, I am of opinion, you might with his advice obtain your wishes." The king readily believed what he was so well inclined to, and ordered Merlin, who was also come to the siege, to be called. Merlin, therefore, being introduced into the king's presence, was commanded to give his advice, how the king might accomplish his desire with respect to Igraine.

And he, finding the great anguish of the king, was moved by such excessive love, and said, "To accomplish your desire, you must make use of such arts as have not been heard of in your time. I know how, by the force of my medicines, to give you the exact likeness of Gorlois, so that in all respects you shall seem to be no other than himself. If you will therefore obey my prescriptions, I will metamorphose you into the true semblance of Gorlois, and Ulfin into Jordan of Tintagel, his familiar friend; and I myself, being transformed into another shape, will make the third in the adventure; and in this disguise you may go safely to the town where Igraine is, and have admittance to her."

The king complied with the proposal, and acted with great caution in this affair; and when he had committed the care of the siege to his intimate friends, underwent the medical applications of Merlin, by whom he was transformed into the likeness of Gorlois; as was Ulfin also into Jordan, and Merlin himself into Brice; so that nobody could see any remains now of their former likeness. They then set forward on their way to Tintagel, at which they arrived in the evening twilight, and forthwith signified to the porter, that the consul was come; upon which the gates were opened, and the men let in. For what room could there be for suspicion, when Gorlois himself seemed to be there present?

The king therefore stayed that night with Igraine, and had the full enjoyment of her, for she was deceived with the false disguise which he had put on, and the artful and amorous discourses wherewith he entertained her. He told her he had left his own place besieged, purely to provide for the safety of her dear self, and the town she was in; so that believing all that he said, she refused him nothing which he desired. The same night therefore she conceived of the most renowned Arthur, whose heroic and wonderful actions have justly rendered his name famous to posterity.

Chap. XX —Gorlois being killed, Uther marries Igraine.

In the meantime, as soon as the king's absence was discovered at the siege, his army unadvisedly made an assault upon the walls, and provoked the besieged count to a battle; who himself also, acting as inconsiderately as they, sallied forth with his men, thinking with such a small handful to oppose a powerful army; but happened to be killed in the very first brunt of the fight, and had all his men routed. The town also was taken; but all the riches of it were not shared equally among the besiegers, but every one greedily took what he could get, according as fortune or his own strength favoured him. After this bold attempt, came messengers to Igraine, with the news both of the duke's death, and of the event of the siege. But when they saw the king in the likeness of the consul, sitting close by her, they were struck with shame and

astonishment at his safe arrival there, whom they had left dead at the siege; for they were wholly ignorant of the miracles which Merlin had wrought with his medicines. The king therefore smiled at the news, and embracing the countess, said to her: "Your own eyes may convince you that I am not dead, but alive. But notwithstanding, the destruction of the town, and the slaughter of my men, is what very much grieves me; so that there is reason to fear the king's coming upon us, and taking us in this place. To prevent which, I will go out to meet him, and make my peace with him, for fear of a worse disaster."

Accordingly, as soon as he was out of the town, he went to his army, and having put off the disguise of Gorlois, was now Uther Pendragon again. When he had a full relation made to him how matters had succeeded, he was sorry for the death of Gorlois, but rejoiced that Igraine was now at liberty to marry again. Then he returned to the town of Tintagel, which he took, and in it, what he impatiently wished for, Igraine herself. After this they continued to live together with much affection for each other, and had a son and daughter, whose names were Arthur and Anna.

Chap. XXI — *Octa and Eosa renew the war. Lot, a consul, marries the king's daughter.*

In process of time the king was taken ill of a lingering distemper; and meanwhile the keepers of the prison, wherein Octa and Eosa (as we related before) led a weary life, had fled over with them into Germany, and occasioned great fear over the kingdom. For there was a report of their great levies in Germany, and the vast fleet which they had prepared for their return to destroy the island: which the event verified. For they returned in a great fleet, and with a prodigious number of men, and invaded the parts of Albany, where they destroyed both cities and inhabitants with fire and sword. Wherefore, in order to repulse the enemies, the command of the British army was committed to Lot of Lothian, who was a consul, and a most valiant knight, and grown up to maturity both of years and wisdom. Out of respect to his eminent merits, the king had given him his daughter Anna, and entrusted him with the care of the kingdom, during his illness. In his expedition against the enemies he had various success, being often repulsed by them, and forced to retreat to the cities; but he oftener routed and dispersed them, and compelled them to flee sometimes into the woods, sometimes to their ships. So that in a war attended with so many turns of fortune, it was hard to know which side had the better. The greatest injury to the Britons was their own pride, in disdaining to obey the consul's commands; for which reason all their efforts against the enemy were less vigorous and successful.

Chap. XXII — *Uther, being ill, is carried in a horse litter against the enemy.*

The island being by this conduct now almost laid waste, the king, having information of the matter, fell into a greater rage than his weakness could bear, and commanded all his nobility to come before him, that he might reprove them

severely for their pride and cowardice. And as soon as they were all entered into his presence, he sharply rebuked them in menacing language, and swore he himself would lead them against the enemy. For this purpose, he ordered a horse litter to be made, in which he designed to be carried, for his infirmity would not suffer him to use any other sort of vehicle; and he charged them to be all ready to march against the enemy on the first opportunity. So, delay, the horse litter and all his attendants were got ready; and the day arrived which had been appointed for their march.

Chap. XXIII — Octa and Eosa, with a great number of their men, are killed.

The king, therefore, being put into his vehicle, they marched directly to Verulam, where the Saxons were grievously oppressing the people. When Octa and Eosa had intelligence that the Britons were come, and that the king was brought in a horse litter, they disdained to fight with him, saying, it would be a shame for such brave men to fight with one that was halfdead. For which reason they retired into the city, and, as it were in contempt of any danger from the enemy, left their gates wide open. But Uther, upon information of this, instantly commanded his men to lay siege to the city, and assault the walls on all sides; which orders they strictly executed; and were just entering the breaches which they had made in the walls, and ready to begin a general assault, when the Saxons, seeing the advantages which the Britons had gained, and being forced to abate somewhat of their haughty pride, condescended so far as to put themselves into a posture of defence. They therefore mounted the walls, from whence they poured down showers of arrows, and repulsed the Britons. On both sides the contest continued till night released them from the fatigue of their arms, which was what many of the Britons desired, though the greater part of them were, for having the matter quickly decided with the enemy.

The Saxons, on the other hand, finding how prejudicial their own pride had been to them, and that the advantage was on the side of the Britons, resolved to make a sally at break of day, and try their fortune with the enemy in the open field; which accordingly was done. For no sooner was it daylight, than they marched out with this design, all in their proper ranks. The Britons, seeing them; divided their men into several bodies, and advancing towards them, began the attack first, their part being to assault, while the others were only upon the defensive. However, much blood was shed on both sides, and the greatest part of the day spent in the fight, when at last, Octa and Eosa being killed, the Saxons turned their backs, and left the Britons a complete victory. The king at this was in such an ecstasy of joy, that whereas before he could hardly raise up himself without the help of others, he now without any difficulty sat upright in his horse litter of himself, as if he was on a sudden restored to health; and said with a laughing and merry countenance, "These Ambrons called me the halfdead king, because my sickness obliged me to lie on a horse litter; and indeed, so I was. Yet victory to me halfdead, is better than to be safe and sound and vanquished. For to die with honour, is preferable to living with disgrace."

Chap. XXIV — *Uther, upon drinking spring water that was treacherously
poisoned by the Saxons, dies.*

The Saxons, notwithstanding this defeat, persisted still in their malice, and entering the northern provinces, without respite infested the people there. Uther's purpose was to have pursued them; but his princes dissuaded him from it, because his illness had increased since the victory. This gave new courage to the enemy, who left nothing unattempted to make conquest of the kingdom. And now they have recourse to their former treacherous practices, and contrive how to compass the king's death by secret villainy. And because they could have no access to him otherwise, they resolved to take him off by poison; in which they succeeded. For while he was lying ill at Verulam, they sent away some spies in a poor habit, to learn the state of the court; and when they had thoroughly informed themselves of the posture of affairs, they found out an expedient by which they might best accomplish their villainy. For there was near the court a spring of very clear water, which the king used to drink of, when his distemper had made all other liquors nauseous to him. This the detestable conspirators made use of to destroy him, by so poisoning the whole mass of water which sprang up, that the next time the king drank of it, he was siezed with sudden death, as were also a hundred other persons after him, till the villainy was discovered, and a heap of earth thrown over the well. As soon as the king's death was divulged, the bishops and clergy of the kingdom assembled, and carried his body to the convent of Ambrius, where they buried it with regal solemnity, close by Aurelius Ambrosius, within the Giant's Dance.