

# The Battles of Celidon Forest and Badon Hill

## Chapter I

**A**non, thereafter, came word to King Arthur that Ryence, King of North Wales, was making war upon King Leodegrance of Camelgard; whereat he was passing wroth, for he loved Leodegrance well, and hated Ryence. So he departed with Kings Ban and Bors and twenty thousand men, and came to Camelgard, and rescued Leodegrance, and slew ten thousand of Ryence's men and put him to flight. Then Leodegrance made a great festival to the three kings, and treated them with every manner of mirth and pleasure which could be devised. And there had King Arthur the first sight of Guinevere, daughter of Leodegrance, whom in the end he married, as shall be told hereafter. Then did Kings Ban and Bors take leave, and went to their own country, where King Claudas worked great mischief. And King Arthur would have gone with them, but they refused him, saying, «Nay, ye shall not at this time, for ye have yet much to do in these lands of your own; and we with the riches we have won here by your gifts shall hire many good knights, and, by the grace of God, withstand the malice of King Claudas; and if we have need we will send to ye for succour; and likewise ye, if ye have need, send for us, and we will not tarry, by the faith of our bodies.»

When the two kings had left, King Arthur rode to Caerleon, and thither came to him his half-sister Belisent, wife to King Lot, sent as a messenger, but in truth to espy his power; and with her came a noble retinue, and also her four sons--Gawain, Gaheris, Agravaine, and Gareth. But when she saw King Arthur and his nobleness, and all the splendour of his knights and service, she forbore to spy upon him as a foe, and told him of her husband's plots against him and his throne. And the king, not knowing that she was his half-sister, made great court to her; and being full of admiration for her beauty, loved her out of measure, and kept her a long season at Caerleon. Wherefore her husband, King Lot, was more than ever King Arthur's enemy, and hated him till death with a passing great hatred. At that time King Arthur had a marvellous dream, which gave him great disquietness of heart. He dreamed that the whole land was full of many fiery griffins and serpents, which burnt and slew the people everywhere; and then that he himself fought with them, and that they did him mighty injuries, and wounded him nigh to death, but that at last he overcame and slew them all. When he woke, he sat in great heaviness of spirit and pensiveness, thinking what this dream might signify, but by-and-by, when he could by no means satisfy himself what it might mean, to rid himself of all his thoughts of it, he made ready with a great company to ride out hunting. As soon as he was in the forest, the king saw a great hart before him, and spurred his horse, and rode long eagerly after it, and chased until his horse lost breath and fell down dead from under him. Then, seeing the hart escaped and his horse dead, he sat down by a fountain, and fell into deep thought again. And as he sat there alone, he thought he heard the noise of hounds, as it were some thirty couple in number, and looking up he saw coming towards him the strangest beast that ever he had seen or heard tell of, which ran towards the fountain and drank of the water. Its head was like a serpent's, with a leopard's body and a lion's tail, and it was footed like a stag; and the noise was in its belly, as it were the baying or questing of thirty couple of hounds. While it drank there was no noise within it; but presently, having finished, it departed with a greater sound than ever. The king was amazed at all this; but being greatly wearied, he fell asleep, and was before long waked up by a knight on foot, who said, «Knight, full of thought and sleepy, tell me if thou sawest a strange beast pass this way?»

«Such a one I saw,» said King Arthur to the knight, «but that is now two miles distant at the least. What would you with that beast?»

«Sir,» said the knight, «I have followed it for a long time, and have killed my horse, and would to heaven I had another to pursue my quest withal.» At that moment came a yeoman with another horse for the king, which, when the knight saw, he earnestly prayed to be given him. «For I have followed this quest,» said he, «twelve months, and either I shall achieve him or bleed of the best blood of my body.»

It was King Pellinore who at that time followed the questing beast, but neither he nor King Arthur knew each other.

«Sir Knight,» said King Arthur, «leave that quest and suffer me to have it, and I will follow it other twelve months.» «Ah, fool,» said the knight, «thy desire is utterly in vain, for it shall never be achieved but by me, or by my next of kin.»

Therewith he started to the king's horse, and mounted to the saddle, crying out, «Grammercy, this horse is mine!»

«Well,» said the king, «thou mayest take my horse by force, and I will not say nay; but till we prove whether thou or I be best on horseback, I shall not rest content.»