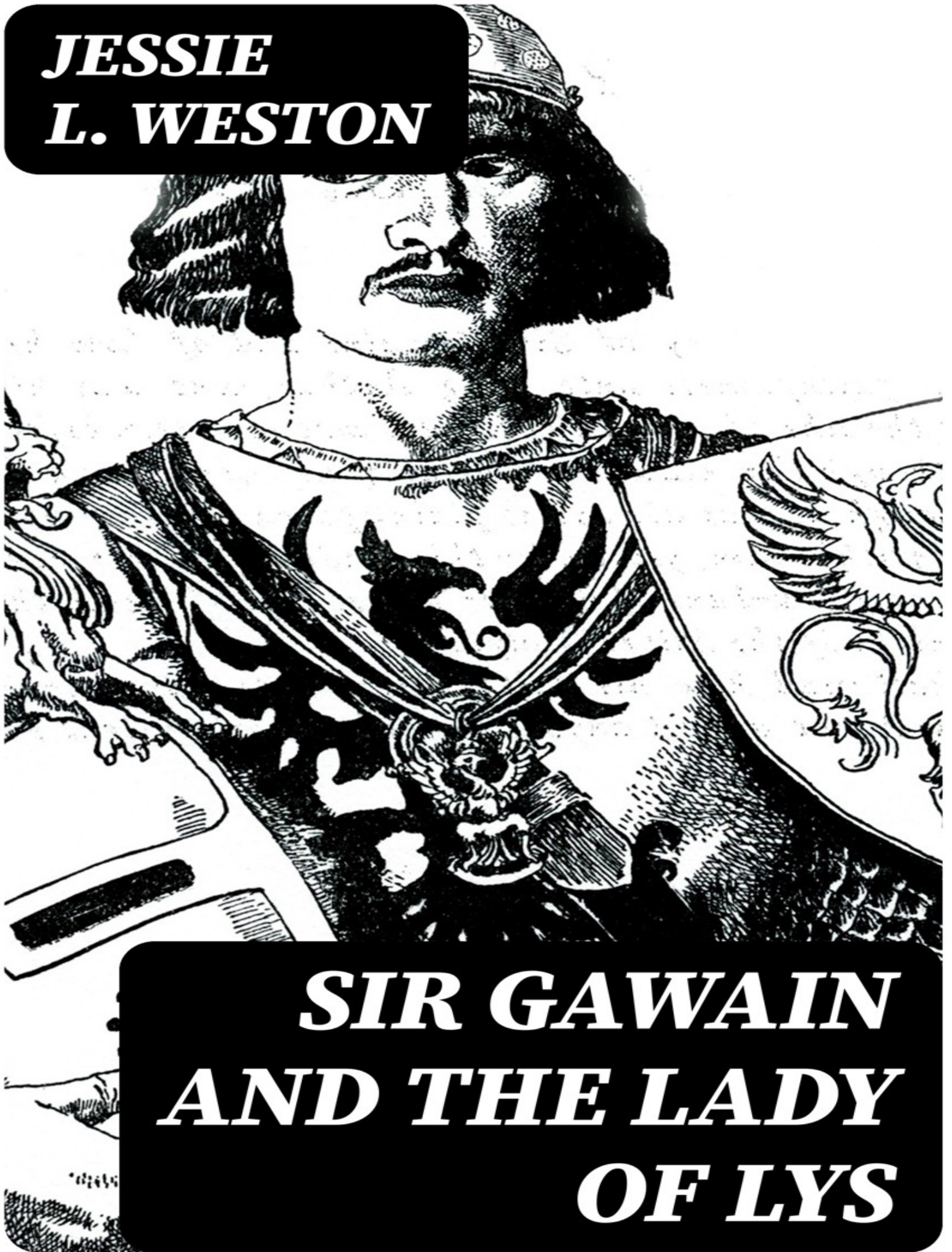


**JESSIE
L. WESTON**



**SIR GAWAIN
AND THE LADY
OF LYS**

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Sir Gawain and the Lady of Lys

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THE stories contained in the present volume of

Arthurian Romances

are drawn from the same collection of tales as that from which the first visit of Gawain to the Grail castle, in the preceding volume of the series, is derived. Indeed, the stories follow in close sequence, and a glance at the introductory lines of the Grail visit will show that that adventure is placed immediately after the successful termination of the expedition against Chastel Orguellous, which forms the subject of this volume. These stories practically form three separate tales, and are translated almost entirely from the same MS. as that used for the Grail visit, the fine

Perceval

codex B.N. 12576. With regard to the second adventure a few words of explanation are necessary.

The relations of Gawain with the lady of Lys, recorded in all the *Perceval*-Wauchier texts, are as a rule related twice over; in the first instance in the section which, in my *Perceval* studies, I have called the *Brun de Branlant* section, as it is devoted to Arthur's expedition against that recalcitrant noble. Gawain's meeting with the lady takes place, as he here explains, during the siege. Later on, on the expedition against Chastel Orguellous, related in these

pages, Arthur and his knights come all unwittingly to the castle of the lady's brother, Bran de Lis, and Gawain, realising the position, relates the story of the first meeting.

Now in the best and fullest texts the two versions do not agree—they are, in fact, incapable of being harmonised—and the curious point is that this second version, related by Gawain himself, and included in a collection of tales of which he is the hero, represents his conduct in a distinctly less favourable light. In the *Studies* above referred to I have entered at length into the question, and have expressed my opinion that this second form is really the older, and owes its somewhat repellent character to the fact that it is a survival of a very early, pre-chivalric stage of tradition. It is worthy of note that the subsequent conduct of both brother and sister is precisely the same in both versions; whether Gawain accepts favours freely proffered, or takes them by force, Bran de Lis is neither more nor less his enemy; whether she wins her heart's desire, or is the victim of *force majeure*, his sister is equally Gawain's devoted *amie*. But for purposes of translation the versions do not stand on an equal footing; and, these volumes being intended for the general public, I have preferred to follow the later and, undoubtedly, more sympathetic form.

Nor is this to take an undue liberty with the text; we are but following the example set by certain early copyists. Two MSS., B.N. 794 and British Museum Add. 36614, give the story on each occasion in an identical form. Their text, however, is on the whole far less detailed and interesting than that of B.N. 12576. I have therefore, for the terms of Gawain's recital, and for that only, adopted the version of

794; for the rest the stories are as close a rendering as may be of the text of 12576.

The first story, *Kay and the Spit*, and the taking of *Chastel Orguellous*, all part of one and the same expedition, possess a special interest for us, in that we have in our English *Gawayne and Golagros* another version of the same tales. Sir Frederick Madden, in his *Syr Gawayne*, drew attention to this, and gave a brief summary of the French text. It seemed to me that the interest of the story itself, and its connection with our vernacular literature, were sufficient to warrant a full translation being placed at the disposal of English readers. For indeed the interest of these stories is great, and if I be not mistaken, their importance as yet scarcely realised. Since the publication of the last volume of this series we have become aware of certain facts, small in themselves, but weighty in their connection and *ensemble*, which go to prove that there existed at an early date a collection of poems dealing with the feats of Gawain and his kin, which may be styled *The Geste of Syr Gawayne*, the authorship of which was ascribed to a certain Bleheris. Of this collection the story in vol. i., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; the first visit of Sir Gawain to the Grail castle, in vol. vi.; and the stories here given all formed part, while our English *Gawain* poems are a late and fragmentary survival of the same collection.

Judging also from the appearance on the scene of Gawain's son, Guinglain, and the numerous allusions in Wauchier's text to the length and importance of the *grande conte* of which these tales formed a part, it seems most probable that the original collection included a version of

the adventures of the hero we know as *Sir Libeaus Desconus*, whose feats will be found recorded in vol. v. of this series. The English poem there modernised says that the hero was *begotten by a forest side*, thus apparently identifying him with the child of the picturesque adventure related in these pages. At the same time the adventures summarised by Wauchier—for he gives but little detail concerning Guinglain—do not agree with the English tradition. At a considerably later point of the collection, however, we find the young knight giving his name in terms which accord completely with our poem; on meeting his father,

Sire, fait il, 'ie sui Giglain
Votre fis, qui le roi Artus
Mist nom Le Biax Desconeus.

Which may well refer to the tale we know.

This is not the place to enter into a discussion of the varying tradition connected with Sir Guinglain; the point of interest is rather the character of the stories with which we are immediately dealing.

There can, I think, be little doubt that whoever was responsible for the *Geste of Syr Gawayne*, and whether Bleheris, whose name is more than once connected with it, composed, or merely arranged, the poems, they represent a tradition of great poetical force and vitality. The adventure with the sister of Bran de Lis is an admirable story, picturesque, vivid, and full of human interest. Our *Syr Gawayne and the Grene Knyghte* is notoriously one of the finest of our Mediæval poems. The visit of Sir Gawain to the Grail castle, related in our last volume, yields in dramatic detail and picturesque directness of narration to no other