

***WILLIAM HENRY
GILES KINGSTON***



***THE SEVEN
CHAMPIONS
OF CHRISTENDOM***

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The Seven Champions of Christendom

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Preface.

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The following pages should not go forth into the world without due acknowledgment being made to that worthy old Dominie, Richard Johnson, to whose erudite but somewhat unreadable work the author is so largely indebted. As he flourished at the end of the sixteenth century, and the commencement of the seventeenth, great allowances should be made for his style, which is certainly not suited to the taste of this generation. It is to be hoped that the present version, while much of his vivid imagery is retained, may be free from his more glaring errors. And, thus quoting the Dominie's dedication:—

“To all courteous readers The Author wisheth encrease of vertuous knowledge.

“Gentle readers, in kindness accept my labours, and be not like the chattering cranes, nor Momus' mates, that carp at everything. What the simple say I care not; what the spiteful speak I pass not; only the censure of the conceited I stand unto; that is the mark I aym at; whose good likings if I obtain, I have won my race; if not, I faint in the first attempt, and so lose the quiet of my happy goal.

“Yours in kindness and command,—

“R.J.”

Chapter One.

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The Birth of Saint George.

Who has not heard of the Seven Champions of Christendom—of the wonderful adventures they went through—of the dangers they encountered, and the heroic deeds they performed? Should any persons exist ignorant of the history of those noble knights, let them with attentive ears now listen to my veracious chronicle.

Gallant and dauntless as were all those seven heroes, yet not one equalled in valour “Saint George of Merrie England.” Many countries have in consequence claimed him as their own especial Champion. Portugal, Germany, Greece, and Russia, for what is known to the contrary, would be glad to have him; but we have proof undoubted that to England he alone belongs, even if we did not see him, on many a golden guinea, engaged in his desperate encounter with the most terribly terrific and greenest of green dragons. Not only are his orders worn by nobles, but by British monarchs themselves, while, in memory of his heroic deeds, they lead forth their armies under his banner. However, many long years have passed away since he astonished the world by his prowess. Of royal birth was his mother, the daughter of one of England’s early kings; a Duke and High Steward of the realm was his father. Of the name of the king history is most mysteriously silent, or of the extent of his dominions; but there can be no doubt that the ancient city of Coventry was situated within them, and that, if not the principal, it was one of the principal cities of the realm, and, moreover,

that a prison existed there on the silent system. Thus, when people are unfit to be spoken to, it is said, by a figure of speech, that they are sent to Coventry.

In Coventry the Lord High Steward and his royal bride resided. Now, some time before the Princess was about to present her husband with a babe, she dreamed a dream; it was enough to terrify her, for she dreamed that, instead of a smiling infant, she should have to nurse a little green dragon. To nurse a small crocodile or alligator, or even a young hippopotamus, would have been bad enough, but a green dragon, with claws and a long wriggling fork-pointed tail, was out of the question; the very idea was enough to drive her distracted. The Lord High Steward was a man who always took the bull by the horns in a dilemma, and so he resolved forthwith to take steps to solve the mystery. He had heard that in the Black Forest in Germany there lived a powerful enchantress, Kalyb by name, who would, without doubt, be able at once to give him all the information he required. Sir Albert, for that was the High Steward's name, instantly set off across the seas, accompanied only by his faithful Squire, De Fistycuff. They bore offerings of gold and silver and precious stones with which to propitiate her.

For many days they voyaged, tossed by the stormy billows, and for many days they travelled on till they arrived at the dreary precincts of the Black Forest. Boldly plunging into it, they reached a dense part of the wood, composed of withered, hollow, and distorted trees, whence proceeded sounds the most unearthly and terrific. The dismal croaking of the night raven, the hissing of serpents, the hoarse bellowing of wild bulls, the roaring of lions, the laughing of

hyenas, and other hideous cries of all sorts of savage beasts. Some men would have stood astounded. Not so Sir Albert and his faithful Squire. On they went till they found themselves in front of a dark and lofty rock, within which was seen a vast and gloomy cavern. The entrance was secured by a massive iron gate studded over with huge knots and bars of steel. Near it hung a brazen trumpet, the use of which the Knight full readily guessed. He blew a blast which rung through the vaulted cave, echoing away till the sounds were lost in the distance, while it made the very earth rock and tremble. Scarcely had the echoes of the magic horn died away than a terrifically loud, discordant, hollow voice, proceeding out of the very depths of the cavern, inquired:—"Mortal, what want you here?" Sir Albert briefly told his errand, and said that he had brought gifts which he desired to offer to the famous Enchantress Kalyb, the lady of the Black Forest.

As he was a courteous knight, and had spoken the Enchantress fair, so he expected a courteous and satisfactory reply. What, then, was his amazement when he heard these words proceeding from the cavern:—

"Whatever must be—must be there's no doubt;
You've got an answer, and so turn about!"

In vain he protested that such a reply was far from satisfactory; that he should go back as wise as he came; that it would have been better had he stayed at home; that he should have had all his pains for nothing. No other answer could he get. Though a courteous knight, he was yet somewhat irascible; and this was an occasion to try the

temper of a milder man than a knight of those days. He seized the trumpet, and blew till it refused to give forth any further sound. He handed it to De Fistycuff, and told him to blow till he cracked his own cheeks or the trumpet. In vain the Squire puffed and puffed, not a sound could he produce. He holloed and shouted, and so did De Fistycuff; but to their united voices no answer was returned. Then Sir Albert began to shower abuse on the Enchantress; he told her some awkward truths, and called her some names which were far from complimentary; but the only answer he received was in shouts of hollow and mocking laughter which proceeded out of the recesses of the cavern.

At length Sir Albert turned his horse's head, and in high dudgeon rode off, followed by De Fistycuff, who first pocketed the gifts they had brought to propitiate the Enchantress. Dull and dreary was their homeward journey; and, if truth must be told, the Lord High Steward could not help feeling remarkably small at the result of their expedition. After having been tossed about for many days by a storm, and made very sick in the German Ocean, they at length reached Coventry. The master of his household, his family physician, and a numerous assemblage of knights and ladies, rushed out of his castle to tell Sir Albert the news. Neither an hippopotamus nor an alligator had been born to him, but a right merry, rosy, bouncing infant. Alas! however, there was grief in store for the gallant knight, the partner of his joys and cares, his beautiful princess, was dead! Deeply he mourned his loss, and then he inquired if any one could solve the mystery of the dream which had caused him so long a journey. He found that had he waited

patiently at home, like a wise man, all would have been known. The smiling infant was brought to him; and then, wonderful to relate, he discovered on its breast the portrait of a green dragon, just as his wife had described it to him; and, moreover, a blood-red cross marked on the boy's right hand, and a golden garter below his knee on the left.

"He'll do something wonderful!" exclaimed the proud father; and he was not mistaken.

The name of George was given to the boy; and forthwith the Lord High Steward, retiring from the cares of state, bestowed on him all his thoughts and attention. He selected three nurses to watch over him, called Prudence, Firmness, and Gentleness. One to prepare his nourishment, another to feed him, and the last to lull him to sleep. All would have gone well, but unhappily the boy's grandfather suggested that another nurse was necessary, and Carelessness was introduced into the household.

It should be known that all this time the wicked Enchantress Kalyb had been well aware who it was who had come to her cavern and blown so furiously on her magic horn. Every word the Knight had uttered, and every opprobrious epithet which he had so lavishly bestowed, had been heard by her. She nourished, in consequence, in her evil heart, a spirit of revenge, which she waited a convenient opportunity to gratify. Oh, anger! oh, loss of temper! how blind art thou! How dost thou make wise men become like the most foolish! Revenge, too, how dost thou, malignant spirit, fall into the trap thou hast thyself laid, as will be soon seen!

Wicked Kalyb waited her time. She knew of the young Prince's birth, she knew how his father doated on him, and she resolved to carry him off; but when she heard of the three nurses appointed to guard over him she despaired of succeeding in her object. The boy grew and flourished. Every day he became more beautiful, every day he gave proofs of a noble and gallant spirit. Truly was he his father's pride; worthy was he of the admiration of all the people of Coventry. When, however, Kalyb found out that Carelessness had become his nurse, instantly she hurried to the sea-shore; when, embarking in an egg-shell,—the shell, be it known, of a huge roc's egg—she set sail for the shores of England. Quickly she spun over the ocean, round and round, faster than any ordinary ship could sail, till she reached the land; and, arriving in the neighbourhood of Coventry, she hid herself in a thick wood, till she could pounce out on the young Prince and carry him off.

However, she had long to wait. Sometimes Prudence walked out with him, sometimes Gentleness, and sometimes Firmness; and all kept so careful a watch over him that she had no opportunity of effecting her purpose. At length, Carelessness one fatal day had charge of him. Kalyb immediately changed herself into a lovely butterfly. Off ran the boy with his velvet cap to catch the fluttering insect. Carelessness sat down on a bank and fell asleep. Soon Kalyb led the boy into the recesses of the forest; then seizing him, in spite of his cries, she placed him in a chariot with ten fiery steeds which she had conjured up, and darting off like a flash of lightning, reached the coast, embarked in her egg-shell, which whirled round and round as before, and then

she travelled on till she arrived once more, with her captive, at the magic cavern in the Black Forest. The massive gates flew asunder at a touch of her silver wand, and the Prince found himself among wonders which his imagination had never before conceived, which far surpassed anything he had ever beheld even in the beautiful city of Coventry. He soon, however, grew weary of them, and longed to return to his fond father and careful nurses; but he found himself a prisoner, and no outlet could he discover by which he could make his escape from the cavern—the massive gates prevented all egress to any who had once entered within them.

The wicked Kalyb watched the sorrow of the boy, and knowing that his father was still more sorrowful, rejoiced in her revenge. She had numerous attendants to do her will. Among them was a dwarf, a misshapen, ill-favoured creature. To his care the boy was confided, with directions to beat and tease him whenever he had nothing else to do. The noble child bore every indignity with equanimity and good humour, and, instead of harbouring revenge, took every opportunity of doing a kindness to the poor dwarf, who was himself the peculiar object of the wicked Kalyb's ill-treatment. Crumpleback was the dwarf's name. Often poor Crumpleback's body was black and blue with the pommelling he received from the furious Kalyb, while his cheeks were thin and haggard from want of food and rest. One day Kalyb was absent when Crumpleback addressed the Prince:—"Know," said he, "kind boy, that I am a fairy in disguise, and though less powerful than the fell Enchantress Kalyb, I may yet circumvent her acts. Your kindness and

gentleness, and forgiveness of the injuries I was forced to do you, have won my heart. I have vowed to serve you to the best of my power. Let not Kalyb know what has passed between us, but wait patiently, and see what will happen.” The young Prince thanked the fairy, and his hopes of escaping once more revived. He had long to wait. In the mean time, whenever Kalyb was absent, the seeming dwarf gave him instructions in all the arts which would fit him to become an accomplished knight. Book learning, though not much in vogue in those days, was not neglected. Sometimes the fairy put a shining sword into his grasp, and showed him how to wield it with a force no one could withstand; sometimes he was mounted on a fiery steed which few mortals could have bestrode, and with lance in hand he was taught to tilt against phantom knights, which, in the most desperate encounters, he invariably overthrew. Thus, by the time he had attained to man’s estate, no knight in Europe was so accomplished, while none surpassed him in virtue or valour.

Meantime the Lord High Steward bitterly mourned the loss of his promising son. In vain he sent messengers throughout the world to find him, and at last, remembering the ancient proverb, “Who wants goes, who does not want sends,” he resolved to go in search of the boy himself. Storing himself with gold and precious jewels, he set off, attended only by his faithful De Fistycuff. From place to place he wandered, year after year, till his locks were turned to silvery grey, and his beard became like the down of a thistle. One evening his heart fainting, and his once firm knees trembling, he reached the gate of a monastery in

Bohemia. Then he sunk down before even his Squire could ring the bell to summon the monks to his assistance. When the porter opened the door, the Lord High Steward of England had breathed his last, and poor De Fistycuff was bewailing his loved master's death, and his own hard fate, in being thus left alone in a foreign land. The monks buried Sir Albert hard by, and raised a monument, covered with some of his own jewels, over his grave, reserving the remainder to pay the expenses of his funeral. The worthy De Fistycuff they recommended to return to his native land, unless he wished to become a monk; an honour he declined, having his faithful Grumculda waiting for him at home. So, paying a farewell visit to his master's tomb, the jewels on which he found had by enchantment been changed to glass, he set off on his journey. Happily he had, however, some of the presents intended for the wicked Kalyb in his pockets; so, like an honest Briton, he was able to pay his way, and be no discredit to his country. Leaving him to pursue his toilsome peregrination, we return once more to the cavern of Kalyb.

Chapter Two.

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Saint George releases the six Champions.

Even the Enchantress wondered at the progress in the arts and sciences her captive was making; but, as she knew that he was destined to become a great man, she was aware that she could not hope to stop his progress. All she

could do was to keep him shut up till fate set him free. One day the friendly fairy addressed the Prince:—"Know," she said, "the Enchantress sleeps once, and once only, for one week every hundred years. Her magic art depends on her silver wand, which on that occasion she hides away so carefully that it is scarcely possible to discover it. Still, we will search. For that opportunity I have long been waiting. If we can possess ourselves of it, she will be completely in our power, and we can work our will within the magic cavern. Know also that I am an English fairy, Sabrina by name. I love you because you are kind to me, and because you come of an honest English stock. If we can overcome the Enchantress, I will enable you to commence that career of glory for which I know that your heart is even now thirsting." The young Prince's heart beat high with joy and hope on hearing these words.

Anxiously they watched the Enchantress, to try and discover where she would place her silver wand. Day after day they followed her through all the vast interminable recesses of her magic cavern. Every day she grew more drowsy and less inclined to speak; which is not surprising, considering how long she had been awake, and how sleepy she must have become.

In spite of all this vigilance, however, at last she appeared without her silver wand; and soon after they saw her sink down on a couch of rose-leaves she had prepared for herself in a sumptuous apartment, where, had it not been for her hideous countenance, where all the malignant passions were portrayed, she would have looked like a

sovereign resting on her bed of state. The Prince was eager instantly to set off to look for the silver wand.

“Stay,” whispered the Fairy Sabrina, “she yet sleeps with one eye open, like a weasel; wait till she closes both, and snores.” Accordingly they waited till both Kalyb’s eyes were closed, and loud snores echoed along the vaulted roof. Then off they set.

“Nothing worth having can be gained without toil and trouble,” observed the Dwarf, as he parted from the Prince. All the other attendants of the Enchantress had taken the opportunity to go to sleep likewise; so silence profound reigned throughout the cavern, broken only by her snores. The Prince searched and searched in every direction, under heaps of costly jewels and glittering robes, piles of gold and silver, and rich armour; but they had now no charms for him: the silver wand which was to set him free to commence his noble career was all he sought for—that wand, the type of knowledge, which can only be obtained by study and perseverance. Day after day he sought for it; but at the end of each day all he could say was that he believed he could tell where it was not. The Dwarf came back equally unsuccessful; but still numberless heaps had been turned over, intricate passages explored, profound depths dived into, and unthought of recesses in the cavern discovered.

Five days had thus passed away; the Prince knew more about the cavern than he had ever known before; the sixth day came, and that, too, ended. He had added to his knowledge, but the silver wand had not been found. He became anxious, as well he might. On the seventh the Enchantress would awake and resume her power.