

The Sword in the Stone Project



... they were greeted by the entire household.



Chapter One

“On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays it was Court Hand and Summulae Logicales, while the rest of the week it was the Organon, Repetition and Astrology. The governess was always getting muddled with her astrolabe, and when she got specially muddled she would take it out of the Wart by rapping his knuckles. She did not rap Kay's knuckles, because when Kay grew older he would be Sir Kay, the master of the estate. The Wart was called the Wart because it more or less rhymed with Art, which was short for his real name. Kay had given him the nickname. Kay was not called anything but Kay, as he was too dignified to have a nickname and would have flown into a passion if anybody had tried to give him one. The governess had red hair and some mysterious wound from which she derived a lot of prestige by showing it to all the women of the castle, behind closed doors. It was believed to be where she sat down, and to have been caused by sitting on some armour at a picnic by mistake. Eventually she offered to show it to Sir Ector, who was Kay's father, had hysterics and was sent away. They found out afterwards that she had been in a lunatic hospital for three years.

In the afternoons the programme was: Mondays and Fridays, tilting and horsemanship; Tuesdays, hawking; Wednesdays, fencing; Thursdays, archery; Saturdays, the theory of chivalry, with the proper measures to be blown on all occasions, terminology of the chase and hunting etiquette. If you did the wrong thing at the mort or the undoing, for instance, you were bent over the body of the dead beast and smacked with the flat side of a sword. This was called being bladed. It was horseplay, a sort of joke like being shaved when crossing the line. Kay was not bladed, although he often went wrong.”

In the opening two paragraphs of *The Sword in the Stone*, our author, T. H. White, opens up a great dynamic for the rest of this book. Wart, a less than dignified nickname (I've had worse from older brothers), obviously has some kind of backstory and we know nothing of it. His companion, Kay, is the son of a “Sir” and we can see already that Kay is going to be important someday somewhere. But even the dimmest reader can make guesses about Art(hur).

White also foreshadows an issue here: the loss of the tutor/teacher will need to be addressed and that story becomes the backbone of this book. A “blading” will occur in the book in a scene that ties together a few loose ends and sets up a story line in the next segment of the larger story, “The Once and Future King.”

Even as an adult, I would enjoy the afternoon sessions. As *The Sword in the Stone* progresses, we will have a story about each of the afternoon classes and, oddly for a story about knights and knighthood, the best stories will involve archery. Historically, the longbow doomed armored knights and the first recorded victories of longbow over knight come not long after the Doomesday Book and the Norman Conquest...1066 to 1100 or so.

At the Battles of Crecy and Agincourt, just to name two, the longbow proved far more powerful and deadly than mounted knights...yet, armor was continually updated and made into just the past few centuries.

When I asked my professor about this issue, Norm Jones replied: "It's like buying an expensive car. Is it better than a normal or cheap car?"

Um. Not necessarily.

"Right. But everyone knows you can afford an expensive car."

Light bulb goes off: Ah...armor is expensive. I have armor. I am better than you.

Got it! How little things have changed...

White seems, as some level, to appreciate this and we will enjoy the archery stories that lead us to the tutor and Robin Wood (Wood! "Pronounce it right," argue the characters.)

The mornings are a bit drier. I do respect the importance of logic in the classroom. If you are not up to date on your medieval class work, here you go:

Court Hand: it's a kind of handwriting used "back in the day" for legal proceedings. It was very formal...very upright. Probably no fun at all...

Summulae Logicales: This is the medieval study of Aristotelian Logic. This is the culmination of the work of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The author, Peter of Spain, sums it as this: "Dialectic logic is the art of arts, science of sciences, having the way to the principles of all methods; for in fact dialectic alone credibly argues about the principles of all other sciences, and therefore in acquisition of all other sciences dialectic must be prior." In other words, learn logic first and everything else will be easier. It's very much like I tell people to learn Geometry before studying lifting. (It's all about your Givens!)

Organon: the study of the six key books of Aristotle.

Repetition: "Repetition is a major rhetorical strategy for producing emphasis, clarity, amplification, or emotional effect. Within the history of rhetoric terms have been developed to name both general and very specific sorts of repetition."

Astrology: most of us know this as the twelve signs of the Zodiac. I don't believe in it; as a Virgo, we tend to be skeptical of these kinds of things. But, in the time of the story, Astrology was major influence in areas such as medicine. Trying to use the past to predict the future is perhaps the most "human" thing we do...Astrology is an attempt to systematize this urge.

"Kay was not bladed, although he often went wrong."

As I age, this line stands out to me more than when I was thirteen. I have seen the long-term issues with parents never carrying out their "threats." If you assign a punishment to some

behavioral issue, you need to carry it out. I learned this the hard way twenty years ago and wrote an article about it.

It is just the Arrows

The month of January is named after the 'two headed' Roman god, Janus. It isn't a bad image to start a year, one set of eyes looking ahead to the future and the other set looking behind at the past. Many of us fill out sheets of paper with resolutions for the New Year, often based on the failings of last year. I like to also spend some time reviewing the best parts of the last year, as well as the minor tragedies of life that seem to pop up here and there on life's journey.

January is also a month that has an interesting set of Memorial Days for such Saints as Basil the Great, Elizabeth Ann Seton, Anthony, Francis de Sales, John Bosco and Thomas Aquinas. An interesting and enlightening group of catechists, certainly, but one of my favorite Saints also makes our list this month: Saint Sebastian.

The image of Sebastian is misleading: yes, he was a Roman soldier who was mercilessly executed by Emperor Diocletian when Sebastian's faith as a Christian was discovered. But, the statues and the paintings can be confusing. Yes, Sebastian was shot by a hail of arrows, but, you see, that is not what killed him. He survived the onslaught of arrows just to go back to tell Diocletian that the Emperor was in trouble with the Lord. Then, Diocletian had Sebastian clubbed to death. This time, he died.

Sebastian is the Patron Saint of athletes, but I would also argue that he provides an excellent role model for teachers and parents. Those of us who enter into catechetical ministry often find ourselves overwhelmed by the multiple duties which only are compounded by the occasional lapses of students, parents, and colleagues. Perhaps every teacher would understand that 'it wasn't the arrows that got me, it was the clubbing.'

Occasionally, though, it is in our moments of greatest weakness, after the clubbing if you will, that we teach the best. Years ago, I had a young man who had decided to change his life path and get involved in sports. The process of moving from one set of life's choices to sports was occasionally difficult for him and he would occasionally get in trouble at school and receive detention.

To 'encourage' him to mend his school behaviors, I offered him a challenge. Next time he got detention, he would have to run six hills carrying small hand weights. Each time after that, we would double the number of hills and double the weight of what we carried. Oh, and one other thing: I had to do them with him. My logic, which I now realize was cloudy, was that he would fear to get into trouble as he would have to endure the hills.

He was better school, truly, but things can happen. A few days later, we enjoyed our six hills together. A few weeks went by and we found ourselves with five pound weights in each hand

and twelve hills. These were not easy. At the time, I weighed a full fifty pounds more than I do now and my heart rate and breathing were getting dangerously fast after the first hill.

But, the fear of me dying seemed to change this boy. Unfortunately, things can happen and we found ourselves on the hill again. Ten pounds in each hand and twenty-four hills was the agreed upon goal. Around twenty, Mike looked at me and said: 'No, Mr. John, you have to stop I'm worried about you.'

I can't type my response as I didn't really say anything. It was the clubbing not the arrows. For the record, long into the afternoon, we finished. Also, for the record, Mike never got in trouble again.

As I look back, it is the single best teaching moment of my career. I said nothing; instead I 'walked with' a young man who needed help. Oh, and I survived. It was just arrows, I guess.
End article.

In other words, Kay needed a good blading

When they had got rid of the governess, Sir Ector said, "After all, damn it all, we can't have the boys runnin' about all day like hooligans—after all, damn it all? Ought to be havin' a first-rate eddication, at their age. When I was their age I was doin' all this Latin and stuff at five o'clock every mornin'. Happiest time of me life. Pass the port."

Sir Grummore Grummursum, who was staying the night because he had been benighted out questin' after a specially long run, said that when he was their age he was swished every mornin' because he would go hawkin' instead of learnin'. He attributed to this weakness the fact that he could never get beyond the Future Simple of Utor. It was a third of the way down the left-hand leaf, he said. He thought it was leaf ninety-seven. He passed the port.

Well, T. H. White, I think, is having some fun with us. "Utor" means "to use or employ" and I have always wondered if our questing friend, Sir Grummore Grummursum, is White's mouthpiece for the real value of learning a dead language. I know the Art of Manliness had a fun article on Latin phrases we should all know, but the "usefulness" of mastering Latin would be my question.

"Utor" sticks with us in words like "utility" and words like useful, useless, and usable.

Maybe now you will see my joke about the "usefulness" of mastering Latin.

When I came home from school one time with poor grades in Latin, my mother was angry with me.

I answered: "But, mom, it has changed so much since you were young!"

That was a joke, an attempt at humor. Latin is, ahem, a “Dead Language.” Doesn’t change. I will wait as you laugh.

And, since we will see my spellcheck alerts for every chapter of this book from the British English edition, let’s just say it was an attempt at humour.

And, of course, White could have chosen Utor because it is so similar to “Tutor.” Merlyn’s tutoring is going to be the core of the entire book. Once again, Tutor is a more recent word than the events of the story, but that is not going to be an issue with White’s work.

Hawking, by the way, continues to see its own rebirth. Near Galway, Ireland, Tiffini and I visited a Falconry and this is a hobby...a passion...that is worthy of further study. Not long ago, the best seller, H is for Hawk, by Helen MacDonald, seemed to be required reading on planes. MacDonald based a lot of her work on the writings of White and his book, The Goshawk. White, too, attempted his hand in falconry and his book (The Goshawk) parallels much of the torture and pain in T. H.’s private life.

I read a very stern criticism of H is for Hawk where the critic basically attacked White. Among other things, White was called sadist and barbaric. As I reviewed the opening paragraphs, it did stand out that White mentions both blading and switching (a “switch” is a stick used for corporal punishment) as punishments for educational missteps.

The critic was using modern standards for the critique of White and his life choices. I always find this habit troubling.

I always open my history courses with this quote:

“Nothing is more unfair than to judge men of the past by the ideas of the present.”

Denys Winstanley

I’ve been always amazed by teenagers who race to school driving while texting as well as puffing on a Doobie but still can find so much fault in the people of history. As someone infinity more qualified than me once said: "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:5)

In other words, don’t pick on T. H. White.

This quote of Winstanley is one of my “commandments” of teaching history (especially...and generally everything else, too). Let me share a few others:

- Never be so sure that something that "everybody knows" is correct.
- You can be guaranteed that anything that has "always been done this way" has not been.

- Obviously, if it could be done over again and everybody knew what was going to happen, it would be done different. However, none of this will ever happen.
- We will never know the whole story.
- "There is nothing sad-except history." T. H. White. The Sword in the Stone
- The "Twin Towers" of the Historical Method are Chronology and Geography.
- "If they did it to Him, they will do it to us. It is something that we can expect."

Blessed John XXIII

That last one is a good reminder for me about people who applaud my work and then stab me in the back. Hooligans, I say. By the way, the first known use of "Hooligan" is 1896, a bit later historically than the story of King Arthur. One online source mentions it might be taken from an Irish surname; but there is little evidence.

Oh, and on "Pass the port." In a few paragraphs, White will tell us that it is NOT port, rather "Metheglyn" which is honey-wine or mead. White works fast and loose with history throughout his books, but think more of Beowulf here than medieval movies. Mead could be flavored a lot of different ways and White is trying to share with us the image of two English bachelors of probably the turn of the century around 1900...and, yes, Holmes and Watson would make a good "for example."

Sir Ector said, "Had a good quest today?"

Sir Grummore said, "Oh, not so bad. Rattlin' good day, in fact. Found a chap called Sir Bruce Saunce Pité choppin' off a maiden's head in Weedon Bushes, ran him to Mixbury Plantation in the Bicester, where he doubled back, and lost him in Wicken Wood. Must have been a good twenty-five miles as he ran."

"A straight-necked 'un," said Sir Ector.

"But about these boys and all this Latin and that," added the old gentleman. "Amo, amas, you know, and runnin' about like hooligans: what would you advise?"

"Ah," said Sir Grummore, laying his finger by his nose and winking at the bottle, "that takes a deal of thinkin' about, if you don't mind my sayin' so."

"Don't mind at all," said Sir Ector. "Very kind of you to say anythin'. Much obliged, I'm sure. Help yourself to port."

"Good port this."

"Get it from a friend of mine."

"But about these boys," said Sir Grummore. "How many of them are there, do you know?"

"Two," said Sir Ector, "counting them both, that is."

"Couldn't send them to Eton, I suppose?" inquired Sir Grummore cautiously. "Long way and all that, we know."

It was not really Eton that he mentioned, for the College of Blessed Mary was not founded until 1440, but it was a place of the same sort. Also they were drinking Metheglyn, not Port, but by mentioning the modern wine it is easier to give you the feel.

"Isn't so much the distance," said Sir Ector, "but that giant What's-'is-name is in the way. Have to pass through his country, you understand."

"What is his name?"

"Can't recollect it at the moment, not for the life of me. Fellow that lives by the Burbly Water."

"Galapas," said Sir Grummore.

"That's the very chap."

"The only other thing," said Sir Grummore, "is to have a tutor."

"You mean a fellow who teaches you."

"That's it," said Sir Grummore. "A tutor, you know, a fellow who teaches you."

"Have some more port," said Sir Ector. "You need it after all this questin'."

"Splendid day," said Sir Grummore. "Only they never seem to kill nowadays. Run twenty-five miles and then mark to ground or lose him altogether. The worst is when you start a fresh quest."

"We kill all our giants cubbin'," said Sir Ector. "After that they give you a fine run, but get away."

"Run out of scent," said Sir Grummore, "I dare say. It's always the same with these big giants in a big country. They run out of scent."

"But even if you was to have a tutor," said Sir Ector, "I don't see how you would get him."

"Advertise," said Sir Grummore.

"I have advertised," said Sir Ector. "It was cried by the Humberland Newsmen and Cardoile Advertiser."

"The only other way," said Sir Grummore, "is to start a quest."

"You mean a quest for a tutor," explained Sir Ector.

"That's it."

"Hic, Haec, Hoc," said Sir Ector. "Have some more of this drink, whatever it calls itself."

"Hunc," said Sir Grummore.

So it was decided. When Grummore Grummursum had gone home next day, Sir Ector tied a knot in his handkerchief to remember to start a quest for a tutor as soon as he had time to do so, and, as he was not sure how to set about it, he told the boys what Sir Grummore had suggested and warned them not to be hooligans meanwhile.

It will be a chore for me to find ways to cut up some of the conversations in this book. Sir Grummore is going to be hard to edit and his joust in a later chapter with King Pellinore is often considered the funniest "skit" in the book (Chapter Seven). There are many dialogues that have stunning moments worth reflection, but this scene needs to be seen in the light of the whole conversation.

Let's begin with a fun thing...if you like Ghostbusters and Arthurian legends. Sir Bruce Saunce Pité is the "go to" bad guy in much of Sir Thomas Mallory's work on Arthur. He is the master of sneak attacks and all-around bad behavior. In the animated series, Ghostbusters, he reactivates from a tapestry where he had been imprisoned by Merlin/Merlyn.

If you take a moment to say his name out loud, you will hear "sons pity," in the English (from the French), "without pity." This is NOT what we think of our glorious knights.

In the rest of the White books, Sir Bruce will represent the opposite of the Round Table ideals. He will be the object of many quests.

Questing is an interesting term. The root of "quest" is, basically, the same as "quarry." Questing is seeking.

St. Anslem's famous "Fides Quaerens Intellectum (Faith Seeks Understanding)" was the foundation of my academic career. In White's book, following the lead of his mentor Thomas Mallory, knights quest as part of their daily routine. In the story of Parsifal, we (and he) will be told that the way to learn knighthood is to quest. To quest is to seek.

The other foundation I have stood on for my career is athletics.

“Athlete” literally means “one who seeks a prize.” I don’t think it is a large leap in logic to equate our modern games to the Jousting Tournaments of Mallory...or the Gladiator games of Rome.

In my life, my quests have been athletic...and academic. There just haven’t been a lot of dragons and giants in my life that need a good joust.

Each of us “quests.” My favorite song might be “The Impossible Dream,” from The Man of La Mancha.

*This is my quest, to follow that star,
No matter how hopeless, no matter how far
To fight for the right without question or cause
To be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause*

*And I know if I'll only be true to this glorious quest
That my heart will lie peaceful and calm when I'm laid to my rest*

*And the world will be better for this
That one man scorned and covered with scars
Still strove with his last ounce of courage
To fight the unbeatable foe, to reach the unreachable star*

Richard Kiley’s original Broadway rendition still brings me to chills. “To reach the unreachable star” defines much of what we do in the process of goal setting. Our hero in this story, Don Quixote, tries to make the world better by clinging to the ideals of knighthood...by questing.

There is something beautiful and lovely about a world where people will “fight for the right without question or pause.” Arthur’s greatest lesson from Merlyn will be: “Not Might Makes Right, but Might FOR Right.”

I can dream.

Back to the story: to truly “set the table” on this discussion, let’s get back to that image of Holmes and Watson in front of a fire drinking a bit too much. The BBC show, Sherlock, has some fun with Watson’s bachelor party running amok and I can’t think of a better starting place to understand this dialogue.

If you “Pass the Port” often enough, the conversation is going to meander a bit. Note how the conversation concerning questing overflows into and out of the importance of getting the boys an “eddication.” The following line is how my wife, Tiffini, and I talk much of the time:

"But about these boys," said Sir Grummore. "How many of them are there, do you know?"

"Two," said Sir Ector, "counting them both, that is."

"Two, counting them both" just makes me laugh. White's humor slides from the extreme to the subtle and I enjoy most of it...and, as we will see later, it has taken me multiple readings to follow every point, nuance and jab....at least, I think I have discovered most of them.

White is very helpful in this part of the book telling us that the character mentions Eton, but it couldn't be Eton and that Port is actually Metheglyn. White wants us to understand the "feel" of this conversation and doesn't worry about the absolute historical accuracy. He is both narrating here and tutoring the reader to understand that this book is going to be about something OTHER than another knights in shining armor book.

White's fans include J. K. Rowling and Neil Gaiman. Rowling's epic Harry Potter series nods to *The Sword in the Stone* throughout and Rowling has been very clear that Albus Dumbledore is based on Merlyn. Gaiman, who has written *Stardust* and *American Gods* among many other things, once noted that he and J. K. were obviously using White:

"And I said to her that I thought we were both just stealing from T.H. White: very straightforward."

I'm not sure I can point and say that White invited the modern fantasy adventure and you will find reading Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan* and John Carter of Mars series to have some of the same themes. And certainly, *Mary Poppins* and *Peter Pan* have layers of magic in them, too, but White's ability to blend the adventure, magic, and fantasy might be of the first. Rowling and Gaiman agree.

Let's get back to the scene. You might miss an important point: both characters have a buzz. Towards the end, we return to Latin, but it is deeply embedded in cheap humor.

"This" joke is all about "this:" Hic, Haec, Hoc are all part of the Latin way to say "this." "Hunc" is the accusatory tense: and I can imagine Grummore raising his glass to "this."

You would need to spend more time drinking alcohol heavily if you don't see the joke: the character has the hiccups. Drunken people often get the deep "hics" just before the evening comes to an end.

There is also a funny joke between the characters and the narrator, White:

"Hic, Haec, Hoc," said Sir Ector. "Have some more of this drink, whatever it calls itself."

Ector must have heard White's comment about the fact that they weren't actually drinking Port.

The conversation flows exactly how conversations flow when people are drinking: the topics pop up, slide back, and pop up again.

If you read the later versions of *The Sword in the Stone*, you will not find the chapter on Galapas. I find the story delightful. In the 1958 version, where the four books of *The Once and Future King* are arranged in one text, the publishers made some decisions. There WAS a fifth book, later published a decade after the death of White. This book, *The Book of Merlyn*, came out in 1975. In *The Book of Merlyn*, we find two stories that eat up a large portion of the book: the story of the ants and the story of the geese.

In 1958, it was decided to stick those two stories in a revamped *The Sword in the Stone*; moreover, it was decided to delete some of the interesting adventures of the original.

I have always thought this was a mistake. The ants and geese stories fit *The Book of Merlyn* perfectly as the aging Arthur needs a different vision of the world to deal with the rebellion.

So, in the 1958 version, a few things “dangle.” As we go deep into the forest with Wart searching for the falcon, he will be shot at by an arrow with a “Wasp” band around the feathers. This is never again addressed in the 1958 volume, but it becomes a massive story in the original. I will highlight the major changes:

Chapter Two: the “Wasp” banded arrow that almost hits Wart; in the 1938 version, Chapters Nine through and including Twelve take an entirely different approach to Robin Wood (and “Wood” is the correct spelling) and we will find the owners of this kind of arrow.

Chapter Six: Madam Mim (The animated version’s best scene, in my opinion. In addition, there is a foreshadowing, by a goat, of the eventual status of Wart/Arthur.)

Chapter Eighteen: Meeting Athene and the dreams of Trees and Stones (These are fascinating stories about time...something White returns to over and over in this book. Also, “Cohere” is such an interesting choice of a word to explain stones.)

Chapter Nineteen: the Giant, Galapas (If you can’t see Harry Potter and Dumbledore in this story...you need to read Book Six, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* again.)

The Disney movie adaption from 1963, which thudded at the theaters (having a movie about King Arthur and Camelot immediately after the assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy was unfortunate) includes Madam Mim. The movie sticks closely to the 1938 original scene...save that Mim dies of the diseases in the book. Moreover, the producers included a long scene with squirrels that made O. C. Harbison call the movie “The Disney Chocolate Éclair Machine.”

The animated movie is usually considered a disappointment to fans of the book; I have mixed emotions. The underwater scene with the Pike (Luce) is an excellent retelling of the first of Wart's transfiguration adventures.

But, let's not get too far ahead of ourselves. It's time to meet the boys.

Two of them...if you count them both.

So it was decided. When Grummore Grummursum had gone home next day, Sir Ector tied a knot in his handkerchief to remember to start a quest for a tutor as soon as he had time to do so, and, as he was not sure how to set about it, he told the boys what Sir Grummore had suggested and warned them not to be hooligans meanwhile. Then they went hay-making.

It was July, and every able-bodied man and woman on the estate worked during that month in the field, under Sir Ector's direction. In any case the boys would have been excused from being eddicated just then.

Sir Ector's castle stood in an enormous clearing in a still more enormous forest. It had a courtyard and a moat with pike in it. The moat was crossed by a fortified stone bridge which ended half-way across it. The other half was covered by a wooden drawbridge which was wound up every night. As soon as you had crossed the drawbridge you were at the top of the village street—it had only one street—and this extended for about half a mile, with thatched houses of wattle and daub on either side of it. The street divided the clearing into two huge fields, that on the left being cultivated in hundreds of long narrow strips, while that on the right ran down to a river and was used as pasture. Half of the right-hand field was fenced off for hay.

It was July, and real July weather, such as they had in Old England. Everybody went bright brown, like Red Indians, with startling teeth and flashing eyes. The dogs moved about with their tongues hanging out, or lay panting in bits of shade, while the farm horses sweated through their coats and flicked their tails and tried to kick the horse-flies off their bellies with their great hind hoofs. In the pasture field the cows were on the gad, and could be seen galloping about with their tails in the air, which made Sir Ector angry.

Sir Ector stood on the top of a rick, whence he could see what everybody was doing, and shouted commands all over the two-hundred-acre field, and grew purple in the face. The best mowers mowed away in a line where the grass was still uncut, their scythes roaring in the strong sunlight. The women raked the dry hay together in long strips with wooden rakes, and the two boys with pitchforks followed up on either side of the strip, turning the hay inwards so that it lay well for picking up. Then the great carts followed, rumbling with their spiked wooden wheels, drawn by horses or slow white oxen. One man stood on top of the cart to receive the hay and direct operations, while one man walked on either side picking up what the boys had prepared and throwing it to him with a fork. The cart was led down the lane between two lines of hay, and was loaded in strict rotation from the front poles to the back,

the man on top calling out in a stern voice where he wanted each fork to be pitched. The loaders grumbled at the boys for not having laid the hay properly and threatened to tan them when they caught them, if they got left behind.

When the wagon was loaded, it was drawn to Sir Ector's rick and pitched to him. It came up easily because it had been loaded systematically—not like modern hay—and Sir Ector scrambled about on top, getting in the way of his assistants, who did the real work, and stamping and perspiring and scratching about with his fork and trying to make the rick grow straight and shouting that it would all fall down as soon as the west winds came.

The Wart loved hay-making, and was good at it. Kay, who was two years older, generally stood on the edge of the bundle which he was trying to pick up, with the result that he worked twice as hard as the Wart for only half the result. But he hated to be beaten at anything, and used to fight away with the wretched hay—which he loathed like poison—until he was quite sick.

The day after Sir Grummore's visit was sweltering for the men who toiled from milking to milking and then again till sunset in their battle with the sultry element. For the hay was an element to them, like sea or air, in which they bathed and plunged themselves and which they even breathed in. The seeds and small scraps stuck in their hair, their mouths, their nostrils, and worked, tickling, inside their clothes. They did not wear many clothes, and the shadows between their sliding muscles were blue on the nut-brown skins. Those who feared thunder had felt ill that morning.

In the afternoon the storm broke. Sir Ector kept them at it till the great flashes were right overhead, and then, with the sky as dark as night, the rain came hurling against them so that they were drenched at once and could not see a hundred yards. The boys lay crouched under the wagons, wrapped in hay to keep their wet bodies warm against the now cold wind, and all joked with one another while heaven fell. Kay was shivering, though not with cold, but he joked like the others because he would not show he was afraid. At the last and greatest thunderbolt every man startled involuntarily, and each saw the other startle, until they laughed away their shame.

But that was the end of the hay-making and the beginning of play. The boys were sent home to change their clothes. The old dame who had been their nurse fetched dry jerkins out of a press, and scolded them for catching their deaths, and denounced Sir Ector for keeping on so long. Then they slipped their heads into the laundered shirts, and ran out to the refreshed and sparkling court.

"I vote we take Cully and see if we can get some rabbits in the chase," cried the Wart.

First, let's get this out of the way: "Red Indian."

One of my foundational statements is: “Nothing is more unfair than to judge men of the past by the ideas of the present.” (Denys Winstanley)

The book by Caleb Carr, *The Alienist*, has a very bad guy who uses the phrase “Red Injun.” And, yes, I wouldn’t use the term now. But, unlike those people who don’t want Huckleberry Finn taught in school because of a word, I think that people can hold diverse concepts in their minds. As Oscar Wilde insisted:

“The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.”

So, yes, don’t say “Red Indian.” But you can still keep reading along.

T. H. White’s gift as a storyteller will be illuminated in the transfiguration stories of *The Sword in the Stone*. These stories of fish, bird and beast are ideal for animated features and giving us a “moral to the story.” His skill in transitioning from story to story might be missed.

Merlyn, of course, will drive our story as he takes on young Sir Kay and Wart as his students. It will be obvious from the first that Wart(hur) is the focus of Merlyn’s eddication methods, but Kay will join in occasionally.

In this section, we see an interesting transition. It’s the day after Grummore and Ector drink and decide upon a tutor. We know this because it is mentioned twice. It is also July...as that is mentioned twice, too.

By simply pulling out the opening words of each paragraph, I noted something that I learned back in college from the late, great Utah Poet Laureate, Ken Brewer. Brewer was also my professor and he and Professor Charles Johnson both took me aside in college and thanked me for caring as much about academics as I did about athletics.

I loved Brewer’s poetry class. He opened my eyes to the utility of words, brevity of writing and the beauty of a well-formed phrase. Professor Johnson, who specialized in Wittgenstein’s work, took the same path in the study of philosophy teaching me that words mean “what we decide words mean.”

That’s why when someone says: “goblet squats mixed with suitcase carries,” many of us will recognize the “Sparhawk” workout. Others will have NO idea what we are talking about!

This section of the *The Sword in the Stone* is not unlike William Carlos Williams delightful poem, *The Dance*. Williams wrote a poem about a painting about a dance. As Ken Brewer read it aloud, the words began to dance and it is hard still to read it aloud without hearing the beat of bagpipes, bugle, and fiddle.

In Breughel's great picture, *The Kermess*,

the dancers go round, they go round and around, the squeal and the blare and the tweedle of bagpipes, a bugle and fiddles tipping their bellies (round as the thick-sided glasses whose wash they impound) their hips and their bellies off balance to turn them. Kicking and rolling about the Fair Grounds, swinging their butts, those shanks must be sound to bear up under such rollicking measures, prance as they dance in Breughel's great picture, The Kermess.

It begins and ends with the same great line, "(I)n Breughel's great picture, The Kermess," and as I read it again nearly forty years after my first visit, I can't imagine a better poem about a painting about a dance.

With a nod to Brewer and Williams, I suggest looking at the opening lines of this section:

- *(So it was decided.) When Grummore Grummursum had gone home next day, (Sir Ector tied a knot in his handkerchief to remember to start a quest for a tutor as soon as he had time to do so, and, as he was not sure how to set about it, he told the boys what Sir Grummore had suggested and warned them not to be hooligans meanwhile. Then they went hay-making.)*
- It was July...
- Sir Ector's Castle...
- It was July...
- Sir Ector stood on the top of the rick...
- When the wagon was loaded, it was drawn to Sir Ector's rick...
- The Wart loved hay-making, and was good at it. *(Kay, who was two years older, generally stood on the edge of the bundle which he was trying to pick up, with the result that he worked twice as hard as the Wart for only half the result. But he hated to be beaten at anything, and used to fight away with the wretched hay—which he loathed like poison—until he was quite sick.)*
- The day after Sir Grummore's visit...

White frames this short section of hay-making with the reminder that it is the day after Sir Grummore's visit, reminding us it is July, giving us a quick tour of the castle and a primer on the hay-gathering system. And, yes, in one sentence he could have said much of this.

White, like Williams, is giving a whirl...a dance of hay-making and history.

White has shifted a bit here: In the previous evening, White mixes dates and history with a boozy flair. In this section, he is pinning down a date:

The day AFTER Grummore visited, in July, at Sir Ector's castle, during the hay-making season, Wart "voted" to go hawking. (Hint: the hawking will lead to a big discovery deep in the forest.)

The story is not "once upon a time:" it is not a fairy tale. These are events that happen to particular people at a particular time and particular place.

My years of teaching Scripture may have opened my eyes about this point. There is a line in the Gospel of Luke that many breeze over, but I have become convinced that it might Luke's most insightful point:

"In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness." (Luke 3: 1-2)

This isn't "once upon a time" in "Never Never Land," this is a story about specific people, places and time.

A careful rereading of this section of *The Sword in the Stone* gives us a feel of the poetry of Williams and the insightfulness of Luke.

This section also prepares us for the actually "sword in the stone" moment:

The Wart loved hay-making, and was good at it. Kay, who was two years older, generally stood on the edge of the bundle which he was trying to pick up, with the result that he worked twice as hard as the Wart for only half the result. But he hated to be beaten at anything, and used to fight away with the wretched hay—which he loathed like poison—until he was quite sick.

Kay working "twice as hard as the Wart for only half the result" is a delightful line for those of us in sports and fitness. I get many questions on a program we call "Easy Strength." You may ask: "what's the problem with the program?"

It's easy.

No, that's the problem: most people want to work twice as hard for half the results!

There is some universal truth here. My wife and I have often joke about getting engaged: the moment you decide to get married, it seems that every person you ever dated, wanted to date or would be a great date suddenly contacts you! When you stop trying, the magic doors seem to open.

I have heard many stories from people who finally figure out a problem while taking a shower. I always insist on writing things on napkins when we go out after certifications or workshops, because those ideas that float up while sitting around a meal are the best of the whole weekend. (People occasionally will send me pictures of the various scrawls I have made on a napkin and they keep them like a prized heirloom.)

Sir Ector and Kay, father and son, both seem "in the way" during hay-making, but it is their castle, their hay and, as we will find out next time, their hawk.

"I vote we take Cully and see if we can get some rabbits in the chase," cried the Wart.

"The rabbits will not be out in this wet," said Kay sarcastically delighted to have caught him over natural history.

"Oh, come on. It will soon be dry."

"I must carry Cully, then."

Kay insisted on carrying the goshawk and flying her, when they went hawking together. This he had a right to do, not only because he was older than the Wart but also because he was Sir Ector's proper son. The Wart was not a proper son. He did not understand this, but it made him feel unhappy, because Kay seemed to regard it as making him inferior in some way. Also it was different not having a father and mother, and Kay had taught him that being different was wrong. Nobody talked to him about it, but he thought about it when he was alone, and was distressed. He did not like people to bring it up. Since the other boy always did bring it up when a question of precedence arose, he had got into the habit of giving in at once before it could be mentioned. Besides he admired Kay and was a born follower. He was a hero-worshipper.

"Come on, then," cried the Wart, and they scampered off towards the Mews, turning a few cartwheels on the way.

The Mews was one of the most important parts of the castle, next to the stables and the kennels. It was opposite to the solar, and faced south. The outside windows had to be small, for reasons of fortification, but the windows which looked inward to the courtyard were big and sunny. The windows had close vertical slats nailed down them, but not horizontal ones. There was no glass, but to keep the hawks from draughts there was horn in the small windows. At one end of the Mews there was a little fireplace and a kind of snugery, like the place in a saddle-room where the grooms sit to clean their tack on wet nights after fox-

hunting. Here there were a couple of stools, a cauldron, a bench with all sorts of small knives and surgical instruments, and some shelves with pots on them. The pots were labelled Cardamum, Ginger, Barley Sugar, Wrangle, For a Snurt, For the Craye, Vertigo, etc. There were leather skins hanging up, which had been snipped about as pieces were cut out of them for jesses, hoods or leashes. On a neat row of nails there were Indian bells and swivels and silver varvels, each with Ector cut on. A special shelf, and the most beautiful of all, held the hoods: very old cracked rufter hoods which had been made for birds before Kay was born, tiny hoods for the merlins, small hoods for tiercels, splendid new hoods which had been knocked up to pass away the long winter evenings. All the hoods, except the rufers, were made in Sir Ector's colours: white leather with red baize at the sides and a bunch of blue-grey plumes on top, made out of the hackle feathers of herons. On the bench there was a jumble of oddments such as are to be found in every workshop, bits of cord, wire, metal, tools, some bread and cheese which the mice had been at, a leather bottle, some frayed gauntlets for the left hand, nails, bits of sacking, a couple of lures and some rough tallies scratched on the wood. These read: Conays 11111111, Harn 111, etc. They were not spelled very well.

Right down the length of the room, with the afternoon sun shining full on them, there ran the screen perches to which the birds were tied. There were two little merlins which had only just been taken up from hacking, an old peregrine who was not much use in this wooded country but who was kept for appearances, a kestrel on which the boys had learned the rudiments of falconry, a spar-hawk which Sir Ector was kind enough to keep for the parish priest, and, caged off in a special apartment of his own at the far end, there was the tiercel goshawk Cully.

The Mews was neatly kept, with sawdust on the floor to absorb the mutes, and the castings taken up every day. Sir Ector visited the place each morning at seven o'clock and the two austringers stood at attention outside the door. If they had forgotten to brush their hair he confined them to barracks. They took no notice.

Kay put on one of the left-hand gauntlets and called Cully from the perch—but Cully, with all his feathers close-set and malevolent, glared at him with a mad marigold eye and refused to come. So Kay took him up.

"Do you think we ought to fly him?" asked the Wart doubtfully. "Deep in the moult like this?"

"Of course we can fly him, you ninny," said Kay. "He only wants to be carried a bit, that's all."

So they went out across the hay-field, noting how the carefully raked hay was now sodden again and losing its goodness, into the chase where the trees began to grow, far apart as yet and parklike, but gradually crowding into the forest shade. The conies had hundreds of buries under these trees, so close together that the problem was not to find a rabbit, but to find a rabbit far enough away from its hole.

"Hob says that we must not fly Cully till he has roused at least twice," said the Wart.

"Hob does not know anything about it. Nobody can tell whether a hawk is fit to fly except the man who is carrying it.

"Hob is only a villein anyway," added Kay, and began to undo the leash and swivel from the jesses.

When he felt the trappings being taken off him, so that he was in hunting order, Cully did make some movements as if to rouse. He raised his crest, his shoulder coverts and the soft feathers of his thighs. But at the last moment he thought better or worse of it and subsided without the rattle. This movement of the hawk's made the Wart itch to carry him. He yearned to take him away from Kay and set him to rights himself. He felt certain that he could get Cully into a good temper by scratching his feet and softly teasing his breast feathers upward, if only he were allowed to do it himself, instead of having to plod along behind with the stupid lure. But he knew how annoying it must be for the elder boy to be continually subjected to advice, and so he held his peace. Just as in modern shooting, you must never offer criticism to the man in command, so in hawking it was important that no outside advice should be allowed to disturb the judgment of the austringer.

"So-ho!" cried Kay, throwing his arm upward to give the hawk a better take-off, and a rabbit was scooting across the close-nibbled turf in front of them, and Cully was in the air. The movement had surprised the Wart, the rabbit and the hawk, all three, and all three hung a moment in surprise. Then the great wings of the aerial assassin began to row the air, but reluctant and undecided. The rabbit vanished in a hidden hole. Up went the hawk, swooping like a child flung high in a swing, until the wings folded and he was sitting in a tree. Cully looked down at his masters, opened his beak in an angry pant of failure, and remained motionless. The two hearts stood still.

Well, we finally finished the First Chapter. No matter what version you read, nothing was edited or changed here. But, without some knowledge of castles and hawking, the vocabulary will leave you either a little lost or just skipping over the words and getting to the point.

So, to fix this issue, I embarked on a quest: I would define all of these words and get a sense of things. As I crunched through various dictionaries and translation issues, White's English is English and his spellings are often archaic, I stumbled upon this site that has already done the work for me! This section on the plants mentioned in White's books is as follows:

<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/t-h-white-glossary>

angelica, p.179 - "An aromatic umbelliferous plant, used in cookery and medicine." (OED)

aniseed, p.179 - "The seed of the anise." (OED)

attar of roses, p.470 - "A fragrant, volatile, essential oil obtained from the petals of the rose." (OED)

Barley sugar, p.14 - "a confection made from sugar, formerly by boiling in a decoction of barley." (OED)

basil, p.179 - "Popular name of a genus of aromatic shrubby plants, including the culinary herbs Common or Sweet Basil and Bush or Lesser Basil." (OED)

bindweed, p.94 - "Name for the species of the N. O. Convolvulus; as *C. sepium*, *C. arvensis*, etc." (OED)

camomile, p.179 - "A Composite plant *Anthemis nobilis*, a creeping herb, with downy leaves, and flowers white in the ray and yellow in the disc. The flowers are used in Medicine for their bitter and tonic properties." (OED)

Cardamum, p.14 - "A spice consisting of the seed-capsules of species *Amomum* and *Ellettaria*." (OED)

convolvus, p.94 - as *convolvulus*, "A large genus of plants, having slender, twisting stems and trumpet-shaped flowers." (OED)

fennel, p.179 - "A fragrant perennial umbellifer having yellow flowers, made use of in sauces, etc." (OED)

fetherfew, p.203 - a corruption of "feverfew": the plant *Pyrethrum parthenium*. (OED)

fritillaries, p.94 - "Any plant of the genus *Fritillaria*, esp. *F. meleagris*." (OED)

fuchsias, p.422 - "A genus of ornamental shrubs." (OED)

Ginger, p.14 - "The rhizome of the tropical plant *Zingiber officinale*, characterized by its hot spicy taste; used in cookery and medicine, and as a sweetmeat." (OED)

gorse bush, p.153 - a prickly or rough bush.

hysop, p.179 - "A small bushy aromatic herb of the genus *Hyssopus*." (OED)

kale, p.111 - "a generic name for various edible plants of the genus *Brassica*; cole, colewort, cabbage." (OED)

lavender, p.179 - "The plant *Lavandula vera*, a small shrub with small pale bluish flowers, and narrow oblong or lanceolate leaves; cultivated extensively for its perfume." (OED)

Mandragora, p.31 - "The plant Mandrake. Now only *Hist.*" (OED)

Mandrake, p.31 - "The mandrake is poisonous, having emetic and narcotic properties. Its forked root was thought to resemble the human form, and was fabled to shriek when plucked up from the ground." (OED)

Old Man's Beard, p.31 - "a name of the epiphytic plant *Tillandsia usneoides*." (OED)

oleander, p.31 - an evergreen poisonous herb. (OED)

Peridexions, p.254 - or Perindeus. "A tree in India. Its fruit is very sweet and exceedingly agreeable. Doves delight in the produce of this tree, and live in it, feeding on its fruits." (White 159)

saffron, p.179 - "the deep orange aromatic pungent dried stigmas of a purple-flowered crocus (*Crocus sativus*) used to color and flavor foods and formerly as a dyestuff and in medicine." (www.merriam-webster.com)

sward, p.67 - "The surface of soil covered with grass and other herbage." (OED)

sweet briar, p.203 - "a species of wild rose (*R. rubiginosa*) with fragrant leaves and shoots." (OED)

tarragon, p.179 - "A composite plant, *Artemisia dracunculus*, of the wormwood genus, a native of Southern Russia and Eastern Europe, the aromatic leaves of which are used to flavour salads, soups, etc." (OED)

Tamarisk tree, p.254 - "A plant of the genus *Tamarix*, a graceful evergreen shrub or small tree, with slender feathery branches and minute scale-like leaves, growing in sandy places in S. Europe and W. Asia, and now much planted by the sea-shore in the south of England." (OED)

teazles, p. 94 - variant form of teasel, "A plant of the genus *Dipsacus*, comprising herbs with prickly leaves and flower-heads; esp. fullers' teasel, *D. fullonum*, the heads of which have hooked prickles between the flowers, and are used for teasing cloth...and wild teasel, *D. sylvestris*, held by some to be the original type, but having straight instead of hooked prickles." (OED)

tussocks, p.168 - "A tuft, clump, or matted growth, forming a small hillock." (OED)

whins, p.227 - "The common furze or gorse" (OED); i.e., a kind of shrub.

Zostera marina, (M), p.137 - eelgrass: "a submerged long-leaved monocotyledonous marine plant (*Zostera marina*) of the eelgrass family that is abundant along the Atlantic coast and has stems used especially in woven products (as mats and hats)." (www.merriam-webster.com)

Enjoy a bumper (“a brimming cup or glass”) as you scroll through this site and I will continue to pound away on looking for insights on this book.

For those of who read or watch The Game of Thrones, one of the central questions of the story is the parentage of Jon Snow. This, of course, is a classic motif in heroic writing: “Who’s your daddy?”

Rick Riordan has resurfaced this with his Percy Jackson series and most of the Demi-gods of Greece struggled with this question. It is a question that runs through Western Civilization. “Who is your father?” will be the central question for many heroes:

Moses
Jesus of Nazareth
Superman
Spiderman
Tarzan
Beowulf
Theseus
King Arthur
Luke Skywalker
And...that guy from Guardians of the Galaxy

Of course, Batman and Harry Potter will have their own issues in this area, too.

Joseph Campbell’s work, from The Hero with a Thousand Faces to The Power of Myth, illuminates this issue. By NOT having a family or a father, we, in a sense, adopt the hero into our community, our family. We adopt the orphan and the orphan redeems us. Of course, the question of fatherhood will always haunt the stories.

“The Wart was not a proper son. He did not understand this, but it made him feel unhappy, because Kay seemed to regard it as making him inferior in some way. Also it was different not having a father and mother, and Kay had taught him that being different was wrong.”

I mentioned before that J. K. Rowling drank deeply from The Sword in the Stone for her work with Harry Potter. The line “being different was wrong,” perfectly sums up the attitudes of Harry’s adoptive family, the Dursleys of Little Whinging. “Normal” was the goal for the Dursley family and Harry’s dreams, scars, magic, friends, and family are the farthest thing from the Dursley norms.

In high school, we were asked, in an English class, what we wanted to “be” as adults. I wrote “Something different, something unique,” so I would be on the wrong side of Kay and the Dursleys, too.

Wart's difference here is that we don't know who his father is nor do we know his mother. We will get the answer to the question of his father in this book when he pulls the sword from the stone. As to his mother, that question will remain a mystery long enough to bring us the downfall of Camelot. Mordred, Arthur's son will also be his nephew. I just realized that the story of Jon Snow and King Arthur have more than just a few plot lines in common (incest being one major issue).

We begin to see a list of Wart's qualities here: "Besides he admired Kay and was a born follower. He was a hero-worshipper." He is very good at hay-making and seems to understand hawks better than Kay. He also holds back his opinions. We will see his kindness and politeness throughout the stories and Kay will be one who flies off into temper and rudeness.

Wart is not a natural leader. He will soon become the King of England and be faced with an unruly mob to bring under his wing (that will be funny after you read the whole book). He will always be stuck...as all great heroes...with the burden of "why am I here?" or, more to the point, who is my father?

Chapter Two

A good while later, when they had been whistling and luring and following the disturbed and sulky hawk from tree to tree, Kay lost his temper.

"Let him go, then," he said. "He is no use anyway."

"Oh, we could not leave him," cried the Wart. "What would Hob say?"

"It is my hawk, not Hob's," exclaimed Kay furiously. "What does it matter what Hob says? He is a servant."

"But Hob made Cully. It is all right for us to lose him, because we did not have to sit up with him three nights and carry him all day and all that. But we can't lose Hob's hawk. It would be beastly."

"Serve him right, then. He is a fool and it is a rotten hawk. Who wants a rotten stupid hawk? You had better stay yourself, if you are so keen on it. I am going home."

"I will stay," said the Wart sadly, "if you will send Hob when you get there."

Kay began walking off in the wrong direction, raging in his heart because he knew that he had flown the bird when he was not properly in yarak, and the Wart had to shout after him the right way. Then the latter sat down under the tree and looked up at Cully like a cat watching a sparrow, with his heart beating fast.

It was well enough for Kay, who was not really keen on hawking except in so far as it was the proper occupation for a boy in his station of life, but the Wart had some of the falconer's

feelings and knew that a lost hawk was the greatest possible calamity. He knew that Hob had worked on Cully for fourteen hours a day to teach him his trade, and that his work had been like Jacob's struggle with the angel. When Cully was lost a part of Hob would be lost too. The Wart did not dare to face the look of reproach which would be in the falconer's eye, after all that he had tried to teach them.

What was he to do? He had better sit still, leaving the lure on the ground, so that Cully could settle down and come in his own time. But Cully had no intention of doing this. He had been given a generous gorge the night before, and he was not hungry. The hot day had put him in a bad temper. The waving and whistling of the boys below, and their pursuit of him from tree to tree, had disturbed his never powerful brains. Now he did not quite know what he wanted to do, but it was not what anybody else wanted. He thought perhaps it would be nice to kill something, from spite.

A long time after that, the Wart was on the verge of the true forest, and Cully was inside it. In a series of infuriating removes they had come nearer and nearer, till they were further from the castle than the boy had ever been, and now they had reached it quite.

Wart would not have been frightened of an English forest nowadays, but the great jungle of Old England was a different matter. It was not only that there were wild boars in it, whose sounders would at this season be furiously rooting about, nor that one of the surviving wolves might be slinking behind any tree, with pale eyes and slavering chops. The mad and wicked animals were not the only inhabitants of the crowded gloom. When men themselves became wicked they took refuge there, outlaws cunning and bloody as the gore-crow, and as persecuted. The Wart thought particularly of a man named Wat, whose name the cottagers used to frighten their children with. He had once lived in Sir Ector's village and the Wart could remember him. He squinted, had no nose, and was weak in his wits. The children threw stones at him. One day he turned on the children and caught one and made a snarly noise and bit off his nose too. Then he ran into the forest. They threw stones at the child with no nose, now, but Wat was supposed to be in the forest still, running on all fours and dressed in skins.

There were magicians in the forest also in those legendary days, as well as strange animals not known to modern works of natural history. There were regular bands of Saxon outlaws—not like Wat—who lived together and wore green and shot with arrows which never missed. There were even a few dragons, though these were small ones, which lived under stones and could hiss like a kettle.

Added to this, there was the fact that it was getting dark. The forest was trackless and nobody in the village knew what was on the other side. The evening hush had fallen, and the high trees stood looking at the Wart without a sound.

He felt that it would be safer to go home, while he still knew where he was—but he had a stout heart, and did not want to give in. He understood that once Cully had slept in freedom

for a whole night he would be wild again and irreclaimable. Cully was a passager. But if the poor Wart could only mark him to roost, and if Hob would only arrive then with a dark lantern, they might still take him that night by climbing the tree, while he was sleepy and muddled with the light. The boy could see more or less where the hawk had perched, about a hundred yards within the thick trees, because the home-going rooks of evening were mobbing that place.

He made a mark on one of the trees outside the forest, hoping that it might help him to find his way back, and then began to fight his way into the undergrowth as best he might. He heard by the rooks that Cully had immediately moved further off.

The night fell still as the small boy struggled with the brambles. But he went on doggedly, listening with all his ears, and Cully's evasions became sleepier and shorter until at last, before the utter darkness fell, he could see the hunched shoulders in a tree above him against the sky. Wart sat down under the tree, so as not to disturb the bird any further as it went to sleep, and Cully, standing on one leg, ignored his existence.

"Perhaps," said the Wart to himself, "even if Hob does not come, and I do not see how he can very well follow me in this trackless woodland now, I shall be able to climb up by myself at about midnight, and bring Cully down. He might stay there at about midnight because he ought to be asleep by then. I could speak to him softly by name, so that he thought it was just the usual person coming to take him up while hooded. I shall have to climb very quietly. Then, if I do get him, I shall have to find my way home, and the drawbridge will be up. But perhaps somebody will wait for me, for Kay will have told them I am out. I wonder which way it was? I wish Kay had not gone."

He snuggled down between the roots of the tree, trying to find a comfortable place where the hard wood did not stick into his shoulder-blades.

"I think the way was behind that big spruce with the spike top. I ought to try to remember which side of me the sun is setting, so that when it rises I may keep it on the same side going home. Did something move under that spruce tree, I wonder? Oh, I wish I may not meet that old wild Wat and have my nose bitten off! How aggravating Cully looks, standing there on one leg as if there was nothing the matter."

At this there was a quick whirr and a smack and the Wart found an arrow sticking in the tree between the fingers of his right hand. He snatched his hand away, thinking he had been stung by something, before he noticed it was an arrow. Then everything went slow. He had time to notice quite carefully what sort of an arrow it was, and how it had driven three inches into the solid wood. It was a black arrow with yellow bands round it, like a wasp, and its cock feather was yellow. The two others were black. They were dyed goose feathers.

The Wart found that, although he was frightened of the danger of the forest before it happened, once he was in it he was not frightened any more. He got up quickly—but it

seemed to him slowly—and went behind the other side of the tree. As he did this, another arrow came whirr and frump, but this one buried all except its feathers in the grass, and stayed still, as if it had never moved.

On the other side of the tree he found a waste of bracken, six foot high. This was splendid cover, but it betrayed his whereabouts by rustling. He heard another arrow hiss through the fronds, and what seemed to be a man's voice cursing, but it was not very near. Then he heard the man, or whatever it was, running about in the bracken. It was reluctant to fire any more arrows because they were valuable things and would certainly get lost in the undergrowth. Wart went like a snake, like a coney, like a silent owl. He was small and the creature had no chance against him at this game. In five minutes he was safe.

The assassin searched for his arrows and went away grumbling—but the Wart realized that, even if he was safe from the archer, he had lost his way and his hawk. He had not the faintest idea where he was. He lay down for half an hour, pressed under the fallen tree where he had hidden, to give time for the thing to go right away and for his own heart to cease thundering. It had begun beating like this as soon as he knew that he had got away.

"Oh," thought he, "now I am truly lost, and now there is almost no alternative except to have my nose bitten off, or to be pierced right through with one of those waspy arrows, or to be eaten by a hissing dragon or a wolf or a wild boar or a magician—if magicians do eat boys, which I expect they do. Now I may well wish that I had been good, and not angered the governess when she got muddled with her astrolabe, and had loved my dear guardian Sir Ector as much as he deserved."

At these melancholy thoughts, and especially at the recollection of kind Sir Ector with his pitchfork and his red nose, the poor Wart's eyes became full of tears and he lay most desolate beneath the tree.

The sun finished the last rays of its lingering good-bye, and the moon rose in awful majesty over the silver tree-tops, before he dared to stand. Then he got up, and dusted the twigs out of his jerkin, and wandered off forlorn, taking the easiest way and trusting himself to God. He had been walking like this for about half an hour, and sometimes feeling more cheerful—because it really was very cool and lovely in the summer forest by moonlight—when he came upon the most beautiful thing that he had seen in his short life so far.

We see in this reading the great qualities of Wart. In the other books of White's series, one of these qualities will doom him, his best friend, his wife and Camelot. His kindness...his empathy...will constantly be at odds with his quest for justice. As I type this, I realize that much of modern theology is based on this insight.

Often, at Religious Education seminars, we hear this story:

It seems that God created the earth three times. The first time, God gave humans Total Freedom and they messed up everything so badly, God destroyed the earth. The next time, God gave humans Total Justice, and soon no one was left and God started again.

The third time, God gave humans both Total Freedom and Total Justice, but God won't tell us the percentages. And, we are still around.

The crowd always politely laughs. I don't usually laugh as the story breaks the cardinal rules of theology (the ones I know and teach): God doesn't know the results of God's actions in this story. In other words, the story puts God IN time versus outside of time (the definition of eternal is "Outside of time").

But I get the point. Sometimes, certain important things in life, like freedom and justice collide. In coaching and parenting, wants and needs often collide. In life, your need to get across town might conflict with the rest of us waiting at the red light.

And, in our stories, King Arthur, like God, will struggle with balancing empathy and kindness with the new kind of justice he is trying to forge:

Not might IS right, rather, might FOR right.

And, as any parent or teacher will tell you: being fair, being just, being kind and being empathetic all at the same time is nearly impossible.

This line gives us a good look into Arthur's future:

"But Hob made Cully. It is all right for us to lose him, because we did not have to sit up with him three nights and carry him all day and all that. But we can't lose Hob's hawk. It would be beastly."

Wart's concern is with Hob. Wart's concerns are with the man who stayed up for three days and nights with Cully not for his (and Kay's) issues.

I like this kid.

"Yarak," by the way, is a GREAT word. It is the super alert state that falcons are in when just hungry enough to hunt. It's a stare. Yarak is a great way to explain how I get work done when I fast. I make this deal with myself daily:

No food until all my chores, writings, and workouts are finished. When I finally eat, I have been in yarak for quite a while.

Having been fed well the day before and being handled poorly, Cully has no interest in making the boys happy.

The forest, as White explains, is NOT a safe place. I have seen something like this in County Sligo (Ireland) where the bog water waterfalls mix in with deep ancient forest. I can imagine how frightening this forest could be without footpaths with warning signs. Add the wolves, beasts and other threats and this would make a perfect setting for a movie.

As we have seen before, White foreshadows much of the upcoming chapters.

- “It was not only that there were wild boars in it,”
The Christmas boar hunt will reacquaint us later with King Pellinore and the Questing Beast.
- “When men themselves became wicked they took refuge there, outlaws cunning and bloody as the gore-crow, and as persecuted.”
I’m not sure if White is referring to the anthropophagi (more later) or Robin Wood here, but both will be in one story.
- “The Wart thought particularly of a man named Wat, whose name the cottagers used to frighten their children with.”
In every version Wat is returned to Sir Ector’s village and becomes friends with the Dog Boy.
- “There were magicians in the forest also in those legendary days,”
We will meet one soon!
- “There were regular bands of Saxon outlaws—not like Wat—who lived together and wore green and shot with arrows which never missed.”
This must be Robin Wood and his band. We will enjoy Wart’s crush on Maid Marian.
- “There were even a few dragons, though these were small ones, which lived under stones and could hiss like a kettle.”
Dragons were real to the medieval audience. Da Vinci mentions them. And, just because YOU haven’t seen one, perhaps they might still be around. (See The Game of Thrones for proof!)
- “Added to this, there was the fact that it was getting dark. The forest was trackless and nobody in the village knew what was on the other side.”
It’s late. He’s lost. And no one knows to find him. He thinks he is in danger....but just wait.
- “He heard another arrow hiss through the fronds, and what seemed to be a man's voice cursing, but it was not very near. Then he heard the man, or whatever it was, running about in the bracken. It was reluctant to fire any more arrows because they were valuable things and would certainly get lost in the undergrowth.”

In the original British version of 1938, we meet the anthropophagi later in the book. These are mythical cannibals that make fine (dangerous) creatures of the night in Greek and Medieval stories. We find this note in William Shakespeare’s Othello:

And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders.

When we do meet the Anthropophagi in the 1938 edition, we will learn more about the poisonous arrows. We will also meet other forms of ancient evils. Later versions soften the stories and eventually eliminate much of the fun, frankly. The upside of this story is that Sir Kay is included in this adventure as a favor to Wart and, for once, Kay comes off well.

Kay is not a bad sort of person. But, as I noted earlier, he is rarely corrected for his behaviors and tries far too hard to remind everyone that he is special. He would make a fine internet expert.

Although I don't want to get ahead of myself, in the next few lines of the story we will find what I consider the saddest line in literature.

There was a clearing in the forest, a wide sward of moonlit grass, and the white rays shone full upon the tree trunks on the opposite side. These trees were beeches, whose trunks are always more beautiful in a pearly light, and among the beeches there was the smallest movement and a silvery clink. Before the clink there were just the beeches, but immediately afterward there was a knight in full armour, standing still and silent and unearthly, among the majestic trunks. He was mounted on an enormous white horse that stood as rapt as its master, and he carried in his right hand, with its butt resting on the stirrup, a high, smooth jousting lance, which stood up among the tree stumps, higher and higher, till it was outlined against the velvet sky. All was moon-lit, all silver, too beautiful to describe.

The Wart did not know what to do. He did not know whether it would be safe to go up to this knight, for there were so many terrible things in the forest that even the knight might be a ghost. Most ghostly he looked, too, as he hove meditating on the confines of the gloom. Eventually the boy made up his mind that even if it were a ghost, it would be the ghost of a knight, and knights were bound by their vows to help people in distress.

"Excuse me," he said, when he was right under the mysterious figure, "but can you tell me the way back to Sir Ector's castle?"

At this the ghost jumped, so that it nearly fell off its horse, and gave out a muffled baaa through its visor, like a sheep.

"Excuse me," began the Wart again, and stopped, terrified, in the middle of his speech.

For the ghost lifted up its visor, revealing two enormous eyes frosted like ice; exclaimed in an anxious voice, "What, what?"; took off its eyes—which turned out to be horn-rimmed spectacles, fogged by being inside the helmet; tried to wipe them on the horse's mane—

which only made them worse; lifted both hands above its head and tried to wipe them on its plume; dropped its lance; dropped the spectacles; got off the horse to search for them—the visor shutting in the process; lifted its visor; bent down for the spectacles; stood up again as the visor shut once more, and exclaimed in a plaintive voice, "Oh, dear!"

The Wart found the spectacles, wiped them, and gave them to the ghost, who immediately put them on (the visor shut at once) and began scrambling back on its horse for dear life. When it was there it held out its hand for the lance, which the Wart handed up, and, feeling all secure, opened the visor with its left hand, and held it open. It peered at the boy with one hand up—like a lost mariner searching for land—and exclaimed, "Ah-hah! Whom have we here, what?"

"Please," said the Wart, "I am a boy whose guardian is Sir Ector."

"Charming fellah," said the Knight. "Never met him in me life."

"Can you tell me the way back to his castle?"

"Faintest idea. Stranger in these parts meself."

"I am lost," said the Wart.

"Funny thing that. Now I have been lost for seventeen years.

"Name of King Pellinore," continued the Knight. "May have heard of me, what?" The visor shut with a pop, like an echo to the What, but was opened again immediately. "Seventeen years ago, come Michaelmas, and been after the Questing Beast ever since. Boring, very."

"I should think it would be," said the Wart, who had never heard of King Pellinore, nor of the Questing Beast, but he felt that this was the safest thing to say in the circumstances.

"It is the Burden of the Pellinores," said the King proudly. "Only a Pellinore can catch it—that is, of course, or his next of kin. Train all the Pellinores with that idea in mind. Limited eddication, rather. Fewmets, and all that."

"I know what fewmets are," said the boy with interest. "They are the droppings of the beast pursued. The harbinger keeps them in his horn, to show to his master, and can tell by them whether it is a warrantable beast or otherwise, and what state it is in."

"Intelligent child," remarked the King. "Very. Now I carry fewmets about with me practically all the time.

"Insanitary habit," he added, beginning to look dejected, "and quite pointless. Only one Questing Beast, you know, so there can't be any question whether she is warrantable or not."

Here his visor began to droop so much that the Wart decided he had better forget his own troubles and try to cheer his companion, by asking questions on the one subject about which he seemed qualified to speak. Even talking to a lost royalty was better than being alone in the wood.

"What does the Questing Beast look like?"

"Ah, we call it the Beast Glatisant, you know," replied the monarch, assuming a learned air and beginning to speak quite volubly. "Now the Beast Glatisant, or, as we say in English, the Questing Beast—you may call it either," he added graciously—"this Beast has the head of a serpent, ah, and the body of a libbard, the haunches of a lion, and he is footed like a hart. Wherever this beast goes he makes a noise in his belly as it had been the noise of thirty couple of hounds questing.

"Except when he is drinking, of course," added the King.

"It must be a dreadful kind of monster," said the Wart, looking about him anxiously.

"A dreadful monster," repeated the King. "It is the Beast Glatisant."

"And how do you follow it?"

This seemed to be the wrong question, for Pellinore began to look even more depressed.

"I have a brachet," he said sadly. "There she is, over there."

The Wart looked in the direction which had been indicated with a despondent thumb, and saw a lot of rope wound round a tree. The other end of the rope was tied to King Pellinore's saddle.

"I do not see her very well."

"Wound herself round the other side, I dare say. She always goes the opposite way from me."

The Wart went over to the tree and found a large white dog scratching herself for fleas. As soon as she saw the Wart, she began wagging her whole body, grinning vacuously, and panting in her efforts to lick his face, in spite of the cord. She was too tangled up to move.

"It's quite a good brachet," said King Pellinore, "only it pants so, and gets wound round things, and goes the opposite way. What with that and the visor, what, I sometimes don't know which way to turn."

"Why don't you let her loose?" asked the Wart. "She would follow the Beast just as well like that."

"She goes right away then, you see, and I don't see her sometimes for a week.

"Gets a bit lonely without her," added the King, "following the Beast about, and never knowing where one is. Makes a bit of company, you know."

"She seems to have a friendly nature."

"Too friendly. Sometimes I doubt whether she is really chasing the Beast at all."

"What does she do when she sees it?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, well," said the Wart. "I dare say she will get to be interested in it after a time."

"It is eight months, anyway, since we saw the Beast at all."

The poor fellow's voice had grown sadder and sadder since the beginning of the conversation, and now he definitely began to snuffle. "It is the curse of the Pellinores," he exclaimed.

"Always mollocking about after that beastly Beast. What on earth use is she, anyway? First you have to stop to unwind the brachet, then your visor falls down, then you can't see through your spectacles. Nowhere to sleep, never know where you are. Rheumatism in the winter, sunstroke in the summer. All this horrid armour takes hours to put on. When it is on it's either frying or freezing, and it gets rusty. You have to sit up all night polishing the stuff. Oh, how I do wish I had a nice house of my own to live in, a house with beds in it and real pillows and sheets. If I was rich that's what I would buy. A nice bed with a nice pillow and a nice sheet that you could lie in, and then I would put this beastly horse in a meadow and tell that beastly brachet to run away and play, and throw all this beastly armour out of the window, and let the beastly Beast go and chase himself—that I would."

"If you could show me the way home," said the Wart craftily, "I am sure Sir Ector would put you up in a bed for the night."

"Do you really mean it?" cried the King. "In a bed?"

"A feather bed."

King Pellinore's eyes grew round as saucers. "A feather bed!" he repeated slowly. "Would it have pillows?"

"Down pillows."

"Down pillows!" whispered the King, holding his breath. And then, letting it out in one rush, "What a lovely house your gentleman must have!"

"I do not think it is more than two hours away," said the Wart, following up his advantage.

"And did this gentleman really send you out to invite me in?" (He had forgotten about the Wart being lost.) "How nice of him, how very nice of him, I do think, what?"

"He will be pleased to see us," said the Wart truthfully.

"Oh, how nice of him," exclaimed the King again, beginning to bustle about with his various trappings. "And what a lovely gentleman he must be, to have a feather bed!"

"I suppose I should have to share it with somebody?" he added doubtfully.

"You could have one of your own."

"A feather bed of one's very own, with sheets and a pillow—perhaps even two pillows, or a pillow and a bolster—and no need to get up in time for breakfast! Does your guardian get up in time for breakfast?"

"Never," said the Wart.

"Fleas in the bed?"

"Not one."

"Well!" said King Pellinore. "It does sound too nice for words, I must say. A feather bed and none of those fewmets for ever so long. How long did you say it would take us to get there?"

"Two hours," said the Wart—but he had to shout the second of these words, for the sounds were drowned in his mouth by a noise which had that moment arisen close beside them.

"What was that?" exclaimed the Wart.

"Hark!" cried the King.

"Mercy!"

"It is the Beast!"

And immediately the loving huntsman had forgotten everything else, but was busied about his task. He wiped his spectacles upon the seat of his trousers, the only accessible piece of cloth about him, while the belling and bloody cry arose all round. He balanced them on the end of his long nose, just before the visor automatically clapped to. He clutched his jousting lance in his right hand, and galloped off in the direction of the noise. He was brought up short by the rope which was wound round the tree—the vacuous brachet meanwhile giving a melancholy yelp—and fell off his horse with a tremendous clang. In a second he was up again—the Wart was convinced that the spectacles must be broken—and hopping round the white horse with one foot in the stirrup. The girths stood the test and he was in the saddle somehow, with his jousting lance between his legs, and then he was galloping round and round the tree, in the opposite direction to the one in which the brachet had wound herself up. He went round three times too often, the brachet meanwhile running and yelping the other way, and then, after four or five back casts, they were both free of the obstruction. "Yoicks, what!" cried King Pellinore, waving his lance in the air, and swaying excitedly in the saddle. Then he disappeared into the gloom of the forest, with the unfortunate hound trailing behind him at the other end of the cord."

With this reading, we finish the first two chapters of *The Sword in the Stone*. Frankly, I can see why many people would struggle with these first two chapters and maybe put the book down. But, like the Harry Potter books, we have met characters that will guide us throughout the rest of the series.

One thing about the first of the Potter books that still amazes me to this day is how J. K. Rowling mentions Sirius Black simply in passing in Chapter One (He owns the flying motorcycle that Hagrid borrows). He, of course, is the focus of the third book, *Harry's Godfather*, a wanted criminal, and a hero. This small mention gives us an insight into the depth of Rowling's long-term narrative as she began this series...as an unemployed, single mom living in Edinburgh.

We will meet King Pellinore in this little side story; I think we are meeting White's "go to" comic relief. Pellinore, of course, has to chase his questing beast. The beast, Glatisant, has a remarkable history. We learn much of it here from Pellinore, but Glatisant, or "Barking Beast," is snake, leopard, lion (libbard) and deer (hart). It is the chore of the Pellinore family to seek him out.

The name "Barking Beast" refers to the roaring barking sound that the animal makes when the beast moves. Except, of course, when it drinks.

Wart doesn't know this, and perhaps few do/did, but the beast also foretells the problems King Arthur will have in his future. In Mallory's work, we meet the beast after Arthur's incestuous moment with Morgause (bringing the child Mordred, "More Dread"). The beast has been formed when a woman falls madly in love with her brother and makes a deal with the devil to "have him," so the beast represents all things rape, incest and chaos.

The woman later accuses her brother of rape and the dad has his son torn apart by dogs. If you watch "The Game of Thrones," you might be thinking "wait...I have seen some of this."

You would be right.

In White's book, Pellinore and his beast provide comic relief. We also see again the relationship between "Quest/Quarry" and the importance of knights (and all of us) to be actively "seeking," the literal meaning of quest and quarry. So, Pellinore has much to teach of in humor and questing.

For those of us raised in BBC humor with Monty Python, Dame Edna and Benny Hill, we see the humor in such lines as:

- "Charming fellah," said the Knight. "Never met him in me life."
- "Insanitary habit," he added, beginning to look dejected, "and quite pointless. Only one Questing Beast, you know, so there can't be any question whether she is warrantable or not." (He is referring to carrying fewmets, or quarry dung)
- "Too friendly. Sometimes I doubt whether she is really chasing the Beast at all." "What does she do when she sees it?" "Nothing."

We will meet Pellinore again in this book. If you continue reading the series, we will find him in the other books, too. He will always be comic relief until he is killed by the "Orkney faction," Sir Gawain and his brothers, for killing their father...probably by accident...in a joust. In some Arthurian tales, Pellinore is the father of Sir Parcival, but White has other uses for him.

Pellinore brings up a worthy discussion I try to raise in my coaching and my workshops. When "seeking" a goal...will attaining it make you successful?

There is a cliché that I always think needs more exposure:

"People may spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to find, once they reach the top, that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall."

It is also sometimes written like this:

"It's no fun to reach the top of the ladder only to discover it's propped against the wrong wall."

The great San Franciscan Herb Caen wrote it like this: "It is a funny thing—you work all your life toward a certain goal and then somebody moves the posts on you."

You get the point. I know many people from my sports career who have achieved great goals and were miserable failures at life. I won't mention names, but the failed former superstar is itself a cliché in the arts.

The Pellinore family is cursed with chasing this beast and a good question to ask after the capture (or kill): Now What?

That would make a great book title, by the way. (It's one of mine)

I'm all for goals, yes. But, achieving success might be different.

"Success is the progressive realization of a worthy goal or ideal" Earl Nightingale taught us. So, again "yes," goal setting and success are intertwined. But, Nightingale reminds us that it has to be "worthy." He immediately noted that the most successful people in life are schoolteachers and parents who are trying to build a better future.

Success is progressive. Success means we are taking the steps towards the goal. I never achieved my long-term goals as a discus thrower, but I can tell you exactly how close (or far from) my journey brought me along.

Pellinore's quest for the Questing Beast is humorous. We will bump into these two a few more times and the stories are always fun.

But, not successful!

Before I give you a rather lengthy section of *The Sword in the Stone*, I have to admit that this section, in my opinion, might be the best writing...the best descriptive writing...of White's entire *The Once and Future King*.

Arthur falls deeply asleep in the forest alone and scared. When he finally wakes up, he is basically at the front door of Merlyn's home.

It is so magical, one could deduce that Wart is still dreaming. As I mulled this over, I began to think about a professor who "ruined" the *Odyssey* for me.

Very simply, he pointed out that Ulysses washed up on a beach, naked, very close to the King's daughter. To keep his head, he "sang for his supper" and gave us a delightful story of men turning into pigs, Cyclopes, Sirens and a variety of near-death experiences. After his speech, the rest of the story continues in realm of reality.

Then, I slapped my own face and reminded myself "I'm an idiot." This book is fantasy and it lives in the world of dragons, wizards, and magic.

Years ago, at discus camp, we had a particularly annoying teenage boy (as if there is another kind) who constantly found flaws in every meal selection, outfit and drill. While watching Star Wars, he shouted out "That's so fake!" when the Death Star exploded.

I had my fill: "So, the Wookies...you thought those were real? The aliens in the Cantina? The X-Wing Fighters? The Force?"

In other words, as I leave you with this delightful selection, don't tell me it is "fake!" Enjoy!

The boy slept well in the woodland nest where he had laid himself down, in that kind of thin but refreshing sleep which people have when they begin to lie out of doors. At first he only dipped below the surface of sleep, and skimmed along like a salmon in shallow water, so close to the surface that he fancied himself in air. He thought himself awake when he was already asleep. He saw the stars above his face, whirling on their silent and sleepless axis, and the leaves of the trees rustling against them, and he heard small changes in the grass. These little noises of footsteps and soft-fringed wing-beats and stealthy bellies drawn over the grass blades or rattling against the bracken at first frightened or interested him, so that he moved to see what they were (but never saw), then soothed him, so that he no longer cared to see what they were but trusted them to be themselves, and finally left him altogether as he swam down deeper and deeper, nuzzling into the scented turf, into the warm ground, into the unending waters under the earth.

It had been difficult to go to sleep in the bright summer moonlight, but once he was there it was not difficult to stay. The sun came early, causing him to turn over in protest, but in going to sleep he had learned to vanquish light, and now the light could not awake him. It was nine o'clock, five hours after daylight, before he rolled over, opened his eyes, and was awake at once. He was hungry.

The Wart had heard about people who lived on berries, but this did not seem practical at the moment, because it was July, and there were none. He found two wild strawberries and ate them greedily. They tasted nicer than anything, so that he wished there were more. Then he wished it was April, so that he could find some birds' eggs and eat those, or that he had not lost his goshawk Cully, so that the hawk could catch him a rabbit which he would cook by rubbing two sticks together like the base Indian. But he had lost Cully, or he would not have lost himself, and probably the sticks would not have lighted in any case. He decided that he could not have gone more than three or four miles from home, and that the best thing he could do would be to sit still and listen. Then he might hear the noise of the haymakers, if he were lucky with the wind, and he could hearken his way to the castle by that.

What he did hear was a faint clanking noise, which made him think that King Pellinore must be after the Questing Beast again, close by. Only the noise was so regular and single in intention that it made him think of King Pellinore doing some special action, with great patience and concentration—trying to scratch his back without taking off his armour, for instance. He went toward the noise.

There was a clearing in the forest, and in this clearing there was a snug cottage built of stone. It was a cottage, although the Wart could not notice this at the time, which was divided into two bits. The main bit was the hall or every-purpose room, which was high because it extended from floor to roof, and this room had a fire on the floor whose smoke came out eventually from a hole in the thatch of the roof. The other half of the cottage was divided into two rooms by a horizontal floor which made the top half into a bedroom and study, while the bottom half served for a larder, storeroom, stable and barn. A white donkey lived in this downstairs room, and a ladder led to the one upstairs.

There was a well in front of the cottage, and the metallic noise which the Wart had heard was caused by a very old gentleman who was drawing water out of it by means of a handle and chain. Clank, clank, clank, went the chain, until the bucket hit the lip of the well, and "Drat the whole thing!" said the old gentleman. "You would think that after all these years of study you could do better for yourself than a by-our-lady well with a by-our-lady bucket, whatever the by-our-lady cost.

"By this and by that," added the old gentleman, heaving his bucket out of the well with a malevolent glance, "why can't they get us the electric light and company's water?"

He was dressed in a flowing gown with fur tippets which had the signs of the zodiac embroidered over it, with various cabalistic signs, such as triangles with eyes in them, queer crosses, leaves of trees, bones of birds and animals, and a planetarium whose stars shone like bits of looking-glass with the sun on them. He had a pointed hat like a dunce's cap, or like the headgear worn by ladies of that time, except that the ladies were accustomed to have a bit of veil floating from the top of it. He also had a wand of lignum vitae, which he had laid down in the grass beside him, and a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles like those of King Pellinore. They were unusual spectacles, being without ear pieces, but shaped rather like scissors or like the antennae of the tarantula wasp.

"Excuse me, sir," said the Wart, "but can you tell me the way to Sir Ector's castle, if you don't mind?"

The aged gentleman put down his bucket and looked at him.

"Your name would be the Wart."

"Yes, sir, please, sir."

"My name," said the old man, "is Merlyn."

"How do you do?"

"How do."

When these formalities had been concluded, the Wart had leisure to look at him more closely. The magician was staring at him with a kind of unwinking and benevolent curiosity which made him feel that it would not be at all rude to stare back, no ruder than it would be to stare at one of his guardian's cows who happened to be thinking about his personality as she leaned her head over a gate.

Merlyn had a long white beard and long white moustaches which hung down on either side of it. Close inspection showed that he was far from clean. It was not that he had dirty fingernails, or anything like that, but some large bird seemed to have been nesting in his hair. The Wart was familiar with the nests of Spar-hark and Gos, the crazy conglomerations of sticks and oddments which had been taken over from squirrels or crows, and he knew how the twigs and the tree foot were splashed with white mutes, old bones, muddy feathers and castings. This was the impression which he got from Merlyn. The old man was streaked with droppings over his shoulders, among the stars and triangles of his gown, and a large spider was slowly lowering itself from the tip of his hat, as he gazed and slowly blinked at the little boy in front of him. He had a worried expression, as though he were trying to remember some name which began with Choi but which was pronounced in quite a different way, possibly Menzies or was it Dalziel? His mild blue eyes, very big and round under the tarantula spectacles, gradually filmed and clouded over as he gazed at the boy, and then he turned his head away with a resigned expression, as though it was all too much for him after all.

"Do you like peaches?"

"Very much indeed," said the Wart, and his mouth began to water so that it was full of sweet, soft liquid.

"They are scarcely in season," said the old man reprovingly, and he walked off in the direction of the cottage.

The Wart followed after, since this was the simplest thing to do, and offered to carry the bucket (which seemed to please Merlyn, who gave it to him) and waited while he counted the keys—while he muttered and mislaid them and dropped them in the grass. Finally, when they had got their way into the black and white home with as much trouble as if they were burgling it, he climbed up the ladder after his host and found himself in the upstairs room.

It was the most marvellous room that he had ever been in.

There was a real corkindrill hanging from the rafters, very life-like and horrible with glass eyes and scaly tail stretched out behind it. When its master came into the room it winked one eye in salutation, although it was stuffed. There were thousands of brown books in leather bindings, some chained to the book-shelves and others propped against each other as if they had had too much to drink and did not really trust themselves. These gave out a smell of must and solid brownness which was most secure. Then there were stuffed birds, popinjays,

and maggot-pies and kingfishers, and peacocks with all their feathers but two, and tiny birds like beetles, and a reputed phoenix which smelt of incense and cinnamon. It could not have been a real phoenix, because there is only one of these at a time. Over by the mantelpiece there was a fox's mask, with GRAFTON, BUCKINGHAM TO DAVENTRY, 2 HRS 20 MINS written under it, and also a forty-pound salmon with AWE, 43 MIN., BULLDOG written under it, and a very life-like basilisk with CROWHURST OTTER HOUNDS in Roman print. There were several boars' tusks and the claws of tigers and libbards mounted in symmetrical patterns, and a big head of Ovis Poli, six live grass snakes in a kind of aquarium, some nests of the solitary wasp nicely set up in a glass cylinder, an ordinary beehive whose inhabitants went in and out of the window unmolested, two young hedgehogs in cotton wool, a pair of badgers which immediately began to cry Yik-Yik-Yik-Yik in loud voices as soon as the magician appeared, twenty boxes which contained stick caterpillars and sixths of the puss-moth, and even an oleander that was worth sixpence—all feeding on the appropriate leaves—a guncase with all sorts of weapons which would not be invented for half a thousand years, a rod-box ditto, a chest of drawers full of salmon flies which had been tied by Merlyn himself, another chest whose drawers were labelled Mandragora, Mandrake, Old Man's Beard, etc., a bunch of turkey feathers and goose-quills for making pens, an astrolabe, twelve pairs of boots, a dozen purse-nets, three dozen rabbit wires, twelve corkscrews, some ants' nests between two glass plates, ink-bottles of every possible colour from red to violet, darning-needles, a gold medal for being the best scholar at Winchester, four or five recorders, a nest of field mice all alive-o, two skulls, plenty of cut glass, Venetian glass, Bristol glass and a bottle of Mastic varnish, some satsuma china and some cloisonné, the fourteenth edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (marred as it was by the sensationalism of the popular plates), two paint-boxes (one oil, one water-colour), three globes of the known geographical world, a few fossils, the stuffed head of a cameleopard, six pismires, some glass retorts with cauldrons, bunsen burners, etc., and a complete set of cigarette cards depicting wild fowl by Peter Scott.

Merlyn took off his pointed hat when he came into this chamber, because it was too high for the roof, and immediately there was a scamper in one of the dark corners and a flap of soft wings, and a tawny owl was sitting on the black skull-cap which protected the top of his head.

"Oh, what a lovely owl!" cried the Wart.

But when he went up to it and held out his hand, the owl grew half as tall again, stood up as stiff as a poker, closed its eyes so that there was only the smallest slit to peep through—as you are in the habit of doing when told to shut your eyes at hide-and-seek and said in a doubtful voice:

"There is no owl."

Then it shut its eyes entirely and looked the other way.

"It is only a boy," said Merlyn.

"There is no boy," said the owl hopefully, without turning round.

The Wart was so startled by finding that the owl could talk that he forgot his manners and came closer still. At this the bird became so nervous that it made a mess on Merlyn's head—the whole room was quite white with droppings—and flew off to perch on the farthest tip of the corkindrill's tail, out of reach.

"We see so little company," explained the magician, wiping his head with half a worn-out pair of pyjamas which he kept for that purpose, "that Archimedes is a little shy of strangers. Come, Archimedes, I want you to meet a friend of mine called Wart."

Here he held out his hand to the owl, who came waddling like a goose along the corkindrill's back—he waddled with this rolling gait so as to keep his tail from being damaged—and hopped down to Merlyn's finger with every sign of reluctance.

"Hold out your finger and put it behind his legs. No, lift it up under his train."

When the Wart had done this, Merlyn moved the owl gently backward, so that the boy's finger pressed against its legs from behind, and it either had to step back on the finger or get pushed off its balance altogether. It stepped back. The Wart stood there delighted, while the furry feet held tight on his finger and the sharp claws prickled his skin.

"Say how d'you do properly," said Merlyn.

"I will not," said Archimedes, looking the other way and holding tight.

"Oh, he is lovely," said the Wart again. "Have you had him long?"

"Archimedes has stayed with me since he was small, indeed since he had a tiny head like a chicken's."

"I wish he would talk to me."

"Perhaps if you were to give him this mouse here, politely, he might learn to know you better."

Merlyn took a dead mouse out of his skull-cap—"I always keep them there, and worms too, for fishing. I find it most convenient"—and handed it to the Wart, who held it out rather gingerly toward Archimedes. The nutty curved beak looked as if it were capable of doing damage, but Archimedes looked closely at the mouse, blinked at the Wart, moved nearer on the finger, closed his eyes and leaned forward. He stood there with closed eyes and an expression of rapture on his face, as if he were saying Grace, and then, with the absurdest sideways nibble, took the morsel so gently that he would not have broken a soap bubble. He remained leaning forward with closed eyes, with the mouse suspended from his beak, as if he

were not sure what to do with it. Then he lifted his right foot—he was right-handed, though people say only men are—and took hold of the mouse. He held it up like a boy holding a stick of rock or a constable with his truncheon, looked at it, nibbled its tail. He turned it round so that it was head first, for the Wart had offered it the wrong way round, and gave one gulp. He looked round at the company with the tail hanging out of the corner of his mouth—as much as to say, "I wish you would not all stare at me so"—turned his head away, politely swallowed the tail, scratched his sailor's beard with his left toe, and began to ruffle out his feathers.

"Let him alone," said Merlyn. "Perhaps he does not want to be friends with you until he knows what you are like. With owls, it is never easy-come and easy-go."

"Perhaps he will sit on my shoulder," said the Wart, and with that he instinctively lowered his hand, so that the owl, who liked to be as high as possible, ran up the slope and stood shyly beside his ear.

"Now breakfast," said Merlyn.

The Wart saw that the most perfect breakfast was laid out neatly for two, on a table before the window. There were peaches. There were also melons, strawberries and cream, rusks, brown trout piping hot, grilled perch which were much nicer, chicken devilled enough to burn one's mouth out, kidneys and mushrooms on toast, fricassee, curry, and a choice of boiling coffee or best chocolate made with cream in large cups.

"Have some mustard," said the magician, when they had got to the kidneys.

The mustard-pot got up and walked over to his plate on thin silver legs that waddled like the owl's. Then it uncurled its handles and one handle lifted its lid with exaggerated courtesy while the other helped him to a generous spoonful.

"Oh, I love the mustard-pot!" cried the Wart. "Wherever did you get it?"

At this the pot beamed all over its face and began to strut a bit, but Merlyn rapped it on the head with a teaspoon, so that it sat down and shut up at once.

"It is not a bad pot," he said grudgingly. "Only it is inclined to give itself airs."

The Wart was so much impressed by the kindness of the old man, and particularly by the lovely things which he possessed, that he hardly liked to ask him personal questions. It seemed politer to sit still and to speak when he was spoken to. But Merlyn did not speak much, and when he did speak it was never in questions, so that the Wart had little opportunity for conversation. At last his curiosity got the better of him, and he asked something which had been puzzling him for some time.

"Would you mind if I ask you a question?"

"It is what I am for."

"How did you know to set breakfast for two?"

The old gentleman leaned back in his chair and lighted an enormous meerschaum pipe—Good gracious, he breathes fire, thought the Wart, who had never heard of tobacco—before he was ready to reply. Then he looked puzzled, took off his skullcap—three mice fell out—and scratched in the middle of his bald head.

"Have you ever tried to draw in a looking-glass?" he asked.

"I don't think I have."

"Looking-glass," said Merlyn, holding out his hand. Immediately there was a tiny lady's vanity-glass in his hand.

"Not that kind, you fool," he said angrily. "I want one big enough to shave in."

The vanity-glass vanished, and in its place there was a shaving mirror about a foot square. He then demanded pencil and paper in quick succession; got an unsharpened pencil and the Morning Post; sent them back; got a fountain pen with no ink in it and six reams of brown paper suitable for parcels; sent them back; flew into a passion in which he said by-our-lady quite often, and ended up with a carbon pencil and some cigarette papers which he said would have to do.

He put one of the papers in front of the glass and made five dots. "Now," he said, "I want you to join those five dots up to make a W, looking only in the glass."

The Wart took the pen and tried to do as he was bid.

"Well, it is not bad," said the magician doubtfully, "and in a way it does look a bit like an M."

Then he fell into a reverie, stroking his beard, breathing fire, and staring at the paper.

"About the breakfast?"

"Ah, yes. How did I know to set breakfast for two? That was why I showed you the looking-glass. Now ordinary people are born forwards in Time, if you understand what I mean, and nearly everything in the world goes forward too. This makes it quite easy for the ordinary people to live, just as it would be easy to join those five dots into a W if you were allowed to look at them forwards, instead of backwards and inside out. But I unfortunately was born at

the wrong end of time, and I have to live backwards from in front, while surrounded by a lot of people living forwards from behind. Some people call it having second sight."

He stopped talking and looked at the Wart in an anxious way.

"Have I told you this before?"

"No, we only met about half an hour ago."

"So little time to pass?" said Merlyn, and a big tear ran down to the end of his nose. He wiped it off with his pyjamas and added anxiously, "Am I going to tell it you again?"

I was going to break this into much smaller bits but this entire piece is just so well knitted...and fun. Then, we come to what I consider the saddest line in all of literature.

"So little time to pass?"

It takes a few readings or a few minutes of thought to "catch" the sadness. In probably 1999, I wrote this:

Rereading is the Key

I meet with Bishop Niederauer about once a month to review the various religious education matters that arise and fall through the year. The last time we met, we enjoyed a fabulous lunch at a local restaurant. I'm not the food critic, but anytime you can get chicken breasts swimming in a thick pesto sauce, I give it my 'thumbs up.'

After we finished with business, we began to discuss reading. I used to think I was well read until I began talking with the Bishop. When he pointed out the humor in a reference in 'Wuthering Heights,' I realized that the key was not being 'well read,' but rather 'well re-read.'

In this bleak novel, there is a moment where we find a book of collected sermons. One of the sermons is entitled 'The Four Hundred and Ninety-First Sin.' Well, you have to remember the old translation of Matthew 18, where Peter asks how many times we should forgive a brother who sins. Jesus answers: 'I say to you, not seven times but seven times seventy times (Mt. 18:22).' One could pass over the title of this sermon on the first reading without stopping to see the dash of humor. Of course, without a connection to the Gospel of Matthew, the reader may never catch the point.

In elementary school, I read 'The Sword in the Stone,' by T.H. White, for a book report. I enjoyed the transformations into animals, the little jousts, and the great ending. Years later, I picked the book up again. I brought it with me on a trip to Egypt and discovered myself reading it from cover to cover twice. I had a lot of time in buses, vans and broken down airplanes. The fourteenth time through, a short line leaped out to me.

It seems the wizard, Meryln, (White's spelling) lived backwards in time. He knew the future because it was his past and he learned about his future by reading history books. By the way, this is a fairy tale. I came to this short line: 'Have I told you this before?' Young Arthur replies: 'No, we only met about half an hour ago.' Merlyn, beginning to cry, says 'So little time to pass?'

It occurred to me, on this re-reading, that this may be the saddest line in White's five books of Arthur. Because Merlyn lives backwards in time, the first time he meets Arthur is the last. He knows he will never see his best friend again.

It took me multiple readings to see this point. Lots. I think there is a lesson here that is important: in order to fully appreciate the depth and breadth of the Gospel message, it takes more than one reading or one hearing. As we continue to move through the Gospel of Matthew in our Sunday readings, I am always amazed at the challenges to my way of thinking. How often have I acted like 'the Unforgiving Servant?' And how come all the workers in the vineyards got the same pay? I worked longer, so shouldn't I get more? We need to hear these stories more than once or twice.

I had a freshman student once tell me that he didn't need to take the Old Testament course because 'we studied this in the Sixth Grade.' I encouraged him to try to not get too bored with my review and had him re-read Genesis with the class. After three weeks working on the first few chapters, he sheepishly came up to my desk after school and said: 'We learned the whole Bible in three weeks, I thought I knew it all.' This is a good lesson to learn at fourteen: you don't know it all.

Let us learn from this young man. First, remember that we don't know it all. Second, begin the process of 're-reading.' Whether simply listening closer to the readings at Mass along with the Homily or by a conscientious effort to study the Gospels, open yourself to the process of re-reading. You will find the buried treasures and the fine pearls.

And, finally, as a side note: the last time I counted my brother, Philip, is up to four hundred and seventy-nine.

It's hard to read that last line after his tragic death.

Merlyn lives backwards in time, to the first time he sees Arthur is the last. And, perhaps the worst of all...a curse, if you will, he KNOWS it is the last time he will see the king.

Both my father-in-law, Ron, and my mother, Aileen, died on the same day, October 2nd, but years apart (Ron in 2016, mom in 1980). I knew in both cases because of cancer that the last time I saw them alive would be the last time I ever saw them alive.

I can only imagine, truly, Merlyn's feelings. I have thought often about immortality and I have always come away with the sense that I would so desperately miss my loved ones as they age, die and vanish that immortality would be a curse.

Worse is what Merlyn endures. He knows the future as it is his past and he gets confused ("muddled") with living in the wrong direction.

After years of companionship, the first time he meets Wart, it is the last time he will see him.

White has brought us a curse worthy of The Twilight Zone.

I need to catch my breath every time I think of this, rearrange myself and move forward. Let's look at just a bit more of this selection.

I'm not sure there has ever been a more loving tribute to sleep than this:

"The boy slept well in the woodland nest where he had laid himself down, in that kind of thin but refreshing sleep which people have when they begin to lie out of doors. At first he only dipped below the surface of sleep, and skimmed along like a salmon in shallow water, so close to the surface that he fancied himself in air. He thought himself awake when he was already asleep. He saw the stars above his face, whirling on their silent and sleepless axis, and the leaves of the trees rustling against them, and he heard small changes in the grass. These little noises of footsteps and soft-fringed wing-beats and stealthy bellies drawn over the grass blades or rattling against the bracken at first frightened or interested him, so that he moved to see what they were (but never saw), then soothed him, so that he no longer cared to see what they were but trusted them to be themselves, and finally left him altogether as he swam down deeper and deeper, nuzzling into the scented turf, into the warm ground, into the unending waters under the earth."

With marching mustard pots, a magical office, a talking owl and sorcerer's hats filled with mice dancing in my head, I leave this section simply appreciating White's ability to fill my imagination.

He stopped talking and looked at the Wart in an anxious way.

"Have I told you this before?"

"No, we only met about half an hour ago."

"So little time to pass?" said Merlyn, and a big tear ran down to the end of his nose. He wiped it off with his pyjamas and added anxiously, "Am I going to tell it you again?"

"I do not know," said the Wart, "unless you have not finished telling me yet."

"You see, one gets confused with Time, when it is like that. All one's tenses get muddled, for one thing. If you know what is going to happen to people, and not what has happened to them, it makes it difficult to prevent it happening, if you don't want it to have happened, if you see what I mean? Like drawing in a mirror."

The Wart did not quite see, but was just going to say that he was sorry for Merlyn if these things made him unhappy, when he felt a curious sensation at his ear. "Don't jump," said the old man, just as he was going to do so, and the Wart sat still. Archimedes, who had been standing forgotten on his shoulder all this time, was gently touching himself against him. His beak was right against the lobe of the ear, which its bristles made to tickle, and suddenly a soft hoarse voice whispered, "How d'you do," so that it sounded right inside his head.

"Oh, owl!" cried the Wart, forgetting about Merlyn's troubles instantly. "Look, he has decided to talk to me!"

The Wart gently leaned his head against the smooth feathers, and the tawny owl, taking the rim of his ear in its beak, quickly nibbled right round it with the smallest nibbles.

"I shall call him Archie!"

"I trust you will do nothing of the sort," exclaimed Merlyn instantly, in a stern and angry voice, and the owl withdrew to the farthest corner of his shoulder.

"Is it wrong?"

"You might as well call me Wol, or Olly," said the owl sourly, "and have done with it.

"Or Bubbles," it added in a bitter voice.

Merlyn took the Wart's hand and said kindly, "You are young, and do not understand these things. But you will learn that owls are the most courteous, single-hearted and faithful creatures living. You must never be familiar, rude or vulgar with them, or make them look ridiculous. Their mother is Athene, the goddess of wisdom, and, although they are often ready to play the buffoon to amuse you, such conduct is the prerogative of the truly wise. No owl can possibly be called Archie."

"I am sorry, owl," said the Wart.

"And I am sorry, boy," said the owl. "I can see that you spoke in ignorance, and I bitterly regret that I should have been so petty as to take offence where none was intended."

The owl really did regret it, and looked so remorseful that Merlyn had to put on a cheerful manner and change the conversation.

(Note from Dan: this is why I love this story so much. The characters truly care about each other and the small “rubs” of life are noted, dismissed and forgiven. What a better world we would be if we all agreed to follow the example of this owl.)

"Well," said he, "now that we have finished breakfast, I think it is high time that we should all three find our way back to Sir Ector.

"Excuse me a moment," he added as an afterthought, and, turning round to the breakfast things, he pointed a knobby finger at them and said in a stern voice, "Wash up."

At this all the china and cutlery scrambled down off the table, the cloth emptied the crumbs out of the window, and the napkins folded themselves up. All ran off down the ladder, to where Merlyn had left the bucket, and there was such a noise and yelling as if a lot of children had been let out of school. Merlyn went to the door and shouted, "Mind, nobody is to get broken." But his voice was entirely drowned in shrill squeals, splashes, and cries of "My, it is cold," "I shan't stay in long," "Look out, you'll break me," or "Come on, let's duck the teapot."

"Are you really coming all the way home with me?" asked the Wart, who could hardly believe the good news.

"Why not? How else can I be your tutor?"

At this the Wart's eyes grew rounder and rounder, until they were about as big as the owl's who was sitting on his shoulder, and his face got redder and redder, and a breath seemed to gather itself beneath his heart.

"My!" exclaimed the Wart, while his eyes sparkled with excitement at the discovery. "I must have been on a Quest!"

"Quest for a Tutor."

White has been playing name games with us since Sir Ector and Sir Grummore Grummursum discussed hiring a tutor back in the castle before the day of hay-making:

"The only other way," said Sir Grummore, "is to start a quest." "You mean a quest for a tutor," explained Sir Ector."

Wart has succeeded in this/"his" quest. "Utor" as we discussed earlier means "to employ" and Grummore was playing with that word back in front of the fire ("Pass the port!"). Grummore problems with Latin were "attributed to this weakness the fact that he could never get beyond the Future Simple of Utor." Merlyn finds employment as a tutor and now we shall return safely to the castle.

We have seen quest and quarry intertwined (literally, if you recall the leash and the trees) with King Pellinore, his beast and the journey of Arthur into the deep and dangerous woods. At their roots, quest and quarry are all about pursuit.

My career is “partially funded” by helping people achieve their goals. And, honestly, goals are lovely, wonderful and helpful. But as Cervantes reminded us in his non-Don Quixote work: “The road is better than the inn.”

And, I love quoting that. I do it constantly. But, it is cliché. Let’s unpack this insight using the Arthurian legends.

Your goal, and the journey towards your goal, is your Quest. “This is my Quest, to follow that star, no matter how hopeless, no matter how far” is a lovely line from “The Man of La Mancha.” Yet, there is a problem with attaining goals:

You might get them! And, then realize that ..., as I quote in my workshops:

“When you get to the top of the ladder you may find it is propped against the wrong wall.”
(Attributed to Allen Raine)

And this is true. John T Reed’s book, *Succeeding*, does an admirable job discussing achieving a goal versus succeeding. Often, people set goals like a child hoping for a substantial visit from Santa Claus.

But the Arthurian legends lend us a very subtle insight into the journey, the Quest:

Often what you seek on your Quest has always been “right there.”

I can’t think of a better way to explain this than the Quest for the Holy Grail.

I don’t want to go into too much depth here, but in my “other life,” I often lecture on the Holy Grail, the Eucharist, the Shroud of Turin and other related “Arthurian” topics.

The quest for the Holy Grail has as many “cycles;” basically the same story with different characters and different endings. Arthur’s death or “not death” was my first conference presentation (“Arturus Rex Superstar”) as I discovered 27 separate endings for the story. So, you may have heard the story before, but not THIS story.

To begin: there was a movie in 1991 which made me hate the Oscars forever.

How Robin Williams didn’t receive Best Actor for his portrayal of Parry in *The Fisher King* still stuns me. In this film, number one on My Top Ten List of Movies, William’s character is “not all

there." As you watch the film, there will be a moment that explains why perfectly...and makes it difficult to ever watch again.

Parry is short for Sir Parsifal (Parzifal, Percifal ...they all mean "Innocent Fool"). In the stories of Parsifal, he is often fatherless and brotherless as they have been killed doing "knightly" things. Mom raises him, Parsifal, away from everything knightly, but he can't escape destiny.

He sees knights on horseback and decides to follow them...right into the Round Table. When he first becomes a knight, usually portrayed as a fortunate win over the Red Knight, he is told by the other knights to go on a quest to discover what it means to be a knight.

In what may be the key scene of the movie, Parry tells Jack, and the linkage between Jack and Parry defines "destiny," this version of the story making my point:

Parry: Jack--I may be going out on a limb here but you don't seem like a happy camper. [pause] Did you ever hear the story of the Fisher King?

Jack: No.

Parry: It begins with the King as a boy--having to spend a night alone in the forest to prove his courage so that he could become king. While he was alone, he's visited by a sacred vision. Out of the fire appears the Holy Grail, the symbol of God's divine grace. And a voice spoke to the boy, "You shall be the keeper of the Grail, that it may heal the hearts of men." But the boy was blinded by greater visions, of a life filled with power and glory and beauty...And in this state of radical amazement, he felt for a brief moment not like a boy, but invincible...like God. And so he reached into the fire to take the Grail. And the Grail vanished. Leaving him with his hand in the fire, to be terribly wounded.

Now, as this boy grew older, his wound grew deeper, until one day, life for him lost its reason. He had no faith in any man, not even himself. He couldn't love or feel love. He was sick with experience. He began to die.

One day, a fool wandered into the castle and found the king alone. Being a fool, he was simple-minded, he didn't see a king, he saw a man alone and in pain. And he asked the king, "What ails you, friend?" The king replied, "I'm thirsty. I need a some water to cool my throat." So the fool took a cup from beside the bed, filled it with water, handed it to the king. As the king began to drink he realized that his wound was healed. He looked at his hands, and there was the Holy Grail that which he sought all his life! And he turned to the fool and said in amazement, "How could you find that which what my brightest and bravest could not?" And the fool replied, "I don't know. I only knew that you were thirsty." Very beautiful, isn't it? I think I heard it that a lecture once...I don't know...a professor...at Hunter.

End quote

(For reference, "Parry," before he watched his wife murdered in front of him, was a literature professor at Hunter College.)

Many of us would recognize "I thirst" from the Gospel of John 19:28. This is what Jesus says from the cross (and it ties in to the Wedding Feast at Cana) and a common response would be to get Him some water. I could go on for literally hours on all aspects of this story and implications for Christian celebration, but there is a point I need to make from this story from Parry:

Often, what you desire is "right there."

In this story, a fool, simply wanted to help someone alone and in pain, gave a thirsty man something to drink.

Giving drink to the thirsty...hmmm. Years ago, one of my college students complained when I used the following verse from the Gospel of Matthew (25: 31-46) as it portrayed the "wrong" view of Christianity. I struggled with her complaints...she reiterated them in the course evaluation...but, I often think/thought that Jesus of Nazareth would know SOMETHING about Christianity.

Giving drink to the thirsty seems like a very important thing to the members of the Christian community:

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, ***I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,***" (Full text at the bottom).

The king who is helped by Sir Parsifal is often referred to as "the Fisher King." In another cycle, he burns his hand reaching into a fire to pull a piece of flesh from an enchanted "roasting" salmon that he caught fishing. It's always the same basic theme: we reach too soon into the fire and we get burned.

It's true with so many things in adulthood; the Arthurian legends are often prudish about sex, but in my experience as a teacher (since 1979), my students' early forays into sexuality rarely prove to be a good idea in the long-term. It's also true in booze, drugs, fast driving and so many other things Mom warned you about in life.

Yep: listen to mom. She's probably right. My mom once told me: "If it doesn't happen by 10 p.m., it probably ain't going to happen." I still hope she meant something else that what I think she meant.

So, yes, the Fisher King is about growing up, too, but let's get back to my point: those things we strive for are all too often "right there."

The Great Philosopher, Yoda, tried to teach this, too:

Luke Skywalker: Yoda? I am ready! I— Ben, I can be a Jedi! Ben tell him I'm rea— [bangs his head on the low ceiling] Ow!

Yoda: Ready are you? What know you of ready? For 800 years have I trained Jedi. My own counsel will I keep on who is to be trained! A Jedi must have the deepest commitment, the most serious mind. This one, a long time have I watched. All his life has he looked away to the future, the horizon. Never his mind on where he was. Hmm? What he was doing. Adventure. Heh! Excitement. A Jedi craves not these things. You are reckless!

"This one, a long time have I watched. All his life has he looked away to the future, the horizon. Never his mind on where he was."

Sadly, when I admit it, I couldn't wait for my daughters to fall asleep, learn to take care of the basics of life, drive themselves around, and show some independence. Yet, it is a rare day now I wish I could have one more hour of those blonde mop heads wrangling me around the living room as a horse, dinosaur or construction vehicle.

So often in life, happiness, beauty, love and joy are "right there" and we can't see them. The Fisher King needed merely to ask for water to ease his thirst to find the Holy Grail.

Where is the Holy Grail? It's right there waiting for you to pick it up and give drink to the thirsty.

"My!" exclaimed the Wart, while his eyes sparkled with excitement at the discovery. "I must have been on a Quest!"

Wart must have been very close to Merlyn's cottage when he fell asleep. It was literally "right there."

Merlyn's home makes for a great visual. The Disney movie, *The Sword in the Stone*, is often panned, but, in its defense, a movie coming out about King Arthur right after the assassination of President John Kennedy, and his court of Camelot, probably isn't going to do well. The best part of the film is the scenery: the cottage is perfect and the castle, especially Merlyn's "keep," is what I still see in my mind's eye when I read the book.

The Watchmen, the great graphic novel and good movie (in the Director's cut), nods to our feathered friend, Archimedes, naming the airship "Archie." When you watch, or better READ!, the graphic novel, the characters live in time a bit like Merlyn so it's nice to have our friend Archimedes there to keep us straight on events. The rough beginning between Wart and Archimedes has a wonderful resolution and models proper behavior for all of us.

" You are young, and do not understand these things. But you will learn that owls are the most courteous, single-hearted and faithful creatures living. You must never be familiar, rude or vulgar with them, or make them look ridiculous. Their mother is Athene, the goddess of wisdom, and, although they are often ready to play the buffoon to amuse you, such conduct is the prerogative of the truly wise. No owl can possibly be called Archie."

It's okay to call an airship "Archie," but not an owl. Now, in the version I will share with you, we meet Athene in what I consider the most beautiful stories in the whole tome: the story of the Trees and the story of the Stone.

I first read the "Trees" in 1984. I was studying Intensive Turkish, the History of Yemen and a couple of other topics at Portland State University. It was NOT a good time in my life and this isn't the time or place to share those stories. I found a cheap bookstore near campus and found a version of The Sword in the Stone that had these chapters. Oddly, the story of the trees...considering I had never seen it...stopped me in my tracks.

I kept that version with me as I traveled the Middle East the next summer. As I battled a liver parasite, I found myself deeply reading this book again and again as I suffered alone.

It seems, oddly, as I reflect upon my own Dark Night of the Soul that this wonderful book had always been...and always will be..." right there."

Matthew 25: 31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, ***I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink***, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?

When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, ***I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink***, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’” “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’” “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

The Wart started talking before he was half-way over the drawbridge. "Look who I have brought," he said. "Look! I have been on a Quest! I was shot at with three arrows. They had black and yellow stripes. The owl is called Archimedes. I saw King Pellinore. This is my tutor, Merlyn. I went on a Quest for him. He was after the Questing Beast. I mean King Pellinore. It was terrible in the forest. Merlyn made the plates wash up. Hallo, Hob. Look, we have got Cully."

Hob just looked at the Wart, but so proudly that the Wart went quite red. It was such a pleasure to be back home again with all his friends, and everything achieved.

Hob said gruffly, "Ah, master, us shall make an austringer of 'ee yet."

He came for Cully, as if he could not keep his hands off him longer, but he patted the Wart too, fondling them both because he was not sure which he was gladder to see back. He took Cully on his own fist, reassuring him like a lame man putting on his accustomed wooden leg, after it had been lost.

"Merlyn caught him," said the Wart. "He sent Archimedes to look for him on the way home. Then Archimedes told us that he had been and killed a pigeon and was eating it. We went and frightened him off. After that, Merlyn stuck six of the tail feathers round the pigeon in a circle, and made a loop in a long piece of string to go round the feathers. He tied one end to a stick in the ground, and we went away behind a bush with the other end. He said he would not use magic. He said you could not use magic in Great Arts, just as it would be unfair to make a great statue by magic. You have to cut it out with a chisel, you see. Then Cully came down to finish the pigeon, and we pulled the string, and the loop slipped over the feathers and caught him round the legs. He was angry! But we gave him the pigeon."

Hob made a duty to Merlyn, who returned it courteously. They looked upon one another with grave affection, knowing each other to be masters of the same trade. When they could be alone together they would talk about falconry, although Hob was naturally a silent man. Meanwhile they must wait their time.

"Oh, Kay," cried the Wart, as the latter appeared with their nurse and other delighted welcomers. "Look, I have got a magician for our tutor. He has a mustard-pot that walks."

"I am glad you are back," said Kay.

"Alas, where did you sleep, Master Art?" exclaimed the nurse. "Look at your clean jerkin all muddied and torn. Such a turn as you gave us, I really don't know. But look at your poor hair with all them twigs in it. Oh, my own random, wicked little lamb."

Sir Ector came bustling out with his greaves on back to front, and kissed the Wart on both cheeks. "Well, well, well," he exclaimed moistly. "Here we are again, hey? What the devil have we been doin', hey? Settin' the whole household upside down."

But inside himself he was proud of the Wart for staying out after a hawk, and prouder still to see that he had got it, for all the while Hob held the bird in the air for everybody to see.

"Oh, sir," said the Wart, "I have been on that quest you said for a tutor, and I have found him. Please, he is this gentleman here, and he is called Merlyn. He has got some badgers and hedgehogs and mice and ants and things on this white donkey here, because we could not leave them behind to starve. He is a great magician, and can make things come out of the air."

There are many happy, hopeful moments in *The Sword in the Stone*. If you had to pick the happiest, one might pick the sword being pulled from the stone. Yet, Wart's reaction was to run the sword over to (now) Sir Kay. When he discovers the true meaning of this task, Wart is brought to tears.

So, I pick this scene as the happiest as Wart is happy.

This moment of homecoming underlines an insight I have had my whole life: I wrote about it years ago when my daughter, Kelly, began Third Grade. She is a mother now, as well as a teacher and an administrator, yet, all too often, I still see her in her little uniform and sweater bouncing off to school.

Everything I need to know I learned in the Third Grade

This year, my daughter Kelly starts the third grade. In some ways, my whole adult life is compressed into the third grade. It marks the year I learned about 'the Birds and the Bees' and Santa Claus, won my first trophy, and my brother came home from Vietnam. Perhaps all I need to know I learned in kindergarten, but I learned about life, and death, in the third grade.

Playing 'Trivial Pursuit' a few years ago, we came across the question of the shortest verse in the Bible. After one plays the game a few times, some questions are easier to pack into one's

'junk drawer' memory: largest office building: Pentagon; shortest verse in the Bible: 'Jesus Wept.' It occurred to me during one game to look up this 'shortest verse' and read it for myself.

In chapter eleven of the Gospel of John, we find the story of 'The Raising of Lazarus.' It is a challenging chapter. After 'snorting in the spirit,' often translated as 'becoming perturbed,' Jesus asks where Lazarus has been laid. And then, Jesus wept.

When my brother received his traveling orders to Vietnam, nobody in my family had heard of the place. We consulted our little Atlas, the kind that came with the encyclopedia set that one would buy each week at the grocery store at the end of the aisle, and looked for the location. We found nothing, as I recall, our Atlas had an area called 'French Indo-China.'

So, my family's adventures with Vietnam began. The nightly news, which still lasted for one hour in the early Sixties, slowly began to report the battles and body counts. Life magazine added to the images with black and white photos illustrating events we could read in Ray's letters home.

My mother's emotions would only show while she ironed. I never understood why, but perhaps ironing took her back to World War II. First, my husband, now my son. Soon, it would be sons. It is the waiting that breaks one's heart; we were warned about the sudden appearance of Marines in dress blues at the front door: no news is good news. The weeks turned to months; I passed from the second grade to the third grade, my class wrote to Ray during Christmas, the images of the war soon dominated the newspapers, the nightly news, and neighborhood gossip. We waited.

I sat in the far right row of Sister Eugenie's classroom, last seat. I struggled, as I still do, with math. I kept focusing and reviewing the columns. The classroom door opened and I ignored it. My brother Ray walked in. I looked up, leaped up and rushed into his arms. I have held the hand of a newborn baby and the hand of a dying man, but I have never felt the pure joy of seeing my brother return, so unexpectedly.

In a sense, every soldier, sailor and marine rises with Lazarus. After months of fearing to speak the unspeakable, the homecoming marks a foretaste of the final family reunion, the life of the resurrection. When I returned to California for the funeral of my mother, then later for my father, I toured my school. The memory of Ray's return filled me with hope. During the Mass of the Resurrection for my parents, I was reminded that when I join 'with all the Angels and the Saints,' mom and dad will be there, too. And, soon enough, my brothers and my sister. And one day, my daughters will bury me.

It is not a pessimistic view of the world, rather, it is a hope-filled view. It is in contrast to the statement of the famous sage, Anonymous: 'everybody wants to go to heaven, but no one wants to die to get there.' Rather, it is 'in dying that we are born to eternal life.'

It is the lesson of life. And I have been thinking about it all summer, because, this year, my daughter Kelly starts the third grade.

Wart has succeeded in his quest and he returns a hero. His homecoming and explanation makes for a nice review and hints towards not only further adventures but deepening friendships.

I have noted before that J. K. Rowling used White's work as a foundation and we can also see the successful quest seeker in the stories of Harry Potter:

"While Voldemort initiates the quests in the first five books, it is Harry who succeeds in finding the Stone in Book 1, who is able to find and open the Chamber of Secrets in Book 2, who finds Sirius in Book 3, who reaches the Triwizard Cup first in Book 4 and who denies Voldemort the ability to hear the prophecy in its entirety in Book 5. While Harry has help along the way, in the end he succeeds by relying on his own inner strength and convictions."

This interesting connection, written by Phyllis Morris in a short piece, *Elements of the Arthurian Tradition in Harry Potter*, gives us a moment to link (W)Arthur and Harry and the other great orphans of literature. And, by the way, those of us familiar with the heroic journey should NOT be surprised that Harry's position in Quidditch is "Seeker."

The traditional hero, as I noted earlier, tends (well, almost universally) to have the question of parenthood:

Moses
Jesus of Nazareth
Superman
Spiderman
Tarzan
Beowulf
Theseus
King Arthur
Luke Skywalker
Batman
Harry Potter

With Harry and Batman, we find orphans who are driven by demons, both inner and real, to duel evil. In the other stories, we find a mix of issues with dealing with the question of fatherhood. As I noted, Arthur's REAL issues will come from not knowing his mother. And, yes, it gets weird.

The issue of the hero is this: Am I this or that? With Moses, born Hebrew but raised as an Egyptian "prince" with his own mother as his wet nurse, the question will always be, and it is true for all of us, "who am I?" Jesus famously asked Peter: "Who do you say I am?" The question of God and/or Man was an essential early Christian question.

Superman's weakness is a piece of the planet that bore him and he is never truly human. He has two fathers, Pa Kent and Jor-El, by the way, as many heroes have none.

Spiderman fails to stop a man who ends up killing his uncle...who raised him. Tarzan, Lord Greystoke, is raised by primates, Beowulf is raised by his uncle and Theseus's father is either the King or Poseidon (God of the Sea), depending on the story. Luke Skywalker famously discovers his father just after dad slices his arm off.

The hero is the Seeker. The hero is the one that goes deep underground to face evil on evil's home turf and returns triumphant.

I have always loved Wart's return from the deep, dark, dangerous forest.

"Look!"

- Look who I have brought.
- Look! I have been on a Quest!
- I was shot at with three arrows.
- The owl is called Archimedes.
- I saw King Pellinore.
- This is my tutor, Merlyn.
- Merlyn made the plates wash up.
- Hob. Look, we have got Cully.

I can feel the excitement in his voice. I can hear the skip in his step. The moments of admiration between Hob, Merlyn and Wart and the capture of Cully is simply a delight. And, for your illumination:

Falconers fly falcons, but austringers fly hawks. (Goshawks)

We soon will meet more members of Merlyn's traveling zoo and these will be the most unforgettable parts of our story. For whatever reason, as I was working on this particular section, I remembered...from long, long ago...a quote from Anne Frank. I can't think of a better way to prepare ourselves for the lessons of Merlyn's teachings:

I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness; I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too. I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too shall end, that peace and tranquility will return once more.

"Ah, a magician," said Sir Ector, putting on his glasses and looking closely at Merlyn. "White magic, I hope?"

"Assuredly," said Merlyn, who stood patiently among the throng with his arms folded in his necromantic gown, while Archimedes sat very stiff and elongated on the top of his head.

"Ought to have some testimonials," said Sir Ector doubtfully. "It's usual."

"Testimonials," said Merlyn, holding out his hand.

Instantly there were some heavy tablets in it, signed by Aristotle, a parchment signed by Hecate, and some typewritten duplicates signed by the Master of Trinity, who could not remember having met him. All these gave Merlyn an excellent character.

"He had 'em up his sleeve," said Sir Ector wisely. "Can you do anything else?"

"Tree," said Merlyn. At once there was an enormous mulberry growing in the middle of the courtyard, with its luscious blue fruits ready to patter down. This was all the more remarkable, since mulberries only became popular in the days of Cromwell.

"They do it with mirrors," said Sir Ector.

"Snow," said Merlyn. "And an umbrella," he added hastily.

Before they could turn round, the copper sky of summer had assumed a cold and lowering bronze, while the biggest white flakes that ever were seen were floating about them and settling on the battlements. An inch of snow had fallen before they could speak, and all were trembling with the wintry blast. Sir Ector's nose was blue, and had an icicle hanging from the end of it, while all except Merlyn had a ledge of snow upon their shoulders. Merlyn stood in the middle, holding his umbrella high because of the owl.

"It's done by hypnotism," said Sir Ector, with chattering teeth. "Like those wallahs from the Indies.

"But that'll do," he added hastily, "that'll do very well. I'm sure you'll make an excellent tutor for teachin' these boys."

The snow stopped immediately and the sun came out—"Enough to give a body a pewmonia," said the nurse, "or to frighten the elastic commissioners"—while Merlyn folded up his umbrella and handed it back to the air, which received it.

"Imagine the boy doin' a quest like that by himself," exclaimed Sir Ector. "Well, well, well! Wonders never cease."

"I do not think much of it as a quest," said Kay. "He only went after the hawk, after all."

"And got the hawk, Master Kay," said Hob reprovingly.

"Oh, well," said Kay, "I bet the old man caught it for him."

"Kay," said Merlyn, suddenly terrible, "thou wast ever a proud and ill-tongued speaker, and a misfortunate one. Thy sorrow will come from thine own mouth."

At this everybody felt uncomfortable, and Kay, instead of flying into his usual passion, hung his head. He was not at all an unpleasant person really, but clever, quick, proud, passionate and ambitious. He was one of those people who would be neither a follower nor a leader, but only an aspiring heart, impatient in the failing body which imprisoned it. Merlyn repented of his rudeness at once. He made a little silver hunting-knife come out of the air, which he gave him to put things right. The knob of the handle was made of the skull of a stoat, oiled and polished like ivory, and Kay loved it.

Like all homecomings, part of the issue in this short chapter is "coming home." I know, obvious. Every fall, American High Schools and Universities put aside a weekend to welcome all the alumni. There is a football game, a dance, tours of the campus and, usually, a fair amount of drinking. I've been to my "fair share" of these events and I always get the feeling that "Yes, I am part of this but, No, I am not part of this." It's a classic moment of appreciating my favorite quote from Oscar Wilde:

"The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function."

(W)Arthur is about to discover, as so many of have discovered, that coming home from the quest (or any adventure or journey) isn't the same as leaving on this quest. The world doesn't change when we travel: we change.

My writing mentor, Jack Schroeder, had me read the classic book by Thomas Wolfe, "You Can't Go Home Again."

Wolfe was a rare talent and probably the bulk of his writings were published posthumously. In "You Can't Go Home Again," a phrase not unlike "You can't step in the same river twice," Wolfe's protagonist, George Webber, writes a novel about his hometown. Of course, the readers from his hometown take offense to the caricatures and send him letters...as well as death threats. He then travels to New York City, France and Germany (under Hitler's thumb) before returning and rediscovering himself in his native country.

Wart "can't go home again."

As we read this selection from *The Sword in the Stone*, (W)Arthur is present but only referenced. He is "seen but not heard." For those of us from large families, we may recognize the feelings Wart must be going through: fully present in the setting, but only talked about...not talked to. If you are the youngest in a large family...or the only male or female...you probably understand this scene far too well.

Wart has come home after a successful quest. He finds himself in a crowd of people who tug him in several directions:

- Merlyn, obviously, is prepared to mentor the future King/Emperor.
- Ector and Hobs appreciate that Wart has passed the first test of manhood.
- Finally, Kay wants everyone to go back to the past pecking order and keep things as they were just hours before the homecoming.

You can't go home again.

I can remember flying into SFO (San Francisco International Airport...located in Millbrae) and feeling "home" in my heart. Over time, I didn't have that feeling any more: Mom and Dad were buried in Colma, my family has moved away, the neighborhood barely has people who remember me or my family and no one in any of my schools would even remember the family name. When Tiffini and I moved back to Burlingame for our "Two Year Date," I tried over and over to reconnect with friends and classmates.

Often, it went well. People reintroduced themselves and we shared long stories of successes and failures. And, about as often, people tried to put me back into the box that I lived in decades ago.

I doubt there is a reader who doesn't understand this at some level.

"Home is where the heart is" is a great cliché, and "home" has a funny way of changing addresses as we move through life.

In the space of a few hours, Wart's home has changed radically. The rooms, the walls and most of the people are the same, but HE has changed. Both the quest and the quarry (Merlyn) insure that Wart's worldview will never be the same. I will discuss Hecate again, but she is usually considered the Goddess of Crossroads and Wart certainly finds himself at one of life's crossroads in this moment.

From this time forward in the book, every attempt by Kay to demean and diminish Wart will lead to an even greater opportunity for Wart to shine forth. Wart's homecoming, like all heroes, changes the rules for everyone.

White's humor shines through in Ector and Merlyn's interchange. The Disney movie did a nice job with this scene (the story is changed quite a bit and Kay is larger, ruder and more lumbering than what I read in the book) as it does seem to lead to animation. This particular section has always made me laugh:

"Ought to have some testimonials," said Sir Ector doubtfully. "It's usual."

"Testimonials," said Merlyn, holding out his hand.

Instantly there were some heavy tablets in it, signed by Aristotle, a parchment signed by Hecate, and some typewritten duplicates signed by the Master of Trinity, who could not remember having met him. All these gave Merlyn an excellent character.

“(T)ypewritten duplicates signed by the Master of Trinity, who could not remember having met him” became funnier and funnier to me as I wrote more and more Letters of Recommendation through the years. I have written extraordinary letters for my current doctor, lawyer, and most of my kid’s teachers. And, yet, I also have had to write:

“Of all the students, I have ever had, X is one of them. I can’t recall any moments of greatness or insight from X, but s/he did a fine job occupying a chair for much of the time, and fulfilled the minimal expectations...or lower...expected of him/her.”

Feel free to use and edit this as you wish. The BEST letter I ever wrote was for my attorney, Paul Burke. I simply noted this:

“If lives depended upon something being done, I would rush past most of the faculty members I know and hand the keys or information or whatever to Paul as I know he would not only insure the task was fulfilled but fulfilled in its entirety.”

On his college visit, the Dean leaned forward, smiled and pointed to my letter: “Explain this.” And, of course, he did.

The Master of Trinity during this period when White wrote this book, J. J. Thomson, discovered the electron and others members of Trinity include Isaac Newton with his theory of gravity (which I refuse to believe as it is only a theory!) and Ludwig Wittgenstein who changed my approach to education. I wrote about Wittgenstein’s famous “Family Resemblance Theory” in a series of articles trying to explain: “Why do bad things happen to good people:”

Why bad things happen to good people (Part one)

I visited San Francisco a few weeks ago. I spent some time with my brother Gary. He has jet black hair, dark eyes, about my height, but weighs 70 pounds less. In fact, if you saw the two of us together, you would not think we were related. For those readers who don't know, I'm blonde, blue eyed and built a bit thick.

But, it is funny. Gary looks like my sister, Corinne, so much so that people often thought they were twins. And Corinne looks like my brother Ray. Hang on, there are six of us. Ray and my oldest brother, Richard, look like they came out of the same stamp. My brother Rich could pass for my brother Phil's dad. And, although I may hate to admit it, I look like Phil. So, if you see Gary, who looks like Cor, who looks like Ray, who looks like Rich, who looks like Phil, you may not think he looks like me. When you see all six of us together, you will see how much Gary and I

look alike. But, you see, you have to see all six of us together. You have to look at the whole picture.

It is amazing how often when I travel to give a talk, I discover afterwards that a major brouhaha has been boiling around the place the past week. I get hints of it during the questions from the audience. One group recently kept hammering about God and justice, or truly, God and fairness. It turns out that things had really turned down for one of the participants, a good person from all accounts, and, well, it just did not seem right. Why do bad things happen to good people?

Hey, I don't know. I can give a string of answers, "Suffering, a consequence of original sin, . . . becomes a participation in the saving work of Jesus (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1521)," or "Faith gives us the certainty that God would not permit an evil if he did not cause a good to come from that very evil, by ways that we shall fully know only in eternal life (CCC 324)," but it sure does not seem to provide comfort for the person asking the question. Nor do these answers help the junior high level catechist who tried to use these examples to explain "why do bad things . . ."

I turned to the Book of Job to help fortify for my next talk. I found great wisdom in two lines. When God speaks to Job "out of the storm," His first words are "Who is this that obscures divine plans with words of ignorance? (Job 38:2)" Who is this? Maybe part of the reason I can't answer the question perfectly is "who is this?" Forgive my "words of ignorance," it's the best I can do today. The other line worth thinking about occurs at the beginning of the story: "We accept good things from God; and should we not accept Evil? (Job 2:10)"

How often do I thank God for the good days, the easy commutes, and the wonderful tastes of life? Do I just remember God when "bad things happen?" Perhaps, we need to remind ourselves to celebrate and be thankful much more often. We need to stand back and look at the "big picture" of life.

If you stand back and look at the big picture, you will see the connections. How some "bad things" turn out to be "good" and some good, bad. And even then, you still won't have enough perspective, you will still "fully know only in eternal life."

I have a family portrait in my hallway. I am surprised how much I look like Gary.

I'm happy that Merlyn also has letters from Aristotle and Hecate. I used to make my students memorize "SPA:"

Socrates

Plato

Aristotle (The historical genealogy of these three philosophers.)

Plato's Academy was famous for the line: "mèdeis ageômetrêtos eisitô mou tèn stegèn." "Let no one ignorant of geometry under my roof."

Aristotle expanded Plato's work to take philosophy into the realm of geometric proofs. Later, Aquinas would use Aristotle's methods to understand theology. I often note that Pythagoras, of A squared plus B squared equals C squared fame, was also the father-in-law of Milo. Milo, of course, invented progressive resistance exercise by picking up a bull every day and carrying him around.

Lifting and geometry go hand in hand. Geometry and solid thinking also are always paired together.

Hecate has been transformed recently by Wiccans and others into a much more modern deity, but she is the Goddess of Magic...and, as I noted, crossroads.

Merlyn will train young Arthur in the classic Greek tradition (ideally based on gymnastics and music), including the use of magic, as well as early Twentieth Century educational methods. It's going to be fun to watch and follow.

I have argued for years that The Sword in the Stone is a love story to education and learning. Here is an odd thing: I just noticed that I often separate "education and learning." Ideally, we walk hand in hand with both through life, but it doesn't always happen.

"Thy sorrow will come from thine own mouth."

Yes, we all set traps with our "traps," our mouths. As my Mom used to say so eloquently, "Shut your trap." True wisdom drips from this phrase.

Rarely in my life have I caused as much harm with my body as I have with my mouth. Kay serves as a great example for all of us. As the late Brian Oldfield taught me: "Everybody serves a purpose...some as just bad examples."

Often, I get this question at workshops: "If you could only do one exercise, what would it be?" I hate the question. I can't even imagine any scenario where this would truly happen. It makes no sense to me.

If you could only have one season what would it be?

Football season!

If you could only have one beverage what would it be?

Coffee and wine!

If you could only have one thing on a deserted island, what would it be?

Unlimited supply of food and water, lots of people, and a full bar and entertainment options!

I'm not good at this.

BUT!

Chapter Five would be the chapter of *The Sword in the Stone* I would tell a publisher to print "just this one." This chapter breaks into five parts and each part is well developed and very detailed:

- A general overview of the castle and grounds
- An introduction to Dog Boy and the kennels
- Merlyn and Wart beginning his "edification" by becoming fish
- Wart learns to swim like a fish and Merlyn doctors an ill fish
- Wart learns about power from a pike (predator fish)

It's a full chapter, to say the least. It is also the first chapter that provides a sneak peek for the actual pulling of the sword from the stone.

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.

Wart will be transformed into various animals throughout the book and each will revisit him to help him pull the sword from the stone. Some of the advice will be these quotes:

- Power springs from the nape of the neck.
- Use those forearms held together by the chest.
- Find your tool.
- Never Let Go.
- Keep up a steady effort.
- Fold your powers together, with the spirit of your mind.

I have argued that those six quotes inspired my lifting and coaching career:

1. Olympic lifting and Kettlebell Ballistics
2. Anaconda Training
3. "Killer App" (See "Can You Go?")
4. "Never Let Go" is my signature line and title of my first bestseller
5. "Little and Often over the Long Haul"
6. Mental Training in all its forms

In Chapter Five, we will learn to swim like a fish by focusing the power in the nape of the neck!

T. H. White's sense of humor shines through here throughout the chapter. This little interchange made me laugh out loud in 1970 and I still think it is funny:

(Merlyn states): "After all, Rome was not built in a day."

Then he patted all the little roaches once more, told them to grow up into brave little fish, and swam off with an air of importance into the gloom. As he swam, he puffed his mouth in and out.

"What did you mean by that about Rome?" asked the Wart, when they were out of earshot.

"Heaven knows."

I've used clichés with athletes in the past and, with a sudden insight...and regret, realize they have no idea what I mean. I once had a coach answer a question I had with: "You can't have your cake and eat it too." He walked away. I turned to Eric Seubert and asked him "What does that mean?"

Heaven knows!

White includes this little image, too, that always brought me a smile:

The Wart's own special one(dog) was called Cavall, and he happened to be licking Cavall's nose—not the other way about—when Merlyn came in and found him.

"That will come to be regarded as an insanitary habit," said Merlyn, "though I cannot see it myself. After all, God made the creature's nose just as well as he made your tongue.

"If not better," added the philosopher pensively.

I'm looking forward to breaking down the sections of Chapter Five. But, first I have to lick my dog's nose.

Even though I still teach Religious Studies at the college level, as well as Strength and Conditioning, I often miss teaching those broad brushstrokes of history, civilization, and literature from the "social studies" curriculum. Rarely can an instructor circle an event and say "this" in these courses without going back to, well, "In the beginning." There are moments in every one of these fields where you realize the size of this field of study:

Literally, they are "big."

I explain epics this way to my students: "They are big." These are big stories that try to explain the issues that plague the human condition in one form or another:

Life

Death

Love

Chance
Revenge
Afterlife
Humanity

And, truly, “explain” is not the right word. Very often the characters in our stories make good and bad decisions, celebrate for the wrong reasons and “choose poorly,” as the knight in Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade showed us.

The Sword in the Stone is the first of four original books (much later The Book of Merlyn was released) that make up The Once and Future King. We find all of the elements that make this story “big,” an epic. This collection of books, like The Godfather or Dune, might be the modern epics. Without a doubt, Star Wars (the movie), Tolkien’s The Hobbit and the Lord of the Rings books and J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series would fit on this same set of shelves in the Epic Corner of the library.

These books paint pictures. My issue with the Harry Potter movies is that they ignored the small stories that bound the bigger narrative together. I realize the modern audience has a twenty-second attention span, but the joy of reading an epic is the rereading...the realization that there were so many more layers to the story.

The Epic of Gilgamesh begins by describing the walls of the city of Uruk. And inside the walls is a box. And inside the box are tablets. These tablets are the Epic of Gilgamesh:

“Look at its wall gleaming like copper
Look at its inner wall, there is no equal!
Hold the threshold stone--it is ancient!
Go to the Eanna Temple, the home of Ishtar,
No king, no man, will ever equal!
Climb the wall of Uruk and walk around,
examine its foundation, inspect its bricks.
The foundation of kiln-fired brick,
and the Seven Sages laid out the plans!
One league city, one league palm gardens, one league lowlands, the atrium of the Ishtar
Temple,
three leagues and the atrium of Uruk the walls enclose
Find the copper box,
open the lock of bronze,
undo the latch of the secret opening.
Take and read the lapis lazuli tablet
about how Gilgamesh survived every hardship.”

The Epic of Gilgamesh begins with a lovely description of the mighty city walls of Uruk that Gilgamesh has built with his own hands. The city is a character in the Epic of Gilgamesh; Gilgamesh believes that his immortality hinges on the survival, and memory, of these great walls.

The walls don't survive history. They come crashing down, yet those little clay tablets rediscovered around 1850 and slowly translated give us the Epic of Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh's immortality hinged not on the walls of clay but on those tiny tablets of clay.

Buildings, especially castles, are often characters in stories. Hogwarts, the school of wizardry in the Harry Potter series comes to life in every story. The castle seems to favor Harry in several stories, especially the Room of Requirement.

Like the walls of Uruk, The Castle of the Forest Sauvage, is a character in The Sword in the Stone. T. H. White spends a good deal of time redrawing the grounds and keeps from both its modern ruin and its ancient pride.

I never really appreciated these first five or so paragraphs of this chapter. It was only on a trip to Wales where I climbed and crawled around castles true to the name that I understood this chapter. The amount of sheer effort to build the originals still amazes me; the stonework is not just art, it is Olympian in the strength and endurance of the builders.

So, with an eye to the beginning of the Epic of Gilgamesh, let's begin reading this pivotal chapter:

“Sir Ector's home was called The Castle of the Forest Sauvage. It was more like a town or a village than any one man's home, and indeed it was the village during times of danger: for this part of the story is one which deals with troubled times. Whenever there was a raid or an invasion by some neighbouring tyrant, everybody on the estate hurried into the castle, driving the beasts before them into the courts, and there they remained until the danger was over. The wattle and daub cottages nearly always got burned, and had to be rebuilt afterwards with much profanity. For this reason it was not worth while to have a village church, as it would constantly be having to be replaced. The villagers went to church in the chapel of the castle. They wore their best clothes and trooped up the street with their most respectable gait on Sundays, looking with vague and dignified looks in all directions, as if reluctant to disclose their destination, and on week-days they came to Mass and vespers in their ordinary clothes, walking much more cheerfully. Everybody went to church in those days, and liked it.

The Castle of the Forest Sauvage is still standing, and you can see its lovely ruined walls with ivy on them, standing broached to the sun and wind. Some lizards live there now, and the starving sparrows keep warm on winter nights in the ivy, and a barn owl drives it methodically, hovering outside the frightened congregations and beating the ivy with its

wings, to make them fly out. Most of the curtain wall is down, though you can trace the foundations of the twelve round towers which guarded it. They were round, and stuck out from the wall into the moat, so that the archers could shoot in all directions and command every part of the wall. Inside the towers there are circular stairs. These go round and round a central column, and this column is pierced with holes for shooting arrows. Even if the enemy had got inside the curtain wall and fought their way into the bottom of the towers, the defenders could retreat up the bends of the stairs and shoot at those who followed them up, inside, through these slits.

The stone part of the drawbridge with its barbican and the bartizans of the gatehouse are in good repair. These have many ingenious arrangements. Even if enemies got over the wooden bridge, which was pulled up so that they could not, there was a portcullis weighed with an enormous log which would squash them flat and pin them down as well. There was a large hidden trap-door in the floor of the barbican, which would let them into the moat after all. At the other end of the barbican there was another portcullis, so that they could be trapped between the two and annihilated from above, while the bartizans, or hanging turrets, had holes in their floors through which the defenders could drop things on their heads. Finally, inside the gatehouse, there was a neat little hole in the middle of the vaulted ceiling, which had painted tracery and bosses. This hole led to the room above, where there was a big cauldron, for boiling lead or oil.

So much for the outer defences. Once you were inside the curtain wall, you found yourself in a kind of wide alley-way, probably full of frightened sheep, with another complete castle in front of you. This was the inner shell-keep, with its eight enormous round towers which still stand. It is lovely to climb the highest of them and to lie there looking out toward the Marches, from which some of these old dangers came, with nothing but the sun above you and the little tourists trotting about below, quite regardless of arrows and boiling oil. Think for how many centuries that unconquerable tower has withstood. It has changed hands by secession often, by siege once, by treachery twice, but never by assault. On this tower the look-out hove. From here he kept the guard over the blue woods towards Wales. His clean old bones lie beneath the floor of the chapel now, so you must keep it for him.

If you look down and are not frightened of heights (the Society for the Preservation of This and That have put up some excellent railings to preserve you from tumbling over), you can see the whole anatomy of the inner court laid out beneath you like a map. You can see the chapel, now quite open to its god, and the windows of the great hall with the solar over it. You can see the shafts of the huge chimneys and how cunningly the side flues were contrived to enter them, and the little private closets now public, and the enormous kitchen. If you are a sensible person, you will spend days there, possibly weeks, working out for yourself by detection which were the stables, which the mews, where were the cow byres, the armoury, the lofts, the well, the smithy, the kennel, the soldiers' quarters, the priest's room, and my lord's and lady's chambers. Then it will all grow about you again. The little people—they were smaller than we are, and it would be a job for most of us to get inside the few bits of their armour and old gloves that remain—will hurry about in the sunshine, the sheep will baa as

they always did, and perhaps from Wales there will come the ffff-putt of the triple-feathered arrow which looks as if it had never moved.

This place was, of course, a paradise for a boy to be in.

“This place was, of course, a paradise for a boy to be in.” I have always thought this was a lovely line. The Castle of the Forest Sauvage and its namesake, the Forest Sauvage, will be the setting for the bulk of our stories. Save for the journey to London and the pulling of the Sword in the Stone, little of the book happens beyond Sir Ector’s borders.

The forest will be the scene for jousts, quests, hunts, battles and transfigurations. The castle, generally, will be for conversations and discussions. The transfigurations in the castle, Wart becoming a fish and a hawk, tend to be “a bit more” conversational. There will be the same “finish” to both stories: Wart will be literally in the jaws (claws) of death and survive in the nick of time.

The “dreamy” transfigurations while Wart is a snake and an owl begin in the castle and move outside. White’s use of the castle and forest is a nice insight for young writers.

So, the setting is important. The people outside of the castle tend to be wilder and perhaps even dangerous, but they all care for Wart’s education and training. Inside the castle, the characters, as we noted in the homecoming, tend to pull and push young Arthur in various directions...much like all of us as we push through childhood to adulthood.

Finally, this line: “If you look down and are not frightened of heights (the Society for the Preservation of This and That have put up some excellent railings to preserve you from tumbling over), you can see the whole anatomy of the inner court laid out beneath you like a map.” still brings me joy.

When I was in elementary school, we were taken to Fort Point, a battery protecting the entrance to the San Francisco Bay. The Golden Gate Bridge extends over it today.

The first year we went, they basically opened the iron doors and let us run wild. It was a great field trip. The guide showed us the plans for how the defenders would slaughter the attackers with slits through walls and a variety of fun and deadly things for the imaginations of young boys.

Two years later, we were put in lines, followed a guide, told to not do this or touch that. We were all bored stiff.

As we continue to march through this marvelous chapter, we come to a section that at first glance may seem unimportant. Yet, like we discovered with the Forest and the Castle, small little asides by T. H. White tend to give us a peek into future events of our story.

When we meet Dog Boy, we are reminded of the dangerous man in the forest, Wat. Wat and Dog Boy will be part of the adventures with Robin Wood in the forest. They will become fast friends as both have been bullied by humanity.

The dogs will be an important part of another story, the Christmas boar hunt with Master Twyti. It will be a funny, tragic adventure and King Pellinore will be a major part of the story.

This part of the chapter gave me an opportunity to learn a lot about the dogs of the medieval period. As my dog, Sirius Black, looks on, I will try not to insist that he goes with me on boar hunts on Christmas.

Let's pick up the story again:

This place was, of course, a paradise for a boy to be in. The Wart ran about it like a rabbit in its own complicated labyrinth. He knew everything, everywhere, all the special smells, good climbs, soft lairs, secret hiding-places, jumps, slides, nooks, larders and blisses. For every season he had the best place, like a cat, and he yelled and ran and fought and upset people and snoozed and daydreamed and pretended he was a Knight, without stopping. Just now he was in the kennel.

People in those days had rather different ideas about the training of dogs to what we have today. They did it more by love than strictness. Imagine a modern M.F.H. going to bed with his hounds, and yet Flavius Arrianus says that it is "Best of all if they can sleep with a person because it makes them more human and because they rejoice in the company of human beings: also if they have had a restless night or been internally upset, you will know of it and will not use them to hunt next day." In Sir Ector's kennel there was a special boy, called the Dog Boy, who lived with the hounds day and night. He was a sort of head hound, and it was his business to take them out every day for walks, to pull thorns out of their feet, keep cankers out of their ears, bind the smaller bones that got dislocated, dose them for worms, isolate and nurse them in distemper, arbitrate in their quarrels and to sleep curled up among them at night. If one more learned quotation may be excused, this is how, later on, the Duke of York who was killed at Agincourt described such a boy in his Master of Game: "Also I will teach the child to lead out the hounds to scombre twice in the day in the morning and in the evening, so that the sun be up, especially in winter. Then should he let them run and play long in a meadow in the sun, and then comb every hound after the other, and wipe them with a great wisp of straw, and this he shall do every morning. And then he shall lead them into some fair place where tender grass grows as corn and other things, that therewith they may feed themselves as it is medicine for them." Thus, since the boy's "heart and his business be with the hounds," the hounds themselves become "goodly and kindly and clean, glad and joyful and playful, and goodly to all manner of folks save to the wild beasts to whom they should be fierce, eager and spiteful."

Sir Ector's dog boy was none other than the one who had his nose bitten off by the terrible Wat. Not having a nose like a human, and being, moreover, subjected to stone-throwing by the other village children, he had become more comfortable with animals. He talked to them, not in baby-talk like a maiden lady, but correctly in their own growls and barks. They all loved him very much, and revered him for taking thorns out of their toes, and came to him with their troubles at once. He always understood immediately what was wrong, and generally he could put it right. It was nice for the dogs to have their god with them, in visible form.

The Wart was fond of the Dog Boy, and thought him very clever to be able to do these things with animals—for he could make them do almost anything just by moving his hands—while the Dog Boy loved the Wart in much the same way as his dogs loved him, and thought the Wart was almost holy because he could read and write. They spent much of their time together, rolling about with the dogs in the kennel.

The kennel was on the ground floor, near the mews, with a loft above it, so that it should be cool in summer and warm in winter. The hounds were alaunts, gaze-hounds, lymers and braches. They were called Clumsy, Trowneer, Phoebe, Colle, Gerland, Talbot, Luath, Luffra, Apollon, Orthros, Bran, Gelert, Bounce, Boy, Lion, Bungey, Toby, and Diamond. The Wart's own special one was called Cavall, and he happened to be licking Cavall's nose—not the other way about—when Merlyn came in and found him.

"That will come to be regarded as an insanitary habit," said Merlyn, "though I cannot see it myself. After all, God made the creature's nose just as well as he made your tongue.

"If not better," added the philosopher pensively.

The Wart did not know what Merlyn was talking about, but he liked him to talk.

The title "Celtic Hound" probably is the best term to use when thinking of these kinds of dogs. The following is possibly one of the earliest known breed standards, dating as it does from the middle of the second century AD. This is from the *Cynegeticus* of Flavius Arrianus, usually known as Arrian although he liked to style himself "The Younger Xenophon". He was a native of Nicomedia in Bythinia (Asia Minor) and was a keen huntsman.

"There is nothing more beautiful to see, whether their eyes or their whole body, or their coat and colour. In those that are pied there is a wonderful variegation and the whole coloured ones are no less pleasing to the sight." He says they may be rough or smooth haired and the larger the better. "A good Celt should be long, length being regarded as indicative of speed and good breeding, and should possess wide, supple hips and shoulders, broad loins and firm, sweeping haunches. The legs, of which the hind pair should be the longer, are required to be straight and well knit, the ribs strong, the back wide and firm without being fat, the belly well drawn up, the thighs hollow, the tail narrow, hairy, long and flexible, with thicker hair at the tip; the feet round and strong and the eyes large and clear and strikingly bright. Flame coloured eyes are best, next

to these dark; light eyes come last, yet a good dog may have light eyes. A light, well set on head is considered the hallmark of particular excellence but such a feature is by no means regarded as essential and a hound may have a head of any shape always provided it is not heavy, or with a broad muzzle, or with a hanging dewlap. A hound may have soft ears, that look as if they have been broken, or prick ears and still be a good hound to hunt. A good Celt should have a prominent brow and a proud look, should not be afraid of people or of noise, should never stand still once it has been slipped, and should come back to the hunter without a call."

Now, if you are trying to get your own Sir Ector kennel club, here are the modern explanations:

Lymers: Bloodhound and Red Setter mix

Alaunts: Greyhounds with thick heads

Brach(et): Beagles with all the joy that comes with beagles.

Gaze-hounds: Greyhounds

"The Wart did not know what Merlyn was talking about, but he liked him to talk."

This line ends the first parts of this chapter. Some of the best parts of this book are coming right up.

I formally began coaching in 1979 and, not long after, began teaching. I started teaching courses as a "volunteer," in a sense, at Utah State University. I was getting my Masters in History, but I would sit in on Ross Peterson's survey course of American History and Norm Jones's Western Civilization course.

Both courses were daily 50-minute lectures. In addition to my coursework, my research on my masters, my coaching and my part-time job(s), I sat in for almost two hours a day to hear the sweep of history. I loved it.

I had heard much of the material before getting my bachelor's degree but what I needed was the connections. Literally, you can miss centuries of history if you take class on Greece and Rome and then pick up a course on the Renaissance. It's the same basic geography, but a few things happened in between!

I realized later, as a coach, that I was practicing the Whole-Part-Whole-Part method of coaching/learning.

There is a time for detailed, deep study. But, there is also a time to step back and see the whole picture. Both are right.

One day, Norm Jones asked me if I would cover for him in his class for a week while he traveled. He asked me to lecture on Anglo-Saxon England including Beowulf and the early Viking "issues." Obviously, I had to prep for this and I loved every minute of it.

I was 22 and many of my students were far older than me. Ross Peterson later asked me to cover a few lectures, too.

I “dived” in. There is no better way to learn than to lean over and jump in. If you are with Merlyn, you change in more ways than just your mind.

In *The Sword in the Stone*, Wart’s education is going to be expanded by some of the greatest Field Trips in the history of education. The first story is going to “in depth” as literally Wart will be turned into a fish (and I love the pun). Let’s pick up on the story:

The Wart did not know what Merlyn was talking about, but he liked him to talk. He did not like the grown-ups who talked down to him, but the ones who went on talking in their usual way, leaving him to leap along in their wake, jumping at meanings, guessing, clutching at known words, and chuckling at complicated jokes as they suddenly dawned. He had the glee of the porpoise then, pouring and leaping through strange seas.

"Shall we go out?" asked Merlyn. "I think it is about time we began lessons."

The Wart's heart sank at this. His tutor had been there a month, and it was now August, but they had done no lessons so far. Now he suddenly remembered that this was what Merlyn was for, and he thought with dread of Summulae Logicales and the filthy astrolabe. He knew that it had to be borne, however, and got up obediently enough, after giving Cavall a last reluctant pat. He thought that it might not be so bad with Merlyn, who might be able to make even the old Organon interesting, particularly if he would do some magic.

They went into the courtyard, into a sun so burning that the heat of hay-making seemed to have been nothing. It was baking. The thunder-clouds which usually go with hot weather were there, high columns of cumulus with glaring edges, but there was not going to be any thunder. It was too hot even for that. "If only," thought the Wart, "I did not have to go into a stuffy classroom, but could take off my clothes and swim in the moat."

They crossed the courtyard, having almost to take deep breaths before they darted across it, as if they were going quickly through an oven. The shade of the gatehouse was cool, but the barbican, with its close walls, was hottest of all. In one last dash across the desert they had reached the drawbridge—could Merlyn have guessed what he was thinking?—and were staring down into the moat.

It was the season of water-lilies. If Sir Ector had not kept one section free of them for the boys' bathing, all the water would have been covered. As it was, about twenty yards on each side of the bridge were cut each year, and one could dive in from the bridge itself. The moat was deep. It was used as a stew, so that the inhabitants of the castle could have fish on Fridays, and for this reason the architects had been careful not to let the drains and sewers run into it. It was stocked with fish every year.

"I wish I was a fish," said the Wart.

We literally stand with Wart and Merlyn on the edge of this story now looking down into the water. The magic of *The Sword in the Stone* are the stories of the transformations. Wart's animal friends teach him about strength and history. Every concept of power and leadership is coupled with a history lesson.

Wart is given a little bit, a part, of every aspect of being a kind, being the man who will pull the sword from the stone, but it is always put into perspective...the whole.

I love this line:

"The Wart did not know what Merlyn was talking about, but he liked him to talk. He did not like the grown-ups who talked down to him, but the ones who went on talking in their usual way, leaving him to leap along in their wake, jumping at meanings, guessing, clutching at known words, and chuckling at complicated jokes as they suddenly dawned."

I used the insight throughout my life. Now, as I have more past than future, I continue to talk with children and teens as peers. I talk to them about books, usually books they have read. If I haven't read a book that makes their heart leap, I read it and get back to them.

One of my foundational points is the absolute dignity of every human person. I think a lot of people agree with this, then treat children like idiots. Now, as a veteran of the high school hallway for decades, kids do idiotic things, yes...and they have an ability to do stupid things very well.

That's their behaviors. I think we need to correct them, but treat them like people, not babies. It's a tough lesson for some parents!

Literally, we are about to dive into this story!

Finally!!!! It's taken me a bit of time, but we are about to really leap into *The Sword in the Stone*. Our characters literally are about to leap and the magic really happens (in every sense) of our story now.

This will be Wart's first lesson in power. How does one wield power? The Pike will argue that power is everything and it must be used. As Wart becomes King Arthur, this discussion will be the key to his kingdom.

But...in this selection, we have one more great insight about teaching and learning.

"I wish I was a fish," said the Wart.

"What sort of fish?"

It was almost too hot to think about this, but the Wart stared down into the cool amber depths where a school of small perch were aimlessly hanging about.

"I think I should like to be a perch," he said. "They are braver than the silly roach, and not quite so slaughterous as the pike are."

Merlyn took off his hat, raised his staff of lignum vitae politely in the air, and said slowly, "Snylrem stnemilpmoc ot enutpen dna lliw eh yldnik tpecca siht yob sa a hsif?"

Immediately there was a loud blowing of sea-shells, conches and so forth, and a stout, jolly-looking gentleman appeared seated on a well-blown-up cloud above the battlements. He had an anchor tattooed on his stomach and a handsome mermaid with Mabel written under her on his chest. He ejected a quid of tobacco, nodded affably to Merlyn and pointed his trident at the Wart. The Wart found he had no clothes on. He found that he had tumbled off the drawbridge, landing with a smack on his side in the water. He found that the moat and the bridge had grown hundreds of times bigger. He knew that he was turning into a fish.

"Oh, Merlyn," he cried, "please come too."

"For this once," said a large and solemn tench beside his ear, "I will come. But in future you will have to go by yourself. Education is experience, and the essence of experience is self-reliance."

It's obvious from the first reading that Merlyn's enchantment is simply speaking in reverse. Here you go if you missed it:

"Snylrem stnemilpmoc ot enutpen dna lliw eh yldnik tpecca siht yob sa a hsif?"
Merlyn's compliments to Neptune and will he kindly accept this boy as a fish?

This phrase is the key: "Education is experience, and the essence of experience is self-reliance."

Years ago, I wrote this article. I edited out some parts for clarity...I worry my editing skills might not help!

Common Sense in Education

It was at this time that I noticed my feet were burning. So, I looked down and realized that I was barefoot. I was barefoot, on the sidewalk in front of my house, in December, at three in the morning, standing in rock salt. And my feet were burning.

It had been a rough week. Tuesday night, Kelly 'exploded' with the flu. My wife, Tiffini, and I cleaned and comforted her, then struggled off to the rest of the work week. Thursday night, somewhere around three, Lindsay's flu came to the surface. As we scrambled to take care of her, my wife handed me a bundle of items to throw in the garbage. Friday is garbage day, so the

can was at the curb. It was the Christmas wrapping season, so our can was full. So was our next-door neighbor's. But, one of our neighbors, a few houses down had room. After I loaded the mess in the trash, I noticed my feet were burning.

Over the past few months, I have dedicated articles to what many consider to be the real keys to an education: the skill of understanding, the ability to synthesize information, and the importance of focus. An important point to keep in mind concerning education is that it should never be limited to the schoolhouse. As Emerson said: 'The things taught in schools and colleges are not an education, but a means to an education.' In this article, I wish to discuss a topic that seems lost in modern schools and colleges, yet is a hallowed concept in classic education: common sense. And the guy writing the article doesn't wear shoes outside in the winter.

Philip Howard's wonderful book, 'The Death of Common Sense,' provides example after example about the silliness of new rules and regulations pumped out by local and federal governments. He explains the rise of homelessness in the United States as a by-product of statutes that make building low cost housing impossible. The late Earl Nightingale used a wonderful example of a real estate agent telling Earl and his wife, 'This is the kitchen.' Telling someone 'this is the kitchen' or 'this is the bathroom' certainly assumes the total loss of common sense in America.

Watching those awful daytime talk shows, one finds that common sense may be dying in America. The 'easy answer' and the 'quick fix' are often the antithesis to common sense. Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher, gives this common sense advice: 'Choose always the way that seems best, however rough it may be, and custom will soon render it easy and agreeable.' To understand that the rough way will soon be the easy way requires some understanding, some guidance, and some community.

I need to be careful about writing this article. Someone may read it and pass a regulation requiring shoes to be worn to bed. Or rule that sidewalks be carpeted. I just wiped my feet off with a towel and went back to my family. It made sense.

Education is experience, and the essence of experience is self-reliance.

Wart is going to "jump in" to many adventures along his way. This time, Merlyn makes it clear he needs to go it alone in the future.

Here's the rub: he never does! The late Father James Semple used to love to tell the story of the young boy who decided to go into the big city by himself. He told the family that he was a man and set off to take a train and a bus to see the sights.

His father sat still reading the paper ignoring the boast. The boy got his jacket, paid for the train, hopped on the bus and explored the town.

Hours later, he returned triumphantly. The father was not in the chair.

When, the boy left, Dad hopped up and followed him on his whole adventure....just out of sight. Father Semple used this story to explain so many different things like the Holy Spirit and just good parenting.

Wart will "be alone." With others. But to learn, he must get some experience.

I miss Father Semple. I miss my Dad.

But, I 'm not going it alone.

The Wart found it difficult to be a new kind of creature. It was no good trying to swim like a human being, for it made him go corkscrew and much too slowly. He did not know how to swim like a fish.

"Not like that," said the tench in ponderous tones. "Put your chin on your left shoulder and do jack-knives. Never mind about the fins to begin with."

The Wart's legs had fused together into his backbone and his feet and toes had become a tail fin. His arms had become two more fins—of a delicate pink—and he had sprouted some more somewhere about his stomach. His head faced over his shoulder, so that when he bent in the middle his toes were moving toward his ear instead of toward his forehead. He was a beautiful olive-green, with rather scratchy plate-armour all over him, and dark bands down his sides. He was not sure which were his sides and which were his back and front, but what now appeared to be his belly had an attractive whitish colour, while his back was armed with a splendid great fin that could be erected for war and had spikes in it. He did jack-knives as the tench directed and found that he was swimming vertically downward into the mud.

"Use your feet to turn to left or right," said the tench, "and spread those fins on your tummy to keep level. You are living in two planes now, not one."

The Wart found that he could keep more or less level by altering the inclination of his arm fins and the ones on his stomach. He swam feebly off, enjoying himself very much.

"Come back," said the tench. "You must learn to swim before you can dart."

The Wart returned to his tutor in a series of zig-zags and remarked, "I do not seem to keep quite straight."

"The trouble with you is that you do not swim from the shoulder. You swim as if you were a boy, bending at the hips. Try doing your jack-knives right from the neck downward, and move your body exactly the same amount to the right as you are going to move it to the left. Put your back into it."

Wart gave two terrific kicks and vanished altogether in a clump of mare's tail several yards away.

"That's better," said the tench, now out of sight in the murky olive water, and the Wart backed himself out of his tangle with infinite trouble, by wriggling his arm fins. He undulated back toward the voice in one terrific shove, to show off.

"Good," said the tench, as they collided end to end. "But direction is the better part of valour.

"Try if you can do this one," it added.

Without apparent exertion of any kind it swam off backward under a water-lily. Without apparent exertion—but the Wart, who was an enterprising learner, had been watching the slightest movement of its fins. He moved his own fins anti-clockwise, gave the tip of his tail a cunning flick, and was lying alongside the tench.

"Splendid," said Merlyn. "Let us go for a little swim."

The tench is a freshwater fish and, yes, it is also called the "Doctor Fish" as, it was argued, it's skin could cure psoriasis. In just a few moments, Merlyn's skill will be called upon to aid a sick fish.

This small part of the book really is another primer on education. In this case, we will also get some insights on lifting weights and general physical training, but it is easy to overlook this first line:

"He did not know how to swim like a fish."

There is a learning curve in every sport, game or employment ("utor" if you remember your Latin from earlier). Every job I have ever taken on enjoys a learning curve. You need to learn the "how things are done around here." And, yes, often the new person will see some things as stupid.

When I started at Judge Memorial, we worked on "Judge Time." The clocks were all set back four minutes. Why?

Yeah...why? Well, the most city bus with the most students arrived exactly at 8:00 am. On paper, the day began at 8:00 am. Now, since the tail always wagged the dog at JMCHS, instead of changing the schedule for the day to start at 8:05, the answer was to have an entire building with the clocks set on the wrong time.

The students arrived to school at 8:00 and had four minutes to get to class at...8:00.

When I first arrived, I didn't know how to swim like a fish. Oddly, almost forty years later, the idea of having clocks on the wrong time still seems, um, wrong.

When you first arrive in a new environment, there is a learning curve. Things are done in a certain way, some people have an unusual amount of power even though their official status wouldn't suggest the power they shake and swing, and "don't ask questions" about certain things that maybe should be questioned.

"Without apparent exertion—but the Wart, who was an enterprising learner, had been watching the slightest movement of its fins. He moved his own fins anti-clockwise, gave the tip of his tail a cunning flick, and was lying alongside the tench."

I think Wart has given us a great life lesson about adaption and learning here. I like the phrase "Enterprising Learner;" it would make a great annual award for students. He is watching for the "secret" to mastering this underwater environment.

I was explaining to someone the other day about why the media covers religion so badly. I usually explain that theology can be foggy to most people. The news people don't want a complex explanation of Genesis One and Two, the importance of the choirs of Angels, the order of the Theological Universe and the importance of understanding eternal, everlasting, infinite and immortal before going into...

Yep, we lose them there. So, they ask about sex. (Seriously) "Can/Can't? Yes/No?" Sex...and perhaps lack of...is the rope the news people look for in theology. It's their safety rope out of the fog and back to the stories about miracle supplements that will burn fat.

When you start a new job, you might find a safety rope to help your way out of the fog. I had Tony Crandall, a fellow teacher at Judge. He explained things clearly from attendance policies and how to keep ahead on them and the notion that "whenever something doesn't make sense, think how this is affecting the Boys Basketball team: if helps them, we do it; if it doesn't we don't."

Boom! The rope appeared!

"Use your feet to turn to left or right," said the tench, "and spread those fins on your tummy to keep level. You are living in two planes now, not one."

Merlyn is giving Wart a lesson here about more than the life of fish. As you advance in any business or sport...or anything...you soon learn that you live in two planes. In my work on Beowulf, I discovered that warriors only spoke in the pure present, while kings always spoke in the pattern of "past-present-future."

Wart needs to learn to live in several planes to become an efficient King Arthur. We will soon meet a Pike (Luce) that will see power in one plane, but that is a few weeks away.

“The trouble with you is that you do not swim from the shoulder. You swim as if you were a boy, bending at the hips. Try doing your jack-knives right from the neck downward, and move your body exactly the same amount to the right as you are going to move it to the left. Put your back into it.”

Of course, this point, put your back into it, is going to be important when he pulls the sword from the stone. Finally, this line: “But direction is the better part of valour” is T. H. White at his punniest best.

"Splendid," said Merlyn. "Let us go for a little swim."

The Wart was on an even keel now, and reasonably able to move about. He had leisure to look at the extraordinary universe into which the tattooed gentleman's trident had plunged him. It was different from the universe to which he had been accustomed. For one thing, the heaven or sky above him was now a perfect circle. The horizon had closed to this. In order to imagine yourself into the Wart's position, you would have to picture a round horizon, a few inches about your head, instead of the flat horizon which you usually see. Under this horizon of air you would have to imagine another horizon of under water, spherical and practically upside down—for the surface of the water acted partly as a mirror to what was below it. It is difficult to imagine. What makes it a great deal more difficult to imagine is that everything which human beings would consider to be above the water level was fringed with all the colours of the spectrum. For instance, if you had happened to be fishing for the Wart, he would have seen you, at the rim of the tea saucer which was the upper air to him, not as one person waving a fishing-rod, but as seven people, whose outlines were red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet, all waving the same rod whose colours were as varied. In fact, you would have been a rainbow man to him, a beacon of flashing and radiating colours, which ran into one another and had rays all about. You would have burned upon the water like Cleopatra in the poem.

The next most lovely thing was that the Wart had no weight. He was not earth-bound any more and did not have to plod along on a flat surface, pressed down by gravity and the weight of the atmosphere. He could do what men have always wanted to do, that is, fly. There is practically no difference between flying in the water and flying in the air. The best of it was that he did not have to fly in a machine, by pulling levers and sitting still, but could do it with his own body. It was like the dreams people have.

Just as they were going to swim off on their tour of inspection, a timid young roach appeared from between two waving bottle bushes of mare's tail and hung about, looking pale with agitation. It looked at them with big, apprehensive eyes and evidently wanted something, but could not make up its mind.

"Approach," said Merlyn gravely.

"It was like the dreams people have."

I dream about flying a lot. In my dreams, if I jump backward and move my hips, I can fly. I've had that ability in dreams since my childhood. Wart's swimming is "flying in water."

Humans are odd creatures: we are born to walk long ways on the savannah, probably eat an omnivore diet, and work in teams. But, we also seem to want to cross large bodies of water:

First, we swim.

Then, we float.

Then, we row.

Then, we sail.

Then, we fly over it.

By the way, Wart will experience flying in some upcoming chapters. Just a little bit as a hawk, but then a full flight as an owl. In the 1958 version, he will succeed in a long-distance flight as a goose, but I like the evening as an owl better than the multiple chapters as a goose.

We get an important insight about learning in this selection: Wart's education is often about perspective.

Douglas Adams, of "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" fame, said it best about perspective: "The fact that we live at the bottom of a deep gravity well, on the surface of a gas covered planet going around a nuclear fireball 90 million miles away and think this to be normal is obviously some indication of how skewed our perspective tends to be."

What is normal, as I type on keys linking to a magic box that will later send this work invisibly to my editor, Laree Draper, who lives 800 miles away in literally an instant, is in the eye of the beholder.

I travel a lot. One thing I discover is that my normal is not normal. In Europe, table manners are different. In the Middle East, I discovered an entirely new level of table manners. Foods are different and every meal's "normal" simply is not normal to my friends here in Utah.

And, that is why I think you need to travel. It makes "normal" less so. It flips perspective.

Walking one night in Cairo, I noticed that, among the 26 million people gathered in the city, I might have been the only person who was "like me." A few weeks later, in Nubia, the children would dare each other to touch me, as they had never seen "my kind of normal."

Oddly, when I teach a program called "Easy Strength" which is picking five exercises, doing a total of ten perfect repetitions in each, and leave feeling fresh and alert seems to blow the brains out of many lifters. Their "normal" is blitzing, bombing, and crushing their muscles into submission.

Easy Strength makes one very strong. It is the classic way to train. It used to be “normal.” Now, normal is...

There is that wonderful cliché about walking a mile in another person’s shoes before commenting. As the songwriter, Joe South, wrote:

*Walk a mile in my shoes
Walk a mile in my shoes
Hey, before you abuse, criticize and accuse
Walk a mile in my shoes*

*Now your whole world
You see around you
Is just a reflection
And the law of karma
Says you're gonna reap
Just what you sow, yes you will
So unless
You've lived a life of
Total perfection
You'd better be careful
Of every stone
That you should throw, yeah*

And, you don’t learn perspective until you walk those miles.

The reference to Cleopatra is, of course, Shakespeare (a man who never dealt with Amazon reviews):

Enobarbus: I will tell you.
The barge she sat in, like a burnish’d throne,
Burned on the water: the poop was beaten gold;
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
The winds were lovesick with them; the oars were silver,
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
The water which they beat to follow faster,
As amorous of their strokes.

Antony and Cleopatra, Act II, Scene II

Just as they were going to swim off on their tour of inspection, a timid young roach appeared from between two waving bottle bushes of mare's tail and hung about, looking pale with agitation. It looked at them with big, apprehensive eyes and evidently wanted something, but could not make up its mind.

"Approach," said Merlyn gravely.

At this the roach rushed up like a hen, burst into tears, and began stammering its message.

"If you p-p-p-please, doctor," stammered the poor creature, gabbling so that they could scarcely understand what it said, "we have such a d-d-d-dretful case of s-s-s-something or other in our family, and we w-w-w-wondered if you could s-s-s-spare the time? It's our d-d-d-dear Mamma, who w-w-w-will swim a-a-all the time upside d-d-d-down, and she d-d-d-does look so horrible and s-s-s-speaks so strange, that we r-r-r-really thought she ought to have a d-d-d-doctor, if it w-w-w-wouldn't be too much? C-C-C-Clara says to say so. Sir, if you s-s-s-see w-w-w-what I m-m-m-mean?"

Here the poor roach began fizzing so much, what with its stammer and its tearful disposition, that it became quite inarticulate and could only stare at Merlyn with mournful eyes.

"Never mind, my little man," said Merlyn. "There, there, lead me to your dear Mamma, and we shall see what we can do."

They all three swam off into the murk under the drawbridge, upon their errand of mercy.

"Neurotic, these roach," whispered Merlyn, behind his fin. "It is probably a case of nervous hysteria, a matter for the psychologist rather than the physician."

The roach's Mamma was lying on her back as he had described. She was squinting, had folded her fins on her chest, and every now and then she blew a bubble. All her children were gathered round her in a circle, and every time she blew they nudged each other and gasped. She had a seraphic smile on her face.

"Well, well, well," said Merlyn, putting on his best bed-side manner, "and how is Mrs. Roach today?"

He patted the young roaches on the head and advanced with stately motions toward his patient. It should perhaps be mentioned that Merlyn was a ponderous, deep-beamed fish of about five pounds, leather coloured, with small scales, adipose in his fins, rather slimy, and having a bright marigold eye—a respectable figure.

Mrs. Roach held out a languid fin, sighed emphatically and said, "Ah, doctor, so you've come at last?"

"Hum," said the physician, in his deepest tone.

Then he told everybody to close their eyes—the Wart peeped—and began to swim round the invalid in a slow and stately dance. As he danced he sang. His song was this:

Therapeutic,
Elephantic,
Diagnosis,
Boom!
Pancreatic,
Microstatic,
Anti-toxic,
Doom!
With a normal catabolism,
Gabbleism and babbleism,
Snip, Snap, Snorum,
Cut out his abdonorum.
Dyspepsia,
Anaemia,
Toxaemia.
One, two, three,
And out goes He,
With a fol-de-rol-derido for the Five Guinea Fee.

At the end of the song he was swimming round his patient so close that he actually touched her, stroking his brown smooth-scaled flanks against her more rattly pale ones. Perhaps he was healing her with his slime—for all the fishes are said to go to the Tench for medicine—or perhaps it was by touch or massage or hypnotism. In any case, Mrs. Roach suddenly stopped squinting, turned the right way up, and said, "Oh, doctor, dear doctor, I feel I could eat a little lob-worm now."

"No lob-worm," said Merlyn, "not for two days. I shall give you a prescription for a strong broth of algae every two hours, Mrs. Roach. We must build up your strength, you know. After all, Rome was not built in a day."

Then he patted all the little roaches once more, told them to grow up into brave little fish, and swam off with an air of importance into the gloom. As he swam, he puffed his mouth in and out.

"What did you mean by that about Rome?" asked the Wart, when they were out of earshot.

"Heaven knows."

This little exchange, doctor and patient, is going to lead us next to Wart's first real moments of danger. It's a fun little scene and the last line always makes me laugh:

"After all, Rome was not built in a day."

...

"What did you mean by that about Rome?" asked the Wart, when they were out of earshot. "Heaven knows."

Anyone who has ever tried to use a quote with an adolescent (or an analogy) has probably faced this moment: you suddenly realize that your perfect quote needs a lot of explanation.

By the way, I have amended this quote:

"Rome wasn't built in a day, but, then, I wasn't the foreman on that job." Laugh away.

Mrs. Roach brings us into a nice little scene that is a bit cartoonish but will be a nice counter to the next engagement with the King of the Moat.

Some people know that I am fairly educated in the world of angels. I can spit out the Nine Choirs of Angels without a second thought.

"The roach's Mamma was lying on her back as he had described. She was squinting, had folded her fins on her chest, and every now and then she blew a bubble. All her children were gathered round her in a circle, and every time she blew they nudged each other and gasped. She had a seraphic smile on her face."

"Seraphic" is a nice word: "beautiful in a way that suggests that someone is morally good and pure." I think that one word really pops this part of the story. Now, we have all had people in our lives who tend to overstate ailments ("Let me tell you about this weird mole!") but I think this term really changes the meaning for me.

The Seraphs (actually, the plural in Hebrew adds an "im," so it should be Seraphim...like Cherubim) are those amazing angels who stand before God chanting "Kaddosh, Kaddosh, Kaddosh," "Holy, Holy, Holy," with their six wings: two flying, two protecting their faces and two protecting their bodies. (Isaiah 6:2)

"Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke."

Most of us know the most famous of the Seraphim, Lucifer. I found it interesting to discover that my daughter's middle name "Aileen" and the name, Lucifer, BOTH come from the same root: the incredible lightness of being...or "lightbearer." There were times in Kelly's youth (Kelly Aileen is my daughter), that I thought we were raising Lucifer.

The “Nine Ladies Dancing” from the Twelve Days of Christmas represent the Nine Choirs of Angles:

Seraphim
Cherubim
Thrones (Wheels)

Dominions
Powers
Virtues

Principalities
Archangels
Angels (“Guardian Angels”)

The whole song is a simplified Catechism (religious education tool):

12 Tribes of Israel
11 Apostles
10 Commandments
9 Choirs of Angels
8 Beatitudes
7 Sacraments (usually)
6 Days of Creation
5 Books of the Torah
4 Gospels
3 Theological Virtues (Faith, Hope and Love)
2 Testaments
1 Jesus on the Cross (in tradition)

And, yes, I can lecture on this for days.

Let’s hope Mrs. Roach recovers. Until then, avoid lob worm.

They swam along, Merlyn occasionally advising him to put his back into it when he forgot, and the strange under-water world began to dawn about them, deliciously cool after the heat of the upper air. The great forests of weed were delicately traced, and in them there hung motionless many schools of sticklebacks learning to do their physical exercises in strict unison. On the word One they all lay still; at Two they faced about; at Three they all shot together into a cone, whose apex was a bit of something to eat. Water snails slowly ambled about on the stems of the lilies or under their leaves, while fresh-water mussels lay on the bottom doing nothing in particular. Their flesh was salmon pink, like a very good strawberry cream ice. The small congregations of perch—it was a strange thing, but all the bigger fish seemed to have hidden themselves—had delicate circulations, so that they blushed or grew

pale as easily as a lady in a Victorian novel. Only their blush was a deep olive colour, and it was the blush of rage. Whenever Merlyn and his companion swam past them, they raised their spiky dorsal fins in menace, and only lowered them when they saw that Merlyn was a tench. The black bars on their sides made them look as if they had been grilled, and these also could become darker or lighter. Once the two travellers passed under a swan. The white creature floated above like a Zeppelin, all indistinct except what was under the water. The latter part was quite clear and showed that the swan was floating slightly on one side with one leg cocked over its back.

"Look," said the Wart, "it is the poor swan with the deformed leg. It can only paddle with one leg, and the other side of it is hunched."

"Nonsense," said the swan snappily, putting its head into the water and giving them a frown with its black nares. "Swans like to rest in this position, and you can keep your fishy sympathy to yourself, so there." It continued to glare at them from up above, like a white snake suddenly let down through the ceiling, until they were out of sight.

"You swim along," said the tench, "as if there was nothing to be afraid of in the world. Don't you see that this place is exactly like the forest which you had to come through to find me?"

"Is it?"

"Look over there."

The Wart looked, and at first saw nothing. Then he saw a small translucent shape hanging motionless near the surface. It was just outside the shadow of a water-lily and was evidently enjoying the sun. It was a baby pike, absolutely rigid and probably asleep, and it looked like a pipe stem or a sea-horse stretched out flat. It would be a brigand when it grew up.

"I am taking you to see one of those," said the tench, "the Emperor of these purlieus. As a doctor I have immunity, and I dare say he will respect you as my companion as well—but you had better keep your tail bent in case he is feeling tyrannical."

"Is he the King of the Moat?"

Even as a child, this quote rang true with me:

"You swim along," said the tench, "as if there was nothing to be afraid of in the world. Don't you see that this place is exactly like the forest which you had to come through to find me?"

As I write this, I am just back from Korea. It's an amazing place with great people and great food. But, I had an issue:

Every single person now is walking with their head down staring at their phone.

Now, this is true everywhere, but as a guest in another country, I didn't want to slam into people. So, I hopped and popped out of the way in streets, halls and malls.

In American airports, pods of girls walk mindlessly through the narrow halls, side by side, staring down at texts, pics and whatever. We all move out of their way...well, most of the time...and they remain serenely clueless about the dangers of this world.

This level of "Cluelessness" is dangerous: the world still has maniacs and murderers and lack of awareness can literally lead you to your doom.

I'm not being an old codger yelling at clouds here: I am genuinely concerned. Yes, there are advantages to these devices: we see almost in real time police brutality, natural disasters and terrorist activities. At some level, this instant knowledge has value.

But, as I might be completely aware of what is going on half a world away, this same device muffles me from the realities of "here and now."

Yoda warned Luke Skywalker about this:

"Ready are you? What know you of ready? For eight hundred years have I trained Jedi. My own counsel will I keep on who is to be trained. A Jedi must have the deepest commitment, the most serious mind. This one a long time have I watched. All his life has he looked away... to the future, to the horizon. Never his mind on where he was. Hmm? What he was doing. Hmph. Adventure. Heh. Excitement. Heh. A Jedi craves not these things. You are reckless."

"Never his mind on where he was." That's it exactly. Many of the resources out there on situational awareness say it can be cultivated by generally keeping tabs on your surroundings — "checking your six" and "keeping your back to the wall."

I've walked alone in Cairo and Jerusalem in the wee hours of the morning and wasn't afraid of anything. Yet, my "Spider Senses" will get ramped up in certain parts of Salt Lake City and San Francisco. As I was told in my criminology classes in junior college: ALWAYS trust your instincts.

But, if your instincts are muffled by kittens scratching puppies, inappropriate pictures or Facebook, you may be leaving yourself open to getting hit by a bus, attacked or falling into a well.

Merlyn's warning to Wart is still true. He is about to meet the most dangerous creature in the moat and is woefully unprepared for it.

"Is he the King of the Moat?"

"He is. Old Jack they call him, and some call him Black Peter, but for the most part they do not mention him by name at all. They just call him Mr. P. You will see what it is to be a king."

The Wart began to hang behind his conductor a little, and perhaps it was as well that he did, for they were almost on top of their destination before he noticed it. When he did see the old despot he started back in horror, for Mr. P. was four feet long, his weight incalculable. The great body, shadowy and almost invisible among the stems, ended in a face which had been ravaged by all the passions of an absolute monarch—by cruelty, sorrow, age, pride, selfishness, loneliness and thoughts too strong for individual brains. There he hung or hove, his vast ironic mouth permanently drawn downward in a kind of melancholy, his lean clean-shaven chops giving him an American expression, like that of Uncle Sam. He was remorseless, disillusioned, logical, predatory, fierce, pitiless—but his great jewel of an eye was that of a stricken deer, large, fearful, sensitive and full of griefs. He made no movement, but looked upon them with his bitter eye.

The Wart thought to himself that he did not care for Mr. P.

"Lord," said Merlyn, not paying attention to his nervousness, "I have brought a young professor who would learn to profess."

"To profess what?" asked the King of the Moat slowly, hardly opening his jaws and speaking through his nose.

"Power," said the tench.

"Let him speak for himself."

"Please," said the Wart, "I don't know what I ought to ask."

"There is nothing," said the monarch, "except the power which you pretend to seek: power to grind and power to digest, power to seek and power to find, power to await and power to claim, all power and pitilessness springing from the nape of the neck."

"Thank you."

"Love is a trick played on us by the forces of evolution. Pleasure is the bait laid down by the same. There is only power. Power is of the individual mind, but the mind's power is not enough. Power of the body decides everything in the end, and only Might is Right.

"Now I think it is time that you should go away, young master, for I find this conversation uninteresting and exhausting. I think you ought to go away really almost at once, in case my disillusioned mouth should suddenly determine to introduce you to my great gills, which have teeth in them also. Yes, I really think you might be wise to go away this moment. Indeed, I think you ought to put your back into it. And so, a long farewell to all my greatness."

The Wart had found himself almost hypnotized by the big words, and hardly noticed that the tight mouth was coming closer and closer to him. It came imperceptibly, as the lecture distracted his attention, and suddenly it was looming within an inch of his nose. On the last sentence it opened, horrible and vast, the skin stretching ravenously from bone to bone and tooth to tooth. Inside there seemed to be nothing but teeth, sharp teeth like thorns in rows and ridges everywhere, like the nails in labourers' boots, and it was only at the last second that he was able to regain his own will, to pull himself together, to recollect his instructions and to escape. All those teeth clashed behind him at the tip of his tail, as he gave the heartiest jack-knife he had ever given.

In a second he was on dry land once again, standing beside Merlyn on the piping drawbridge, panting in his stuffy clothes.

Well, we finally came to the end of Chapter Five. Chapter Six is going to be a bit tamer, especially if you read the 1958 version. In the 1938 version, Wart and Kay meet Madam Mim and come close to death. I will do my best to fill in both versions.

“There is only power. Power is of the individual mind, but the mind's power is not enough. Power of the body decides everything in the end, and only Might is Right.”

The Pike's seductive speech gives us to an insight into the world of White. Hitler and Fascism is boiling up all over Europe and the winds of war are blowing. Sadly, in my adult life, I have been watching the slow progress of “Money is Right.” After becoming King, Wart (Arthur) will rethink war and focus on a different worldview, essentially “Right is Right.”

The Pike will, of course, later assist Wart when Wart pulls the Sword from the Stone. “Put your back into it” is going to have a completely different meaning after facing down those rows of teeth.

In the Disney movie, this scene, pardon me, becomes “cartoonish.” Rather than a single snap of the tail to freedom, there is a rather involved scene with an old helmet, Archimedes the owl assisting and lots chasing, leaping and near misses.

And, I think the scene misses the point: Wart is saved by a single powerful jack-knife...from the nape of the neck...that saves him. He isn't saved by Merlyn or Archimedes, he is saved by swimming...snapping...away.

It's a different “moral” to the story: in White's version, the Mentor teaches (always remember that Mentor was a person) but the student performs. In Disney's version, which I also like, the hero is aided by friends...and we see that motif in all heroic journeys, too.

But, in the vision of The Sword in the Stone, with the centerpiece being the moment where Wart discovers he is King Arthur, having the Pike “teach” Wart seems more appropriate.

It's like what I teach my throwers: I give them the basics, the movements and the fundamentals. But, it is up to them to do the 10,000 throws a year to be great. Like Jerry Seinfeld said in Seinlanguage:

"But the pressure is on you now. This book is filled with funny ideas, but you have to provide the delivery. So when you read it, remember: timing, inflection, attitude. That's comedy. I've done my part. The performance is up to you."

On Thursday afternoon the boys were doing their archery as usual. There were two straw targets fifty yards apart, and when they had shot their arrows at one, they had only to go to it, collect them, and shoot back at the other, after facing about. It was still the loveliest summer weather, and there had been chicken for dinner, so that Merlyn had gone off to the edge of their shooting-ground and sat down under a tree. What with the warmth and the chicken and the cream he had poured over his pudding and the continual repassing of the boys and the tock of the arrows in the targets—which was as sleepy to listen to as the noise of a lawn-mower or of a village cricket match—and what with the dance of the egg-shaped sunspots between the leaves of his tree, the aged man was soon fast asleep.

Archery was a serious occupation in those days. It had not yet been turned over to Indians and small boys. When you were shooting badly you got into a bad temper, just as the wealthy pheasant shooters do today. Kay was shooting badly. He was trying too hard and plucking on his loose, instead of leaving it to the bow. "Oh, come on," he said. "I am sick of these beastly targets. Let's have a shot at the popinjay."

They left the targets and had several shots at the popinjay—which was a large, bright-coloured artificial bird stuck on the top of a stick, like a parrot—and Kay missed these also. First he had the feeling of, "Well, I will hit the filthy thing, even if I have to go without my tea until I do it." Then he merely became bored.

The Wart said, "Let's play Rovers then. We can come back in half an hour and wake Merlyn up."

What they called Rovers, consisted in going for a walk with their bows and shooting one arrow each at any agreed mark which they came across. Sometimes it would be a molehill, sometimes a clump of rushes, sometimes a big thistle almost at their feet. They varied the distance at which they chose these objects, sometimes picking a target as much as 120 yards away—which was about as far as these boys' bows could carry—and sometimes having to aim actually below a close thistle because the arrow always leaps up a foot or two as it leaves the bow. They counted five for a hit, and one if the arrow was within a bow's length, and they added up their scores at the end.

On this Thursday they chose their targets wisely. Besides, the grass of the big field had been lately cut, so that they never had to search for their arrows for long, which nearly always

happens, as in golf, if you shoot ill-advisedly near hedges or in rough places. The result was that they strayed further than usual and found themselves near the edge of the savage forest where Cully had been lost.

"I vote," said Kay, "that we go to those buries in the chase, and see if we can get a rabbit. It would be more fun than shooting at these hummocks."

They did this. They chose two trees about a hundred yards apart, and each boy stood under one of them waiting for the conies to come out again. They stood still, with their bows already raised and arrows fitted, so that they would make the least possible movement to disturb the creatures when they did appear. It was not difficult for either of them to stand thus, for the first test which they had had to pass in archery was standing with the bow at arm's length for half an hour. They had six arrows each and would be able to fire and mark them all before they needed to frighten the rabbits back by walking about to collect. An arrow does not make enough noise to upset more than the particular rabbit that it is shot at.

At the fifth shot Kay was lucky. He allowed just the right amount for wind and distance, and his point took a young coney square in the head. It had been standing up on end to look at him, wondering what he was.

"Oh, well shot!" cried the Wart, as they ran to pick it up. It was the first rabbit they had ever hit, and luckily they had killed it dead.

When they had carefully gutted it with the hunting knife which Merlyn had given—to keep it fresh—and passed one of its hind legs through the other at the hock, for convenience in carrying, the two boys prepared to go home with their prize. But before they unstrung their bows they used to observe a ceremony. Every Thursday afternoon, after the last serious arrow had been shot, they were allowed to fit one more nock to their strings and to shoot the arrow straight up into the air. It was partly a gesture of farewell, partly of triumph, and it was beautiful. They did it now as salute to their first prey.

Towards the end of the book, Kay will become a knight. So, he will be 21. White will give us many adventures and a few chapters that show the passing of years. In this scene then, we can imagine that Wart and Kay are in their early teens. In the Disney movie, Wart is shown pulling the sword out of the stone as either a pre-teen or early teen...and that is a mistake.

The reason I bring up age is that, as I write this, the society for the prevention of this or that would be outraged by this reading. Boys with bows and arrows? Madness!

I very much like, as a strength coach, the idea that the two boys had to stand the test of strength with the bow at arms-length for half an hour. We also learn a nice lesson here from Kay, sadly the person who teaches us so many lessons by his failures, that we can't force the arrow...we must let it go.

Overall, I love this section as it highlights these boys' ability to find fun. Merlyn is asleep after a wonderful meal and practice moves from discipline and rigor to a game then to a hunt.

I stopped at an important point in the literary narrative. In the original version, we will meet an arrow stealing crow who leads us to Madam Mim. In the more common modern (1958) version, this scene ends, as nice as I can say it, with a quick disappointing end, "It was a witch." And, that is it. It ends there. For me, reading the 1958 version always had these quick cuts that only made sense to me when I read the original.

The Madam Mim story is in the Disney version of the movie and when I finally saw it again (probably in the late 1970s), I thought the fight scene between Mim and Merlyn was interesting but I thought studio invented it...like the squirrel scene (which goes on forever and teaches nothing). I will discuss this fight scene more as this story unfolds.

We also get another hint of a future story here. "He was trying too hard and plucking on his loose" will be something to remember as we meet Robin Hood. When Wart and Kay show their archery skills, they are commending for NOT being "lute players," they don't pluck their strings.

We are on the edge of another fun story. It will also lead us into a lot of danger and the boys, as happens in many of the stories, will be on the edge of death.

"It was a witch," said Kay.

One of the problems with the heavily edited later versions of *The Sword in the Stone* is that it drops this fun story of the local witch, Madame Mim. Yes, Disney includes it in the movie, but so much of the story gets lost in the telling of this scene with the focus on chasing and cheap humor.

Skipping the rest of the story leaves the "It was a witch" point in a bind. Students often turn to resources to improve their work (or simply find a quicker way to do an assignment) and might turn to this kind of thing, Cliff Notes:

"Kay's description of the arrow-stealing crow as a "witch" is somewhat accurate. In Chapter 11, the boys will see the crow sitting on top of the castle of The Oldest Ones of All, allowing the reader to infer that the crow is actually an animal-spirit, that serves the sorceress Morgan Le Fay, who is keeping watch over the Wart and Kay. Later in the novel, they will encounter her face-to-face during their adventures with Robin Hood.

More important in these two chapters is the joust between King Pellinore and Sir Grummore, which reveals different attitudes toward jousting (and proving one's heroism through it). White begins Chapter 7 by offering his reader an extensive survey of jousting traditions, equipment, and practices."

By not reading the original, Cliff Notes misses so much of the story. It's actually funny to read "allowing the reader to infer that the crow is actually an animal-spirit" and the line "more important in these two chapters is the joust" as the story of Mim stands on its own.

Let's pick up:

"I don't care if it was ten witches," said the Wart. "I am going to get it back."

"But it went towards the Forest."

"I shall go after it."

"You can go alone, then," said Kay. "I'm not going into the Forest Sauvage, just for a putrid arrow."

"I shall go alone."

"Oh, well," said Kay, "I suppose I shall have to come too, if you're set on it. And I bet we shall get nobbled by Wat."

"Let him nobble," said the Wart, "I want my arrow."

They went in the Forest at the place where they had last seen the bird of carrion.

In less than five minutes they were in a clearing with a well and a cottage just like Merlyn's.

"Goodness," said Kay, "I never knew there were any cottages so close. I say, let's go back."

"I just want to look at this place," said the Wart. "It's probably a wizard's."

The cottage had a brass plate screwed on the garden gate. It said:

MADAME MIM, B. B. (Dom-Daniel)

PIANOFORTE

NEEDLEWORK

NECROMANCY

No Hawkers,

Circulars or Income Tax

Beware of the Dragon

I have read this book for the better part of fifty years and only after retyping this section did I realize that...Kay is Right! Perhaps this is the reason for its omissions in the later versions as Wart has become the one who drives on witlessly and Kay is the voice of reason.

"Hawkers," in the 1930s were people asking for food or handouts, we have our own terms in every generation. "Circulars" would be junk mail and that will never cease and the "dragon" makes for a funny little line as many of us would be aware of "Beware of the Dog."

Dom-Daniel (Domdaniel) shows up in a variety of stories but it is, usually, an underwater cavern where evil entities commune. I had no idea until I looked this up that "Pianoforte" is the original name for "piano" and it means "soft and loud." Necromancy is a specific part of the "Dark Arts," as Mim and Merlyn will discuss, that practices raising the dead. The dead, after being conjured, would answer questions, unlock secrets or even be used to do things. In other words, Mim is on the side of Voldemort and Sauron (the Harry Potter series and The Lord of the Rings...if you don't know).

Unusually, therefore, we can say:

Kay was right.

The cottage had lace curtains. These stirred ever so slightly, for behind them there was a lady peeping. The gore-crow was standing on the chimney.

“Come on,” said Kay.” “Oh, do come on. I tell you, she’ll never give it us back.”

At this point the door of the cottage opened suddenly and the witch was revealed standing in the passage. She was a strikingly beautiful woman of about thirty, with coal-black hair so rich that it had the blue-black of the maggot pies in it, sky bright eyes and a general soft air of butter-wouldn’t-melt-in-my-mouth. She was sly.

“How do you do, my dears,” said Madame Mim. “And what can I do for you to-day?”

The boys took off their leather caps, and Wart said, “Please, there is a crow sitting on your chimney and I think it has stolen one of my arrows.”

“Precisely,” said Madame Mim, “I have the arrow within.”

“Could I have it back, please?”

“Inevitably,” said Madame Mim. “The young gentleman shall have his arrow on the very instant, in four ticks and ere the bat squeaks thrice.”

“Thank you very much,” said the Wart.

“Step forwards,” said Madame Mim. “Honour the threshold. Accept the humble hospitality in the spirit in which it is given.”

“I really do not think we can stay,” said the Wart politely. “I really think we must go. We shall be expected back at home.”

“Sweet expectations,” replied Madame Mim in devout tones.

“Yet you would have thought,” she added, “that the young gentleman could have found time to honour a poor cottager, out of politeness. Few can believe how we ignoble tenants of the lower classes value a visit from the landlord’s sons.”

“We would like to come in,” said the Wart, “very much. But you see we shall be late already.”

The lady now began to give a sort of simpering whine. “The fare is lowly,” she said. “No doubt it is not what you would be accustomed to eating, and so naturally such highly-born ones would not care to partake.”

Kay's strongly-developed feeling for good form gave way to this. He was an aristocratic boy always, and condescended to his inferiors so that they would admire him. Even at the risk of visiting a witch, he was not going to have it said that he had refused to eat a tenant's food because it was too humble.

"Come on, Wart," he said. "We needn't be back before vespers."

Madame Mim swept them a low curtsy as they crossed the threshold. Then she took them each by the scruff of the neck, lifted them right off the ground with her strong gypsy arms, and shot out of the back door with them almost before they had got in at the front. The Wart caught a hurried glimpse of her parlour and kitchen. The lace curtains, the aspidistra, the lithograph called the Virgin's Choice, the printed text of the Lord's Prayer written backwards and hung upside down, the sea-shell, the needle-case in the shape of a heart with A Present from Camelot written on it, the broom sticks, the cauldrons, and the bottles of dandelion wine. Then they were kicking and struggling in the back yard.

"We thought that the growing sportsmen would care to examine our rabbits," said Madame Mim.

There were indeed a row of large rabbit hutches in front of them., but they were empty of rabbits. In one hutch there was a poor ragged old eagle owl, evidently miserable and neglected; in another a small boy unknown to them, a wittol who could only roll his eyes and burble when the witch came near. In a third there was a moulting black cock. A fourth had a mangy goat in it, also black, and two more stood empty.

"Grizzle Greediguts," cried the witch.

"Here, mother," answer the carrion crow.

With a flop and a squawk it was sitting beside them, its hairy black beak cocked on one side. It was the witch's familiar.

"Open the doors," commanded Madame Mim, "and Greediguts shall have eyes for supper, round and blue."

The gore-crow hastened to obey, with every sign of satisfaction, and pulled back the heavy doors in its strong beak, with three times three. Then the two boys were thrust inside, one into each hutch and Madame Mim regarded them with unmixed pleasure. The doors had magic locks on them and the witch had made them to open by whispering in their keyholes.

"Gore-crows" is a tough word to get a good definition. It is a crow brought back to life by a necromancer and it has become a popular concept in modern fiction and role-playing games. I think we can assume that Grizzle Greediguts is a bit of evil, especially for its hunger for round, blue eyed boy eyes. "Maggot Pies" is probably the modern "magpies," those cousins of crows

who tease domestic cats at every turn. Certainly, T. H. White is given us a clue that Madame Mim and her crow are close companions.

One thing that leaps out to me each time I read this section is that Mim is beautiful.

“She was a strikingly beautiful woman of about thirty, with coal-black hair so rich that it had the blue-black of the maggot pies in it, sky bright eyes and a general soft air of butter-wouldn’t-melt-in-my-mouth.”

Butter wouldn’t melt in my mouth. Now THAT is a way of describing beauty that I need to use in my daily life. The reason I note this is that the Disney version makes Mim everything BUT beautiful. Her clothes are ill-fitting, she has a bulbous nose and there is nothing remotely attractive with the Disney version of Mim.

Now, I can run with this a bit and take a knock on the Disney vision. Beauty is good, not-beauty is bad...in the Disney universe. One can even argue that up until only recently, Disney’s vision of beauty was strictly Scandinavian: blonde/light brown hair, fair eyes and white skin.

I find White’s beautiful Mim actually more of a challenge for young Kay and Wart. Wart will fall, a bit, for Maid Marian later in our readings and I’m not sure we ever get a glimpse of what Kay finds alluring. In this story, we see that Kay has an interesting weakness:

“He was an aristocratic boy always, and condescended to his inferiors so that they would admire him.”

“His inferiors.” It’s an interesting term for a modern audience and this tension will be central in the later works of The Once and Future King series.

Let me say this: in THIS version of The Sword in the Stone, Wart (and Kay) truly are in trouble. Merlyn is NOT around, no one knows where they are nor the danger they are in and we don’t see any allies in this cottage.

I’m not sure why this story was dropped from later editions as, unlike many of the other stories, Wart is in danger.

Serious danger.

“As nice a brace of young gentlemen,” said the witch, “as ever stewed or roasted. Fattened on real butcher’s meat, I daresay, with milk and all. Now we’ll have the big one jugged for Sunday, if I can get a bit of wine to go in the pot, and the little one we’ll have on the moon’s morn, by jing and by jee, for how can I keep my sharp fork out of him a minute longer it fair gives me the croup.”

“Let me out,” said Kay hoarsely, “you old witch, or Sir Ector will come for you.”

At this Madame Mim could no longer contain her joy. “Hark to the little varmint,” she cried, snapping her fingers and doing a bouncing jib before the cages. “Hark to the sweet, audacious, tender little veal. He answers back and threatens us with Sir Ector, on the very brink of the pot. That’s how I faint to tooth them, I do declare, and that’s how I with them ere the week be out, by Scarmiglione, Belial, Peor, Ciriato Sannuto and Dr. D.”

With this she began bustling about in the back yard, the herb garden and the scullery, cleaning pots, gathering plants for the stuffing, sharpening knives and cleavers, boiling water, skipping for joy, licking her greedy lips, saying spells, braiding her night-black hair, and sing as she worked.”

White’s use of language is lovely. James Joyce, basically a contemporary of White, is noted for his “word play” and this section does a nice job of showing T. H. White’s talents.

Mim worries about the croup, then Kay speaks hoarsely. It’s just fun to read that. So many words in this section can easily be skipped over, but a few add depth and luster to this situation. These, I thought, were fun to learn:

Jing: to move nimbly (like liquid)

Jee: to move forward

Croup: upper respiratory inflammation.

Scarmiglione: one of the demons who torments politicians in Dante’s Inferno.

Belial: from the Bible, a demon. Often considered Lucifer’s assistant.

Peor: from the Book of Numbers, a mountain peak where Balak wanted Balaam to curse Israel.

Ciriato Sannuto: another demon from Dante’s Inferno. I’m just guessing that “Dr. D” is the devil.

Mim, to say the least, is Satanic. This section had to be toned down for the American readers when the story came out:

“The Sword in the Stone was accepted for publication in the U.S. by G.P. Putnam & Sons, on the condition that several fairly significant changes were made. As required by Putnam, Chapter 6, where Arthur and Kay were trapped by Madame Mim was substantially edited. According to Elisabeth Brewer, Putnam might have required this change because they feared the material was too risqué for a young audience (33).”

<https://seymourebels.wordpress.com/early-modern-works-and-sources-up-to-1960/the-once-and-future-king/the-sword-in-the-stone/>

Mim’s pinching of the naked Wart might have been too rough for the readers of this generation; these readers had lived through the Great Depression and were listening to Hitler on the radio were too faint for such things like torture and murder.

This is rough reading: our heroes are going to be butchered and stewed. J. K. Rowling seems to also understand a key to children's literature when she, too, puts her heroes in tight corners and some die in the action.

Catch your breath as, soon, we sing and talk to animals.

Let's pick up on this: Madame Mim has Kay and Wart in tiny cages and she is preparing them for dinner. Here you go:

First she sang the old witch's song:

**Black spirits and white, red spirits and grey,
Mingle, mingle, mingle, you that mingle may.
Here's the blood of a bat.
Put in that, oh, put in that.
Here's libbard's bane.
Put in again.
Mingle, mingle, mingle, you that mingle may.**

Then she sang her work song.

**Two spoons of sherry
Three oz. of yeast,
Half a pound of unicorn,
And God bless the feast.
Shake them in the colander,
Bang them to a chop,
Simmer slightly, snip up nicely,
Jump, skip, hop.
Knit one, knot one, purl two together,**

Pip one and pop one and pluck the secret feather.

**Baste in a mod. Oven.
God bless our coven.
Tra-la-la!
Three toads in a jar.
Te-he-he.
Put in the frog's knee.
Peep out of the lace curtain.
There goes the Toplady girl, she's up to no good that's certain.
Oh, what a lovely baby!
How nice it would go with gravy.
Pinch of salt.**

Here she pinched it very nastily.

Turn the malt

Here she began twiddling round widdershins, in a vulgar way.

With a hey-nonny-nonny and I don't mean maybe.

At the end of the song, Madame Mim took a sentimental turn and delivered herself of several hymns of a blasphemous nature, and a tender love lyric which she sang sotto-voce with trills. It was:

My love is like a red, rose nose
His tail is soft and tawny,
And everywhere my lovely goes
I call him Nick or Horny.

She vanished into the parlour, to lay the table.

Poor Kay was weeping in the corner of the end hutch, lying on his face and paying no attention to anything. Before Madame Mim had finally thrown him in, she had pinched him all over to see if he was fat. She had also slapped him, to see, as the butchers put it, if he was hollow. On top of this, he did not in the least want to be eaten for Sunday dinner and he was miserably furious with the Wart for leading him into such a terrible doom on account of a mere arrow. He had forgotten that it was he who had insisted on entering the fatal cottage.

The Wart sat on his haunches, because the cage was too small for standing up, and examined his prison. The bars were of iron and the gate was iron, too. He shook all the bars, one after the other, but they were as firm as rock. There was an iron bowl for water-with no water in it-and some old straw in a corner for lying down. It was verminous.

"Our mistress," said the mangy old goat suddenly from the next pen, "is not very careful with her pets."

He spoke in a low voice, so that nobody could hear, but the carrion crow which had been left on the chimney to spy on them noticed that they were talking and moved nearer.

"Whisper," said the goat, "if you wish to talk."

"Are you one of her familiars?" asked the Wart suspiciously.

"No," he said. "I'm not a familiar. I'm only a mangy old black goat, rather tattered as you see, and kept for sacrifice."

“Will she eat you too?” asked the Wart, rather tremblingly.

“Not she. I shall be too rank for her sweet tooth, you may be sure. No she will use my blood for making patterns with on Walpurgis Night.

Walpurgis Night is April 30. It is a celebration that was also known as “Witches Night,” but this would long after our story. Of course, that doesn’t matter as White seems to enjoy having a mix of modern (1930s) references sprinkled into his story of the Arthurian legends.

This leads me to a point about this section: the talking goat. I never fully understand White’s rules about talking animals. In the Bible, we have two talking animals: serpent and Balaam’s talking ass (donkey...for clarity). The “rules” of the Bible and talking animals seem to apply to White:

Animals talk when we need to push the story forward.
Maybe.

When Wart was the fish, and soon to be a hawk, serpent, and badger, it makes sense that he would be able to talk to the animals, like Doctor Dolittle. In this story, we are going to see, especially with the next reading, a difficult set of rules to understand when Wart can talk to animals.

So, as I spend far too much thinking about White’s use of animal language in *The Sword in the Stone*, I need to bring out my inner coach and remind myself that this is a fantasy book about a legendary figure.

In the next reading, we get a hint that most of the animals know Arthur’s actual identity.

To help understand this next section, let’s review this from Philip Womack:

“White manages to compress several centuries of British history into his work, and Wart sees it all, remaining sympathetic, valorous and humanly flawed till his final, tragic (in the Aristotelian sense, as White himself would have it) end. Wart oversees the transformation of Britain from a world where Might is Right, through his own more civilised court, to the decadent cynicism of Mordred and his twisted views. Wart can understand what goes before him; but King Arthur can't change what's going to happen. Such is the pain of human existence.

One of the last things that Wart does before his death is speak to a little page, Thomas. "My idea of those knights," he says of the Round Table, "was a sort of candle... I have carried it for many years with a hand to shield it from the wind. It has flickered often. I am giving you the candle now – you won't let it out?"

The candle is about to “blow out” in our meeting with MIm.

“It’s quite a long way off, you know,” continued the goat without self-pity. “For myself I don’t mind very much, for I am old. But look at that poor owl there, that she keeps merely for a sense of possession and generally forgets to feed. That makes my blood boil, that does. It wants to fly, to stretch its wings. At night it just runs round and round and round like a big rat, it gets so restless. Look, it has broken all its soft feathers. For me, it doesn’t matter, for I’m naturally of a sedentary disposition now that youth has flown, but I call that owl a rare shame. Something ought to be done about it.”

The Wart knew that he was probably going to be killed that night, the first to be released out of all that band, but yet he could not help feeling touch at the greatheartedness of this goat. Itself under sentence of death, it could afford to feel strongly about the owl. He wished he were as brave as this.

“If only I could get out,” said the Wart. “I know a magician who would soon settle her hash, and rescue us all.”

The goat thought about this for some time, nodding its gentle head with the great cairngorm eyes. Then it said, “As a matter of fact I know how to get you out, only I did not like to mention it before. Put your ear nearer the bars. I know how to get you out, but not your poor friend there who is crying. I didn’t like to subject you to a temptation like that. You see when she whispers to the lock I have heard what she says, but only on the locks on either side of mine. When she gets a cage away she is too soft to be heard. I know the words to release both you and me, and the black cock here too, but not your young friend yonder.”

“Why haven’t you let yourself out before?” asked the Wart, his heart beginning to bound.

“I can’t speak them in human speech, you see,” said the goat sadly, “and this poor mad boy here, the wittol, he can’t speak them either.”

I think this is a beautiful section. Wart is going to be popped in a pot, yet he stops and admires the bravery and compassion of the goat. I think that one could argue that Wart is naïve and simple, but time and again in our stories, he has these moments of simple courage that really set him apart in the annals of literature.

Obviously, I love him.

“Wittol” is an interesting word and should be used more often. Yes, it does mean “witless,” but it also means, like cuckoldry, a man who allows/ignores his wife’s adultery. So, by all means, I will be using this in my daily life.

This selection also makes me even more confused about Wart’s abilities to speak with animals. The goat can’t “speak them in human speech,” but Wart seems to understand him perfectly. I will live to survive another day, of course, as, I have noted, it is fantasy.

I seem to enjoy this chapter the more I retype it and reanalyze it. Originally, I considered skipping it, as some editions do, but I find this marvelous reading.

“Oh, tell me then.”

“You will be safe then, and so would I and the cock be too, if you stayed long enough to let us out. But would you be brave enough to stay, or would you run at once? And what about your friend and the wittol and the old owl?”

“I should run for Merlyn at once,” said the Wart. “Oh, at once, and he would come back and kill this old witch in two twos and then we should all be out.”

The goat looked at him deeply, his tired old eyes seeming to ask their way kindly into the bottom of his heart.

“I shall tell you only the words for you own lock, said the goat at last. “The cock and I will stay here with your friend, as hostages for you return.”

“Oh, goat,” whispered the Wart. “You could have made me say the words to get you out first and then gone your way. Or you could have got the three of us out, starting with yourself to make sure, and left Kay to be eaten. But you are staying with Kay. Oh, goat, I will never forget you, and if I do not get back in time shall not be able to bear my life.”

“We shall have to wait till dark. It will only be a few minutes now.”

As the goat spoke, they could see Madame Mim lighting the oil lamp in the parlour. It had a pink glass shade with patterns on it. The crow, which could not see in the dark, came quietly closer, so that at least he ought to be able to hear.

“Goat,” said the Wart, in whose heart something strange and terrible had been going on in the dangerous twilight, “put your head closer still. Please, goat, I am not trying to be better than you are, but I have a plan. I think it is I who had better stay as hostage and you had better go. You are black and will not be seen in the night. You have four legs and can run much faster than I. Let you go with a message for Merlyn. I will whisper you out, and I will stay.”

He was hardly able to say the last sentence, for he knew that Madame Mim might come for him at any moment now, and if she came before Merlyn it would be his death warrant. But he did say it, pushing the words as if he were breathing against water, for he knew that if he himself were gone when Madame came for him, she would certainly eat Kay at once.”

“Master,” said the goat without further words, and it put one leg out and laid its double-knobbed forehead on the ground in the salute which is given to royalty. Then it kissed his hand as a friend.

“Quick,” said the Wart, “give me one of your hoofs through the bars and I will scratch a message on it with one of my arrows.”

It was difficult to know what message to write on such a small space with such a clumsy implement. In the end he just wrote Kay; He did not use his own name because he thought Kay more important, and that they would come quicker for him.

“Do you know the way?” he asked.

“My grandam used to live at the castle.”

“What are the words?”

“Mine,” said the goat, “are rather upsetting.”

“What are they?”

“Well,” said the goat. “You must say: Let Good Digestion Wait on Appetite.”

“Oh, goat,” said the Wart in a broken voice. “How horrible! But run quickly, goat, and come back safely, goat, and oh, goat, give me one more kiss for company before you go.” The goat refused to kiss him. It gave him the Emperor’s salute, of both feet, and bounded away into the darkness as soon as he had said the words.

Unfortunately, although he had whispered too carefully for the crow to hear their speech, the release words had had to be said rather loudly to reach the next-door keyhole, and the door had creaked.

“Mother, mother!” screamed the crow. “The rabbits are escaping.”

Instantly Madame Mim was framed in the lighted doorway of the kitchen.

“What is it, my Grizzle?” she cried. “What ails us, my halcyon tit?”

“The rabbits are escaping,” shrieked the crow again.

The witch ran out, but too late to catch the goat or even to see him, and began examining the locks at once by the light of her fingers. She held these up in the air and a blue flame burned at the tip of each.

“One little boy safe,” counted Madame Mim,” and sobbing for his dinner. Two little boys safe, and neither getting thinner. One mangy goat gone, and who cares a fiddle? For the owl and the cock are left, and the wittol in the middle.

“Still,” added Madame Mim, “it’s a caution how he got out, a proper caution, that it is.”

Things are not going to get better for Wart. In the original American version, the next scene will be cut out as Mim will be basically torturing Wart and pinching and prepping him for the pot. It is an uncomfortable scene hearing the recipe for Wart.

The goat gives us a hint about Wart’s future: the goat gives him, twice, the Emperor’s bow. Now, why all the animals know about the pedigree of Wart and no human (save the Wizard Merlyn) has a clue is another interesting mystery.

Wart's mind and bravery shine through in this reading. Plus, and this will carry through more and more through the readings, Wart is very bright...even under pressure.

I have seen the Shadow of Death twice, perhaps more, in my life. During my junior year at THE Utah State University, I walked over to Ferron Sondereggor between rounds to talk about my discus technique. I was leading by a long way at the University of Montana, but I couldn't get that bomb throw that would qualify me for the Nationals.

He called me over...I remember that...then he stopped waving and started shouting. And, I remember looking up, tossing my hand up and deflecting a discus throw from about 145 feet away enough so that when it crashed into my head, I only got a concussion that made me black out for six months.

I broke my thumb stopping the discus, but it flattened out enough to NOT hit me on the edge. I wouldn't be writing this if it was on the edge. About six months later, I "woke." No, I wasn't in a coma, but as most people who have had major concussions will tell you, I didn't make a good decision, good choice, for six months. My handwriting was a scrawl like a kindergarten student.

Years later, Professor Glatfelter told my wife, Tiffini, the story about how concerned the faculty was in Political Science (my major) as it was obvious I wasn't the same person. As I have written before, he gave me an A in Russian Studies, not for my Final, but for my work throughout the course.

When I took the Final, he told Tiff, I looked up and said: "I don't remember. I don't remember anything." I must have done a good job until that day.

And, I apologize to anyone for anything I did or said during that time. If I remembered, I would be clearer.

Years later, in 1985, I was in Medinet Habu as part of my studies in Egypt. It was July in the desert and I ran out of water. I was alone in temperatures sneaking up on 120 degrees and I had to make, as we would say in "Dune," a "water decision."

I did. I drank out of some water that was...well, you don't want the details. I picked up a parasite and lost forty pounds in two weeks. There were times I could barely stay awake long enough to run to the toilet. It wasn't pretty.

In both cases, I survived. I think there was a reason I need to "be here." I hope I will know someday, frankly.

Wart, though, in this scene is looking death in its murderous eye. Mim is coming to eat him. He has a choice: flee and maybe get help and save himself.

Or: Stay. Send the goat and hope.

I think this is a transformative moment in Wart's life. As King, he will rethink fighting, "Might MAKES Right," and save lives in the process. He, as White tells us, has a plan. He isn't better than the goat, he simply sees more. He will continue to use his brain throughout our stories. If you continue to read the rest of the books White gives us, you will discover that his heart is going to let him down.

"He was hardly able to say the last sentence, for he knew that Madame Mim might come for him at any moment now, and if she came before Merlyn it would be his death warrant."

Facing the knives and pots of Mim, Wart puts forward a plan. As Dumas writes as the last lines of the Count of Monte Cristo, Wart, like his audience must "wait and hope."

Sadly, for Wart, it is about to get worse.

"He was whispering to the little boy," sneaked the crow, "whispering for the last half-hour together."

"Indeed?" said the witch, "whispering to the little dinner, hey? And much good may it do him. What about a sage stuffing, boy, hey? And what were you doing, my Greediguts, to let them carry on like that? No dinner for you, my little painted bird of paradise, so you may just flap off to any old tree and roost."

"Oh, Mother, "whined the crow. "I was only adoing (sic) of my duty."

"Flap off," cried Madame Mim, "Flap off, and go broody if you like."

The poor crow hung its head and crept off to the other end of the roof, sneering to itself."

"Now my juicy toothful," said the witch, turning to the Wart and opening his door with the proper whisper of Enough-Is-As-Good-As-A-Feast, "we think the cauldron simmers and the oven is mod. How will my tender sucking pig enjoy a little popping lard instead of a clandestine whisper?"

The Wart ran about in his cage as much as he could, and gave as much trouble as possible in being caught, in order to save even a little time for the coming of Merlyn.

"Let go of me, you beast," he cried. "Let go of me, you me, you foul hag, or I'll bite your fingers."

"How the creature scratches," said Madame Mim.

"Bless us, how he wriggles and kicks, just for being a pagan's dinner."

"Don't you dare kill me," cried the Wart, now hanging by one leg. "Don't you dare lay a finger on me, or you'll be sorry for it."

"The lamb," said Madame Mim. "The partridge with a plump breast, how he does squeak.

"And then there's the cruel old custom, "continued the witch, carrying him into the lamplight of the kitchen where a new sheet was laid on the floor, "of plucking the poor chicken before it is dead. The feathers come out cleaner so. Nobody could be so cruel to do it nowadays, by Nothing or by Never, but of course a little boy doesn't feel any pain. Their clothes come off

nicer if you take them off alive, and who would dream of roasting a little boy in his clothes, to spoil the feast.”

“Murdress,” cried the Wart. “You will rue this ere the night is out.”

“Cubling,” said the Witch. “It’s a shame to kill you, that it is. Look how his little downy hair stares in the lamplight, and how his poor eyes pop out of his head. Greediguts will be sorry to miss those eyes, so she will. Sometimes one could almost be a vegetarian, when one has to do a deed like this.”

The witch laid the Wart over her lap, with his head between her knees, and carefully began to take his clothes off with a practiced hand. He kicked and squirmed as much as he could, reckoning that every hindrance would put off the time when he would be actually knocked on the head, and thus increase the time in which the black goat could bring Merlyn to his rescue. During this time the witch sang her plucking song, of:

Pull the feather with the skin,
Not against the grain-o,
Pluck the soft one out from in,
The great with might and main-o,
Even if he wriggles,
Never heed his squiggles,
For mercifully little boys are quite immune to pain—o.

She varied this song with the other kitchen song of the happy cook:

Soft skin for crackling,
Oh, my lovely duckling,
The skewers go here,
And the strings go there
And such is my scrumptious suckling.

“You will be sorry for this,” cried the Wart, “Even if you live to be a thousand.”

“He has spoken enough,” said Madame Mim. “It is time that we knocked him on the napper.”

“Hold him by the legs, and
When he goes his head,
Clip him with the palm-edge, and
Then he is dead.”

The dreadful witch now lifted the Wart into the air and prepared to have her will of him, but at that very moment there was a fizzle of summer lightning with any crash and in the nick of time Merlyn was standing on the threshold.

“Ha!” said Merlyn. “Now we shall see what a double-first at Dom-Daniel avails the private education of my master Bleise.”

This section was cut from the 1938 American version because Yanks would be too sensitive to read this level of violence. Mim is ripping the clothes off of Wart and singing to him that he is about to pound his head on the edge of a table.

Of course, most of us know that Merlyn will arrive and save the day. T. H. White’s original (what I have retyped above) takes a lot of time for the hero to show up in “the nick of time.” One can only imagine what is going through Kay’s mind as his friend is stripped and prepared as a meal.

I think the popularity of the Harry Potter stories is, in part, due to Rowling’s approach to this epic: people die in epics. As I tell my students: “Epics are “big.” Yes, laugh, but realize that epics deal with the great issues of life:

Life

Death

Love

And, to be a true epic, characters, even beloved ones, die. The deadpool in the Potter series is shocking: Sirius, Dumbledore, Snape (heroically), Nymphadora Tonks, Remus Lupin, Alastor "Mad-Eye" Moody, Hedwig, Cedric Diggory, Fred Weasley, and Dobby. As I list them out, I remind myself that each one of these characters, including an owl and House Elf, was fully fleshed out by Rowling and, as a reader, I cared about each of them.

A lot.

White spares Wart and Kay in this story, but the characters are certainly in peril. This isn’t the farcical comic set piece of the Disney movie; Wart is about to die here. In the later books, of course, characters will die, but White doesn’t really take down major characters like Rowlings.

White spends little time explaining Bleise here. We have already discussed Madame Mim’s training background in the depths and pits of the world of devil worship and the dark arts. I found this little explanation on the web, but I struggled to make sense of it:

“I have a Master called Bleise who lives in North Humberland, and perhaps he will be able to tell me what it is I am trying to remember.”

The quote comes from the second book of White’s *The Once and Future King*, *The Queen of Air and Darkness*. I don’t appreciate that book as much as *The Sword in the Stone* (obviously), but the book does put into the action Merlyn and Arthur’s insights on “*Might FOR Right*.”

In Malory, Bleise (Blaise) is Merlyn's Master, to whom he tells the history of Arthur so it can be written down. In the novels, we don't hear too much about this guy. This is pretty much it. Is

this who has taught Merlyn magic? That might be hinted at here in his title "Master" (which in the medieval period could mean either "Ruler" or "Teacher").

Merlyn's memory will be a major force in the events than explode in the following books. I should say, his "issues with memory," as, if you recall," he remembers the future. That can be confusing.

The goat, by the way, will appear again in OUR version of The Sword in the Stone. He will be fine. In addition, he will become a fixture in The Book of Merlyn, the "lost" true last chapter of this series.

Madame Mim put the Wart down without looking at him, rose from her chair, and drew herself to her full magnificent height. Her glorious hair began to crackle, and sparks shot out of her flashing eyes. She and Merlyn stood facing each other for fully sixty seconds, without a word spoken, and then Madame Mim swept a royal curtsey and Merlyn bowed a frigid bow. He stood aside to let her go first out of the doorway and then followed her into the garden.

It ought perhaps to be explained, before we go any further, that in those far-off days, when there was actually a college for Witches and Warlocks under the sea at Dom-Daniel and when all wizards were either black or white, there was a good deal of ill-feeling between the different creeds. Quarrels between white and black were settled ceremonially, by means of duels. A wizard's duel was run like this. The two principals would stand opposite each other in some large space free from obstructions, and await the signal to begin. When the signal was given they were at liberty to turn themselves into things. It was rather like the game that can be played by two people with their fists. They say One, Two, Three, and at Three they either stick out two fingers for scissors, or the flat palm for paper, or the clenched fist for stone. If your hand becomes paper when your opponent's becomes scissors, then he cuts you and wins: but if yours had turned into stone, his scissors are blunted, and the win is yours. The object of the wizard in the duel was, to turn himself into some kind of animal, vegetable or mineral which would destroy the particular animal, vegetable or mineral which had been selected by his opponent. Sometimes it went on for hours.

Merlyn had Archimedes for his second, Madame Mim had the gore-crow for hers, while Hecate, who always had to be present at these affairs in order to keep them regular, sat on the top of a step-ladder in the middle to umpire. She was a cold, shining, muscular lady, the colour of moonlight. Merlyn and Madame Mim rolled up their sleeves, gave their surcoats to Hecate to hold and the latter put on a celluloid eye-shade to watch the battle.

At the first gong Madame Mim immediately turned herself into a dragon. This was the accepted opening move and Merlyn ought to have replied by being a thunderstorm or something like that. Instead he caused a great deal of preliminary confusion by becoming a field mouse, which was quite invisible in the grass, and nibbled Madame Mim's tail, as she started about in all directions, for about five minutes before she noticed him. But when she did notice the nibbling, she was a furious cat in two flicks.

Wart held his breath to see what the mouse would become next-he thought perhaps a tiger which could kill the cat-but Merlyn merely became another cat. He stood opposite her and made faces. This most irregular procedure put Madame Mim quite out of her stride, and it took her more than a minute to regain her bearings and become a dog. Even as she became it, Merlyn was another dog standing opposite her, of the same sort.

“Oh, well played, sir!” cried the Wart, beginning to see the plan.

Madame Mim was furious. She felt herself out of her depth against these unusual stonewalling tactics and experienced an internal struggle not to lose her temper. She knew that if she did lose it she would lose her judgement, and the battle as well. She did some quick thinking. If whatever she turned herself into a menacing animal, Merlyn was merely going to turn into the same kind, the thing would become either a dog-fight or stalemate. She had better alter her own tactics and give Merlyn a surprise.

At this moment the gong went for the end of the first round. The combatants retired into the respective corners and their seconds cooled them by flapping their wings, while Archimedes gave Merlyn a little message by nibbling with his beak.

“Second round,” commanded Hecate. “Seconds out of the ring...Time!”

Clang went the gong, and the two desperate wizards stood face to face.

Madame Mim had gone on plotting during her rest. She had decided to try a new tack by leaving the offensive to Merlyn, beginning by assuming a defensive shape herself. She turned into a spreading oak.

Merlyn stood baffled under the oak for a few seconds. Then he most cheekily-and, as it turned out, rashly- became a powdery little blue-tit, which flew up and sat perkily on Madame Mim’s branches. You could see the oak boiling with indignation for a moment; but then its rage became icy cold, and the poor little blue-tit was sitting, not on an oak, but on a snake. The snake’s mouth was open, and the bird was actually perching on its jaws. The jaws clashed together, but only in the nick of time, the bird whizzed off as a gnat into the safe air. Madame Mim had got it on the run, however, and the speed of the contest became bewildering. The quicker the attacker could assume a form, the less time the fugitive had to think of a form which would elude it, and now the changes were as quick as thought. The gnat was scarcely in the air when the snake had turned into a toad whose curious tongue, rooted at the front instead of the back of the jaw, was already unrolling in the flick which would snap it in. The gnat, flustered by the sore pursuit, was bounced into an offensive role, and the hard-pressed Merlyn now stood before the toad in the shape of a molly which could attack it. But Madame Mim was in her element. The game was going according to the normal rules now, and in less than an eye’s blink the toad had turned into a peregrine falcon which was diving at two hundred and fifty miles an hour upon the heron’s back. Poor Merlyn, beginning to lose his nerve, turned wildly into an elephant-this move usually won a little

breathing space-but Madame Mim, relentless, changed from the falcon into an aullay on the instant. An aullay was as much bigger than an elephant as an elephant is larger than a sheep. It was a sort of horse with an elephant's trunk. Madame Mim raised this trunk into the air, gave a shriek like a railway engine, and rushed upon her panting foe. In a flick, Merlyn had disappeared.

"One," said Hecate. "Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. Nine-"

But before the fatal Ten which would have counted him out, Merlyn reappeared in a bed of nettles, mopping his brow. He had been standing among them as a nettle.

The aullay saw no reason to change its shape. It rushed upon the man before it with another piercing scream. Merlyn vanished again just as the thrashing trunk descended, and all stood still a moment, looking about them, wondering where he would step out next.

"One," began Hecate again, but even as she proceeded with her counting, strange things began to happen. The aullay got hiccoughs, turned red, swelled visibly, began whooping, come out in spots, staggered three times, rolled its eyes, fell rumbling to the ground. It groaned, kicked and said Farewell. The Wart cheered, Archimedes hooted till her cried, the gore-crow fell down dead, and Hecate, on the top of her ladder, clapped so much that she nearly tumbled off. It was a master stroke.

The ingenious magician had turned himself successively into the microbes, not yet discovered, of hiccoughs, scarlet fever, mumps, whooping cough, measles and heat spots and from a complication of all of these complaints the infamous Madame Mim had immediately expired.

I really enjoy how White steps in and clarifies things for his readers several times in this text. The "Slap Game" explanation, scissors, paper and rock, brings me back to my youth. I also find Merlyn's tactics to be worth careful study.

Really, only one criticism from me: there is no real explanation of Hecate. Hecate is the Greek goddess of magic, sorcery, witchcraft, crossroads, trivial knowledge, necromancy, and ghosts. Her appearance here as the official is interesting and White doesn't really include a description of her.

I don't know why, or course, but maybe he is trying to keep us focused on the duel. In other versions, Mim doesn't die, but here, I give you the original. Well, she "expires," but that is still far better than that terrible scene in the Disney movie where Merlyn is checking Mim's temperature as she recovers in bed. If this is serious business, eating boys for meals seems like something we need to deal with seriously, then the stakes must be high.

Sometimes *The Sword in the Stone* is tossed into that pile called “Children’s Books.” We keep reading chapter after chapter here where people face death, people die and violence is common. And, good books deal with these issues whether or not they are for kids or adults.

We are about to move into a chapter that is considered White’s funniest work. As we bury Mim, we probably need a collective breath. A little light comedy might be the best antidote.

Chapter Seven

Tilting and horsemanship had two afternoons a week, because they were the most important branches of a gentleman's education in those days. Merlyn grumbled about athletics, saying that nowadays people seemed to think that you were an educated man if you could knock another man off a horse and that the craze for games was the ruin of scholarship—nobody got scholarships like they used to do when he was a boy, and all the public schools had been forced to lower their standards—but Sir Ector, who was an old tilting blue, said that the battle of Crécy had been won upon the playing fields of Camelot. This made Merlyn so furious that he gave Sir Ector rheumatism two nights running before he relented.

Tilting was a great art and needed practice. When two knights jousted they held their lances in their right hands, but they directed their horses at one another so that each man had his opponent on his near side. The base of the lance, in fact, was held on the opposite side of the body to the side at which the enemy was charging. This seems rather inside out to anybody who is in the habit, say, of opening gates with a hunting-crop, but it had its reasons. For one thing, it meant that the shield was on the left arm, so that the opponents charged shield to shield, fully covered. It also meant that a man could be unhorsed with the side or edge of the lance, in a kind of horizontal swipe, if you did not feel sure of hitting him with your point. This was the humblest or least skillful blow in jousting.

A good jousting, like Lancelot or Tristram, always used the blow of the point, because, although it was liable to miss in unskillful hands, it made contact sooner. If one knight charged with his lance held rigidly sideways, to sweep his opponent out of the saddle, the other knight with his lance held directly forward would knock him down a lance length before the sweep came into effect.

Then there was how to hold the lance for the point stroke. It was no good crouching in the saddle and clutching it in a rigid grip preparatory to the great shock, for if you held it inflexibly like this its point bucked up and down to every movement of your thundering mount and you were practically certain to miss the aim. On the contrary, you had to sit loosely in the saddle with the lance easy and balanced against the horse's motion. It was not until the actual moment of striking that you clamped your knees into the horse's sides, threw your weight forward in your seat, clutched the lance with the whole hand instead of with the finger and thumb, and hugged your right elbow to your side to support the butt.

There was the size of the spear. Obviously a man with a spear one hundred yards long would strike down an opponent with a spear of ten or twelve feet before the latter came anywhere near him. But it would have been impossible to make a spear one hundred yards long and, if made, impossible to carry it. The jousting had to find out the greatest length which he could manage with the greatest speed, and he had to stick to that. Sir Lancelot, who came some time after this part of the story, had several sizes of spear and would call for his Great Spear or his Lesser Spear as occasion demanded.

There were the places on which the enemy should be hit. In the armoury of The Castle of the Forest Sauvage there was a big picture of a knight in armour with circles round his vulnerable points. These varied with the style of armour, so that you had to study your opponent before the charge and select a point. The good armourers—the best lived at Warrington, and still live near there—were careful to make all the forward or entering sides of their suits convex, so that the spear point glanced off them. Curiously enough, the shields of Gothic suits were more inclined to be concave. It was better that a spear point should stay on the shield, rather than glance off upward or downward, and perhaps hit a more vulnerable point of the body armour. The best place of all for hitting people was on the very crest of the tilting helm, that is, if the person in question were vain enough to have a large metal crest in whose folds and ornaments the point would find a ready lodging. Many were vain enough to have these armorial crests, with bears and dragons or even ships or castles on them, but Sir Lancelot always contented himself with a bare helmet, or a bunch of feathers which would not hold spears, or, on one occasion, a soft lady's sleeve.

It would take too long to go into all the interesting details of proper tilting which the boys had to learn, for in those days you had to be a master of your craft from the bottom upward. You had to know what wood was best for spears, and why, and even how to turn them so that they would not splinter or warp. There were a thousand disputed questions about arms and armour, all of which had to be understood.

T. H. White does such a marvelous job in this opening section of the chapter outlining the basics of jousting and tilting. If you continue reading the series, we will meet Lancelot and his uncle, Uncle Dap, is one of these experts on armor and jousting. Lancelot, of course, is usually considered the ultimate in jousting and fighting in the series; White will add a lot of insights into how he evolved into such a man.

The chapters reflect the opening of the book. We began this story with a review of Kay and Wart's weekly curriculum. Here is the afternoons:

"In the afternoons the programme was: Mondays and Fridays, tilting and horsemanship; Tuesdays, hawking; Wednesdays, fencing; Thursdays, archery; Saturdays, the theory of chivalry, with the proper measures to be blown on all occasions, terminology of the chase and hunting etiquette."

So, we have had stories involved with hawking and archery. We will return to both fairly soon. This new chapter focuses on tilting and horsemanship with a bit of chivalry tossed in for good luck too.

The deeper I look at this book, the more it becomes apparent to me that this is more than just a book about knights and transfigurations: it is a book about learning. It is a book about education. White's "most popular" quote, at least if you dive into the internet, is this from an upcoming chapter:

"The best thing for being sad," replied Merlin, beginning to puff and blow, "is to learn something. That's the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honour trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then — to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the only thing for you. Look what a lot of things there are to learn."

This is usually what you see quoted online, but Merlyn continues:

"Learning is the thing for you. Look at what a lot of things there are to learn—pure science, the only purity there is. You can learn astronomy in a lifetime, natural history in three, literature in six. And then, after you have exhausted a milliard lifetimes in biology and medicine and theocriticism and geography and history and economics—why, you can start to make a cartwheel out of the appropriate wood, or spend fifty years learning to begin to learn to beat your adversary at fencing. After that you can start again on mathematics, until it is time to learn to plough."

After this amazing speech, White sends Wart off to meet the badger to round off his education.

White plays with time again in this chapter. His mention of the Battle of Crecy, August 26, 1346, seems to throw our timeline for the events of *The Sword in the Stone* off a bit again. I don't worry about the exact dates, of course, as I have noted before in these writings.

The reason this battle is important is that it was won by the use of the longbow and it was the moment that jousting and tilting became nearly useless. Armor couldn't hold up to the longbow and became a fashion show. The value of armor became limited, but it was always nice to have around to impress your friends.

Just outside Sir Ector's castle there was a jousting field for tournaments, although there had been no tournaments in it since Kay was born. It was a green meadow, kept short, with a broad grassy bank raised round it on which pavilions could be erected. There was an old wooden grandstand at one side, lifted on stilts for the ladies. At present the field was only used as a practice-ground for tilting, so a quintain had been erected at one end and a ring at

the other. The quintain was a wooden saracen on a pole. He was painted with a bright blue face and red beard and glaring eyes. He had a shield in his left hand and a flat wooden sword in his right. If you hit him in the middle of his forehead all was well, but if your lance struck him on the shield or on any part to left or right of the middle line, then he spun round with great rapidity, and usually caught you a wallop with his sword as you galloped by, ducking. His paint was somewhat scratched and the wood picked up over his right eye. The ring was just an ordinary iron ring tied to a kind of gallows by a thread. If you managed to put your point through the ring, the thread broke, and you could canter off proudly with the ring round your spear.

The day was cooler than it had been for some time, for the autumn was almost within sight, and the two boys were in the tilting yard with the master armourer and Merlyn. The master armourer, or sergeant-at-arms, was a stiff, pale, bouncy gentleman with waxed moustaches. He always marched about with his chest stuck out like a pouter pigeon, and he called out "On the word One—" on every possible occasion. He took great pains to keep his stomach in, and often tripped over his feet because he could not see them over his chest. He was generally making his muscles ripple, which annoyed Merlyn.

Wart lay beside Merlyn in the shade of the grandstand and scratched himself for harvest bugs. The saw-like sickles had only lately been put away, and the wheat stood in stooks of eight among the tall stubble of those times. The Wart still itched. He was also sore about the shoulders and had a burning ear, from making bosh shots at the quintain—for, of course, practice tilting was done without armour. Wart was pleased that it was Kay's turn to go through it now and he lay drowsily in the shade, snoozing, scratching, twitching like a dog and partly attending to the fun.

Merlyn, sitting with his back to all the athleticism, was practising a spell which he had forgotten. It was a spell to make the sergeant's moustaches uncurl, but at present it only uncurled one of them, and the sergeant had not noticed it. He absent-mindedly curled it up again every time Merlyn did the spell, and Merlyn said, "Drat it!" and began again. Once he made the sergeant's ears flap by mistake, and the latter gave a startled look at the sky.

"The master armourer, or sergeant-at-arms," will return as the butt of several jokes as we continue through our book. He will bravely lead his troops in the wrong direction during a boar hunt. I think White enjoys poking fun at the military puffery here.

Years ago, on my recommendation, a friend of mine read this book. This was the chapter that was most vexing for the reader: "All those details that never push the story forward!"

To be fair, the person was well educated. To be unfair, they missed the point of the whole book. As I have said before, *The Sword in the Stone* is a love story...about learning. In the end, of course, it also becomes a primer on strength training (as you will see; you need to be strong to pull the sword from the stone), but every page dances with the love of education.

As I was mulling over this, I thought back through my education and remembered that small story that we find in Boswell's "Life of Johnson." Sadly, this book receives little mention today, but Sherlock Holmes fans will recognize the name, Boswell, from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia." And, yes, you should read that work because it remains my favorite Sherlock story.

We find this small episode on one of Boswell and Johnson's trips:

On Saturday, July 30, Dr. Johnson and I took a sculler at the Temple-stairs, and set out for Greenwich. I asked him if he really thought a knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages an essential requisite to a good education.

Johnson: "Most certainly, Sir; for those who know them have a very great advantage over those who do not. Nay, Sir, it is wonderful what a difference learning makes upon people even in the common intercourse of life, which does not appear to be much connected with it." "And yet, (said I) people go through the world very well, and carry on the business of life to good advantage, without learning."

Johnson: "Why, Sir, that may be true in cases where learning cannot possibly be of any use; for instance, this boy rows us as well without learning, as if he could sing the song of Orpheus to the Argonauts, who were the first sailors." He then called to the boy, "What would you give, my lad, to know about the Argonauts?" "Sir, (said the boy) I would give what I have." Johnson was much pleased with his answer, and we gave him a double fare. Dr. Johnson then turning to me, "Sir, (said he) a desire of knowledge is the natural feeling of mankind; and every human being, whose mind is not debauched, will be willing to give all that he has, to get knowledge." End quote.

We can forgive Boswell and Johnson for the class warfare issues that we see here: it was another time and era.

As I read this again, I realized that I am the boy who is rowing. I'm the kid from the blue collar, Union family who lived one paycheck away from ruin. I paid for my education by throwing the discus far, but I never missed class and I never missed assignments. I knew that the ticket to success was simply leaning forward in my desk listening, taking notes and applying the lessons.

So, yes, White spends a lot of time in detail teaching us about lots of things that don't push the story forward.

And, that is why I love this book.

We pick our story with a selection that is not in all versions of The Sword in the Stone:

"How's goat?" asked Merlyn lazily, getting tired of these activities.

The had set free all Madame Mim's poor captives on the night of the great duel, but the goat had insisted on coming home with them. They had found him lurking on the edge of the battle ground, having galloped all the way back to see the fun and to help the Wart as best he could if Madame Mim should have proved the victor.

"He has made friends with Cavall," said the Wart, "and decided to sleep in the kennels. It was funny at first, because Clumsy and Apollon thought it was cheek and tried to run him out. He just stood in a corner so that they could not nip his hocks, and gave them such a bunt each with his knobbly forehead that now, whenever they are doing and go somewhere else. The Dog Boy says that Clumsy believes he is the devil."

Again, you won't find this in some editions of *The Sword in the Stone*. The editors dropped Madame Mim and, logically (if you think dropping the Madame Mim story is logical) dropped our little story of our goat's life in the kennels. Dropping it loses, in my humble opinion, one of the great arcs of White's story, but let's look at one thing before we do:

Goat returned to defend Wart.

If you need a definition of hero, say "Goat." I remember a firefighter on 9/11 saying: "We go back in." For all the horrors of 9/11...and the resulting wars...I have found this to be the great gift. It is a wonderful insight about courage.

Now, back to the mundane: There is a minor argument that Cavall comes from the Latin for "horse," but White is NOT playing that game. Cavall, as we have seen, is Arthur's favorite dog.

Fortunately, it doesn't end here for fans of our heroic goat and dog. Cavall will need to be saved in a later story in *The Sword in the Stone*, but I think White is saving him for what I consider the most beautiful moment in the whole FIVE books, from *The Sword in the Stone* to *The Book of Merlyn*.

Published in 1977, nearly 20 years after the completed *The Once and Future King*, and well after the death of White, *The Book of Merlyn* was chopped up a bit and turned into the 1958 version of *The Sword in the Stone*. The stories of the ants and the geese, for example, seem much more appropriate in *The Book of Merlyn*.

Goat and Cavall return (among others) in *The Book of Merlyn*. Discussing the positive aspects of humans, Merlyn dismisses much of humanity's triumphs and Goat joins in:

"Goat observed slyly: "Parasites."

At this, Cavall got off his master's lap, and he and the new king walked over to the goat on stiff legs. Cavall spoke in human speech for the first and last time in his long life, in unision with his master. His voice sound like a teuton's speaker through a trumpet.

“Did you say Parasites?” they asked. “Just say that once again, will you, until we punch your head?”

The goat regarded them with amused affection, but refused to have a row.

“If you punched my head,” he said, “you would get a pair of bloody knuckles. Besides, I take it back.”

End quote.

The scene goes on to include “the most wonderful comment which he (Arthur) had ever received.” It was simply this:

“It is because we love you, king, yourself,” said Archimedes eventually.”

The Sword in the Stone, as well as the other books, is an epic. As I noted before, we deal with the big issues:

Love

Death

Immortality

The Book of Merlyn leaves us with a question about Arthur: does he die or not? White “likes to think” that he remains in the College of Life in a badger’s lair trying to figure out how to save our violent species.

And, the reason for saving humanity, as Dumbledore tells Harry Potter over and over, is love. That’s why we go back in.

We pick up the narrative of The Sword in the Stone that is in all the various editions:

From far off at the other side of the tilting ground the sergeant's voice came floating on the still air.

"Nah, Nah, Master Kay, that ain't it at all. Has you were. Has you were. The spear should be 'eld between the thumb and forefinger of the right 'and, with the shield in line with the seam of the trahser leg...."

The Wart rubbed his sore ear and sighed.

"What are you grieving about?"

"I was not grieving; I was thinking."

"What were you thinking?"

"Oh, it was not anything. I was thinking about Kay learning to be a knight."

"And well you may grieve," exclaimed Merlyn hotly. "A lot of brainless unicorns swaggering about and calling themselves educated just because they can push each other off a horse with a bit of stick! It makes me tired. Why, I believe Sir Ector would have been gladder to get a by-our-lady tilting blue for your tutor, that swings himself along on his knuckles like an anthropoid ape, rather than a magician of known probity and international reputation with first-class honours from every European university. The trouble with the Norman Aristocracy is that they are games-mad, that is what it is, games-mad."

He broke off indignantly and deliberately made the sergeant's ears flap slowly twice, in unison.

"I was not thinking quite about that," said the Wart. "As a matter of fact, I was thinking how nice it would be to be a knight, like Kay."

"Well, you will be one soon enough, won't you?" asked the old man, impatiently.

Wart did not answer.

"Won't you?"

Merlyn turned round and looked closely at the boy through his spectacles.

"What is the matter now?" he enquired nastily. His inspection had shown him that his pupil was trying not to cry, and if he spoke in a kind voice he would break down and do it.

"I shall not be a knight," replied the Wart coldly. Merlyn's trick had worked and he no longer wanted to weep: he wanted to kick Merlyn. "I shall not be a knight because I am not a proper son of Sir Ector's. They will knight Kay, and I shall be his squire."

Merlyn's back was turned again, but his eyes were bright behind his spectacles. "Too bad," he said, without commiseration.

The Wart burst out with all his thoughts aloud. "Oh," he cried, "but I should have liked to be born with a proper father and mother, so that I could be a knight errant."

"What would you have done?"

"I should have had a splendid suit of armour and dozens of spears and a black horse standing eighteen hands, and I should have called myself The Black Knight. And I should have hosed at a well or a ford or something and made all true knights that came that way to joust with me for the honour of their ladies, and I should have spared them all after I had given them a great fall. And I should live out of doors all the year round in a pavilion, and never do

anything but joust and go on quests and bear away the prize at tournaments, and I should not ever tell anybody my name."

"Your wife will scarcely enjoy the life."

"Oh, I am not going to have a wife. I think they are stupid."

"I shall have to have a lady-love, though," added the future knight uncomfortably, "so that I can wear her favour in my helm, and do deeds in her honour."

A humblebee came zooming between them, under the grandstand and out into the sunlight.

Later in the book, we will be brought back to nearly this same theme: all Wart wants to be is a heroic knight, but the circumstances of his birth keep him from realizing this dream.

In a sense, he will never be an actual knight as he goes right from squire to King in literally a flash. If one continues the journey of reading through the entire *The Once and Future King* series, we will meet Sir Lancelot who mirrors Wart's dreams of knighthood with his actual life.

This chapter is considered one of the funniest and merriest chapters of our book by many reviewers. I have always found it a bit slow and plodding. Certainly, that reflects on me as a reader as much as anything, but I do like one thing I see here that is beginning to form: Wart and Merlyn, who obviously care much about each other, are beginning to find the ideas and ideals that will provide the rub of the relationship.

If one continues reading all the way through *The Book of Merlyn*, we will discover that Merlyn finds little good with humanity at all. Yet, as always, Merlyn will find his back to Arthur. This exchange has always been my favorite part of this chapter:

"I was not thinking quite about that," said the Wart. "As a matter of fact, I was thinking how nice it would be to be a knight, like Kay."

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"He no longer wanted to weep; he wanted to kick Merlyn." I think we see "reverse psychology" in action here; this seemingly cruel moment is also filled with kindness. Much later in the book,

we will return to this same discussion (Chapter Twenty) and Merlyn's bitterness towards knighthood, and games, seem to be more protective towards Wart. Here is the discussion from Chapter Twenty:

"If I were to be made a knight," said the Wart, staring dreamily into the fire, "I should insist on doing my vigil by myself, as Hob does with his hawks, and I should pray to God to let me encounter all the evil in the world in my own person, so that if I conquered there would be none left, and, if I were defeated, I would be the one to suffer for it."

"That would be extremely presumptuous of you," said Merlyn, "and you would be conquered, and you would suffer for it."

"I shouldn't mind."

"Wouldn't you? Wait till it happens and see."

"Why do people not think, when they are grown up, as I do when I am young?"

"Oh dear," said Merlyn. "You are making me feel confused. Suppose you wait till you are grown up and know the reason?"

"I don't think that is an answer at all," replied the Wart, justly.

Merlyn wrung his hands.

"Well, anyway," he said, "suppose they did not let you stand against all the evil in the world?"

"I could ask," said the Wart.

"You could ask," repeated Merlyn.

He thrust the end of his beard into his mouth, stared tragically at the fire, and began to munch it fiercely.

End quote.

"I could ask." From the first time I read that line, until now, it might be my favorite line in the entire book. Merlyn knows that young Arthur is about to face a lot of evil in this world. Moreover, Arthur will rarely be happy once he pulls the sword from the stone. He will constantly be standing up to a lot of evil...whether or not he asked for it.

A humblebee came zooming between them, under the grandstand and out into the sunlight.

"Would you like to see some real knights errant?" asked the magician slowly. "Now, for the sake of your education?"

"Oh, I would! We have never even had a tournament since I was here."

"I suppose it could be managed."

"Oh, please do. You could take me to some like you did to the fish."

"I suppose it is educational, in a way."

"It is very educational," said the Wart. "I can't think of anything more educational than to see some real knights fighting. Oh, won't you please do it?"

"Do you prefer any particular knight?"

"King Pellinore," he said immediately. He had a weakness for this gentleman since their strange encounter in the Forest.

Merlyn said, "That will do very well. Put your hands to your sides and relax your muscles. Cabricias arci thuram, catalamus, singulariter, nominativa, haec musa. Shut your eyes and keep them shut. Bonus, Bona, Bonum. Here we go. Deus Sanctus, est-ne oratio Latinas? Etiam, oui, quare? Pourquoi? Quai substantive et adjectivum concordat in generi, numerum et casus. Here we are."

While this incantation was going on, the patient felt some queer sensations. First he could hear the sergeant calling out to Kay, "Nah, then, nah then, keep the 'eels dahn and swing the body from the 'ips." Then the words got smaller and smaller, as if he were looking at his feet through the wrong end of a telescope, and began to swirl round in a cone, as if they were at the pointed bottom end of a whirlpool which was sucking him into the air. Then there was nothing but a loud rotating roaring and hissing noise which rose to such a tornado that he felt that he could not stand it any more. Finally there was utter silence and Merlyn saying, "Here we are." All this happened in about the time that it would take a sixpenny rocket to start off with its fiery swish, bend down from its climax and disperse itself in thunder and coloured stars. He opened his eyes just at the moment when one would have heard the invisible stick hitting the ground.

They were lying under a beech tree in the Forest Sauvage.

"Here we are," said Merlyn. "Get up and dust your clothes."

"And there, I think," continued the magician, in a tone of satisfaction because his spells had worked for once without a hitch, "is your friend, King Pellinore, pricking toward us o'er the plain."

"Hallo, hallo," cried King Pellinore, popping his visor up and down. "It's the young boy with the feather bed, isn't it, I say, what?"

"Yes, it is," said the Wart. "And I am very glad to see you. Did you manage to catch the Beast?"

"No," said King Pellinore. "Didn't catch the beast. Oh, do come here, you brachet, and leave that bush alone. Tcha! Tcha! Naughty, naughty! She runs riot, you know, what. Very keen on rabbits. I tell you there's nothing in it, you beastly dog. Tcha! Tcha! Leave it, leave it! Oh, do come to heel, like I tell you.

"She never does come to heel," he added.

At this the dog put a cock pheasant out of the bush, which rocketed off with a tremendous clatter, and the dog became so excited that it ran round its master three or four times at the end of its rope, panting hoarsely as if it had asthma. King Pellinore's horse stood patiently while the rope was wound round its legs, and Merlyn and the Wart had to catch the brachet and unwind it before the conversation could go on.

"I say," said King Pellinore. "Thank you very much, I must say. Won't you introduce me to your friend, what?"

"This is my tutor Merlyn, a great magician."

"How-de-do," said the King. "Always like to meet magicians. In fact I always like to meet anybody. It passes the time away, what, on a quest."

"Hail," said Merlyn, in his most mysterious manner.

"Hail," replied the King, anxious to make a good impression.

They shook hands.

"Did you say Hail?" inquired the King, looking about him nervously. "I thought it was going to be fine, myself."

"He meant How-do-you-do," explained the Wart.

"Ah, yes, How-de-do?"

They shook hands again.

"Good afternoon," said King Pellinore. "What do you think the weather looks like now?"

"I think it looks like an anti-cyclone."

"Ah, yes," said the King. "An anti-cyclone. Well, I suppose I ought to be getting along."

At this the King trembled very much, opened and shut his visor several times, coughed, wove his reins into a knot, exclaimed, "I beg your pardon?" and showed signs of cantering away.

"He is a white magician," said the Wart. "You need not be afraid of him. He is my best friend, your majesty, and in any case he generally gets his spells muddled up."

"Ah, yes," said King Pellinore. "A white magician, what? How small the world is, is it not? How-de-do?"

"Hail," said Merlyn.

"Hail," said King Pellinore.

They shook hands for the third time.

On the list of things "I did not know," the term "humblebee" might be in the top half. As we sit back and "hear" the word, the large bee certainly seems to hum a bit and the "bumble" seems to be a story to hear. There is. I found this:

"When Darwin, or indeed any of his contemporaries, wrote of the animated bundles of fluff, he would have called them humblebees. But they weren't humble in the sense of lowly beings doing the drudge work of nectar and pollen collecting; rather they would have been celebrated for the powerful evolutionary interaction with the flowers they had visited for millions of years. Darwin would have called them humblebees because, as they fly, they hum. Simple.

The etymological change of entomological names occurred gradually and imperceptibly, but some key events can be pin-pointed. The first great 20th-century book on bees was by Frederick Sladen, and his 1912 opus on their life history was firmly in the "humble" camp. By then, bumble, which had always been knocking around in the background as a second-rate alternative, had started to gain some ground. In Beatrix Potter's Tale of Mrs Tittlemouse (1910), the eponymous heroine is troubled by squatters making mossy nests in her back yard. Chief troublemaker is one Babbitty Bumble.

It is, perhaps, at about this time that the myth of the bumblebee's scientifically impossible flight came into play. As aeronautics took off between the wars, along with faster and sleeker planes, the clumsy-looking furry bee with its pitifully small wings and tubby body was the perfect match for its new, slightly belittling name, as it bumbled from droopy bloom to droopy bloom. By the time of the next bee monograph, by John Free and Colin Butler (1959), the humblebee had gone forever." (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/aug/01/humblebee-bumblebee-darwin>)

I had no idea. As always, the deeper I travel into *The Sword in the Stone*, the more I discover what I don't know. T. H. White was from a generation of people who specialized in generalization and were able to converse, discuss, study and test a variety of fields. White took on hawking, hunting, literature and history during a typical week. The more I read this book, the more I learn, too.

The concept of Knight Errant will come up throughout every Arthurian Cycle.

"Cycle," by the way, is a term that reminds us of the ways the original troubadours presented the original stories: a poet, singer or balladeer would present a variation of a story and, next, someone else would step up and pick up the story. By adding details, links, and other variations, soon the story would expand in all kinds of directions. That is why, for example, we have so many variations of the Death (or not-death) of Arthur, the Holy Grail stories and the intrigues of Camelot. Lots of singers...lots of variations.

The Knight Errant, the wandering hero, certainly is my image of knighthood. This is a person wandering from place to place defeating evil, saving people and being an overall good person. My image is probably the opposite of the historical truth, but it is what we see in most movies. After the Viking attacks, Europe moved to the feudal, manorial system and Knights Errant were probably just wandering bullies.

In literature, however, they become our "Shanes," if you know your movie history.

Our incantation here is not as fun as the one that turned Wart into a fish (basically, Merlyn spoke backwards). This one is from Molière's play, *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* (*Le Médecin Malgré Lui*), Act II, Scene 4 (tr. Donald M. Frame):

SGANARELLE. Do you understand Latin?

GÉRONTE. Not in the least.

SGANARELLE (getting up in astonishment). You don't understand Latin?

GÉRONTE. No.

SGANARELLE (assuming various comical poses). *Cabricias arci thuram, catalamus, singulariter, nominativo haec Musa, "the Muse", bonus, bona, bonum, Deus sanctus, estne oratio latinus? Etiam, "yes." Quare, "why?" Quia substantivo et adjectivum concordat in generi, numerum, et casus.*

GÉRONTE. Oh! Why did I never study?

JACQUELINE. Land! That's an able man!

LUCAS. Yup, that's so purty I can't make out a word of it.

In the French:

SGANARELLE. Entendez-vous le latin?

GÉRONTE. En aucune façon.

SGANARELLE (se levant avec étonnement). Vous n'entendez point le latin!

GÉRONTE. Non.

SGANARELLE (en faisant diverses plaisantes postures). Cabricias arcu thuram, catalamus, singulariter, nominativo haec Musa, "la Muse", bonus, bona, bonum, Deus sanctus, estne oratio latinas? Etiam, "oui." Quare, "pourquoi?" Quia substantivo et adjectivum concordat in generi, numerum, et casus.

GÉRONTE. Ah! que n'ai-je étudié!

JACQUELINE. L'habile homme que velà!

LUCAS. Oui, ça est si biau, que je n'y entends goutte.

Thank you, Internet!

This section is considered White's funniest work. I'm not necessarily a fan as I don't like the fact that two good people in our story (Pellinore and Sir Grummore Grummursum) are going to end up trying to hurt each other. But, I get the jokes. They are the kind people say I make: bad puns.

This one is a groaner:

"How-de-do," said the King. "Always like to meet magicians. In fact I always like to meet anybody. It passes the time away, what, on a quest."

"Hail," said Merlyn, in his most mysterious manner.

"Hail," replied the King, anxious to make a good impression.

They shook hands.

"Did you say Hail?" inquired the King, looking about him nervously. "I thought it was going to be fine, myself."

End quote.

Hail: it's hello and a weather pun. Ouch.

Let's shake hands for a third time and begin the adventure.

"I should not go away," said the wizard, "if I were you. Sir Grummore Grummursum is on the way to challenge you to a joust."

"No, you don't say? Sir What-you-may-call-it coming here to challenge me to a joust?"

"Assuredly."

"Good handicap man?"

"I should think it would be an even match."

"Well, I must say," exclaimed the King, "it never hails but it pours."

"Hail," said Merlyn.

"Hail," said King Pellinore.

"Hail," said the Wart.

"Now I really won't shake hands with anybody else," announced the monarch. "We must assume that we have all met before."

"Is Sir Grummore really coming," inquired the Wart, hastily changing the subject, "to challenge King Pellinore to a battle?"

"Look yonder," said Merlyn, and both of them looked in the direction of his outstretched finger.

Sir Grummore Grummursum was cantering up the clearing in full panoply of war. Instead of his ordinary helmet with a visor he was wearing the proper tilting-helm, which looked like a large coal-scuttle, and as he cantered he clanged.

He was singing his old school song:

"We'll tilt together
Steady from crupper to poll,
And nothin' in life shall sever
Our love for the dear old coll.
Follow-up, follow-up, follow-up, follow-up, follow-up
Till the shield ring again and again
With the clanks of the clanky true men."

"Goodness," exclaimed King Pellinore. "It's about two months since I had a proper tilt, and last winter they put me up to eighteen. That was when they had the new handicaps."

Sir Grummore had arrived while he was speaking, and had recognized the Wart.

"Mornin'," said Sir Grummore. "You're Sir Ector's boy, ain't you? And who's that chap in the comic hat?"

"That is my tutor," said the Wart hurriedly. "Merlyn, the magician."

Sir Grummore looked at Merlyn—magicians were considered rather middle-class by the true jousting set in those days—and said distantly, "Ah, a magician. How-de-do?"

"And this is King Pellinore," said the Wart. "Sir Grummore Grummursum—King Pellinore."

"How-de-do?" inquired Sir Grummore.

"Hail," said King Pellinore. "No, I mean it won't hail, will it?"

"Nice day," said Sir Grummore.

"Yes, it is nice, isn't it, what?"

"Been questin' today?"

"Oh, yes, thank you. Always am questing, you know. After the Questing Beast."

"Interestin' job, that, very."

"Yes, it is interesting. Would you like to see some fewmets?"

"By Jove, yes. Like to see some fewmets."

"I have some better ones at home, but these are quite good, really."

"Bless my soul. So these are her fewmets."

"Yes, these are her fewmets."

"Interestin' fewmets."

"Yes, they are interesting, aren't they? Only you get tired of them," added King Pellinore.

"Well, well. It's a fine day, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is rather fine."

"Suppose we'd better have a joust, eh, what?"

"Yes, I suppose we had better," said King Pellinore, "really."

"What shall we have it for?"

"Oh, the usual thing, I suppose. Would one of you kindly help me on with my helm?"

They all three had to help him on eventually, for, what with the unscrewing of screws and the easing of nuts and bolts which the King had clumsily set on the wrong thread when getting up in a hurry that morning, it was quite a feat of engineering to get him out of his helmet and into his helm. The helm was an enormous thing like an oil drum, padded inside with two thicknesses of leather and three inches of straw.

As soon as they were ready, the two knights stationed themselves at each end of the clearing and then advanced to meet in the middle.

"Fair knight," said King Pellinore, "I pray thee tell me thy name."

"That me regards," replied Sir Grummore, using the proper formula.

"That is uncourtously said," said King Pellinore, "what? For no knight ne dreadeth for to speak his name openly, but for some reason of shame."

"Be that as it may, I choose that thou shalt not know my name as at this time, for no askin'."

"Then you must stay and joust with me, false knight."

"Haven't you got that wrong, Pellinore?" inquired Sir Grummore. "I believe it ought to be 'thou shalt'."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Sir Grummore. Yes, so it should, of course. Then thou shalt stay and joust with me, false knight."

Without further words, the two gentlemen retreated to the opposite ends of the clearing, fewtered their spears, and prepared to hurtle together in the preliminary charge.

"I think we had better climb this tree," said Merlyn. "You never know what will happen in a joust like this."

They climbed up the big beech, which had easy branches sticking out in all directions, and the Wart stationed himself toward the end of a smooth bough about fifteen feet up, where he could get a good view. Nothing is so comfortable to sit in as a beech.

To be able to picture the terrible battle which now took place, there is one thing which ought to be known. A knight in his full armour of those days, or at any rate during the heaviest days of armour, was generally carrying as much or more than his own weight in metal. He often weighed no less than twenty-two stone, and sometimes as much as twenty-five. This meant that his horse had to be a slow and enormous weight-carrier, like the farm horse of today, and that his own movements were so hampered by his burden of iron and padding that they were toned down into slow motion, as on the cinema.

"They're off!" cried the Wart, holding his breath with excitement.

Slowly and majestically, the ponderous horses lumbered into a walk. The spears, which had been pointing in the air, bowed to a horizontal line and pointed at each other. King Pellinore and Sir Grummore could be seen to be thumping their horses' sides with their heels for all they were worth, and in a few minutes the splendid animals had shambled into an earth-shaking imitation of a trot. Clank, rumble, thump-thump went the horses, and now the two knights were flapping their elbows and legs in unison, showing a good deal of daylight at their seats. There was a change in tempo, and Sir Grummore's horse could be definitely seen to be cantering. In another minute King Pellinore's was doing so too. It was a terrible spectacle.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the Wart, feeling ashamed that his blood-thirstiness had been responsible for making these two knights joust before him. "Do you think they will kill each other?"

"Dangerous sport," said Merlyn, shaking his head.

"Now!" cried the Wart.

With a blood-curdling beat of iron hoofs the mighty equestrians came together. Their spears wavered for a moment within a few inches of each other's helms—each had chosen the difficult point-stroke—and then they were galloping off in opposite directions. Sir Grummore drove his spear deep into the beech tree where they were sitting, and stopped dead. King Pellinore, who had been run away with, vanished altogether behind his back.

"Is it safe to look?" inquired the Wart, who had shut his eyes at the critical moment.

"Quite safe," said Merlyn. "It will take them some time to get back in position."

This section is considered the funniest of White's writing by many and I can see the truth in that. This is a feast of British humor; Monty Python, Benny Hill and Mr. Bean would all applaud the spoofing here.

White's anti-war sentiments will certainly become clearer in *The Book of Merlyn*. As he writes this, Hitler is stirring up the European War and the world limps closer to World War II. The slaughter and waste of WWI still linger over England.

White's royalty reflects the incompetence of the European leadership during The War to End All Wars and he is seeing the same drumbeats as England is dipping its spear towards another war.

It's a funny section, yes, but it has never been my favorite. Let's continue to push on.

Tilting and White

Our second paragraph of *The Sword in the Stone* expands on the formal education of Wart and Kay:

“In the afternoons the programme was: Mondays and Fridays, tilting and horsemanship; Tuesdays, hawking; Wednesdays, fencing; Thursdays, archery; Saturdays, the theory of chivalry, with the proper measures to be blown on all occasions, terminology of the chase and hunting etiquette. If you did the wrong thing at the mort or the undoing, for instance, you were bent over the body of the dead beast and smacked with the flat side of a sword. This was called being bladed. It was horseplay, a sort of joke like being shaved when crossing the line. Kay was not bladed, although he often went wrong.”

As I warned our readership then, White uses each of these afternoon programs to expand out the stories. My favorite chapter includes the hawks of hawking and we will enjoy a lot of stories with archery and chivalry. At the start of this Chapter Seven, White returned us to tilting and, it is obvious to me, he is no fan:

“Tilting and horsemanship had two afternoons a week, because they were the most important branches of a gentleman's education in those days. Merlyn grumbled about athletics, saying that nowadays people seemed to think that you were an educated man if you could knock another man off a horse and that the craze for games was the ruin of scholarship—nobody got scholarships like they used to do when he was a boy, and all the public schools had been forced to lower their standards—but Sir Ector, who was an old tilting blue, said that the battle of Crécy had been won upon the playing fields of Camelot. This made Merlyn so furious that he gave Sir Ector rheumatism two nights running before he relented.”

As a reminder, Crécy was won by the longbowmen.

Tilting will be the thing that gets Wart to desperately seek a sword as Kay waits to prove himself in a contest...sadly, or perhaps knowingly, forgetting this piece of equipment that seems to me important in fighting:

“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-gurdy 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."

End quote.

This section does not reflect the greatest moment of jousting and tilting:

Is it safe to look?" inquired the Wart, who had shut his eyes at the critical moment.

"Quite safe," said Merlyn. "It will take them some time to get back in position."

"Whoa, whoa, I say!" cried King Pellinore in muffled and distant tones, far away among the gorse bushes.

"Hi, Pellinore, hi!" shouted Sir Grummore. "Come back, my dear fellah, I'm over here."

There was a long pause, while the complicated stations of the two knights readjusted themselves, and then King Pellinore was at the opposite end from that at which he had started, while Sir Grummore faced him from his original position.

"Traitor knight!" cried Sir Grummore.

"Yield, recreant, what?" cried King Pellinore.

They fewtered their spears again, and thundered into the charge.

"Oh," said the Wart, "I hope they don't hurt themselves."

But the two mounts were patiently blundering together, and the two knights had simultaneously decided on the sweeping stroke. Each held his spear at right angles toward the left, and, before the Wart could say anything further, there was a terrific yet melodious thump. Clang! went the armour, like a motor omnibus in collision with a smithy, and the jousts were sitting side by side on the green sward, while their horses cantered off in opposite directions.

"A splendid fall," said Merlyn.

The two horses pulled themselves up, their duty done, and began resignedly to eat the sward. King Pellinore and Sir Grummore sat looking straight before them, each with the other's spear clasped hopefully under his arm.

"Well!" said the Wart. "What a bump! They both seem to be all right, so far."

Pellinore and Grummore are not Lancelot and Galahad. "Sward," by the way, is a word I need to use more. I think we would say "a patch of grass" now, but using the term "sward" seems a bit fun:

"Okay lads: rest a bit over here on this sward, while I talk with the officials."

I like that. None of my athletes would have any idea about what to do, but it would be fun.

The sweeping stroke is considered by White, and I imagine jousters would agree, to be the lowest kind of attack in tilting. Our next selection will be a bit long and it contains White's most comical discussion. These two jousters turn to words quite quickly.

This next section reminds me of me, my brother, Phil, and neighbor, Kim, arguing over who had been killed in our various games of war.

I grew up at a time where little boys did this thing called "play." We would play the Three Musketeers, win WWII, defeat the evil Sheriff of Nottingham and still find time to play Hide and Seek (I could have been a professional) and all the rest of the games one can play on a street corner. Not long ago, I found myself thinking about my childhood friends. It wasn't happy:

Kim: Dead.

Daryl: Dead.

Steve: Dead.

Bobby: Dead.

Peter (James): Dead.

Wil: Dead.

Mark: Dead.

Dave: Dead.

Rita: Dead.

And some others...

I had to stop myself. I talked with Gregor (Greg) and we realized that much of our group was no longer on the planet: suicides, drugs, police, life.

But, in my memories, we run and laugh and sprint. We play. Each and every time I crack open White's book, I get transported back to 1970 when we were all still together, I had yet to pick up a discus, and as long as we ignored the nightly news, life was pretty good. Let's pick up after the fall:

"A splendid fall," said Merlyn.

The two horses pulled themselves up, their duty done, and began resignedly to eat the sward. King Pellinore and Sir Grummore sat looking straight before them, each with the other's spear clasped hopefully under his arm.

"Well!" said the Wart. "What a bump! They both seem to be all right, so far."

Sir Grummore and King Pellinore laboriously got up.

"Defend thee," cried King Pellinore.

"God save thee," cried Sir Grummore.

With this they drew their swords and rushed together with such ferocity that each, after dealing the other a dint on the helm, sat down suddenly backwards.

"Bah!" cried King Pellinore.

"Booh!" cried Sir Grummore, also sitting down.

"Mercy," exclaimed the Wart. "What a combat!"

The knights had now lost their tempers and the battle was joined in earnest. It did not matter much, however, for they were so encased in metal that they could not do each other much damage. It took them so long to get up, and the dealing of a blow when you weighed the eighth part of a ton was such a cumbrous business, that every stage of the contest could be marked and pondered.

In the first stage King Pellinore and Sir Grummore stood opposite each other for about half an hour, and walloped each other on the helm. There was only opportunity for one blow at a time, so they more or less took it in turns, King Pellinore striking while Sir Grummore was recovering, and vice versa. At first, if either of them dropped his sword or got it stuck in the ground, the other put in two or three extra blows while he was patiently fumbling for it or trying to tug it out. Later, they fell into the rhythm of the thing more perfectly, like the toy mechanical people who saw wood on Christmas trees. Eventually the exercise and the monotony restored their good humour and they began to get bored.

The second stage was introduced as a change, by common consent. Sir Grummore stumped off to one end of the clearing, while King Pellinore plodded off to the other. Then they turned round and swayed backward and forward once or twice, in order to get their weight on their toes. When they leaned forward they had to run forward, to keep up with their weight, and if they leaned too far backward they fell down. So even walking was complicated. When they

had got their weight properly distributed in front of them, so that they were just off their balance, each broke into a trot to keep up with himself. They hurtled together as it had been two boars.

They met in the middle, breast to breast, with a noise of shipwreck and great bells tolling, and both, bouncing off, fell breathless on their backs. They lay thus for a few minutes, panting. Then they slowly began to heave themselves to their feet, and it was obvious that they had lost their tempers once again.

King Pellinore had not only lost his temper but he seemed to have been a bit astonished by the impact. He got up facing the wrong way, and could not find Sir Grummore. There was some excuse for this, since he had only a slit to peep through—and that was three inches away from his eye owing to the padding of straw—but he looked muddled as well. Perhaps he had broken his spectacles. Sir Grummore was quick to seize his advantage.

"Take that!" cried Sir Grummore, giving the unfortunate monarch a two-handed swipe on the nob as he was slowly turning his head from side to side, peering in the opposite direction.

King Pellinore turned round morosely, but his opponent had been too quick for him. He had ambled round so that he was still behind the King, and now gave him another terrific blow in the same place.

"Where are you?" asked King Pellinore.

"Here," cried Sir Grummore, giving him another.

The poor King turned himself round as nimbly as possible, but Sir Grummore had given him the slip again.

"Tally-ho back!" shouted Sir Grummore, with another wallop.

"I think you're a cad," said the King.

"Wallop!" replied Sir Grummore, doing it.

What with the preliminary crash, the repeated blows on the back of his head, and the puzzling nature of his opponent, King Pellinore could now be seen to be visibly troubled in his brains. He swayed backward and forward under the hail of blows which were administered, and feebly wagged his arms.

"Poor King," said the Wart. "I wish he would not hit him so."

As if in answer to his wish, Sir Grummore paused in his labours.

"Do you want Pax?" asked Sir Grummore.

King Pellinore made no answer.

Sir Grummore favoured him with another whack and said, "If you don't say Pax, I shall cut your head off."

"I won't," said the King.

Whang! went the sword on the top of his head.

Whang! it went again.

Whang! for the third time.

"Pax," said King Pellinore, mumbling rather.

Then, just as Sir Grummore was relaxing with the fruits of victory, he swung round upon him, shouted "Non!" at the top of his voice, and gave him a good push in the middle of the chest.

Sir Grummore fell over backwards.

"Well!" exclaimed the Wart. "What a cheat! I would not have thought it of him."

King Pellinore hurriedly sat on his victim's chest, thus increasing the weight upon him to a quarter of a ton and making it quite impossible for him to move, and began to undo Sir Grummore's helm.

"You said Pax!"

"I said Pax Non under my breath."

"It's a swindle."

"It's not."

"You're a cad."

"No, I'm not."

"Yes, you are."

"No, I'm not."

"Yes, you are."

"I said Pax Non."

"You said Pax."

"No, I didn't."

"Yes, you did."

"No, I didn't."

"Yes, you did."

By this time Sir Grummore's helm was unlaced and they could see his bare head glaring at King Pellinore, quite purple in the face.

"Yield thee, recreant," said the King.

"Shan't," said Sir Grummore.

"You have got to yield, or I shall cut off your head."

"Cut it off then."

"Oh, come on," said the King. "You know you have to yield when your helm is off."

"Feign I," said Sir Grummore.

"Well, I shall just cut your head off."

"I don't care."

The King waved his sword menacingly in the air.

"Go on," said Sir Grummore. "I dare you to."

The King lowered his sword and said, "Oh, I say, do yield, please."

"You yield," said Sir Grummore.

"But I can't yield. I am on top of you after all, am I not, what?"

"Well, I have feigned yieldin'."

"Oh, come on, Grummore. I do think you are a cad not to yield. You know very well I can't cut your head off."

"I would not yield to a cheat who started fightin' after he said Pax."

"I am not a cheat."

"You are a cheat."

"No, I'm not."

"Yes, you are."

"No, I'm not."

"Yes, you are."

"Very well," said King Pellinore. "You can jolly well get up and put on your helm and we will have a fight. I won't be called a cheat for anybody."

"Cheat!" said Sir Grummore.

They stood up and fumbled together with the helm, hissing, "No, I'm not"—"Yes, you are," until it was safely on. Then they retreated to opposite ends of the clearing, got their weight upon their toes, and came rumbling and thundering together like two runaway trams.

Unfortunately they were now so cross that they had both ceased to be vigilant, and in the fury of the moment they missed each other altogether. The momentum of their armour was too great for them to stop till they had passed each other handsomely, and then they manoeuvred about in such a manner that neither happened to come within the other's range of vision. It was funny watching them, because King Pellinore, having already been caught from behind once, was continually spinning round to look behind him, and Sir Grummore, having used the stratagem himself, was doing the same thing. Thus they wandered for some five minutes, standing still, listening, clanking, crouching, creeping, peering, walking on tiptoe, and occasionally making a chance swipe behind their backs. Once they were standing within a few feet of each other, back to back, only to stalk off in opposite directions with infinite precaution, and once King Pellinore did hit Sir Grummore with one of his back strokes, but they both immediately spun round so often that they became giddy and mislaid each other afresh.

After five minutes Sir Grummore said, "All right, Pellinore. It is no use hidin'. I can see where you are."

"I am not hiding," exclaimed King Pellinore indignantly. "Where am I?"

They discovered each other and went up close together, face to face.

"Cad," said Sir Grummore.

"Yah," said King Pellinore.

They turned round and marched off to their corners, seething with indignation.

"Swindler," shouted Sir Grummore.

"Beastly bully," shouted King Pellinore.

With this they summoned all their energies together for one decisive encounter, leaned forward, lowered their heads like two billy-goats, and positively sprinted together for the final blow. Alas, their aim was poor. They missed each other by about five yards, passed at full steam doing at least eight knots, like ships that pass in the night but speak not to each other in passing, and hurtled onward to their doom. Both knights began waving their arms like windmills, anti-clockwise, in the vain effort to slow up. Both continued with undiminished speed. Then Sir Grummore rammed his head against the beech in which the Wart was sitting, and King Pellinore collided with a chestnut at the other side of the clearing. The trees shook, the forest rang. Blackbirds and squirrels cursed and wood-pigeons flew out of their leafy perches half a mile away. The two knights stood to attention while one could count three. Then, with a last unanimous melodious clang, they both fell prostrate on the fatal sward.

"Stunned," said Merlyn, "I should think."

"Oh, dear," said the Wart. "Ought we to get down and help them?"

"We could pour water on their heads," said Merlyn reflectively, "if there was any water. But I don't suppose they would thank us for making their armour rusty. They will be all right. Besides, it is time that we were home."

"But they might be dead!"

"They are not dead, I know. In a minute or two they will come round and go off home to dinner."

"Poor King Pellinore has not got a home."

"Then Sir Grummore will invite him to stay the night. They will be the best of friends when they come to. They always are."

"Do you think so?"

"My dear boy, I know so. Shut your eyes and we will be off."

The Wart gave in to Merlyn's superior knowledge. "Do you think," he asked with his eyes shut, "that Sir Grummore has a featherbed?"

"Probably."

"Good," said the Wart. "That will be nice for King Pellinore, even if he was stunned."

The Latin words were spoken and the secret passes made. The funnel of whistling noise and space received them. In two seconds they were lying under the grandstand, and the sergeant's voice was calling from the opposite side of the tilting ground, "Nah then, Master Art, nah then. You've been a-snoozing there long enough. Come aht into the sunlight 'ere with Master Kay, one-two, one-two, and see some real tilting."

In the time it took me to finish this chapter, I began to appreciate it more and more. This has been my least favorite section of the book since I first read this in 1970 but taking a bit of time to unwrap this chapter has made me appreciate the humor much more.

White is certainly against war. The Book of Merlyn will prove that, so perhaps I fell into disliking this chapter because of my heroic ambitions of my early youth. We have a delightful interaction between Wart and Merlyn in Chapter Twenty that seems to capture what I am trying to say.

Merlyn begins:

"Well, anyway," he said, "suppose they did not let you stand against all the evil in the world?"

"I could ask," said the Wart.

"You could ask," repeated Merlyn.

He thrust the end of his beard into his mouth, stared tragically at the fire, and began to munch it fiercely.

During the Vietnam War, which was presented live and in living color nightly in our home with my brothers and their physical and emotional issues, the nightly news and the death counts and the general unsettledness of America, I was still in that fanciful world of "good guys and bad guys."

There are obvious evils, like the Nazis that White worried about and the Nazis that I worry about as I write this. It helps when they wear black, like Darth Vader, but when they wear white, like the Klu Klux Klan, it gets confusing. When I first read this section, I think I wanted a

joust between two foes fighting, a battle of good versus evil. I wanted what we hear in The Impossible Dream:

“To fight for the right
Without question or pause,
To be willing to march
Into hell for a heavenly cause.”

Our foes in this battle, Pellinore and Grummore, certainly have their weaknesses, but I can't really imagine either as an arch-villain. Neither is a Voldemort, Snidely Whiplash or even Doctor Evil.

Wart, like I did in my youth, wants to pit himself against the evil of this world. Now, as I am closer to the King Arthur of The Book Merlyn in age than the Wart of The Sword in the Stone, evil still seems as prevalent as it was in my fresh-faced youth. This is probably a sad truth that all of learn to bear as we age. We can call it wisdom.

White will call this “knowledge of the world” in his later book, The Ill Made Knight (Chapter 13):

“There is a thing called knowledge of the world, which people do not have until they are middle-aged. It is something which cannot be taught to younger people, because it is not logical and does not obey laws which are constant. It has no rules.”

In a sense, it is the utter lack of evil intent in this story that makes the jousting more painful. Sure, we argue over whether or not Pellinore said “non” in time, but it does come off like the arguments my brothers and me used to have:

“Did so.”
“Did not.”
“Did so.”
“Did not.”
“Did so.”
“Did not.”
“Did so.”
“Did not.”
“Did so.”
“Did not.”

This could continue for decades...and it seems to have. White's warriors here are in the midst of a school yard scrabble. “To the Victor goes the Pillows.”

Evil, in The Sword in the Stone, is never absolutely simple. We meet a pike that makes a lunge for Wart, but he was not truly evil. He was following his nature. Later, we will meet a giant, but the characters will acknowledge that he has asked for little from his prisoners. Was Mim pure

evil? Certainly, the early editors wanted to scrub her character up a bit, but the versions I recommend make her a frightening figure. Evil? This deserves some rereading, but I think the section with her “plucking” Wart is certainly sneaking up on experiencing evil.

Kay, like many older brothers, is a jerk, but not necessarily evil. We soon will meet some very cruel creatures and it will be fun to bring this point up again.

We will, if you choose to continue reading the other books, find true evil. White will address it with this:

“Man had gone on, through age after age, avenging wrong with wrong, slaughter with slaughter. Nobody was the better for it, since both sides always suffered, yet everybody was inextricable. The present war might be attributed to Mordred, or to himself. But also it was due to a million Thrashers, to Lancelot, Guenever, Gawaine, everybody. Those who lived by the sword were forced to die by it. It was as if everything would lead to sorrow, so long as man refused to forget the past. The wrongs of Uther and of Cain were wrongs which could have been righted only by the blessing of forgetting them.”

The blessing of forgetting them. I’m not sure one can say things better.

We know move to the start of my favorite chapter, I will see if I can stand up against evil.

Well, at least, I could ask.

Chapter 8

We now pick up on one of my favorite chapters in the book. This chapter begins with a wet, cold day (exactly the same kind of day I have today) and ends being one of the most insightful discussions of our whole book. We will discover the phrase “Never Let Go” in this chapter and that phrase, of course, is my personal motto. It will make more sense as we read along. Let’s begin at the beginning:

It was a cold wet evening, such as may happen even toward the end of August, and the Wart did not know how to bear himself indoors. He spent some time in the kennels talking to Cavall, then wandered off to help them turn the spit in the kitchen. But there it was too hot. He was not forced to stay indoors because of the rain, by his female supervisors, as happens too frequently to the unhappy children of our generation, but the mere wetness and dreariness in the open discouraged him from going out. He hated everybody.

"Confound the boy," said Sir Ector. "For goodness' sake stop mopin' by that window there, and go and find your tutor. When I was a boy we always used to study on wet days, yes, and eddicate our minds."

"Wart is stupid," said Kay.

"Ah, run along, my duck," said their old Nurse. "I han't got time to attend to thy mopseys now, what with all this sorbent washing."

"Now then, my young master," said Hob. "Let thee run off to thy quarters, and stop confusing they fowls."

"Nah, nah," said the sergeant. "You 'op orf art of 'ere. I got enough to do a-polishing of this ber-lady harmour."

Even the Dog Boy barked at him when he went back to the kennels.

Wart draggled off to the tower room, where Merlyn was busy knitting himself a woollen night-cap for the winter.

"I cast off two together at every other line," said the magician, "but for some reason it seems to end too sharply. Like an onion. It is the turning of the heel that does one, every time."

"I think I ought to have some eddication," said the Wart. "I can't think of anything to do."

"You think that education is something which ought to be done when all else fails?" inquired Merlyn nastily, for he was in a bad mood too.

One of my favorite parts of *The Sword in the Stone* is how we occasionally "check in" with minor characters. I think we could argue that Wart (King Arthur) and Merlyn are the main characters with Kay, Archimedes and Ector would be the key supporting cast. But, we meet lots and lots of other fun people who influence Wart and push the story along.

On this miserable day, everyone hates everyone else and this makes for a fun beginning of another transformation story. We will get a chance to bump into our characters a few more times, notably the Christmas boar hunt and the coronation (oops, spoiler!).

This line leaps out to me: "You think that education is something which ought to be done when all else fails?" I know a few people who live by this method, but it seems, from my observations, to be painful.

White does a marvelous job weaving (perhaps "knitting" would be better here and you will get the joke if you read a bit further) Merlyn and Wart's ongoing dialogue about education. Later, Wart will be depressed (over the knighthood issue...again) and Merlyn will try to inspire him...again:

"The best thing for being sad," replied Merlyn, beginning to puff and blow, "is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honour

trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then—to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the thing for you. Look at what a lot of things there are to learn—pure science, the only purity there is. You can learn astronomy in a lifetime, natural history in three, literature in six. And then, after you have exhausted a milliard lifetimes in biology and medicine and theology and geography and history and economics—why, you can start to make a cartwheel out of the appropriate wood, or spend fifty years learning to begin to learn to beat your adversary at fencing. After that you can start again on mathematics, until it is time to learn to plough."

"Apart from all these things," said the Wart, "what do you suggest for me just now?" (Chapter 21, The Sword in the Stone)

"Apart from all these things." I think this is a marvelous: education is the cure for boredom and the tincture for sadness. But, it also comes with a high price. In the last book of the original "The Once and Future King," Arthur says this:

"Long ago, when I had my Merlyn to help, he tried to teach me to think. He knew he would have to leave in the end, so he forced me to think for myself. Don't ever let anybody teach you to think, Lance: it is the curse of the world." (Chapter 27, The Candle in the Wind)

Oddly, the more we get exposed to the 24-hour news cycle, the more misery and sadness we see each day. King Arthur has a point, but "not thinking," as what seems to be the rule of our social medial universe and celebrity ruling class, is the antithesis of everything I learned in my education.

I come from the classic teachings of Liberal Education. Now, before I lose more readers (I once applauded President Obama's reading habits and got some interesting emails), let me explain:

A "Liberal Education" is the education of a free person. I have never been taught to dig a hole, fix a tire, or even reboot a computer, but with a book, magazine, manual or video, I can do a solid job of any of these tasks. I was taught to think, discuss, disagree and combine throughout my years in both private (Catholic) and public education.

I think this is part of what draws me to reading White. Our characters have depth and breadth; they can be brave and then less than brave. We will see Wart boast, then regret his boast. White's insights, of course, go beyond just this one book. A friend of mine has to put his beloved dog "to sleep" this week and I was trying to think of a way to console him. Of course, I can't, but this little quote from T. H. White seemed to help him:

"It is a queer difference between this kind of thing and getting married that married people love each other at first (I understand) and it fades by use and custom, but with dogs you love them most at last."

"You love them most at last." Perhaps that is why I find "Never Let Go" so perfect for my vision of life, living and learning.

"I think I ought to have some education," said the Wart. "I can't think of anything to do."

"You think that education is something which ought to be done when all else fails?" inquired Merlyn nastily, for he was in a bad mood too.

"Well," said the Wart, "some sorts of education."

"Mine?" asked the magician with flashing eyes.

"Oh, Merlyn," exclaimed the Wart without answering, "please give me something to do, because I feel so miserable. Nobody wants me for anything today, and I just don't know how to be sensible. It rains so."

"You should learn to knit."

"Could I go out and be something, a fish or anything like that?"

"You have been a fish," said Merlyn. "Nobody with any go needs to do their education twice."

"Well, could I be a bird?"

"If you knew anything at all," said Merlyn, "which you do not, you would know that a bird does not like to fly in the rain because it wets its feathers and makes them stick together. They get bedraggled."

"I could be a hawk in Hob's mews," said the Wart stoutly. "Then I should be indoors and not get wet."

"That is pretty ambitious," said the old man, "to want to be a hawk."

"You know you will turn me into a hawk when you want to," shouted the Wart, "but you like to plague me because it is wet. I won't have it."

"Hoity-toity!"

"Please," said the Wart, "dear Merlyn, turn me into a hawk. If you don't do that I shall do something. I don't know what."

Merlyn put down his knitting and looked at his pupil over the top of his spectacles. "My boy," he said, "you shall be everything in the world, animal, vegetable, mineral, protista or virus, for all I care—before I have done with you—but you will have to trust to my superior backsight. The time is not yet ripe for you to be a hawk—for one thing Hob is still in the mews feeding them—so you may as well sit down for the moment and learn to be a human being."

"Very well," said the Wart, "if that's a go." And he sat down.

After several minutes he said, "Is one allowed to speak as a human being, or does the thing about being seen and not heard have to apply?"

"Everybody can speak."

"That's good, because I wanted to mention that you have been knitting your beard into the night-cap for three rows now."

"Well, I'll be...."

"I should think the best thing would be to cut off the end of your beard. Shall I fetch some scissors?"

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I wanted to see what would happen."

"You run a grave risk, my boy," said the magician, "of being turned into a piece of bread, and toasted."

I was reading a small piece on how both C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien did not care for the Disney movies. Snow White, of course, features members of the Dwarf family (I don't want to get into the "Dwarves/Dwarfs" controversy, so I will write in a way that Ernest Hemingway would despise) and these fine people are key elements of the Hobbit stories. And, of course, seven of them appear in Snow White.

None appear in The Sword in the Stone.

My knock on the Disney animation of The Sword in the Stone, besides the completely worthless scene with the squirrels, is the attempt to turn Merlyn into some kind of absent-minded professor. White's Merlyn has his moments, of course, and I like the wit in this scene. But you don't cross Merlyn unless you wish to be turned into a piece of bread.

And toasted.

I find this little conversation one of the gems of our book. Wart's line "Is one allowed to speak as a human being" is a perfect launch to him telling Merlyn that he has knitted his beard into his night cap.

"Knitted," by the way, is an important word for those of us in athletics and fitness. It is the actual root word of "Fit." To be fit is, traditionally, to be knitted. I tell people this at workshops all the time and many ignore the point.

One of things Merlyn is striving to do for Wart is to get him fit/knitted for the crown. He is exposed the creatures that believe that Might is Right (the pike), others that are in rigid military ranks (our story now with the hawks) and others that teach him history (snake and badger).

Our author, T. H. White, tried to learn classic falconry and he wrote a book about it, The Goshawk. It is clear that White had an undying love for dogs and a bit of an obsession with hawks. There is something magical about this chapter and I continue to return to this part of the book over and over again.

It is pretty ambitious to want to be a hawk, we learn from Merlyn. We are about to meet a collection of falcons and hawks and each of them has a personality. I think, in some ways, this is our best chapter. But, that might be something we might want to review down the line.

"You run a grave risk, my boy," said the magician, "of being turned into a piece of bread, and toasted."

With this he slowly began to unpick his beard, muttering to himself meanwhile and taking the greatest precautions not to drop a stitch.

"Will it be as difficult to fly," asked the Wart when he thought his tutor had calmed down, "as it was to swim?"

"You will not need to fly. I don't mean to turn you into a loose hawk, but only to set you in the mews for the night, so that you can talk to the others. That is the way to learn, by listening to the experts."

"Will they talk?"

"They talk every night, deep into the darkness. They say about how they were taken, about what they can remember of their homes: about their lineage and the great deeds of their ancestors, about their training and what they have learned and will learn. It is military conversation really, like you might have in the mess of a crack cavalry regiment: tactics, small arms, maintenance, betting, famous hunts, wine, women and song.

"Another subject they have," he continued, "is food. It is a depressing thought, but of course they are mainly trained by hunger. They are a hungry lot, poor chaps, thinking of the best

restaurants where they used to go, and how they had champagne and caviare and gypsy music. Of course, they all come of noble blood."

"What a shame that they should be kept prisoners and be hungry."

"Well, they do not really understand that they are prisoners, any more than the cavalry officers do. They look on themselves as being dedicated to their profession, like an order of knighthood or something of that sort. You see, the membership of the mews is, after all, restricted to the raptors—and that does help a lot. They know that none of the lower classes can get in. Their screen perches don't carry blackbirds or such trash as that. And then, as to the hungry part, they are far from starving or that kind of hunger. They are in training, you know, and like everybody in strict training, they think about food."

"How soon can I begin?"

"You can begin now, if you want to. My insight tells me that Hob has this minute finished for the night. But first of all you must choose what kind of hawk you would prefer to be."

"I should like to be a merlin," said the Wart politely.

This answer flattered the magician. "A very good choice," he said, "and if you please we will proceed at once."

The Wart got up from his stool and stood in front of his tutor. Merlyn put down his knitting.

This is one of T. H. White's gifts as a writer: he understands and illustrates the cycles of human emotions. Those of us in love (at all levels) know that the relationship ebbs and flows like the tide. It is hard to explain this concept logically in any of its forms. Love is not a geometric proof. Poets seem to understand this issue. The great Northern Irish poet, W. R. Rogers, wrote this wonderful piece (The Easter Sequence):

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane.

It was a lovely night,

A night for weddings and water.

Going out into the cold glow he felt washed

And clean of people. The garden had an air

Of waiting about it, as if the leaves were bent

On eavesdropping. And the rain

Scented the air with more-than-midnight pain

And the wet trees that had nowhere to go

Stood around and gazed at the One walking there below

In agony. Ebb and flow, to and fro, Yes and No;

Doubt assailed him. Which and what to do? This much must be

admitted,

We live between two worlds, faith and doubt,

Like breath. The air that one breathes does not care

Whether it's in or out; it's not in love with life

Or death. And yet we do not dare to hold it long,

But must let it go to find again. So with faith,

With love, with everything.

End quote.

Rogers, like White, is underrated, in my “humble” opinion. “Ebb and flow, to and fro, Yes and No; Doubt assailed him” probably defines and explains the bulk of the four/five books of White’s *The Once and Future King* (and, if you decide to count it separately, *The Book of Merlyn*).

Merlyn threatens Wart with a “toasting” and Wart responds with flattery; he wants to be a merlin. All too often, this seems like how we live in relationship. Ebbs and flows, tos and fros, yeses and nos.

As I read and reread this selection, my mind is running off into dozens of directions. “Merlyn put down his knitting” just springs off the page to me as I think about my days and hours in the weightroom and practice fields. If “fitness” is literally “knitting,” Merlyn is putting down his work to turn over the teaching to a group of warriors.

Merlyn is clear about what he is sending young Arthur into; the hawks are “dedicated professionals.” They will be discussing “tactics, small arms, maintenance, betting, famous hunts, wine, women and song.” And food.

"Well, they do not really understand that they are prisoners, any more than the cavalry officers do. They look on themselves as being dedicated to their profession, like an order of knighthood or something of that sort. You see, the membership of the mews is, after all, restricted to the raptors—and that does help a lot. They know that none of the lower classes can get in. Their screen perches don't carry blackbirds or such trash as that. And then, as to the hungry part, they are far from starving or that kind of hunger. They are in training, you know, and like everybody in strict training, they think about food."

I can see why I am so drawn to this chapter. The discipline of the hawks reminds me of those old days in my life when we ventured away on long bus trips to remote colleges. We left behind family, friends, the party life, and general craziness of college to compete. Yet, I always loved the long bus rides. Oh, I hated not being able to use a bathroom for hours and hours, but I loved the communal sacrifice. At Utah State, teammates would share life stories and class projects. I learned a lot about Argyle sheep, cow diseases and attempts of colonize dung beetles.

And, no, I can't make up that kind of thing.

We ate sandwiches with a bag of chips and an orange drink. Some would try to sleep, but it was always tough with the bounce of the bus and the idiocy of athletes. And, I miss it.

Wart will find as much danger as with the pike. But, he trusts Merlyn. He has faith in Merlyn. And, like love, Merlyn must let him go.

"We live between two worlds, faith and doubt,

Like breath. The air that one breathes does not care

Whether it's in or out; it's not in love with life

Or death. And yet we do not dare to hold it long,

But must let it go to find again. So with faith,

With love, with everything."

The Wart got up from his stool and stood in front of his tutor. Merlyn put down his knitting. "First you go small," said he, pressing him on the top of his head until he was a bit smaller than a pigeon. "Then you stand on the ball of your toes, bend at the knees, hold your elbows to your sides, lift your hands to the level of your shoulders, and press your first and second fingers together, as also your third and fourth. Look, it is like this."

With these words the ancient nigromant stood upon tiptoe and did as he had explained.

The Wart copied him carefully and wondered what would happen next. What did happen was that Merlyn, who had been saying the final spells under his breath, suddenly turned himself into a condor, leaving the Wart standing on tiptoe unchanged. He stood there as if he were drying himself in the sun, with a wingspread of about eleven feet, a bright orange head and a magenta carbuncle. He looked very surprised and rather funny.

"Come back," said the Wart. "You have changed the wrong one."

"It is this by-our-lady spring cleaning," exclaimed Merlyn, turning back into himself. "Once you let a woman into your study for half an hour, you do not know where to lay your hands on the right spell, not if it was ever so. Stand up and we will try again."

This time the now tiny Wart felt his toes shooting out and scratching on the floor. He felt his heels rise and stick out behind and his knees draw into his stomach. His thighs became quite short. A web of skin grew from his wrists to his shoulders, while his primary feathers burst out in soft blue quills from the ends of his fingers and quickly grew. His secondaries sprouted along his forearms, and a charming little false primary sprang from the end of each thumb. The dozen feathers of his tail, with the double deck-feathers in the middle, grew out in the twinkling of an eye, and all the covert feathers of his back and breast and shoulders slipped out of the skin to hide the roots of the more important plumes. Wart looked quickly at Merlyn, ducked his head between his legs and had a look through there, rattled his feathers into place, and began to scratch his chin with the sharp talon of one toe.

"Nigromant" is a form of the word "necromancy." This was a form of magic where the practitioner communicates with the dead to find hidden things, foretell the future or, and this would be something we see a lot in TV and movies, using the dead as a tool. Usually, we would see the term "Black Magic" here.

I have never fully understood Merlyn's relationship with the "whatever" that he converses with when doing magic. It does make for fun reading as the two of them are both confused by Merlyn's life moving backwards in time. The reference to spring cleaning always makes me laugh here as anytime someone cleans up my desk, I tend to lose everything for a week. Moving my notes one inch, it seems, is too much for my brain to handle.

There is a line that makes me laugh here:

"First you go small,"

T. H. White has no idea that Steve Martin would later have a comedy album based on "getting small." Here is an example:

"I'm on drugs. I'm, uh, I mean, you know what it is. What's the deal, man? I like to get small. It's a wild, wild drug. Very dangerous for kids though, because they get really small. I know I shouldn't get small when I'm drivin', but, uh, I was drivin' around the other day, you know and a cop pulls me over. And he goes, 'Hey, are you small?' I said, 'No, I'm tall, I'm tall.' He said, 'Well,

I'm gonna have to measure you.' They've got a little test they give you; it's a balloon, and if you can get inside of it, they know... you're small. And they can't put you in a regular cell either, because you walk right out."

Steve Martin exploded in the 1970s when I was in college. His skits on Saturday Night Live, his albums and his shows gave us a kind of humor no one had ever really seen before him. So, when White notes "first you go small," I chuckle.

One final note here: I like the way White simply tells us that Wart is made small, then turned into a hawk. By this time in our story, we as readers don't need a bunch of fanfare, bugles and technicolor when magic happens.

"Good," said Merlyn. "Now hop on my hand—ah, be careful and don't gripe—and listen to what I have to tell you. I shall take you into the mews now that Hob has locked up for the night, and I shall put you loose and unhooded beside Balin and Balan. Now pay attention. Don't go close to anybody without speaking first. You must remember that most of them are hooded and might be startled into doing something rash. You can trust Balin and Balan, also the kestrel and the spar-hawk. Don't go within reach of the falcon unless she invites you to. On no account must you stand beside Cully's special enclosure, for he is unhooded and will go for you through the mesh if he gets half a chance. He is not quite right in his brains, poor chap, and if he once grips you, you will never leave his grip alive. Remember that you are visiting a kind of Spartan military mess. These fellows are regulars. As the junior subaltern your only business is to keep your mouth shut, speak when you are spoken to, and not interrupt."

"I bet I am more than a subaltern," said the Wart, "if I am a merlin."

"Well, as a matter of fact, you are. You will find that both the kestrel and the spar-hawk will be polite to you, but for all sake's sake don't interrupt the senior merlins or the falcon. She is the honorary colonel of the regiment. And as for Cully, well, he is a colonel too, even if he is infantry, so you must mind your p's and q's."

"I will be careful," said the Wart, who was beginning to feel rather scared.

"Good. I shall come for you in the morning, before Hob is up."

All the hawks were silent as Merlyn carried their new companion into the mews, and silent for some time afterward when they had been left in the dark. The rain had given place to a full August moonlight, so clear that you could see a woolly bear caterpillar fifteen yards away out of doors, as it climbed up and up the knobby sandstone of the great keep, and it took the Wart only a few moments for his eyes to become accustomed to the diffused brightness inside the mews. The darkness became watered with light, with silver radiance, and then it was an eerie sight which dawned upon his vision. Each hawk or falcon stood in the silver upon one leg, the other tucked up inside the apron of its panel, and each was a motionless

statue of a knight in armour. They stood gravely in their plumed helmets, spurred and armed. The canvas or sacking screens of their perches moved heavily in a breath of wind, like banners in a chapel, and the rapt nobility of the air kept their knight's vigil in knightly patience. In those days they used to hood everything they could, even the goshawk and the merlin, which are no longer hooded according to modern practice.

End quote.

Before I begin, my good friend and occasional training partner, Patrick Riedl, sent me an interesting thing. He has the German translation of *The Sword in the Stone* and he copied the line that inspired my catchphrase, Never Let Go:

"Welches ist das erste Gesetz des Fangs?" („Überlegen Sie“, sagte der freundliche kleine Balan hinter vorgehaltenem befiederten Fang.) Wart überlegte und kam auf die richtige Antwort.

„Niemals loslassen“, sagte er.

(We haven't arrived here yet, but this is the selection in English:

"What is the first law of the foot?"

("Think," said friendly little Balan, behind his false primary.)

The Wart thought, and thought right.

"Never to let go," he said.")

The German translation of my book, *Never Let Go*, has the title "Gib niemals auf" which, I have been told, means something a little different. I cut "Never to let go" to "Never let go" as I always thought the "to" was too much extra work. I'm kidding, of course.

Anyone who has taught theology quickly learns that the "end times" and the hawks share a root word: Raptor. It simply means to grab (or seize). Paul's letter to the Thessalonians gives us the usual apocalyptic meaning (Chapter Four):

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

I point out something to my students: Paul says "we." To the early Christian Church, the return of Jesus was imminent. In other words, let's eat lunch now, but don't worry about dinner. The second point is that the phrase "shall be caught up," often translated today as "Rapture" is a fun discussion for another time and place.

So, the word "raptor" is a splendid word with lots of associations.

The Raptor Family of birds, well, that starts a debate. I won't get involved the arguments, but in the world of hawking this seems to be a big deal. Generally, though, Birds of Prey are ordered like this:

Accipitridae: hawks, eagles, buzzards, harriers, kites, and European (Old World) vultures

Pandionidae: the osprey

Sagittariidae: the secretarybird

Falconidae: falcons, caracaras, and forest falcons

Cathartidae: vultures of the Americas (New World)

Generally, these are birds with magnificent vision and talons. The "talons." Remember, the talons.

So, Wart is joining a band of flying birds with great eyesight. This group strangles its prey. Both of these two points are crucial in understanding this story.

The birds, except Cully and Wart, will be hooded. Much of the questions directed at Wart will concern the talons (wrong answer, as we shall see) or "feet," as the troop uses the term. Deprived of the use of their vision, the story actually becomes deeper and more dangerous for our young hero.

On no account must you stand beside Cully's special enclosure, for he is unhooded and will go for you through the mesh if he gets half a chance.

This, of course, is exactly what is about to happen. Wart is again placed near the mouth of the Pike and, like the Pike story, Wart's brand of courage and cleverness keeps him alive. There are certainly parallels between the Pike and Hawk stories; Wart will learn lessons about power, strength and bravery.

We will have much happier transformation stories coming up, but these two tend to draw me in.

For Lord of the Rings fans, the names might ring a bell, Balan and Balin sound like the names from a troop of dwarves. Yes, Balin is one of the group in The Hobbit, but the names probably come from The Ballad of Balin and Balan, Book II in Malory's Le Morté d' Arthur.

White's powers of description are evident here: "The darkness became watered with light, with silver radiance, and then it was an eerie sight which dawned upon his vision." I find this lovely.

"Wart drew his breath at the sight of all these stately figures, standing so still that they might have been cut of stone. He was overwhelmed by their magnificence, and felt no need of Merlyn's warning that he was to be humble and behave himself.

Presently there was a gentle ringing of a bell. The great peregrine falcon had bestirred herself and now said, in a high nasal voice which came from her aristocratic nose, "Gentlemen, you may converse."

There was dead silence.

Only, in the far corner of the room, which had been netted off for Cully—loose there, unhooded and deep in moult—they could hear a faint muttering from the choleric infantry colonel.

"Damned niggers," he was mumbling. "Damned administration. Damned politicians. Damned bolsheviks. Is this a damned dagger that I see before me, the handle toward my hand? Damned spot. Now, Cully, hast thou but one brief hour to live, and then thou must be damned perpetually."

"Colonel," said the peregrine coldly, "not before the younger officers."

"I beg your pardon, Mam," said the poor colonel at once. "It is something that gets into my head, you know. Some deep demnation."

There was silence again, formal, terrible and calm.

"Who is the new officer?" inquired the first fierce and beautiful voice.

Nobody answered.

"Speak for yourself, sir," commanded the peregrine, looking straight before her as if she were talking in her sleep.

They could not see him through their hoods.

"Please," began the Wart, "I am a merlin...."

And he stopped, scared in the stillness.

Balan, who was one of the real merlins standing beside him, leaned over and whispered quite kindly in his ear, "Don't be afraid. Call her Madam."

"I am a merlin, Madam, an it please you."

Cully is the Goshawk we met on our adventure with Madame Mim. Cully seems to be grumpy quite a bit in this book. When I studied molting, I discovered, like hair and nails, that feathers are dead and need to be replaced, "molting." I can only guess it is like a dog shedding his hair, but much, much worse. It takes a lot of time.

“Molting in most passerines takes from 5 to 12 weeks, but some raptors may require two years or more to completely replace their feathers.”

<https://web.stanford.edu/group/stanfordbirds/text/essays/Molting.html>

We will meet Cully again in one of my favorite “cut to the chase” chapters of all time, Chapter Twenty:

“It was hay-making again, and Merlyn had been with them a year. The wind had visited them, and the snow, and the rain, and the sun once more. The boys looked longer in the leg, but otherwise everything was the same.

Six other years passed by.

Sometimes Sir Grummore came on a visit. Sometimes King Pellinore could be descried galloping over the purlieus after the Beast, or with the Beast after him if they happened to have got muddled up. Cully lost the vertical stripes of his first year's plumage and became greyer, grimmer, madder, and distinguished by smart horizontal bars where the long stripes had been. The merlins were released every winter and new ones caught again next year. Hob's hair went white. The sergeant-at-arms developed a pot-belly and nearly died of shame, but continued to cry out One-Two, in a huskier voice, on every possible occasion. Nobody else seemed to change at all, except the boys.

These grew longer. They ran like wild colts as before, and went to see Robin when they had a mind to, and had innumerable adventures too lengthy to be recorded.”

Late in the book, Cully, with all new equipment, will be sent by Hob to the newly crowned King Arthur...our little Wart.

T. H. White will write a book on taming, or attempting to tame, a goshawk. Cully's temperament, a key to this chapter, seems to be more real from White's experience. The image of the hawk ranting and quoting Shakespeare not only sets us up for our adventure, but it does remind me of dealing with a certain two-year old.

As we prepare for Wart's interrogation and ordeal, White is letting us know that Cully is a very real threat...a real danger to Wart.

"I am a merlin, Madam, an it please you."

"A Merlin. That is good. And what branch of the Merlins do you stoop from?"

The Wart did not know in the least what branch he stooped from, but he dared not be found out now in his lie.

"Madam," he said, "I am one of the Merlins of the Forest Sauvage."

There was silence at this again, the silver silence which he had begun to fear.

"There are the Yorkshire Merlins," said the honorary colonel in her slow voice at last, "and the Welsh Merlins, and the McMerlins of the North. Then there are the Salisbury ones, and several from the neighbourhood of Exmoor, and the O'Merlins of Connaught. I do not think I have heard of any family in the Forest Sauvage."

"It would be a cadet branch, Madam," said Balan, "I dare say."

"Bless him," thought the Wart. "I shall catch him a special sparrow tomorrow and give it to him behind Hob's back."

"That will be the solution, Captain Balan, no doubt."

The silence fell again.

At last the peregrine rang her bell. She said, "We will proceed with the catechism, prior to swearing him in."

The Wart heard the spar-hawk on his left giving several nervous coughs at this, but the peregrine paid no attention.

"Merlin of the Forest Sauvage," said the peregrine, "what is a Beast of the Foot?"

"A Beast of the Foot," replied the Wart, blessing his stars that Sir Ector had chosen to give him a First Rate Eddication, "is a horse, or a hound, or a hawk."

"Why are these called beasts of the foot?"

"Because these beasts depend upon the powers of their feet, so that, by law, any damage to the feet of hawk, hound or horse, is reckoned as damage to its life. A lamed horse is a murdered horse."

"Good," said the peregrine. "What are your most important members?"

"My wings," said the Wart after a moment, guessing because he did not know.

At this there was a simultaneous tintinnabulation of all the bells, as each graven image lowered its raised foot in distress. They stood on both feet now, disturbed.

"Your what?" called the peregrine sharply.

"He said his damned wings," said Colonel Cully from his private enclosure. "And damned be he who first cries Hold, enough!"

"But even a thrush has wings!" cried the kestrel, speaking for the first time in his sharp-beaked alarm.

"Think!" whispered Balan, under his breath.

The Wart thought feverishly.

A thrush had wings, tail, eyes, legs—apparently everything.

"My talons!"

"It will do," said the peregrine kindly, after one of her dreadful pauses. "The answer ought to be Feet, just as it is to all the other questions, but Talons will do."

All the hawks, and of course we are using the term loosely, for some were hawks and some were falcons, raised their belled feet again and sat at ease.

"What is the first law of the foot?"

The spar-hawk's nervousness is going to end up being a life or death issue for our young Wart. It's a small point, "The Wart heard the spar-hawk on his left giving several nervous coughs at this, but the peregrine paid no attention," but White seems to utilize quite a few small points in our reading to bring us to the edge later in the story.

I continue to come back to the first and second paragraph of our book and realize that the framework of Wart's "proper eddication" will be supplemented by Merlyn's transfigurations. "In the afternoons the programme was: Mondays and Fridays, tilting and horsemanship; Tuesdays, hawking; Wednesdays, fencing; Thursdays, archery; Saturdays, the theory of chivalry, with the proper measures to be blown on all occasions, terminology of the chase and hunting etiquette." White's book on hawking, *The Goshawk*, certainly is reflected in this chapter and the details are evident.

We had a fun chapter with jousting but we are discovering that hawking and archery will bring us into our more legendary chapters. "Terminology of the chase" will become important later, but, as I think about it, I can't seem to find the fencing.

But the sword will be important!

"Beasts of the foot" might be White's invention, or like "second sleep," a term Chaucer uses to describe waking up at night, doing something (write a letter, clean up, whatever) and go back to

sleep, might be something we don't talk about anymore but was a common concept. Sometimes, common concepts don't get the "press," so to speak, of complicated things.

With automated vehicles, I wonder if telling someone "I got the green light" might soon become a phrase without the substance, for example. Years from now, there will be someone explaining the story of red, yellow and green lights to understanding the cliché.

As a child, I was horrified to hear that a horse was killed because he broke his leg. It seemed so wrong, but Wart, living as close as he does to the animals, accepts it as normal.

"Wings." I enjoy this section. I always wanted wings as a child to fly. But, to our birds of prey, even a thrush has them.

Cully's words, of course, quote Macbeth:

"I will not yield

To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet
And to be baited with the rabble's curse.
Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane,
And thou oppos'd being of no woman born,
Yet I will try the last. Before my body
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff,
And damn'd be him that first cries, "Hold, enough!"

Exeunt, fighting. Alarums

In the German translation, the word for talons will be "Fangs." Fangs has such a better "taste" to what we are about to read. The image of fangs seems to grip me (ha!) better than talons. Cully, of course, hints to the answer to our question, "what is the first Law of the Foot."

"What is the first law of the foot?"

("Think," said friendly little Balan, behind his false primary.)

The Wart thought, and thought right.

"Never to let go," he said.

"Last question," said the peregrine. "How would you, as a Merlin, kill a pigeon bigger than yourself?"

Wart was lucky in this one, for he had heard Hob giving a description of how Balan did it one afternoon, and he answered warily, "I should strangle her with my foot."

"Good!" said the peregrine.

"Bravo!" cried the others, raising their feathers.

"Ninety per cent," said the spar-hawk after a quick sum. "That is, if you give him a half for the talons."

Wart has passed the oral exams. Next week, he faces, yet again, death in the form of a trial.

Wart gets the answer right: "I should strangle her with my foot." Saying "foot" brings us back to our discussion of "talons" and "fangs:" the correct answer to all questions is "foot."

While in England, Dan Cleather explain the British grading system to me. Here in the States, 90% is an "A." Dan noted that 50-70% would be considered very good in many schools in England. His point was interesting: the instructor can make a very difficult, very challenging exam where the student can see the vast chasm from what they know and what they will need to know.

My sister told me how to get an advanced degree: "Grab your "B" and move on." I was complaining, years ago, about the busy work that was still involved in post-graduate work. Her advice: do it, finish it and move along. Get the degree and be done with it.

Both Dan and Corinne, my sister, have excellent advice. Dan's point is very true in my life: I think I finally get it right when I realize how much more I need to know.

At St. Mary's, you will see me digging through old books on lifting, throwing and sports trying to unlock the clues left to us from our legends. The more I study the discus, the more gaps I see in my knowledge. I have been throwing since 1971 and I still don't fully understand what I need to know.

I think this is part of Merlyn's teaching method. Wart does well on this test, but the practical, which is a near-death experience, will teach him even more. And, when we close this chapter, another lesson will appear.

I think this is a good lesson for life.

"Ninety per cent," said the spar-hawk after a quick sum. "That is, if you give him a half for the talons."

"The devil damn me black!"

"Colonel, please!"

Balan whispered to the Wart, "Colonel Cully is not quite right in his wits. It is his liver, we believe, but the kestrel says it is the constant strain of living up to her ladyship's standard. He

says that her ladyship spoke to him from her full social station once, cavalry to infantry, you know, and that he just closed his eyes and got the vertigo. He has never been the same since."

"Captain Balan," said the peregrine, "it is rude to whisper. We will proceed to swear the new officer in. Now, padre, if you please."

The poor spar-hawk, who had been getting more and more nervous for some time, blushed deeply and began faltering out a complicated oath about varvels, jesses and hoods. "With this varvel," the Wart heard, "I thee endow ... love, honour and obey ... till jess us do part."

But before the padre had got to the end of it, he broke down altogether and sobbed out, "Oh, please your ladyship. I beg your pardon, but I have forgotten to keep my tirings."

("Tirings are bones and things," explained Balan, "and of course you have to swear on bones.")

"Forgotten to keep any tirings? But it is your duty to keep tirings."

"I—I know."

"What have you done with them?"

The spar-hawk's voice broke at the enormity of his confession. "I—I ate 'em," wept the unfortunate priest.

Nobody said anything. The dereliction of duty was too terrible for words. All stood on two feet and turned their blind heads toward the culprit. Not a word of reproach was spoken. Only, during an utter silence of five minutes, they could hear the incontinent priest snivelling and hiccupping to himself.

T. H. White's command of falconry is obvious throughout this chapter. Varvels are little rings put on the bird's jesses, those strips of leather around the talons, with the coat of arms of the owner printed upon them. This particular moment in the story seems to carry us back to medieval times more than some of the other stories.

I was trying to find information on "tirings," but the moment I started looking for swearing, I soon found that "swearing an oath" is one of the rarer uses of the word "swear." At one time, By God's Bones, would get your mouth washed out with soap and "sard" was an earlier stand in for our current "F Bomb."

It was fun to read up on all of this, but I was getting away from digging into our story deeper. Yes, I am, at heart, a 14-year old boy when it comes to cussing: it makes me giggle.

Cully's problems keep being explained away by different characters. We first met Cully on our quest to find a tutor:

"Right down the length of the room, with the afternoon sun shining full on them, there ran the screen perches to which the birds were tied. There were two little merlins which had only just been taken up from hacking, an old peregrine who was not much use in this wooded country but who was kept for appearances, a kestrel on which the boys had learned the rudiments of falconry, a spar-hawk which Sir Ector was kind enough to keep for the parish priest, and, caged off in a special apartment of his own at the far end, there was the tiercel goshawk Cully."

Cully was not in a good mood, as Wart tells us: "he is deep in the molt."

Merlyn warns Wart before this adventure: "Don't go within reach of the falcon unless she invites you to. On no account must you stand beside Cully's special enclosure, for he is unhooded and will go for you through the mesh if he gets half a chance. He is not quite right in his brains, poor chap, and if he once grips you, you will never leave his grip alive."

And then Merlyn explains the pecking order (literally) of the roost: "She is the honorary colonel of the regiment. And as for Cully, well, he is a colonel too, even if he is infantry, so you must mind your p's and q's."

As Wart enters the area, White points out: "Only, in the far corner of the room, which had been netted off for Cully—loose there, unhooded and deep in moult—they could hear a faint muttering from the choleric infantry colonel."

And, now, this line:

Balan whispered to the Wart, "Colonel Cully is not quite right in his wits. It is his liver, we believe, but the kestrel says it is the constant strain of living up to her ladyship's standard. He says that her ladyship spoke to him from her full social station once, cavalry to infantry, you know, and that he just closed his eyes and got the vertigo. He has never been the same since."

Molt, madness, choleric, and social station all seem to impact our infantry Colonel.

He seems to molt a lot. He is also very dangerous.

Padre, the Spar-Hawk, reminds us of Merlyn's explanation of this band of warriors: they are always hungry. The Padre's little meal of the tiring brings one of the most powerful condemnations I have ever read:

"Nobody said anything. The dereliction of duty was too terrible for words. All stood on two feet and turned their blind heads toward the culprit. Not a word of reproach was spoken. Only, during an utter silence of five minutes..."

Five minutes of silence! Ouch. I have used silence as a father a few times to let the weight of something set in. But I am not sure I could handle five minutes.

Nobody said anything. The dereliction of duty was too terrible for words. All stood on two feet and turned their blind heads toward the culprit. Not a word of reproach was spoken. Only, during an utter silence of five minutes, they could hear the incontinent priest snivelling and hiccoughing to himself.

"Well," said the peregrine at last, "the initiation will have to be put off till tomorrow."

"If you will excuse me, Madam," said Balin, "perhaps we could manage the ordeal tonight? I believe the candidate is loose, for I did not hear him being tied up."

At the mention of an ordeal the Wart trembled within himself and privately determined that Balin should have not one feather of Balan's sparrow next day.

"Thank you, Captain Balin. I was reflecting upon that subject myself."

Balin shut up.

"Are you loose, candidate?"

"Oh, Madam, yes, I am, if you please: but I do not think I want an ordeal."

"The ordeal is customary."

"Let me see," continued the honorary colonel reflectively. "What was the last ordeal we had? Can you remember, Captain Balan?"

"My ordeal, Mam," said the friendly merlin, "was to hang by my jesses during the third watch."

"If he is loose he cannot do that."

"You could strike him yourself, Mam," said the Kestrel, "judiciously, you know."

"Send him over to stand by Colonel Cully while we ring three times," said the other merlin.

"Oh, no!" cried the crazy colonel in an agony out of his remoter darkness. "Oh no, your ladyship. I beg of you not to do that. I am such a damned villain, your ladyship, that I do not answer for the consequences. Spare the poor boy, your ladyship, and lead us not into temptation."

"Colonel, control yourself. That ordeal will do very well."

"Oh, Madam, I was warned not to stand by Colonel Cully."

"Warned? And by whom?"

The poor Wart realised that now he must choose between confessing himself a human, and learning no more of their secrets, or going through with this ordeal to earn his education. He did not want to be a coward.

"I will stand by the Colonel, Madam," he said, immediately noticing that his voice sounded insulting.

The peregrine falcon paid no attention to the tone.

"It is well," she said. "But first we must have the hymn. Now, padre, if you have not eaten your hymns as well as your tirings, will you be so kind as to lead us in Ancient but not Modern No. 23? The Ordeal Hymn.

"And you, Mr. Kee," she added to the kestrel, "you had better keep quiet, for you are always too high."

The hawks stood still in the moonlight, while the spar-hawk counted "One, Two, Three." Then all those curved or toothed beaks opened in their hoods to a brazen unison, and this is what they chanted:

Life is blood, shed and offered.

The eagle's eye can face this dree.

To beasts of chase the lie is proffered:

Timor Mortis Conturbat Me.

The beast of foot sings Holdfast only,

For flesh is bruckle and foot is slee.

Strength to the strong and the lordly and lonely.

Timor Mortis Exultat Me.

Shame to the slothful and woe to the weak one.

Death to the dreadful who turn to flee.

Blood to the tearing, the talon'd, the beaked one.

Timor Mortis are We.

"Very nice," said the peregrine. "Captain Balan, I think you were a little off on the top C. And now, candidate, you will go over and stand next to Colonel Cully's enclosure, while we ring our bells thrice. On the third ring you may move as quickly as you like."

Well, Balin isn't making any friends with me as a reader. Balan deserves that sparrow, but he needs to learn how to sing a bit better, I guess.

I've always thought that the raptors are in on the story here. This little part here, "And by whom" always seemed to be a "leading question" as we hear on the television lawyer shows:

"Oh, Madam, I was warned not to stand by Colonel Cully."

"Warned? And by whom?"

The poor Wart realised that now he must choose between confessing himself a human, and learning no more of their secrets, or going through with this ordeal to earn his education.

Cully, for sure, seems to know that Wart is a boy:

"Oh no, your ladyship. I beg of you not to do that. I am such a damned villain, your ladyship, that I do not answer for the consequences. *Spare the poor boy*, your ladyship, and lead us not into temptation."

This reference to temptation also sets us up for the Hawk's song. "Timor Mortis are We" translates into "fear of death disturbs me." It was popular in Scottish poetry to repeat that line centuries ago. It appears in the Catholic Office of the Dead:

Peccantem me quotidie, et non poenitentem, timor mortis conturbat me. Quia in inferno nulla est redemptio, miserere mei, Deus, et salva me.

Sinning daily, and not repenting, the fear of death disturbs me. For there is no redemption in Hell, have mercy on me, o God, and save me.

Cully's line hints towards our song as well as the true nature of the junior Merlin of the local forest.

Of course, the peregrine colonel hints toward something worse:

"On the third ring you may move as quickly as you like."

And, that might not be quick enough.

"Very nice," said the peregrine. "Captain Balan, I think you were a little off on the top C. And now, candidate, you will go over and stand next to Colonel Cully's enclosure, while we ring our bells thrice. On the third ring you may move as quickly as you like."

"Very good, Madam," said the Wart, quite fearless with resentment. He flipped his wings and was sitting on the extreme end of the screen perch, next to Cully's enclosure of string netting.

"Boy!" cried the Colonel in an unearthly voice, "don't come near me, don't come near. Ah, tempt not the foul fiend to his damnation."

"I do not fear you, sir," said the Wart. "Do not vex yourself, for no harm will come to either of us."

"No harm, quotha! Ah, go, before it is too late. I feel eternal longings in me."

"Never fear, sir. They have only to ring three times."

At this the knights lowered their raised legs and gave them a solemn shake. The first sweet tinkling filled the room.

"Madam, Madam!" cried the Colonel in torture. "Have pity, have pity on a damned man of blood. Ring out the old, ring in the new. I can't hold off much longer."

"Be brave, sir," said the Wart softly.

"Be brave, sir! Why, but two nights since, one met the duke 'bout midnight in a lane behind Saint Mark's Church, with the leg of a man upon his shoulder: and he howled fearfully."

"It is nothing," said the Wart.

"Nothing! Said he was a wolf, only the difference was a wolf's skin was hairy on the outside, his on the inside. Rip up my flesh and try. Ah, for quietus, with a bare bodkin!"

The bells rang for the second time.

The Wart's heart was thumping, and now the Colonel was sidling toward him along the perch. Stamp, stamp, he went, striking the wood he trod on with a convulsive grip at every pace. His poor, mad, brooding eyes glared in the moonlight, shone against the persecuted darkness of his scowling brow. There was nothing cruel about him, no ignoble passion. He was terrified of the Wart, not triumphing, and he must slay.

"If it were done when 'tis done," whispered the Colonel, "then 'twere well it were done quickly. Who would have thought the young man had so much blood in him?"

"Colonel!" said the Wart, but held himself there.

"Boy!" cried the Colonel. "Speak, stop me, mercy!"

"There is a cat behind you," said the Wart calmly, "or a pine-marten. Look."

The Colonel turned, swift as a wasp's sting, and menaced into the gloom. There was nothing. He swung his wild eyes again upon the Wart, guessing the trick. Then, in the cold voice of an adder, "The bell invites me. Hear it not, Merlin, for it is a knell that summons thee to heaven or to hell."

The third bells were indeed ringing as he spoke, and honour was allowed to move.

Well, there is nothing fancy about Wart's "Look, there's a cat!," but it will work pretty well in this case. As a little brother, I learned to point and say "Mom!," then turn and run as fast as I could.

Sometimes, it worked.

I'm pretty sure Cully is doing Shakespeare....among others.

Sonnet 144 might be part of his rant:

Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
Which like two spirits do suggest me still
The better angel is a man right fair,
The worser spirit a woman coloured ill.
To win me soon to hell, my female evil
Tempteth my better angel from my side,
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.
And, whether that my angel be turn'd fiend,
Suspect I may, yet not directly tell,
But being both from me both to each friend,
I guess one angel in another's hell.
Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,
Till my bad angel fire my good one out.

Antony and Cleopatra inspires, too, with this line:

CLEOPATRA:

Give me my robe. Put on my crown. I have
Immortal longings in me. Now no more
The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip.

Of course, Lady Macbeth is loaded with quotes about blood and damnation and John Webster's Shakespearean era play, the Duchess of Malfi, gives us this quote:

"but two nights since, one met the duke 'bout midnight in a lane behind Saint Mark's Church, with the leg of a man upon his shoulder: and he howled fearfully." We also find references to

Hamlet's soliloquy with the reference to the bodkin. I'm sure if I continued to dig, I would soon be rambling madly.

So, when it comes to mad ramblings, Cully is well versed!

Once again, Merlyn's education is not gentle and kind and filled with hugs. These life or death training sessions, and another follows this chapter, are teaching Wart to think like a leader, like a king.

He will barely escape the jaws and claws of death in this book several times. It should prepare him well for a life in the public eye.

"There is a cat behind you," said the Wart calmly, "or a pine-marten. Look."

The Colonel turned, swift as a wasp's sting, and menaced into the gloom. There was nothing. He swung his wild eyes again upon the Wart, guessing the trick. Then, in the cold voice of an adder, "The bell invites me. Hear it not, Merlin, for it is a knell that summons thee to heaven or to hell."

The third bells were indeed ringing as he spoke, and honour was allowed to move. The ordeal was over and the Wart might fly. But as he moved, but as he flew, quicker than any movement or flight in the world, the terrible sickles had shot from the Colonel's plated legs—not flashed out, for they moved too quick for sight—and with a thump, with a clutch, with an apprehension, like being arrested by a big policeman, the great scimitars had fixed themselves in his retreating thumb.

They fixed themselves, and fixed irrevocably. Gripe, gripe, the enormous thigh muscles tautened in two convulsions. Then the Wart was two yards further down the screen, and Colonel Cully was standing on one foot with a few meshes of string netting and the Wart's false primary, with its covert-feathers, vice-fisted in the other. Two or three minor feathers drifted softly in a moonbeam toward the floor.

"Well stood!" cried Balan, delighted.

"A very gentlemanly exhibition," said the peregrine, not minding that Captain Balan had spoken before her.

"Amen!" said the spar-hawk.

"Brave heart!" said the kestrel.

As I have said before, Wart's education is perilous. Cully eagerly struck a death blow towards Wart and ends up with a fistful of feathers. I've always been a bit confused by this line: "the great scimitars had fixed themselves in his retreating thumb."

When we return to the transformation (“transmogrification” for Calvin and Hobbes fans), this might make more sense:

"First you go small," said he, pressing him on the top of his head until he was a bit smaller than a pigeon. "Then you stand on the ball of your toes, bend at the knees, hold your elbows to your sides, lift your hands to the level of your shoulders, and press your first and second fingers together, as also your third and fourth. Look, it is like this."

So, yes, Cully was fast, but not fast enough. He caught, as I just stood there in my office imitating the transformation, the far end of the wing, the thumb.

Cully was deep into Shakespeare again with his statements. In this quote, the importance of the stage direction from Macbeth, A bell rings, is very important to our story:

A bell rings.

I go, and it is done. The bell invites me.

Hear it not, Duncan, for it is a knell

That summons thee to heaven or to hell.

End quote.

Balan's breach of etiquette is understandable. It is fun to reread this section and see how the comments of the hawks, "Amen" and "Brave heart," for examples, reflect their various stations in life. White's ability to create so many minor characters is amazing...as well as his ability to flesh them out. I think it is the secret to great writing...and great teaching.

I often use Shakespeare's great quote from A Midsummer's Night Dream to explain teaching:

"The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, doth glance from heaven to Earth, from Earth to heaven; and as imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown, the poet's pen turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name; such tricks hath strong imagination."

The job of the teacher is to take "airy nothing" and turn it into something with a body. These stories from long ago or characters in a novel need to leap from the lecture and page. White is a master of this.

So, Wart is safe. Our chapter closes soon, but Wart will soon be in danger again.

"Might we give him the Triumph Song?" asked Balin, relenting.

"Certainly," said the peregrine.

And they all sang together, led by Colonel Cully at the top of his voice, all belling triumphantly in the terrible moonlight.

**The mountain birds are sweeter
But the valley birds are fatter,
And so we deemed it meeter
To carry off the latter.
We met a cowering coney
And struck him through the vitals.
The coney was like honey
And squealed our requitals.
Some struck the lark in feathers
Whose puffing clouds were shed off.
Some plucked the partridge's nethers,
While others pulled his head off.
But Wart the King of Merlins
Struck foot most far before us.
His birds and beasts
Supply our feasts,
And his feats our glorious chorus!**

"Mark my words," cried the beautiful Balan, "we shall have a regular king in that young candidate. Now, boys, chorus altogether for the last time":

**But Wart the King of Merlins
Struck foot most far before us.
His birds and beasts
Supply our feasts,
And his feats our glorious chorus!**

Balin seems to be coming around, but Balan is our new friend. We come to the end (finally?) of my favorite chapter of the book...among many favorite chapters.

Cully continues to be hard for me to understand. On a recent flight, I watched a movie, The Death of Stalin, and Field Marshall Zhukov, played by Jason Isaacs, gave me some insights. Isaacs, who played Lucius Malfoy in the Harry Potter series, stole the show in just a few scenes.

Brash, funny, tough, mean and kind, Zhukov is a career soldier who has seen it all and is willing to do what needs to be done.

When I reconsidered Cully in this light, he makes more sense to me. Yes, he is willing to kill one minute then lead the chorus in congratulations. T. H. White's complexity as a writer comes shining through with the description of a single character...and a bird, at that.

This final chorus, again, reminds us that everyone in Merlyn's strange world knows who Wart is:

**But Wart the King of Merlins
Struck foot most far before us.
His birds and beasts
Supply our feasts,
And his feats our glorious chorus!**

The play on words, Merlyn/Merlin and Feats/Feet, take us back into the whole chapter and "Never to Let Go." Like the goat who gave the Imperial salute to the caged Wart, we are calling the young boy: the King of Merlins.

Next chapter we start off on another adventure but it includes Kay, some insights on Merlyn's magic and a fun story. We also meet, perhaps, Wart's first crush.

Chapter Nine

"Well!" said the Wart, as he woke up in his own bed next morning. "What a horrible, grand crew!"

Kay sat up in bed and began scolding like a squirrel. "Where were you last night?" he cried, "I believe you climbed out. I shall tell my father and get you tanned. You know we are not allowed out after curfew. What have you been doing? I looked for you everywhere. I know you climbed out."

The boys had a way of sliding down a rain-water pipe into the moat, which they could swim on secret occasions when it was necessary to be out at night—to wait for a badger, for instance, or to catch tench, which can only be taken just before dawn.

"Oh, shut up," said the Wart. "I'm sleepy."

Kay said, "Wake up, wake up, you beast. Where have you been?"

"I shan't tell you."

He was sure that Kay would not believe the story, but only call him a liar and get angrier than ever.

"If you don't tell me I shall kill you."

"You will not, then."

"I will."

The Wart turned over on his other side.

Our next adventure begins basically with Wart and Kay arguing. Wart is tired; Kay is angry. For those of you with siblings, you know where this discussion is heading:

A black eye will be a major part of this reading.

This little fight sets up a series of events that will take us through the middle of the book. Chapters nine, ten, eleven, and twelve will have a far different kind of magic; this chapter will be filled with "old magic."

White's handling of the old traditions of religion is interesting. Most of us who travel to Ireland, and White spent much of his writing career living there, begin to get a sense of the unseen.

My neighbor has a hawthorn tree that encroaches into my backyard. In the tradition, the "huath" is the Fairy Tree. We do not cut down the Fairy Tree for fear of the wrath of the fairies. Christianity baptized the tree (that's how we tend to say this in Religious Studies: when a new faith comes along and takes the old and makes it part of the new tradition, it is called "baptizing" the old tradition) and made it the source of the Crown of Thorns around the head of Jesus.

So, these next chapters will have famous names from history, characters introduced earlier in the book and a strange kind of magic.

White mentions the tench and the badger here. Both of these are key figures in Wart's transformation stories; the tench was Merlyn's fish form and the badger will be Wart's last mentor as the special magic that Merlyn uses will have run out.

Not much will happen in Chapter Nine. We will be setting up the story.

As I lay out the whole book, it is interesting to see, in the original *The Sword in the Stone* from 1938 especially, the pattern of transformation stories and reality stories (if you understand what I mean by "reality" here):

Wart's "quest:" He finds Merlyn (After Meeting King Pellinore chasing the Beast Glatissant)
Fish (Perch) Transformation
Madam Mim
Tilting Lesson (King Pellinore and Sir Grummore)
Hawk Transformation

The "Middle of the Book:" our next adventure.

Snake Transformation

Boar Hunt (King Pellinore finds the Beast Glatisant...again)

Owl Transformation

Galapas the Giant (King Pellinore is among the captured...all are saved by the Beast)

Badger Transformation

Wart becomes King Arthur (and receives gifts from all of his friends, (including Pellinore and the Beast)

What leaped out to me as I first set this down was the important role of King Pellinore and the Beast play in connecting the stories and driving the action along. Perhaps because of the Disney adaption, I have always seen Pellinore as a side character providing a bit of humor, but when I stand back, it is obvious that he might have an odd demeanor, he is certainly a key character. Being cursed from birth to chase a Beast in the wilderness might be enough to take the edge off of any of us.

The other thing that leaped out to me is that White might have built the story in what we call in Religious Studies a chiasmus or "crossing the X." It is a method where the story builds up on "one side" then gets reflected, but not repeated on the other.

Here is a simple example to begin:

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair" Shakespeare, Macbeth

The words repeat, but it shows the structure

A: Fair

B: Foul

B': Foul

A': Fair

The Gospel of Mark works amazingly well with this chiasmus. Simply, using locations, one discovers

A: Desert

B: Galilee

C: "The Way"

B': Jerusalem

A': Tomb

The desert and the tomb are alike in many ways with dangerous creatures and solitude. The stories of Galilee and Jerusalem contrast with everybody coming to Jesus in Galilee and

abandoning Him in Jerusalem. The Way connects the story like a keystone in an arch: it holds the story together.

I'm going to develop this as we go along. Right now, I have one sticking point (the Owl Transformation doesn't have an "X" in the first part), but I will find a "way" around this.

"Oh, shut up," said the Wart. "I'm sleepy."

Kay said, "Wake up, wake up, you beast. Where have you been?"

"I shan't tell you."

He was sure that Kay would not believe the story, but only call him a liar and get angrier than ever.

"If you don't tell me I shall kill you."

"You will not, then."

"I will."

The Wart turned over on his other side.

"Beast," said Kay. He took a fold of the Wart's arm between the nails of first finger and thumb, and pinched for all he was worth. Wart kicked like a salmon which has been suddenly hooked, and hit him wildly in the eye. In a trice they were out of bed, pale and indignant, looking rather like skinned rabbits—for in those days, nobody wore clothes in bed—and whirling their arms like windmills in the effort to do each other a mischief.

Kay was older and bigger than the Wart, so that he was bound to win in the end, but he was more nervous and imaginative. He could imagine the effect of each blow that was aimed at him, and this weakened his defence. Wart was only an infuriated hurricane.

"Leave me alone, can't you?" And all the while he did not leave Kay alone, but with head down and swinging arms made it impossible for Kay to do as he was bid. They punched entirely at each other's faces.

Kay had a longer reach and a heavier fist. He straightened his arm, more in self-defence than in anything else, and the Wart smacked his own eye upon the end of it. The sky became a noisy and shocking black, streaked outward with a blaze of meteors. The Wart began to sob and pant. He managed to get in a blow upon his opponent's nose, and this began to bleed. Kay lowered his defence, turned his back on the Wart, and said in a cold, snuffling, reproachful voice, "Now it's bleeding." The battle was over.

Kay lay on the stone floor, bubbling blood out of his nose, and the Wart, with a black eye, fetched the enormous key out of the door to put under Kay's back. Neither of them spoke.

Presently Kay turned over on his face and began to sob. He said, "Merlyn does everything for you, but he never does anything for me."

Chapter eight and chapter nine both begin with our friend, Wart, getting on the wrong side of everyone. In chapter eight, the weather puts everyone into a foul mood and we are basically starting the next day here in chapter nine.

I do know that brothers fight. I have experienced this myself many times. This line, "Merlyn does everything for you, but he never does anything for me," gives us an insight into the problem here: Kay is being left out, left behind.

Our adventure begins soon, but I never really appreciated this chapter very much until I slowed down to enjoy the setting. We are going to learn about Merlyn's magic and its shortcomings. The section will be funny and there will be a good lesson about cursing. Merlyn's conversation with Archimedes concerning a nap is laugh out loud funny for me...I swear I have had the same conversation.

So, and I am giving it away, not much happens here in chapter nine. But, this is an important transition piece from the magic of Merlyn to the magic of the Old People.

I wouldn't recommend that someone pick up *The Sword in the Stone* and just read chapter nine. This chapter provides us another pause in the action and some additional background material. As readers, we are ready to understand more about White's vision of Merlyn and his magic.

So, it might take us a bit to march through chapter nine, but it is worth it.

Presently Kay turned over on his face and began to sob. He said, "Merlyn does everything for you, but he never does anything for me."

At this the Wart felt he had been a beast. He dressed himself in silence and hurried off to find the magician.

On the way he was caught by his nurse.

"Ah, you little helot," exclaimed she, shaking him by the arm, "you've been a-battling again with that there Master Kay. Look at your poor eye, I do declare. It's enough to baffle the college of sturgeons."

"It is all right," said the Wart.

"No, that it isn't, my poppet," cried his nurse, getting crosser and showing signs of slapping him. "Come now, how did you do it, before I have you whipped?"

"I knocked it on the bedpost," said the Wart sullenly.

The old nurse immediately folded him to her broad bosom, patted him on the back, and said, "There, there, my dowsabel. It's the same story Sir Ector told me when I caught him with a blue eye, gone forty years. Nothing like a good family for sticking to a good lie. There, my innocent, you come along of me to the kitchen and we'll slap a nice bit of steak across him in no time. But you hadn't ought to fight with people bigger than yourself."

"It is all right," said the Wart again, disgusted by the fuss, but fate was bent on punishing him, and the old lady was inexorable. It took him half an hour to escape, and then only at the price of carrying with him a juicy piece of raw beef which he was supposed to hold over his eye.

"Nothing like a mealy rump for drawing out the humours," his nurse had said, and the cook had answered:

"Us han't seen a sweeter bit of raw since Easter, no, nor a bloodier."

"I will keep the foul thing for Balan," thought the Wart, resuming his search for his tutor.

I find this little selection delightful. The nurse actually reminds me of my mom: she always seemed on the edge of wanting to hit me or hug me. The nurse's response to the story of the bedpost just makes this chapter "nice:" people in White's book are multi-layered humans with real emotions.

The nurse uses language like one of my relatives (name withheld). Whatever word comes along is just fine. I'm sure she means "hellion" versus, "helot," as Wart isn't a Spartan slave. "Poppet" is a word of endearment...as well as mythical creatures that live in closets and under beds. I'm sure the "College of Sturgeons" is a fine place for caviar.

Putting raw meat on black eyes was still being done in my youth. Western medicine used the four "humours" as the foundation of studying imbalances well into the past century. Blood, Yellow bile, Black bile and Phlegm all needed to be in balance. It's funny to go to health food stores and walk through the books that discuss ancient Indian and Chinese medicines and their emphasis on balancing food, spices and all the rest, but we tend to forget the Western medicine tradition here.

By the way, for men, donating blood is an excellent way to keep the cardiovascular system from getting too "iron rich." I donate blood to not only help the community, but to keep my Hematocrit levels at the appropriate levels. So, yes, bloodletting has some value; just don't drain the patient!

It is marvelous to see that Wart still wants to thank Balan for helping him during the ordeal with the hawks. As I said, this is a simple chapter and Merlyn will find some kindness in his heart for both Wart and Kay.

"I will keep the foul thing for Balan," thought the Wart, resuming his search for his tutor.

He found him without trouble in the tower room which he had chosen when he arrived. All philosophers prefer to live in towers, as may be seen by visiting the room which Erasmus chose in his college at Cambridge, but Merlyn's tower was even more beautiful than this. It was the highest room in the castle, directly below the look-out of the great keep, and from its window you could gaze across the open field—with its rights of warren—across the park, and the chase, until your eye finally wandered out over the distant blue tree-tops of the Forest Sauvage. This sea of leafy timber rolled away and away in knobs like the surface of porridge, until it was finally lost in remote mountains which nobody had ever visited, and the cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces of heaven.

Merlyn's comments upon the black eye were of a medical nature.

"The discoloration," he said, "is caused by haemorrhage into the tissues (ecchymosis) and passes from dark purple through green to yellow before it disappears."

There seemed to be no sensible reply to this.

"I suppose you had it," continued Merlyn, "fighting with Kay?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Ah, well, there it is."

"I came to ask you about Kay."

"Speak. Demand. I'll answer."

"Well, Kay thinks it is unfair that you are always turning me into things and not him. I have not told him about it but I think he guesses. I think it is unfair too."

"It is unfair."

The idea of the philosopher or scholar living in an "Ivory Tower" has become a cliché in our modern speech. The roots of the term come from the Song of Solomon 7:4:

"Your neck is like a tower of ivory, Your eyes like the pools in Heshbon By the gate of Bath-rabbim; Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, Which faces toward Damascus."

(New American Standard Bible)

The Song of Solomon has been considered “scandalous” by some due to lines like:

“Your breasts are like two fawns,
like twin fawns of a gazelle

Awake, north wind,
and come, south wind!
Blow on my garden,
that its fragrance may spread everywhere.
Let my beloved come into his garden
and taste its choice fruits.”

I think it is well worth reading with some of the best love poetry in history. But, let’s get back to Merlyn in his tower.

Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus (died 1536) was one of the first “humanists.” A Catholic, he was critical of the Catholic Church and called for reforms but did not leave the church. He emphasized “Via Media,” the middle road, respecting much of the work of the Reformers but also holding on to the Tradition. As always, the middle way seems to anger everyone.

Wart and Merlyn’s conversation includes many “unsaid” things. I find this particular interaction to highlight Wart’s maturation and Merlyn’s ability to see it, too. As I type this, my daughter has just had her ten-year reunion and I still worry about her riding her bike alone on the street.

"It is unfair."

I’m not sure there are three better words to respond to injustice in this world. If Merlyn contradicts Wart here or gets enraged about “seeing the Big Picture” or whatever, he ignores Wart’s great insight:

"Well, Kay thinks it is unfair that you are always turning me into things and not him. I have not told him about it but I think he guesses. I think it is unfair too."

Merlyn’s response is perfect: "It is unfair."

Let’s just leave this here. Let’s let the unfairness of the situation sit for a moment.

"It is unfair."

And sometimes, that is all we can do: admit it.

"It is unfair."

"So will you turn us both next time that we are turned?"

Merlyn had finished his breakfast, and was puffing at the meerschaum pipe which made his pupil believe that he breathed fire. Now he took a deep puff, looked at the Wart, opened his mouth to speak, changed his mind, blew out the smoke and drew another lungful.

"Sometimes," he said, "life does seem to be unfair. Do you know the story of Elijah and the Rabbi Jachanan?"

"No," said the Wart.

He sat down resignedly upon the most comfortable part of the floor, perceiving that he was in for something like the parable of the looking-glass.

"This rabbi," said Merlyn, "went on a journey with the prophet Elijah. They walked all day, and at nightfall they came to the humble cottage of a poor man, whose only treasure was a cow. The poor man ran out of his cottage, and his wife ran too, to welcome the strangers for the night and to offer them all the simple hospitality which they were able to give in straitened circumstances. Elijah and the Rabbi were entertained with plenty of the cow's milk, sustained by home-made bread and butter, and they were put to sleep in the best bed while their kindly hosts lay down before the kitchen fire. But in the morning the poor man's cow was dead."

"Go on."

"They walked all the next day, and came that evening to the house of a very wealthy merchant, whose hospitality they craved. The merchant was cold and proud and rich, and all that he would do for the prophet and his companion was to lodge them in a cowshed and feed them on bread and water. In the morning, however, Elijah thanked him very much for what he had done, and sent for a mason to repair one of his walls, which happened to be falling down, as a return for his kindness.

"The Rabbi Jachanan, unable to keep silence any longer, begged the holy man to explain the meaning of his dealings with human beings.

"'In regard to the poor man who received us so hospitably,' replied the prophet, 'it was decreed that his wife was to die that night, but in reward for his goodness God took the cow instead of the wife. I repaired the wall of the rich miser because a chest of gold was concealed near the place, and if the miser had repaired the wall himself he would have discovered the treasure. Say not therefore to the Lord: What doest thou? But say in thy heart: Must not the Lord of all the earth do right?'"

"It is a nice sort of story," said the Wart, because it seemed to be over.

Tobacco might be something that Wart would have never seen before in his life. Bob Newhart has a wonderful skit on Sir Walter Raleigh "selling" smoking to the English. Hence, Merlyn becomes "fire breather." I struggled with this story the first few times I read it and I have to admit I had more of a "Wart-like" reaction.

"Because it seemed to be over." I think we have all been in this situation. Someone says: "I have to tell you the funniest story....and then goes on (and on and on and on) a long painful journey with multiple parts, people you don't know and several regressions." Finally, "Isn't that hilarious?"

Well, yes...yes, of course. Ha ha!

There is a great moment in the movie, Auntie Mame (1958), which is referenced in Trading Places (the Eddie Murphy/Dan Aykrod movie):

"Bunny Bixler and I were in the semi-finals - the very semi-finals, mind you - of the ping-pong tournament at the club and this ghastly thing happened. We were both playing way over our heads and the score was 29-28. And we had this really terrific volley and I stepped back to get this really terrific shot. And I stepped on the ping-pong ball! I just squashed it to bits. And then Bunny and I ran to the closet of the game room to get another ping-pong ball and the closet was locked! Imagine? We had to call the whole thing off. Well, it was ghastly. Well, it was just ghastly."

By the way, the actress who says this in the movies has an odd legacy: Joanna Barnes was in BOTH The Parent Trap movies (1961 and 1998).

I suddenly realized I may have told you some things that were not necessarily interesting or fascinating...but it seems to be over!

Isn't that hilarious!

I digress. As always.

There are some "complaints," for lack of a better word, about this story. Many have taken issue with this part:

"it was decreed that his wife was to die that night, but in reward for his goodness God took the cow instead of the wife."

It seems to be an affront those who believe in pre-destination and those who don't believe in pre-destination, but I like the idea that we can "tip the scales" in our favor. In ancient Egypt, the dead were buried with small weights so they could tip the scales, one's heart has to be light, in the Hall of Ma'at. Anubis reigned over this and the deceased had to review 42 separate

transgressions and be innocent of these crimes. Sneaking a few weights on the scales gave you chance for a happy afterlife.

Sometimes, as White is teaching us, life is unfair. Maybe the Egyptians were on to something, but that is another discussion for another time.

"It is a nice sort of story," said the Wart, because it seemed to be over.

"I am sorry," said Merlyn, "that you should be the only one to get my extra tuition, but then, you see, I was only sent for that."

"I do not see that it would do any harm for Kay to come too."

"Nor do I. But the Rabbi Jachanan did not see why the miser should have had his wall repaired."

"I understand that," said the Wart doubtfully, "but I still think it was a shame that the cow died. Could I not have Kay with me just once?"

Merlyn said gently, "Perhaps what is good for you might be bad for him. Besides, remember he has never asked to be turned into anything."

"He wants to be turned, for all that. I like Kay, you know, and I think people don't understand him. He has to be proud because he is frightened."

"You still do not follow what I mean. Suppose he had gone as a merlin last night, and failed in the ordeal, and lost his nerve?"

"How do you know about that ordeal?"

"Ah, well, there it is again."

"Very well," said the Wart obstinately. "But suppose he had not failed in the ordeal, and had not lost his nerve. I don't see why you should have to suppose that he would have."

"Oh, flout the boy!" cried the magician passionately. "You don't seem to see anything this morning. What is it that you want me to do?"

"Turn me and Kay into snakes or something."

Merlyn took off his spectacles, dashed them on the floor and jumped on them with both feet.

If there is a better line in literature than this, “Merlyn took off his spectacles, dashed them on the floor and jumped on them with both feet,” I don’t know what it is. Oh, sure, quote Shakespeare all you want, but I would argue that this is the most real line I have ever read.

And funny. And true.

Most parents, many teachers and all coaches have had this moment: the kid just won’t shut up, let it go, or leave it alone. I find this story funnier and funnier as I age; perhaps, I didn’t see the humor when I was 13.

Wart wants Merlyn to do something Merlyn cannot do.

We have all been there, I think.

I can remember a transfer student (and her mother) arguing that they didn’t need to take any of our coursework at the school because she was obviously too qualified to take basic coursework.

But she will need these classes to fulfill the graduation requirements.

“Edna doesn’t need them. She is brilliant and far ahead of any one her age.” (Actual quote)

But, if you want to go to this school, you need to take these classes.

“We just need the diploma so she can get into University XYZ.” (She didn’t get in, by the way)

But we can’t give you a diploma without classwork, testing and evaluation.

“She already knows all of this.”

This continued for a long time. I finally threw my glasses on the ground and stomped on them.

Kay is going to get his adventure. As we move forward in this story, this adventure, as well as the Boar Hunt with William Twyti, will be a chance to bring many of the story’s characters together.

In the next section, we will learn about Merlyn’s magical abilities and how he actually does magic. Wart is just beginning to discover that Merlyn has limits on his abilities. If you continue reading the rest of *The Once and Future King*, you will discover that Merlyn’s “overlooking” or forgetting, depending on how you read it, a key point is going to be a huge issue for King Arthur.

"Turn me and Kay into snakes or something."

Merlyn took off his spectacles, dashed them on the floor and jumped on them with both feet.

"Castor and Pollux blow me to Bermuda!" he exclaimed, and immediately vanished with a frightful roar.

The Wart was still staring at his tutor's chair in some perplexity, a few moments later, when Merlyn reappeared. He had lost his hat and his hair and beard were tangled up, as if by a hurricane. He sat down again, straightening his gown with trembling fingers.

"Why did you do that?" asked the Wart.

"I did not do it on purpose."

"Do you mean to say that Castor and Pollux did blow you to Bermuda?"

"Let this be a lesson to you," replied Merlyn, "not to swear. I think we had better change the subject."

"We were talking about Kay."

"Yes, and what I was going to say before my—ahem!—my visit to the still vexed Bermoothes, was this. I cannot change Kay into things. The power was not deputed to me when I was sent. Why this was so, neither you nor I am able to say, but such remains the fact. I have tried to hint at some of the reasons for the fact, but you will not take them, so you must just accept the fact in its naked reality. Now please stop talking until I have got my breath back, and my hat."

The fact. Merlyn can NOT change Kay and that is that. But, of course, Wart, and we all have done this, won't let "it" go. For those of you who have children, or taught or coached, know this line of thought. And, Wart needs to do the opposite of the First Law of the Foot: Let it Go!

This, I imagine, is also a great reason not to swear...if you are a magician. We are learning a lot about Merlyn's magical abilities in this chapter. He has limits and he seems to know them well.

"I have tried to hint at some of the reasons for the fact, but you will not take them, so you must just accept the fact in its naked reality."

As the reader, most would know that Merlyn is preparing Wart to become King Arthur (spoiler alert!). Merlyn, to his credit, has been trying to explain this to Wart all chapter nine:

- "I am sorry," said Merlyn, "that you should be the only one to get my extra tuition, but then, you see, I was only sent for that."
- Merlyn said gently, "Perhaps what is good for you might be bad for him. Besides, remember he has never asked to be turned into anything."

- "You still do not follow what I mean. Suppose he had gone as a merlin last night, and failed in the ordeal, and lost his nerve?"
- I cannot change Kay into things. The power was not deputed to me when I was sent. Why this was so, neither you nor I am able to say, but such remains the fact. I have tried to hint at some of the reasons for the fact, but you will not take them, so you must just accept the fact in its naked reality.

Kay won't be changed into things. Fact.

In the next few paragraphs, Merlyn will explain his "ordinary" magic of backsight and insight which allow him to "know" things. But, the transformation magic is something special, something just for Wart.

As for Merlyn's quick trip, we dig deeply into western civilization for this particular funny little part of the story. This also becomes a very popular scene in the Disney movie.

Castor and Pollux were twins. I will oversimplify here, but they were the children (sort of) of Leda and the Swan. Helen, with the ship launching face, was their sister. Castor was a master of horses and Pollux was a boxer. They had many adventures together including saving their sister from Theseus and being part of the Argonauts. When Castor was slain, he was mortal, Pollux asked Zeus to give his (Pollux's) immortality for his brother. Zeus allowed them to spend alternating days in Hades and Heaven. Gemini is their star cluster.

Christianity seems to have adopted ("baptized" is the phrase we use usually in the History of Christianity class) these brothers. They were the deities for travelers and Saints Peter and Paul inherited this role in Christianity. Some authors, notably Dennis McDonald, believe the twins are the basis for James (son of Zebedee) and John, who are identified as the "Sons of Thunder (Zeus)." Moreover, tying some of this together, the Bible does specifically mention them here:

"After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island—it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux."
Acts 28:11 New International Version (NIV)

His hat. Merlyn is missing his hat. Getting his hat back is going to give us some real insights into Merlyn's magic.

Now please stop talking until I have got my breath back, and my hat."

The Wart sat quiet while Merlyn closed his eyes and began to mutter to himself. Presently a curious black cylindrical hat appeared on his head. It was a topper.

Merlyn examined it with a look of disgust, said bitterly, "And they call this service!" and handed it back to the air. Finally he stood up in a passion and exclaimed, "Come here!"

The Wart and Archimedes looked at each other, wondering which was meant—Archimedes had been sitting all the while on the window-sill and looking at the view, for, of course, he never left his master—but Merlyn did not pay them any attention.

"Now," said Merlyn furiously, apparently to nobody, "do you think you are being funny?"

"Very well then, why do you do it?"

"That is no excuse. Naturally I meant the one I was wearing.

"But wearing now, of course, you fool. I don't want a hat I was wearing in 1890. Have you no sense of time at all?"

Merlyn took off the sailor hat which had just appeared and held it out to the air for inspection.

"This is an anachronism," he said severely. "That is what it is, a beastly anachronism."

Archimedes seemed to be accustomed to these scenes, for he now said in a reasonable voice: "Why don't you ask for the hat by name, master? Say, 'I want my magician's hat,' not 'I want the hat I was wearing.' Perhaps the poor chap finds it as difficult to live backward as you do."

"I want my magician's hat," said Merlyn sulkily.

Instantly the long pointed cone was standing on his head.

This gives us a lot of information about Merlyn's magical abilities. Since, as we know, he lives "backwards in time," much of his skills in prophesy and foretelling are due to this gift. He remembers the future and can study history to find out about his future.

I have, and always will, wonder about the "they" in "they call this service." Merlyn is talking to someone/something here:

1. "Come here."

2. "Now," said Merlyn furiously, apparently to nobody, "do you think you are being funny?"

"Very well then, why do you do it?"

"That is no excuse. Naturally I meant the one I was wearing.

"But wearing now, of course, you fool. I don't want a hat I was wearing in 1890. Have you no sense of time at all?"

3. "I want my magician's hat," said Merlyn sulkily.

Archimedes, of course, has seen this before and knows how to deal with this situation. Wart and our readers are a completely baffled by this conversation. Merlyn's magical powers seem to be:

- Transfiguration for Wart...and one instance for himself (the Fish story)
- Backsight: his ability to "see the future" because it is his past/history
- Insight: we will be seeing this again in a moment; his ability to know what is going on around him
- Doctor Doolittle power: he can talk to some animals; Wart seems to share this gift and, no, I can't explain why he has it (see Transfiguration above?)
- The Unseen Helper: the confused assistant we meet here.
- Some level of extended life, perhaps a kind of immortality

Merlyn has a host of other skills: hawking, teaching, general medical knowledge, a depth of understanding in philosophy and other fields (more on this later) and a great grasp of history...as he has lived through so much of it.

Archimedes has his own gifts. In one of the last transfigurations, we will get a lot of information about Archimedes and his Goddess mentor. Of course, a wise talking owl is almost a cliché now with Tootsie Pop commercials and various children's education examples.

I realize with fantasy fiction, magic is always magical. But, as I read *The Sword in the Stone* more and more, the magic seems to be part of the background color. Like the knights and jousting in our stories here, magic just seems to be a signpost pointing along the path of our bigger storyline.

This little section does cause some questions about the kind of magic Merlyn uses, but it is enough of an answer to push us along our adventure.

"I want my magician's hat," said Merlyn sulkily.

Instantly the long pointed cone was standing on his head.

The tension in the air relaxed. Wart sat down again on the floor, and Archimedes resumed his toilet, pulling his pinions and tail feathers through his beak to smooth the barbs together. Each barb had hundreds of little hooks or barbules on it, by means of which the barbs of the feather were held together. He was stroking them into place.

Merlyn said, "I beg your pardon. I am not having a very good day today, and there it is."

"About Kay," said the Wart. "Even if you can't change him into things, could you not give us both an adventure without changing?"

Merlyn made a visible effort to control his temper, and to consider this question dispassionately. He was sick of the subject altogether.

"I cannot do any magic for Kay," he said slowly, "except my own magic that I have anyway. Backsight and insight and all that. Do you mean anything I could do with that?"

"What does your backsight do?"

"It tells me what you would say is going to happen, and the insight sometimes says what is or was happening in other places."

"Is there anything happening just now, anything that Kay and I could go to see?"

Merlyn immediately struck himself on the brow and exclaimed excitedly, "Now I see it all. Yes, of course there is, and you are going to see it. Yes, you must take Kay and hurry up about it. You must go immediately after Mass. Have breakfast first and go immediately after Mass. Yes, that is it. Go straight to Hob's strip of barley in the open field and follow that line until you come to something. That will be splendid, yes, and I shall have a nap this afternoon instead of those filthy Summulae Logicales. Or have I had the nap?"

The last line: "Or have I had the nap?" reminds us of the issues involved in living backwards in time. I think one of the funniest sections in all of *The Sword in the Stone* is the very next few paragraphs, but let's wait just a bit first.

The word "sometimes" is important in this key sentence: "It tells me what you would say is going to happen, and the insight sometimes says what is or was happening in other places."

So, any time in the stories where Merlyn doesn't instantly react to an issue or problem can be explained with the "sometimes."

The fact that Merlyn doesn't know if he is going to have a nap or not usually includes the word "muddled." Living backwards must be extremely confusing and I far prefer having empathy for Merlyn rather than turning him into a dimwitted magician.

Harry Potter fans will note that J. K. Rowling also walked on a narrow balance beam with Dumbledore. She was very good at noting Dumbledore's kindness and empathy, but occasionally, especially in duels and basic "Harry saving" moments, she let us know how terrifyingly powerful this wizard remained.

Merlyn's powers are always hard to grasp. In turning Wart into a fish, he consulted Neptune. He used his wand to tap Wart into a hawk. Later, Wart's transfiguration into an owl will be accomplished by Wart eating a mouse...that tastes rather like a peach with the skin still on it.

The Broadway Musical, Camelot, did a nice job with Merlyn's backstory. It is, in a sense, part of the downfall of King Arthur and His Court as there is an important piece of genealogy that Wart should really know. His son, Mordred, is also his nephew.

Do the math.

In Camelot, and some other various Arthurian movies, Merlyn (Merlin in the other stories) forgets to explain Arthur's family tree and incest brings down everything. Although I have read many of the other books, I have never had the devotion towards them that I do to The Sword in the Stone.

But, part of the job of the epic is to go dark. Epics feast on love, death, and living. Bad things happen. Good people make mistakes. Bad people win.

Epics are life. In a sense, we are all living our own epic filled with adventures and sorrows and joys. I always say "yes" to the adventures, sorrow and joys.

Merlyn immediately struck himself on the brow and exclaimed excitedly, "Now I see it all. Yes, of course there is, and you are going to see it. Yes, you must take Kay and hurry up about it. You must go immediately after Mass. Have breakfast first and go immediately after Mass. Yes, that is it. Go straight to Hob's strip of barley in the open field and follow that line until you come to something. That will be splendid, yes, and I shall have a nap this afternoon instead of those filthy Summulae Logicales. Or have I had the nap?"

"You have not had it," said Archimedes. "That is still in the future, Master."

"Splendid, splendid. And mind, Wart, don't forget to take Kay with you so that I can have my nap."

"What shall we see?" asked the Wart.

"Ah, don't plague me about a little thing like that. You run along now, there's a good boy, and mind you don't forget to take Kay with you. Why ever didn't you mention it before? Don't forget to follow beyond the strip of barley. Well, well, well! This is the first half-holiday I have had since I started this confounded tutorship. First I think I shall have a little nap before luncheon, and then I think I shall have a little nap before tea. Then I shall have to think of something I can do before dinner. What shall I do before dinner, Archimedes?"

"Have a little nap, I expect," said the owl coldly, turning his back upon his master, because he, as well as the Wart, enjoyed to see life.

Well, this section is just a delight. We knew about Merlyn's time and life issues (he lives backwards in time), but this reading takes his issue to a new level. I just love the "little nap" discussion.

White's humor tends to be situational; he tends to set his characters into funny situations and letting the humor unfold. In this selection, Merlyn's excitement about taking a nap just strikes me as funny.

I've been there a few times: long days, humid days, rough sleep and I want to do is take a nap. Merlyn's enthusiasm just makes me smile.

And that is it for the chapter. Not much happens here, but our next three chapters will introduce a lot of new characters and a great story.

It will be fun "to see life."

Chapter Ten

Wart knew that if he told the elder boy about his conversation with Merlyn, Kay would refuse to be condescended to, and would not come. So he said nothing. It was strange, but their battle had made them friends again, and each could look the other in the eye, with a kind of confused affection. They went together unanimously though shyly, without explanations, and found themselves standing at the end of Hob's barley strip after Mass. The Wart had no need to use ingenuity. When they were there it was easy.

"Come on," he said, "Merlyn told me to tell you that there was something along here that was specially for you."

"What sort of thing?" asked Kay.

"An adventure."

"How do we get to it?"

"We ought to follow along the line which this strip makes, and I suppose that would take us into the forest. We should have to keep the sun just there on our left, but allow for it moving."

"All right," said Kay. "What is the adventure?"

"I don't know."

End quote.

I want to stop here and comment on the lovely understanding that White has for human interaction. Not long ago, Mark Toomey, told me something that really cleared up much of how we, the people, get along:

With women: first they bond, then they battle.

With men: first they battle, then they bond.

Toomey's life experiences are vast and varied and I know when to shut up and listen. Sure, summing the interactions of seven billion of us is probably always fraught with issues, but this paragraph of White's seems to be true in my life.

At reunions, the battles seem to be forgotten. The bonds over true experiences remain. I could say the same at funerals...maybe at weddings, too. Your mileage may vary (YMMV).

Wart says something amazing here: "I don't know." I continue to think that most of us would be happier if we added "I don't know," "let's find out," "please" and "thank you" to our lives.

But what do I know?

The adventure begins!

All right," said Kay. "What is the adventure?"

"I don't know."

They went along the strip, and followed its imaginary line over the park and over the chase, keeping their eyes skinned for some miraculous happening. They wondered whether half a dozen young pheasants they started had anything curious about them, and Kay was ready to swear that one of them was white. If it had been white, and if a black eagle had suddenly swooped down upon it from the sky, they would have known quite well that wonders were afoot, and that all they had to do was to follow the pheasant—or the eagle—until they reached the maiden in the enchanted castle. However, the pheasant was not white.

At the edge of the forest Kay said, "I suppose we shall have to go into this?"

"Merlyn said to follow the line."

"Well," said Kay, "I am not afraid. If the adventure was for me, it is bound to be a good one."

I think we can summarize Kay's whole personality with this line: "If the adventure was for me, it is bound to be a good one." Wart certainly loves Kay, as we have seen and will see again. White has painted us lovely pictures of how people bond:

Merlyn and Hobs over falconry.
Gummerson and Ector over wine.
Gummerson and Pellinore over fighting.
Dog Boy and Wot over their shared experiences.
Pellinore and the Beast over whatever binds them.

Kay and Wart seem to be bound together by what seems to be a lack of any other boys "of their station."

And, Kay thinks he is "better" by birth. We, and Kay, will discover (Spoiler Alert!) that Wart's lineage is actually better.

But, for now, like all young boys, Kay has the upper hand. Growing up, the older boy tended to make plans, decisions and directions. I followed my brothers blindly into many adventures. And, later, as they moved off and away and along, the neighborhood kids followed me. It's just the way of the world.

Of course, Kay has to add his "Kay-ness." If it's for him, it has to be a good adventure. Kay is a sympathetic character for White. In the quest for the tutor, we finish the story with a classic moment of Kay-ness:

"I do not think much of it as a quest," said Kay. "He only went after the hawk, after all."

"And got the hawk, Master Kay," said Hob reprovingly.

"Oh, well," said Kay, "I bet the old man caught it for him."

"Kay," said Merlyn, suddenly terrible, "thou wast ever a proud and ill-tongued speaker, and a misfortunate one. Thy sorrow will come from thine own mouth."

At this everybody felt uncomfortable, and Kay, instead of flying into his usual passion, hung his head. He was not at all an unpleasant person really, but clever, quick, proud, passionate and ambitious. He was one of those people who would be neither a follower nor a leader, but only an aspiring heart, impatient in the failing body which imprisoned it. Merlyn repented of his rudeness at once. He made a little silver hunting-knife come out of the air, which he gave him to put things right. The knob of the handle was made of the skull of a stoat, oiled and polished like ivory, and Kay loved it.

I'm not sure there is a more perfect short summary of a person's personality in all of literature. As a child, I hated Kay yet he has grown on me through the years. I know many Kays. Sorrow comes from thine own mouth...a truth.

"Well," said Kay, "I am not afraid. If the adventure was for me, it is bound to be a good one."

They went in, and were surprised to find that the going was not bad. It was about the same as a big wood might be nowadays, whereas the common forest of those times was like a jungle on the Amazon. There were no pheasant-shooting proprietors then, to see that the undergrowth was thinned, and not one thousandth part of the number of the present-day timber merchants who prune judiciously at the few remaining woods. The most of the Forest Sauvage was almost impenetrable, an enormous barrier of eternal trees, the dead ones fallen against the live and held to them by ivy, the living struggling up in competition with each other toward the sun which gave them life, the floor boggy through lack of drainage, or tindery from old wood so that you might suddenly tumble through a decayed tree trunk into an ants' nest, or laced with brambles and bindweed and honeysuckle and convolvulus and teazles and the stuff which country people call sweethearts, until you would be torn to pieces in three yards.

This part was good. Hob's line pointed down what seemed to be a succession of glades, shady and murmuring places in which the wild thyme was droning with bees. The insect season was past its peak, for it was really the time for wasps and fruit; but there were many fritillaries still, with tortoise-shells and red admirals on the flowering mint. Wart pulled a leaf of this, and munched it like chewing-gum as they walked.

"It is queer," he said, "but there have been people here. Look, there is a hoof-mark, and it was shod."

"You don't see much," said Kay, "for there is a man."

I have this book on audio and I often enjoy walking with my dog, or anywhere really, listening to this story. While teaching at St. Mary's (Twickenham, London), I listened to this section wandering over to the stadium. This story, it extends over several chapters, is a great listen for walking.

In the stadium is the Rugby Hall of Fame Museum. It's a remarkable place and I guess even more so that day because I was the only person there. I spent a great day not long ago in the County Sligo museum with W. B. Yeats' original handwritten poetry on display.

This time, Tiffini was here.

Just us.

I'm amazed how people can live near shrines, stones, memorials and museums and only "see them" when a tourist or visitor points them out. There are many places in Ireland where you can walk among stones put in place by humans long before the Egyptians thought about pyramids and sphinxes. Yet, few touch them.

I have an affinity to stones. Especially those that were set in a pattern by our long-forgotten ancestors. As I write this, I am taking a History of the Celts and the stones I touch in Ireland were placed 3,000 years before the first hints of the Celts on the historical record.

So, when Kay points out "a man," I certainly understand Wart's focus elsewhere. Most of us have this odd skill to wormhole into something and miss the obvious right next to us. As we go through this story, Kay will really (finally!) assert himself. He will be the hero, basically, of this story.

I love White's use of language here.

The description of the forest is amazing. Most of the words are obvious, but "convolvulus" is a kind of flowery, binding plant and "teazles" are a family of tallish grasses. Sweethearts have evolved into a houseplant. Fritillaries were not part of Europe until almost 1600, but it is a lily plant. I have a massive mint area in my garden (in six different varieties) and I often find myself chewing it like Wart.

We will quickly come back to this forest and the dangers of walking through it. We are about to meet someone various famous...and you say his name wrong.

"You don't see much," said Kay, "for there is a man."

Sure enough, there was a man at the end of the next glade, sitting with a wood-axe by the side of a tree which he had felled. He was a queer-looking, tiny man, with a hunchback and a face like mahogany, and he was dressed in numerous pieces of old leather which he had secured about his brawny legs and arms with pieces of cord. He was eating a lump of bread and sheep's-milk cheese with a knife which years of sharpening had worn into a mere streak, leaning his back against one of the highest trees they had ever seen. The white flakes of wood lay all about him. The dressed stump of the felled tree looked very new. His eyes were bright like a fox's.

"I expect he will be the adventure," whispered Wart.

"Pooh," said Kay, "you have knights-in-armour, or dragons, or things like that in an adventure, not dirty old men cutting wood."

"Well, I am going to ask him what happens along here, anyway."

They went up to the small munching woodman, who did not seem to have seen them, and asked him where the glades were leading to. They asked two or three times before they discovered that the poor fellow was either deaf or mad, or both. He neither answered nor moved.

"Oh, come on," said Kay. "He is probably loopy like Wat, and does not know what he is at. Let's go on and leave the old fool."

If you know the Hero's Journey, you will recognize this scene well. Think of Jim Hawkins in Treasure Island and his interactions with Billy Bones to get a taste:

"Fifteen men on the dead man's chest –
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"

The woodsman, White's description draws a perfect picture, is one of those "been there, done that" characters we always meet in the start of the journey. Luke Skywalker in Star Wars (the real one) judges just about everyone and everything he meets immediately; too old, too junky, too hairy, too small. He, of course, is always wrong.

Kay does the same thing here: he has this image of maidens in towers and a fierce dragon...that's an adventure. Bill Bryson has a wonderful book about walking the Appalachian Trail, A Walk in the Woods. As he begins the trail, he tells us about a group of women who only walk for 45 minutes and quit the six-month hike: "It's not what we expected."

Few things in life are "what we expected!"

So, our two heroes, Wart and Kay, are still just on the fringe of the adventure. They just walked into Mos Eisley Cantina. They just graduated from Boot Camp. They just got the uniform.

I remember playing a high school football game and a non-starter (with a big mouth and no real talent...but a poor work ethic!) screamed at half-time: "We just need to play harder."

We?

The veteran, of every ilk, has the "been there, done that" air about them. They are careful about who is included in "we." I think "we" have all been there in life.

Now, as we come out of the forest on the other end, Wart and Kay will be transformed. Kay, especially, will be changed for the better and we will see this at the conclusion of the book. Here is a hint: his trophy becomes his gift.

"Oh, come on," said Kay. "He is probably loopy like Wat, and does not know what he is at. Let's go on and leave the old fool."

They went on for nearly a mile, and still the going was good. There were no paths exactly, and the glades were not continuous. Anybody who came there by chance would have thought that there was just the one glade which he was in, a couple of hundred yards long, unless he went to the end of it and discovered another one, screened by a few trees. Now and then they found a stump with the marks of the axe on it, but mostly these had been

carefully covered with brambles or altogether grubbed up. The Wart considered that the glades must have been made.

Kay caught the Wart by the arm, at the edge of a clearing, and pointed silently toward its further end. There was a grassy bank there, swelling gently to a gigantic sycamore, upward of ninety feet high, which stood upon its top. On the bank there was an equally gigantic man lying at his ease, with a dog beside him. This man was as notable as the sycamore, for he stood or lay seven feet without his shoes, and he was dressed in nothing but a kind of kilt made of Lincoln green worsted. He had a leather bracer on his left forearm. His enormous brown chest supported the dog's head—it had pricked its ears and was watching the boys, but had made no other movement—which the muscles gently lifted as they rose and fell. The man appeared to be asleep. There was a seven-foot bow beside him, with some arrows more than a cloth-yard long. He, like the woodman, was the colour of mahogany, and the curled hairs on his chest made a golden haze where the sun caught them.

"He is it," whispered Kay excitedly.

I have read this section many times, but, as always happens with things, I missed the image of the glade being the road to this adventure. I missed the man-made parts of the glade, it seems, in every prior reading.

Wart's moment of deduction is worthy of Sherlock. That's one of the reasons I like taking folks on tours of my house, my neighborhood and the area around me. "Tours" is an overstatement, of course, but I get accustomed to seeing things a certain way and it is nice to have another set of eyes showing you what you miss.

Often, when I travel, I will talk to a local about something and I get one of two reactions:

"Oh yeah...that."

"I've lived here my whole life and never knew that."

I have walked through this story many times and missed that point that Wart makes so clear. It's like what we learn in the stories of Sir Percival: everything you ever seek is "right there." Love, happiness and joy are just right here. The harder you look for them, the longer you travel, the more likely you are to discover that you left them where you started.

For those of you who know your Sherwood Forest, you know the person we just met. White's description gives little doubt that we are meeting the most famous of the Merry Men, Big John:

This man was as notable as the sycamore, for he stood or lay seven feet without his shoes, and he was dressed in nothing but a kind of kilt made of Lincoln green worsted. He had a leather bracer on his left forearm. His enormous brown chest supported the dog's head—it had pricked its ears and was watching the boys, but had made no other movement—which the muscles gently lifted as they rose and fell. The man appeared to be asleep. There was a

seven-foot bow beside him, with some arrows more than a cloth-yard long. He, like the woodman, was the colour of mahogany, and the curled hairs on his chest made a golden haze where the sun caught them.

The long bow and the length of the arrows will be important when we meet our next character, just after we meet Wart's "love of his life." Sadly, Kings can't choose in the ways of love.

"He is it," whispered Kay excitedly.

They went to the man cautiously, for fear of the dog. But the dog only followed them with its eyes, keeping its chin pressed firmly to the chest of its beloved master, and giving them the least suspicion of a wag from its tail. It moved its tail without lifting it, two inches sideways in the grass. The man opened his eyes—obviously he had not been asleep at all—smiled at the boys, and jerked his thumb in a direction which pointed further up the glade. Then he stopped smiling and shut his eyes.

"Excuse me," said Kay, "what happens up there?"

The man made no answer and kept his eyes closed, but he lifted his hand again and pointed onward with his thumb.

"He means us to go on," said Kay.

"It certainly is an adventure," said the Wart. "I wonder if that dumb woodman could have climbed up the big tree he was leaning against and sent a message to this tree that we were coming? He certainly seems to have been expecting us."

At this the naked giant opened one eye and looked at Wart in some surprise. Then he opened both eyes, laughed all over his big twinkling face, sat up, patted the dog, picked up his bow, and rose to his feet.

"Very well, then, young measters," he said, still laughing. "Us will come along of 'ee arter all. Young heads still meake the sharpest, they do say."

Kay looked at him in blank surprise. "Who are you?" he asked.

"Naylor," said the giant, "John Naylor in the wide world it were, till us come to be a man of the 'ood. Then 'twere John Little for some time, in the 'ood like, but mostly folk does put it back'ard now, and calls us Little John."

"Oh!" cried the Wart in delight. "I have heard of you, often, when they tell Saxon stories in the evening, of you and Robin Hood."

"Not Hood," said Little John reprovingly. "That bain't the way to name 'un, measter, not in the 'ood."

"But it is Robin Hood in the stories," said Kay.

"Ah, them book-learning chaps. They don't know all. How'm ever, 'tis time us do be stepping along."

In 1955, the British television made a series called "The Adventures of Robin Hood," starring Richard Greene. As much as I love the Errol Flynn movie, and the Bugs Bunny version, my mind always comes back to this black and white show as my image of Robin Hood. The theme song is running through my head as I type this:

*Robin Hood, Robin Hood, riding through the glen
Robin Hood, Robin Hood, with his band of men
Feared by the bad, loved by the good
Robin Hood, Robin Hood, Robin Hood*

*He called the greatest archers to a tavern on the green
They vowed to help the people of the king
They handled all the troubles on the English country scene
And still found plenty of time to sing*

T. H. White does something fun, once again, with a classic character. He lives in the woods, this Robin Wood, but the stories from the "book-learning chaps" have it wrong again. White's spelling of Merlyn and his nickname for Arthur (Wart) are two other quick examples on how our author takes ownership of these oft repeated stories and makes them his own.

Little John remains a popular character in every Robin Hood movie. In Bugs Bunny, he repeats the famous rhyme:

"Don't you worry, never fear. Robin Hood will soon be here."

Of course, finally in the end, Errol Flynn shows up with the famous "Welcome to Sherwood Forest" line. Flynn received a copy of the film as compensation. This cartoon also has some of the best puns in the history of punning. Bugs, pretending to be from the royal court, anoints the Sheriff with this famous scene:

Bugs: "In the name of my most Royal Majesty, I knight thee! (strikes Sheriff over the head with his sceptre) "Arise, Sir Loin of Beef!"
(strike) "Arise, Earl of Cloves!"
(strike) "Arise, Duke of Brittingham!"
(strike) "Arise, Baron of Munchausen!"
(strike) "Arise, Essence of Myrrh!"

(strike) "Milk of Magnesia"

(strike) "Water of Thames!"

Sheriff: (dazed, slurred, but still on his feet) "You are too kind, your majesty."

Bugs: (to audience) "Got lots of stamina!"

In the Disney version, Little John is a bear that seems to be typecast from Baloo in The Jungle Book. Phil Harris voiced both characters, so it's easy to link Little John and Baloo. Generally, we think of Little John with his legendary height, seven feet usually, and his battling relationship with Robin.

As I have noted before, young Wart seems to be out of character a bit here. He refers to the "dumb woodman" and generally Wart is more of a champion of the less than perfect. This still seems to be Kay's adventure here and Wart will need a bit of a "comeuppance" to restore his usual manners.

He will.

"Ah, them book-learning chaps. They don't know all. How'm ever, 'tis time us do be stepping along."

They fell in on either side of the enormous man, and had to run one step in three to keep up with him; for, although he talked very slowly, he walked on his bare feet very fast. The dog trotted at heel.

"Please," asked the Wart, "where are you taking us?"

"Why, to Robin 'ood, seemingly. An't you sharp enough to guess that also, Measter Art?"

The giant gave him a sly peep out of the corner of his eye at this, for he knew that he had set the boys two problems at once—first, what was Robin's real name, and second, how did Little John come to know the Wart's?

The Wart fixed on the second question first.

"How did you know my name?"

"Ah," said Little John. "Us knowed."

"Does Robin 'ood know we are coming?"

"Nay, my duck, a young scholar like thee should speak his name scholarly."

"Well, what is his name?" cried the boy, between exasperation and being out of breath from running to keep up. "You said 'ood."

"So it is 'ood, my duck. Robin 'ood, like the 'oods you'm running through. And a grand fine name it is."

"Robin Wood!"

"Aye, Robin 'ood. What else should un be, seeing as he rules 'em. They'm free pleaces, the 'oods, and fine pleaces. Let thee sleep in 'em, come summer, come winter, and hunt in 'em for thy commons lest thee starve; and smell to 'em as they brings forward their comely bright leaves, according to order, or loses of 'em by the same order back'ards: let thee stand in 'em that thou be'st not seen, and move in 'em that thou be'st not heard, and warm thee with 'em as thou fall'st on sleep—ah, they'm proper fine pleaces, the 'oods, for a free man of hands and heart."

Kay said, "But I thought all Robin Wood's men wore hose and jerkins of Lincoln green?"

"That us do in the winter like, when us needs 'em, or with leather leggings at 'ood 'ork: but here by summer 'tis more seasonable thus for the pickets, who have nought to do save watch."

"Were you a sentry then?"

"Aye, and so were wold Much, as you spoke to by the felled tree."

"And I think," exclaimed Kay triumphantly, "that this next big tree which we are coming to will be the stronghold of Robin Wood!"

They were coming to the monarch of the forest.

"Much," or Midge in some versions of Robin Hood, is probably the most forgotten of the Merry Men. Allen W. Wright does a great job explaining much in this internet feature, <https://www.boldoutlaw.com/robbeg/much-beginners.html>

Much is mentioned quite a bit in the earliest stories. Some stories call him Midge or even Nick the Miller's Son. Sometimes Much and Midge are different people.

Originally, Much was strong enough to carry Little John. And he was violent enough to behead a monk's page just to keep him quiet.

But nowadays Much is seen as a young, innocent character who is not too bright. In one book, he's only 12, the son of an Older Much the Miller who was murdered by Normans.

Many films show Much killing a deer -- a severe offence against the forest laws. The Norman overlords are about to chop off his hand or burn out his eyes. That's when Robin interferes and saves the young man. Much joins the Merry Men.

Another story makes Much (or Midge, as he was sometimes called) yet another tradesman who was stopped by Robin Hood. The young miller was carrying a great sack of flour, and Robin suspected that he might be holding gold in the sack. Much (or Midge) opened the sack and tossed flour in Robin's face. Then, like so many people before him, Much beat the stuffing out of bold Robin. Of course, Robin asked Much to join the Merry Men.

Sadly, if there's a Merry Man who is left out of the stories these days, it is Much. Even so, he still appears in some tales and is often the youthful mascot of the band. And perhaps, its soul.

I also enjoy this small section as White is probably writing this as Errol Flynn is making the classic version of the movie, Robin Hood. This movie is later parodied by none other than Bugs Bunny ("Rabbit Hood") and probably is the image many people have when they think of Robin. So, Little John is, in a sense, explaining to his 1938 audience that things are a bit different than in the movie.

Maybe.

Next time, we meet Robin.

They were coming to the monarch of the forest.

It was a lime tree as great as that which used to grow at Moor Park in Hertfordshire, no less than one hundred feet in height and seventeen feet in girth, a yard above the ground. Its beech-like trunk was embellished with a beard of twigs at the bottom, and where each of the great branches had sprung from the trunk the bark had split and was now discoloured with rain water or sap. The bees zoomed among its bright and sticky leaves, higher and higher toward heaven, and a rope ladder disappeared among the foliage. Nobody could have climbed it without a ladder, even with irons.

"You think well, Measter Kay," said Little John. "And there be Measter Robin, atween her roots."

The boys, who had been more interested in the look-out man perched in a crow's nest at the top of that swaying and whispering pride of the earth, lowered their eyes at once and clapped them on the great outlaw.

He was not, as they had expected, a romantic man—or not at first—although he was nearly as tall as Little John. These two, of course, were the only people in the world who have ever shot an arrow the distance of a mile, with the English long-bow. He was a sinewy fellow whose body did not carry fat. He was not half-naked, like John, but dressed discreetly in

faded green with a silvery bugle at his side. He was clean-shaven, sunburned, nervous, gnarled like the roots of the trees; but gnarled and mature with weather and poetry rather than with age, for he was scarcely thirty years old. (Eventually he lived to be eighty-seven, and attributed his long life to smelling the turpentine in the pines.) At the moment he was lying on his back and looking upward, but not into the sky.

Robin Wood lay happily with his head in Marian's lap. She sat between the roots of the lime tree, clad in a one-piece smock of green girded with a quiver of arrows, and her feet and arms were bare. She had let down the brown shining waterfall of her hair, which was usually kept braided in pigtailed for convenience in hunting and cookery, and with the falling waves of this she framed his head. She was singing a duet with him softly, and tickling the end of his nose with the fine hairs.

I'm not sure I can really say much more here: this description of Robin and Marian seem to leap off the page to me. Oddly, as descriptive as White makes his writing here, we still have plenty of latitude in filling in what we think these two look like in "real life."

Marian is going to be a force. Wart is going to be fascinated by her and her ability to hunt and fight mixed with her role as a "woman" in this story. She will have talents in fighting that Wart and Kay will be shocked to see but she still maintains her feminine qualities. Marian will be a counter to Mim in almost every way.

There is not much to say about this, but Robin and Marian will now drive our story forward.

"Under the greenwood tree," sang Maid Marian,
"Who loves to lie with me,
And tune his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat."

"Come hither, come hither, come hither," hummed Robin.

"Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather."

They laughed happily and began again, singing lines alternately:

"Who doth ambition shun
And loves to lie in the sun,
Seeking the food he eats
And pleased with what he gets,"

then, both together:

**"Come hither, come hither, come hither:
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather."**

The song ended in laughter. Robin, who had been twisting his brown fingers in the silk-fine threads which fell about his face, gave them a shrewd tug and scrambled to his feet.

The best thing about this project for me, and from what I gather I may be the only audience, too, is that I dig deep into this material and discover so much more. I never knew...and I have read *The Sword in the Stone* countless times that this little song is actually from Shakespeare. Once again, T. H. White reflects his depth and breadth of literature here. Here is the original, from "As You Like It."

**As You Like It
Act 2, Scene 5**

AMIENS

*[sings] Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me
And turn his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat,
Come hither, come hither, come hither.
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather.*

Amiens contributes little to the story in *As You Like It*, but he sings two songs that push the story forward a bit.

Perhaps the most famous part of the play is the brilliant "All the world's a stage" speech:

Jaques to Duke Senior

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their **exits and their entrances**,
And one man in his time plays many parts,

His acts being seven ages. At first, the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

"They have their exits and their entrances," I think this is a beautiful line. Of course, the whole seven ages of life can be hard for me to read as I see my "mere oblivion" come closer to me each day. The great Northern Irish poet, W. R. Rogers, uses "exits and entrances" in a beautiful way in this poem:

And there was Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre...

It is always the women who are the Watchers

And Keepers of life, they guard our exist

And our entrances. They are both tomb and womb,

End beginning. Bitterly they bring forth

And bitterly take back the light they gave.

The last to leave and still the first to come.

They circle us like sleep or like the grave.

Earth is their element, and in it lies

The seed and silence of the lighted skies,

The seasons with their fall and slow uprising,

Man with his sight and militant surmise.

It is always the women who are the Watchers

And Wakeners...

WR Rodgers, from Resurrection: an Easter Sequence

Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

Until next week...

The song ended in laughter. Robin, who had been twisting his brown fingers in the silk-fine threads which fell about his face, gave them a shrewd tug and scrambled to his feet.

"Now, John," he said, seeing them at once.

"Now, Measter," said Little John.

"So you have brought the young squires?"

"They brought me."

"Welcome either way," said Robin. "I never heard ill spoken of Sir Ector, nor reason why his sounders should be pursued. How are you, Kay and Wart, and who put you into the forest at my glades, on this of all days?"

"Robin," interrupted the lady, "you can't take them!"

"Why not, sweet heart?"

"They are children."

"Exactly what we want."

"It is inhuman," she said in a vexed way, and began to do her hair.

The outlaw evidently thought it would be safer not to argue, He turned to the boys and asked them a question instead.

"Can you shoot?"

"Trust me," said the Wart.

"I can try," said Kay, more reserved, as they laughed at the Wart's assurance.

"Come, Marian, let them have one of your bows."

She handed him a bow and half a dozen arrows twenty-eight inches long.

"Shoot the popinjay," said Robin, giving them to the Wart.

He looked and saw a popinjay five-score paces away. He guessed that he had been a fool and said cheerfully, "I am sorry, Robin Wood, but I am afraid it is much too far for me."

"Never mind," said the outlaw. "Have a shot at it. I can tell by the way you shoot."

The Wart fitted his arrow as quickly and neatly as he was able, set his feet wide in the same line that he wished his arrow to go, squared his shoulders, drew the bow to his chin, sighted on the mark, raised his point through an angle of about twenty degrees, aimed two yards to the right because he always pulled to the left in his loose, and sped his arrow. It missed, but not so badly.

"Now, Kay," said Robin.

Kay went through the same motions and also made a good shot. Each of them had held the bow the right way up, had quickly found the cock feather and set it outward, each had taken hold of the string to draw the bow—most boys who have not been taught are inclined to catch hold of the nock of the arrow when they draw, between their finger and thumb, but a proper archer pulls back the string with his first two or three fingers and lets the arrow follow it—neither of them had allowed the point to fall away to the left as they drew, nor struck their left forearms with the bow-string—two common faults with people who do not know—and each had loosed evenly without a pluck.

"Good," said the outlaw. "No lute-players here."

Wart and Kay are about to go on a difficult adventure. Being tested for weapons prowess is something we don't often do with today's adolescents. There is a small edit here which I don't like: Robin says in this translation:

"Welcome either way,"

In the 1938 version, it is this:

"Welcome whichever way,"

This version seems to fit Robin's style of speech here. Robin has a rhythm to his speech that seems to be poetic and princely at the same time. The alliteration of "Welcome whichever way" seems to roll better with the woods and Woods here.

In many versions, there are several paragraphs missing. I will retype them from the original but this next scene of Robin and John competing in shooting is dropped out in the 1958 versions. I have said this before about the deleted scenes from the Harry Potter movies: Why did they cut out those few minutes of information that tied so many events together?

The focus with this section for me has always been this wonderful line:

"Can you shoot?"

"Trust me," said the Wart.

This is probably the true turning point in the book. Wart's private eddication from Merlyn is beginning to bear its first fruits. He has survived some dangerous adventures and he is beginning to get his chest proud posture.

Sure, it is comic. But, it is nevertheless true: Wart is finding his voice. He will, as will all the characters, try to maintain his station (and the other characters will strive to keep him in his place), but we are seeing him transform.

And, as the youngest of six, I know perfectly well this feeling.

Until next week when we discuss the deleted section:

Trust me.

The following is often deleted. From the 1938 text:

"Ah," said Little John, "it warn't bad for boys, but suppose you show 'em, Measter 'ood."

“Is it a match?” asked Robin, smiling grimly. These two men were the oldest rivals with the bow in England, and could never forbear to take one another on in competition.

“Go on,” said Marian. “You two are like kids.”

“Us ha’nt never fled afore a challenge, Measter ‘ood,” said Little John slowly, his eyes twinkling, “as thee know thy cost.”

“Get on, man,” said Robin. “You know I could beat you with one hand tied behind my back.”

“Little John deliberately put the toe of his great bow against the inside of his instep, pulled grip outward with his mighty right fist, and slipped the string into place with his left hand. It was a movement like an absent-minded caress, but probably nobody except Robin could have strung his bow.”

“ ‘Tis for a buffet, Measter?” he inquired, grinning at Robin with a sly challenge.

“A buffet,” said the captain of the outlaws. “Go on and I’ll let you off with a light one.”

Little John lumbered himself into position and remarked philosophically, “Folks say the last laugh rings merriest.”

With this, in a limber flash which had nothing to do with his bear-like movements and slow speech, the fugitive who had once been called Naylor had raised, drawn, loosed and lowered his bow, apparently without aiming it, and the arrow was saying Phutt! In the heart of the popinjay, before cleaving straight through it and burying its point in the ground.

“A shaky loose,” said Robin, from two yards behind him, and, as Little John turned round to smile at his captain, but before he could turn back again towards the popinjay, the captain’s arrow also was cutting through the bird of straw.

Wart noticed that where he and Kay had been compelled to aim their woman’s bow twenty degrees above the mark, Robin and Little John were still loosing well below it, although it was a hundred years away. The boys had been given Maid Marian’s bow to shoot with because they could not have drawn any other. Its draw was a horizontal pull of only twenty-five or thirty pounds, while Robin and his lieutenant were opening arcs with a force of anything up to or above a hundred. If you have ever attempted to lift a hundredweight upwards from the ground, with all your stature to help you, you will be able to appreciate the steady force which the two greatest English archers were able to exert, not upwards but horizontally.

“Robin,” said Maid Marian sharply, “you are being a baby. You will just go on and on until each of you has had a dozen shots, and then one or the other of you will miss and the conqueror will claim the right to give him a smack. How can you be so childish?”

"I want to beat John here," said Robin Wood, plausibly, "because otherwise he will become insubordinate."

"Insubordinate fiddlesticks. Leave your silly competition and send these back to their father."

"Robin," said Marian, sharply, "you can't take children into danger. Send them home to their father."

"That I won't," he said, "unless they wish to go. It is their quarrel as much as mine."

"What is the quarrel?" asked Kay.

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"That I won't," he said, "unless they wish to go. It is their quarrel as much as mine."

"What is the quarrel?" asked Kay.

The outlaw threw down his bow and sat cross-legged on the ground, drawing Maid Marian to sit beside him. His face was puzzled.

"It is Morgan le Fay," he said. "It is difficult to explain her."

"I should not try."

Robin turned on his mistress angrily. "Marian," he said. "Either we must have their help, or else we have to leave the other three without help. I don't want to ask the boys to go there, but it is either that or leaving Tuck to her."

The Wart thought it was time to ask a tactful question, so he made a polite cough and said: "Please, who is Morgan the Fay?"

All three answered at once.

"She'm a bad 'un," said Little John.

"She is a fairy," said Robin.

"No, she is not," said Marian. "She is an enchantress."

"The fact of the matter is," said Robin, "that nobody knows exactly what she is. In my opinion, she is a fairy.

"And that opinion," he added, staring at his wife, "I still hold."

Kay asked: "Do you mean she is one of those people with bluebells for hats, who spend the time sitting on toadstools?"

There was a shout of laughter.

"Certainly not. There are no such creatures. The Queen is a real one, and one of the worst of them."

"If the boys have got to be in it," said Marian, "you had better explain from the beginning."

The outlaw took a deep breath, uncrossed his legs, and the puzzled look came back to his face.

"Well," he said, "suppose that Morgan is the queen of the fairies, or at any rate has to do with them, and that fairies are not the kind of creatures your nurse has told you about. Some people say they are the Oldest Ones of All, who lived in England before the Romans came here—before us Saxons, before the Old Ones themselves—and that they have been driven underground. Some say they look like humans, like dwarfs, and others that they look ordinary, and others that they don't look like anything at all, but put on various shapes as the fancy takes them. Whatever they look like, they have the knowledge of the ancient Gaels. They know things down there in their burrows which the human race has forgotten about, and quite a lot of these things are not good to hear."

"Whisper," said the golden lady, with a strange look, and the boys noticed that the little circle had drawn closer together.

This small part of the discussion is key here:

"She'm a bad 'un," said Little John.

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"The fact of the matter is," said Robin, "that nobody knows exactly what she is. In my opinion, she is a fairy.

Morgan, from the old Welsh meaning "Sea Born," is sometimes referred to as Morgana, Morganna, Morgain, Morgaine, Morgane, Morgen, Morgne, or Morgue. Many of us will hear "Morgue" here, the place where we keep the deceased, but that term is not very old at all: it is the name of the building that housed the dead in Paris.

Adding “Fay” changes everything: it is an old word for fairy. Now, this leads us back to the discussion of the adults here: what does that mean? The oldest accounts of Morgan tell us she came from Avalon (“The Island of Apples,” a phrase I love) and remains a major character in those other Arthurian Cycles with the Lady of the Lake.

I’ve never been a fan of those stories. “Excalibur” literally means “freed from the stone” (“Exit-Calcium-Liberty” is how I explain this to my students) and some scholars note that the troubadours were masters of taking bits of this legend here and combining it with this legend there.

“Whisper” is an important line. “Knock on wood” or “Break a leg” are remnants of this belief: the “others” are close and listening. So, we say these things to either dull the senses of the others or confuse them with what we actually want. My mom, a devout Catholic, certainly held on to these ancient beliefs. Some, like “The John Ghost” that mysteriously closed doors and made sounds when no one was around, were more “for fun.” But, if you said something negative, especially when the boys were fighting in Vietnam, you would certainly get hushed, often slapped, for saying it “out loud.”

I was never sure what audience was in our kitchen on Ramona Avenue, but there was no question that my mom was worried about ancient evil. This part sums it well:

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I took The History of the Celts from Great Courses and White really does a nice job here summing several of our class sessions in a few lines.

The “Old Ones.” They are still near and listening.

Be sure to whisper.

"Whisper," said the golden lady, with a strange look, and the boys noticed that the little circle had drawn closer together.

"Well now," said Robin, lowering his voice, "the thing about these creatures that I am speaking of, and if you will excuse me I won't name them again, is that they have no hearts. It

is not so much that they wish to do evil, but that if you were to catch one and cut it open, you would find no heart inside. They are cold-blooded like fishes."

"They are everywhere, even while people are talking."

The boys looked about them.

"Be quiet," Robin said. "I need not tell you any more. It is unlucky to talk about them. The point is that I believe this Morgan is the queen of the—well—of the Good Folk, and I know she sometimes lives in a castle to the north of our forest called the Castle Chariot. Marian says that the queen is not a fairy herself, but only a necromancer who is friendly with them. Other people say she is a daughter of the Earl of Cornwall. Never mind about that. The thing is that this morning, by her enchantments, the Oldest People of All have taken prisoner one of my servants and one of yours."

"Not Tuck?" cried Little John, who knew nothing of recent developments because he had been on sentry.

Robin nodded. "The news came from the northern trees, before your message arrived about the boys."

"Alas, poor Friar!"

"Tell how it happened," said Marian. "But perhaps you had better explain about the names."

"One of the few things we know," said Robin, "about the Blessed Ones, is that they go by the names of animals. For instance, they may be called Cow, or Goat, or Pig, and so forth. So, if you happen to be calling one of your own cows, you must always point to it when you call. Otherwise you may summon a fairy—a Little Person I ought to have said—who goes by the same name, and, once you have summoned it, it comes, and it can take you away."

"What seems to have happened," said Marian, taking up the story, "is that your Dog Boy from the castle took his hounds to the edge of the forest when they were going to scombre, and he happened to catch sight of Friar Tuck, who was chatting with an old man called Wat that lives hereabouts—"

"Excuse us," cried the two boys, "is that the old man who lived in our village before he lost his wits? He bit off the Dog Boy's nose, as a matter of fact, and now he lives in the forest, a sort of ogre?"

"It is the same person," replied Robin, "but—poor thing—he is not much of an ogre. He lives on grass and roots and acorns, and would not hurt a fly. I am afraid you have got your story muddled."

“Scombre” is a great word: it means to defecate. I need to start using this word more often. In addition, Castle Chariot seems to be a standard name in much of Arthurian legends; it is sometimes the home to four queens, but it is always an enchanted place.

“Other people say she is a daughter of the Earl of Cornwall. Never mind about that.”

Usually, in the Arthurian legends, the Duke of Cornwall is a powerful friend, or protector, of the High-King. Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall traditionally rebelled against King Uther Pendragon (Arthur’s actual father) when Uther became obsessed with Igraine, the Duke’s wife. The movie, Excalibur, does a great job with this story. Uther tricks (with Merlyn’s help) and kills Grolais and takes Igraine.

The result of Uther and Igraine’s union is our young Wart.

So, Wart doesn’t “get it” but this is family. This will happen again later with terrible consequences for King Arthur and Camelot.

In the 1938 version, the anthropophagi are the bad guys in this original “original” version. The earlier stories are much more violent, but the basic points are the same.

Until next time.

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"Fancy Wat living on acorns!"

"What happened," said Marian patiently, "was this. The three of them came together to pass the time of day, and one of the hounds (I think it was the one called Cavall) began jumping up at poor Wat, to lick his face. This frightened the old man, and your Dog Boy called out, 'Come here, Dog!' to make him stop. He did not point with his finger. You see, he ought to have pointed."

"What happened?"

"Well, my man Scathelocke, or Scarlett, as they call him in the ballads, happened to be woodcutting a little way off, and he says that they vanished, just vanished, including the dog."

"My poor Cavall!"

"So the fairies have got them."

"You mean the People of Peace."

"I am sorry."

"But the point is, if Morgan is really the Queen of these creatures, and if we want to get them away before they are enchanted—one of their ancient Queens called Circe used to turn the ones she captured into hogs—we shall have to look for them in her castle."

"Then we must go there."

End quote.

With this, the chapter ends. White finishes this chapter with an interesting note for those of us who love literature: the Queen is very much like the "evil" Queens in western civilization. Circe turned Ulysses' men into pigs and...well, here we are again. "The People of Peace" are always close and we need to whisper about evil.

Oh, and point.

I struggled with this section. I was going to retype the whole chapter with the Anthropophagi, but, as I looked deeper and deeper, I came away wondering about if this was right or wrong. I found this brilliant insight:

The next major change come in chapter 10. In '38 there's an archery contest between Robin Wood and Little John (cut completely in '58), and then they go off to ambush the Anthropophagi. In '58 the enemy becomes Morgan le Fay, and the two versions of chapter 11 are different, except Robin's speech and the journey to the enemy are substantially the same. At the end of chapter 11 in '38 the Wart shoots a Sciopod; in '58 he shoots a griffin at the beginning of chapter 12 instead. According to Professor Wikipedia, White admitted to feeling 'uncomfortable' about the Anthropophagi, and I share his misgivings. The Anthropophagi are described as cannibals; they've captured, sacrificed and eaten humans. Yet they're not human, or at best are semi-human; they're drawn from medieval bestiaries, strange beings conjured up from goodness knows what dark corners of the mind (not all of which seem to be cannibals outside White's pages). The Sciopdes, for example, 'had only one foot, but this was so huge that they could use it as a sunshade to protect themselves when they were sleeping.' The episode in which they are attacked by Robin's men is grotesque rather than simply fantastical, and sits rather unhappily in the book.

'58's Morgan le Fay episode has a touch of the grotesque too, ('Morgan le Fay herself lay stretched upon her bed of glorious lard. She was a fat, dowdy middle-aged woman with black

hair and a slight moustache, but she was made of human flesh'), but a little is required to create a sense of peril, and there are redeeming touches of humour.

Both versions have a cruel or even sadistic streak. In '38 the Wart shoots an arrow at a Sciopod: 'He had often longed to hear the noise that these gay, true, clean and deadly missiles of the air would make in solid flesh. He heard it.' In '58 the target is a griffin rather than a semi-human, which makes it a little less murderous, and the writing is toned down slightly: 'He had often longed to hear the noise that these clean and deadly missiles would make in solid flesh. He heard it.' Either way, it's hard to square this with the pacifist message of the sequence as a whole.

<http://www.icknielindagations.com/2015/12/t-h-whites-sword-in-stone-1st-edition.html>

The description of Morgan Le Fay here is not your Disney Evil Queen...fat and dowdy laying on lard is not exactly what we usually see. This is more of Disney's Madam Mim than Maleficent. So, after reading this selection, I realized I needed more insights. I found this great reading:

So this raises the issue of how much control an author has over their own work. There is a significant casualty from T.H. White's re-editing process, one who might upset fans of the 1963 Disney movie based on The Sword in the Stone: the cannibalistic witch Madam Mim. This sequence forms a substantial part of chapter 6, involving Wart and Kay losing an arrow, and in the process of retrieving it from an isolated cottage in the woods they end up captured by the evil witch Madam Mim, locked away in oversized rabbit-hutches, only to be rescued by Merlin who defeats the witch in a duel. In The Once and Future King however chapter 6 is truncated at the moment the boys lose their arrow, and Madam Mim makes no appearance in the book. T.H. White had clearly decided by 1958 that she was extraneous to the tale he wanted to tell, essentially subjecting the poor cannibal to a damnatio memoriae. If we accept the author's later version as the 'correct' and final edition of the story, then it would mean losing Mim, it would mean losing a boring chapter about a snake, and it would mean having Morgan le Fay rather than a worrying and potentially xenophobic slaughter of some creatures whose species is nearly unpronounceable.

*By this point I feel lost and confused myself. The fact of the matter is that a text is not entirely 'locked' or 'static', and should a living writer wish to come in at a stage post-publication and alter a work to reflect changed circumstances or opinions, or if they felt the original did not accurately reflect their intentions at the time, then we as readers might have to wrestle with that most dangerous concept – *authorial intent*. Or perhaps not, because do we really have to give a damn what the author wanted? When it comes to things like The Hobbit, Tolkien's revision of the character of Gollum to bring the book more into line with its sequel The Lord of the Rings is now unanimously accepted as the standard work, and it would be unusual to find a re-print of an earlier edition lying around or on sale at your local Waterstones. With The Sword in the Stone however the matter is completely different. The previous edition, before T.H. White's revisions, is still very much in circulation, and as this is the one which the Disney movie is based on I daresay it is probably just as well known as the 1958 version – if not more so.*

<http://artichokereadstoomuch.blogspot.com/2016/01/the-sword-in-stone-by-th-white.html>

I thought this was brilliant: are books “static?” Especially with movie adaptations of books, we often have that weird discussion of whether it is “as good as the book.”

Dune, the movie, was horrible. The Sci Fi Channel version was far better. As much as I love the Harry Potter movies, they don’t stand up to the books...usually. The Three Musketeers movies, for example, the Michael York and Raquel Welch version, do a great job. The Count of Monte Cristo films usually disappoint.

When White is writing this in 1938 (or so), I don’t think a movie adaptation was on his mind. As White began writing all four (or five) books, I wonder if things changed. Camelot, the Broadway hit, was released in this life and he would have seen Disney’s The Sword in the Stone. These books, much like L. Frank Baum’s Oz series, started out as one thing (political satire perhaps) and moved into something else.

I still like the original British 1938 version. But, I certainly appreciate the other versions, too.

For now, we will stick with the later editions as I think through this “issue” that I have created in my own head.

Until next time.

Just before we move into this next chapter, a fine adventure, I spent some time in White’s later books in this series and I found this little discussion before a battle:

"You are an innocent fellow, Arthur," he said. "And a good thing too, really."

"Why?"

"Do you remember anything about the magic you had when you were small?"

"No. Did I have some magic? I can remember that I was interested in birds and beasts. Indeed, that is why I still keep my menagerie at the Tower. But I don't remember about magic."

"People don't remember," said Merlyn. "I suppose you wouldn't remember about the parables I used to tell you, when I was trying to explain things?"

**"Of course I do. There was one about some Rabbi or other which you told me when I wanted to take Kay somewhere. I never could understand why the cow died."
(The Witch in the Wood; later the title was changed to “The Queen of Air and Darkness”)**

Thankfully, White addresses this again in the The Book of Merlyn when Arthur realizes that his transformations were not dreams, but real memories. As the books move on, Merlyn leaves (he tells Arthur that he is trapped by a woman, but the story is slightly different In The Book of Merlyn) and the stories become, almost by the page, less magical.

So, as we embark on this adventure to meet the "People of Peace," we have to know that this is real, not a dream. Or whatever.

"Then we must go there."

Chapter XI

Robin smiled at the elder boy and patted him on the back, while the Wart thought despairingly about his dog. Then the outlaw cleared his throat and began to speak again.

"You are right about going there," he said, "but I ought to tell you the unpleasant part. Nobody can get into the Castle Chariot, except a boy or girl."

"Do you mean you can't get in?"

"You could get in."

"I suppose," explained the Wart, when he had thought this over, "it is like the thing about unicorns."

"Right. A unicorn is a magic animal, and only a maiden can catch it. Fairies are magic too, and only innocent people can enter their castles. That is why they take away people's children out of cradles."

Kay and Wart sat in silence for a moment. Then Kay said: "Well, I am game. It is my adventure after all."

The Wart said: "I want to go too. I am fond of Cavall."

Robin looked at Marian.

"Very well," he said. "We won't make a fuss about it, but we will talk about plans. I think it is good of you two to go, without really knowing what you are in for, but it will not be so bad as you think."

"We shall come with you," said Marian. "Our band will come with you to the castle. You will only have to do the going-in part at the end."

"Yes, and the band will probably be attacked by that griffin of hers afterwards."

"Is there a griffin?"

"Indeed there is. The Castle Chariot is guarded by a fierce one, like a watch dog. We shall have to get past it on the way there, or it will give the alarm and you won't be able to get in. It will be a terrific stalk."

"We shall have to wait till night."

This is going to be fun. Wart and Kay are facing some real difficulty here...they may be over their heads.

I have argued, since my youth, that The Sword in the Stone is a love story to education. In a moment, we learn how memorization, one of the traditional pillars of education, was crucial to Robin's army. Let's read it now. Yes, it is a bit out of sequence, but let me make my point:

After the staff lecture, Robin went to give his orders to the men. He made them a long speech, explaining about the griffin and the stalk and what the boys were going to do.

When he had finished his speech, which was listened to in perfect silence, an odd thing happened. He began it again at the beginning and spoke it from start to finish in the same words. On finishing it for the second time, he said, "Now, captains," and the hundred men split into groups of twenty which went to different parts of the clearing and stood round Marian, Little John, Much, Scarlett and Robin. From each of these groups a humming noise rose to the sky.

"What on earth are they doing?"

"Listen," said the Wart.

They were repeating the speech, word for word. Probably none of them could read or write, but they had learned to listen and remember. This was the way in which Robin kept touch with his night raiders, by knowing that each man knew by heart all that the leader himself knew, and why he was able to trust them, when necessary, each man to move by himself.

When the men had repeated their instructions, and everyone was word perfect in the speech, there was an issue of war arrows, a dozen to each. These arrows had bigger heads, ground to razor sharpness, and they were heavily feathered in a square cut. There was a bow inspection, and two or three men were issued with new strings. Then all fell silent.

"Now then," cried Robin cheerfully.

"They had learned to listen and remember."

What a great commencement address that one line would make!!!

Of course, later in the book, we find T. H. White's most famous line about education. Wart is sad realizing he will never be a knight (he will be a King though!). Merlyn tells him this:

"Sir Ector has given me a glass of canary," said the Wart, "and sent me to see if you can't cheer me up."

"Sir Ector," said Merlyn, "is a wise man."

"Well," said the Wart, "what about it?"

"The best thing for being sad," replied Merlyn, beginning to puff and blow, "is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honour trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then—to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the thing for you. Look at what a lot of things there are to learn—pure science, the only purity there is. You can learn astronomy in a lifetime, natural history in three, literature in six. And then, after you have exhausted a milliard lifetimes in biology and medicine and theo-criticism and geography and history and economics—why, you can start to make a cartwheel out of the appropriate wood, or spend fifty years learning to begin to learn to beat your adversary at fencing. After that you can start again on mathematics, until it is time to learn to plough."

"Apart from all these things," said the Wart, "what do you suggest for me just now?"

Honestly, I can't do better.

Learn something.

Listen and remember.

The boys passed the morning pleasantly, getting accustomed to two of Maid Marian's bows. Robin had insisted on this. He said that no man could shoot with another's bow any more than he could cut with another's scythe. For their midday meal they had cold venison pattie, with mead, as did everybody else. The outlaws drifted in for the meal like a conjuring trick. At one moment there would be nobody at the edge of the clearing, at the next half a dozen right inside it—green or sunburned men who had silently appeared out of the bracken or the trees. In the end there were about a hundred of them, eating merrily and laughing. They were not outlaws because they were murderers, or for any reason like that. They were Saxons who had revolted against Uther Pendragon's conquest, and who refused to accept a foreign king. The fens and wild woods of England were alive with them. They were like soldiers of the

resistance in later occupations. Their food was dished out from a leafy bower, where Marian and her attendants cooked.

The partisans usually posted a sentry to take the tree messages, and slept during the afternoon, partly because so much of their hunting had to be done in the times when most workmen sleep, and partly because the wild beasts take a nap in the afternoon and so should their hunters. This afternoon, however, Robin called the boys to a council.

"Look," he said, "you had better know what we are going to do. My band of a hundred will march with you toward Queen Morgan's castle, in four parties. You two will be in Marian's party. When we get to an oak which was struck by lightning in the year of the great storm, we shall be within a mile of the griffin guard. We shall meet at a rendezvous there, and afterward we shall have to move like shadows. We must get past the griffin without an alarm. If we do get past it and if all goes well, we shall halt at the castle at a distance of about four hundred yards. We can't come nearer, because of the iron in our arrow-heads, and from that moment you will have to go alone.

"Now, Kay and Wart, I must explain about iron. If our friends have really been captured by—by the Good People—and if Queen Morgan the Fay is really the queen of them, we have one advantage on our side. None of the Good People can bear the closeness of iron. The reason is that the Oldest Ones of All began in the days of flint, before iron was ever invented, and all their troubles have come from the new metal. The people who conquered them had steel swords (which is even better than iron) and that is how they succeeded in driving the Old Ones underground.

"This is the reason why we must keep away tonight, for fear of giving them the uncomfortable feeling. But you two, with an iron knife-blade hidden close in your hands, will be safe from the Queen, so long as you do not let go of it. A couple of small knives will not give them the feeling without being shown. All you will have to do is to walk the last distance, keeping a good grip of your iron: enter the castle in safety: and make your way to the cell where the prisoners are. As soon as the prisoners are protected by your metal they will be able to walk out with you. Do you understand this, Kay and Wart?"

"Yes, please," they said. "We understand this perfectly."

I can remember reading this section for the very first time. I was up in my bedroom on Ramona Avenue in South San Francisco and having King Arthur and Robin Wood in the same story just had me transfixed. I loved this section as it seemed to combine all of my childhood war play. Toss in The Three Musketeers and the chapter would be perfect for the young me. Iron and fairies. This seems to have been a fairly common belief for a long time. Iron has magical qualities like being able to find North and shuttle electricity (unchanged!) through itself and, of course, it's ability to crush practically any ancient weapon or shield.

Producing iron was very difficult for much of human history. Some sources were meteorites, but, as I understand it, getting the heat high enough was the key. Back in my first years of teaching this period, I used to tell students that perhaps Arthur's real history is when he was a pioneer in the Iron Age: literally, making/taking "the sword FROM stone."

As I was thinking about iron, the idea of using the oak tree struck by lightning as a rendezvous point seems to fit with a lot of powerful images here:

Oak
Lightning
Iron

We will meet and listen to an oak tree later in our adventures. And, yes, trees can talk.

Wart and Kay have lots to learn tonight. Their hunting, stalking and fighting skills are going to be challenged and they will learn so much this evening. They will also learn to respect Maid Marian as a leader and fighter.

"There is one more thing. The most important is to hold your iron, but the next most important is not to eat. Anybody who eats in a you-know-what stronghold has to stay there for ever, so, for all sake's sake, don't eat anything whatever inside the castle, however tempting it may look. Will you remember?"

"We will."

After the staff lecture, Robin went to give his orders to the men. He made them a long speech, explaining about the griffin and the stalk and what the boys were going to do.

When he had finished his speech, which was listened to in perfect silence, an odd thing happened. He began it again at the beginning and spoke it from start to finish in the same words. On finishing it for the second time, he said, "Now, captains," and the hundred men split into groups of twenty which went to different parts of the clearing and stood round Marian, Little John, Much, Scarlett and Robin. From each of these groups a humming noise rose to the sky.

"What on earth are they doing?"

"Listen," said the Wart.

They were repeating the speech, word for word. Probably none of them could read or write, but they had learned to listen and remember. This was the way in which Robin kept touch with his night raiders, by knowing that each man knew by heart all that the leader himself knew, and why he was able to trust them, when necessary, each man to move by himself.

When the men had repeated their instructions, and everyone was word perfect in the speech, there was an issue of war arrows, a dozen to each. These arrows had bigger heads, ground to razor sharpness, and they were heavily feathered in a square cut. There was a bow inspection, and two or three men were issued with new strings. Then all fell silent.

"Now then," cried Robin cheerfully.

He waved his arm, and the men, smiling, raised their bows in salute. Then there was a sigh, a rustle, a snap of one incautious twig, and the clearing of the giant lime tree was as empty as it had been before the days of man.

"Come with me," said Marian, touching the boys on the shoulder. Behind them the bees hummed in the leaves.

End quote.

Reading this takes me back to 1970 when I first read the book cover to cover. This section probably influenced me as a teacher, coach and athlete more than I ever realized. We are in the editing process of "Forty Years with a Whistle," my 2019 book. I discuss my life as a coach and the life lessons that I learned from my mentors.

Throughout my career, good coaches emphasized to me the importance of ME knowing the situations. As a coach, I strived to teach my athletes what to do in every situation we could imagine. Sometimes, what we did was funny; like making the athlete sit in a chair for a long time, then pop up and do a task. But, that is how we often get "called" to compete.

It doesn't matter what the coach knows during competition: it's what the athlete knows. Robin's method remains one of the best things I have ever read on teaching.

Memorization is a skill that seems to be diminishing. I know, I know: why memorize something when you can find it with a touch of a few buttons? My daughters were lucky; their school insisted on monthly poetry challenges and they needed to spend a full month mastering and memorizing a poem. Memory, like lifting, is a skill. And, like lifting, the more you do the more you can handle.

Every one of Robin and Marian's band know the plan. If something comes up, they have the information to adapt and continue on the mission. My little coaching tool:

"The goal is to keep the goal the goal"

is adapted from a military application: "The Mission is to keep The Mission The Mission!"

We all know stories of people who set off on a task, get sidetracked by this or that, and end up years later complaining at the dinner table that they never got their goal. I have learned to keep my mouth shut.

If you go off to college and get a dog or cat, you can't stay in the dorms, you need another place. There are rarely places near campuses that allow dogs, so now you need a car to get to school. To afford the car, you have to get a job. The job interferes with school. You drop out of school.

I no longer point out the obvious here. It reminds me of the poem that was on the wall in my kindergarten class (insert usual joke: "The best three years of my life"):

"For the want of a nail the shoe was lost,
For the want of a shoe the horse was lost,
For the want of a horse the rider was lost,
For the want of a rider the battle was lost,
For the want of a battle the kingdom was lost,
And all for the want of a horseshoe-nail."

(Attributed to Benjamin Franklin, but its roots go back to at least 1230 CE)

The bowstring inspection reflects this simple truth: one broken bowstring could cost lives...or the mission.

Marian, as we shall see, will be a great choice to lead Wart and Kay. They will learn woodcraft from her very quickly.

Finally, I love this last line as we move to the next section:

Behind them the bees hummed in the leaves.

After Robin and his men "hummed" the battle plan, our friends, the bees, continue the noise. I think it is a lovely line.

It was a long march. The artificial glades which led to the lime tree in the form of a cross were no longer of use after the first half-hour. After that they had to make their way through the virgin forest as best they might. It would not have been so bad if they had been able to kick and slash their way, but they were supposed to move in silence. Marian showed them how to go sideways, one side after the other; how to stop at once when a bramble caught them, and take it patiently out; how to put their feet down sensitively and roll their weight to that leg as soon as they were certain that no twig was under the foot; how to distinguish at a glance the places which gave most hope of an easy passage; and how a kind of rhythm in their movements would help them in spite of obstacles. Although there were a hundred invisible men on every side of them, moving toward the same goal, they heard no sounds but their own.

The boys had felt disgruntled at first, at being put in a woman's band. They would have preferred to have gone with Robin, and thought that being put under Marian was like being

trusted to a governess. They soon found their mistake. She had objected to their coming, but, now that their coming was ordered, she accepted them as companions. It was not easy to be a companion of hers. In the first place, it was impossible to keep up with her unless she waited for them—for she could move on all fours or even wriggle like a snake almost as quickly as they could walk—and in the second place she was an accomplished soldier, which they were not. She was a true Weyve—except for her long hair, which most of the female outlaws of those days used to clip. One of the bits of advice which she gave them before talking had to be stopped was this: Aim high when you shoot in battle, rather than low. A low arrow strikes the ground, a high one may kill in the second rank.

"If I am made to get married," thought the Wart, who had doubts on the subject, "I will marry a girl like this: a kind of golden vixen."

As a matter of fact, though the boys did not know it, Marian could hoot like an owl by blowing into her fists, or whistle a shrill blast between tongue and teeth with the fingers in the corner of the mouth; could bring all the birds to her by imitating their calls, and understand much of their small language—such as when the tits exclaim that a hawk is coming; could hit the popinjay twice for three times of Robin's; and could turn cartwheels. But none of these accomplishments was necessary at the moment.

"Weyve," is such a great word. It is the female form of "outlaw." Our author, T. H. White, gets his fair share of negative written about him recently for his cruelty (I won't mention the book) with his hawks and some of his other life issues. I've read odd negative things about him in journals complaining about his sexism and other issues related to sex.

But, White's description here of Marian should be emailed to these authors. Wart agrees; his thoughts here are certainly clear: "I will marry a girl like this: a kind of golden vixen." So, this Weyve, this vixen, seems to have awakened something in our young hero. I love the subtext here, and I probably thought this when I first read the book: "If I am MADE to get married" and "(Wart) had doubts on the subject" still makes me smile.

I'm sure some will cast stones at White for using the term "vixen." It is a female fox. I'm no fan of dictionaries, but, in this case, let's let Merriam-Webster explain this better:

"*Vixen* literally refers to a female fox, but it has two very distinctive extended meanings: "a shrew" and "a sexy woman." How is it that the word took such semantically divergent paths?

The "combative, bad-tempered woman" sense has a very long history in our language, going back as far as the 16th century and extending well into the 20th. It may be found in Shakespeare and Swift as well as in latter-day descriptions of mothers-in-law and the names of gun boats. By mid-century, however, vixen begins to be used of glamorous and attractive women. Perhaps its application to female characters who combined combative and seductive qualities led to the word's reinterpretation. Or perhaps it was influenced by fox, another term for an attractive young woman that made its appearance in English around this time."

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vixen>

I read this out loud to my wife, Tiffini.

She said: "Thank you."

Wart would have liked Tiffini.

Marian's advice on shooting and her training on stealth remains one of my favorite parts of this book. She is an excellent instructor and both boys have learned a quick lesson about early judgment. White's paragraph about her other skills:

As a matter of fact, though the boys did not know it, Marian could hoot like an owl by blowing into her fists, or whistle a shrill blast between tongue and teeth with the fingers in the corner of the mouth; could bring all the birds to her by imitating their calls, and understand much of their small language—such as when the tits exclaim that a hawk is coming; could hit the popinjay twice for three times of Robin's; and could turn cartwheels. But none of these accomplishments was necessary at the moment.

has brought me joy my entire life. "Turn cartwheels." I don't know why, but this statement brings me back to Tom Sawyer. Mark Twain's Becky Thatcher is a fine young heroine plus an on again/off again love interest for Tom. Tom tries to impress Becky with all kinds of acrobatics when they first meet, but the blonde-haired Becky ignores him. When you unpack Chapter Seven of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, you read something like what we see here in *The Sword in the Stone*:

"Say, Becky, was you ever engaged?"

"What's that?"

"Why, engaged to be married."

"No."

"Would you like to?"

"I reckon so. I don't know. What is it like?"

"Like? Why it ain't like anything. You only just tell a boy you won't ever have anybody but him, ever ever ever, and then you kiss and that's all. Anybody can do it."

Tom and Wart both seem to be missing a few details about love and marriage (horse and carriage).

The twilight fell mistily—it was the first of the autumn mists—and in the dimity the undispersed families of the tawny owl called to each other, the young with keewick and the old with the proper hooroo, hooroo. The noise called Tu-Whit, Tu-Whoo, which is wished by poets on the owl, is really a family noise, made by separate birds. Proportionally as the brambles and obstacles became harder to see, so did they become easier to feel. It was odd, but in the deepening silence the Wart found himself able to move more silently, instead of less. Being reduced to touch and sound, he found himself in better sympathy with these, and could go quietly and quick.

It was about compline, or, as we should call it, at nine o'clock at night—and they had covered at least seven miles of the toilsome forest—when Marian touched Kay on the shoulder and pointed into the blue darkness. They could see in the dark now, as well as human beings can see in it and much better than townspeople will ever manage to, and there in front of them, struck through seven miles of trackless forest by Marian's wood-craft, was the smitten oak. They decided with one accord, without even a whisper, to creep up to it so silently that even the members of their own army, who might already be waiting there, would not know of their arrival.

But a motionless man has the advantage of a man in motion, and they had hardly reached the outskirts of the roots when friendly hands took hold of them, patted their backs with pats as light as thistledown, and guided them to seats. The roots were crowded. It was like being a member of a band of starlings, or of roosting rooks. In the night mystery a hundred men breathed on every side of Wart, like the surge of our own blood which we can hear when we are writing or reading in the late and lonely hours. They were in the dark and stilly womb of night.

Presently the Wart noticed that the grasshoppers were creaking their shrill note, so tiny as to be almost extra-audible, like the creak of the bat. They creaked one after another. They creaked, when Marian had creaked three times to account for Kay and Wart as well as for herself, one hundred times. All the outlaws were present, and it was time to go.

There was a rustle, as if the wind had moved in the last few leaves of the nine-hundred-year-old oak. Then an owl hooted softly, a field mouse screamed, a rabbit thumped, a dog-fox barked his deep, single lion's cough, and a bat twittered above their heads. The leaves rustled again more lengthily while you could count a hundred, and then Maid Marian, who had done the rabbit's thump, was surrounded by her band of twenty plus two. The Wart felt a man on either side of him take his hand, as they stood in a circle, and then he noticed that the stridulation of the grasshoppers had begun again. It was going round in a circle, towards him, and, as the last grasshopper rubbed its legs together, the man on his right squeezed his hand. Wart stridulated. Instantly the man on his left did the same, and pressed his hand also. There

were twenty-two grasshoppers before Maid Marian's band was ready for its last stalk through the silence.

End quote.

There is very little to be said about this particular section, save to tell you to read it again! This is Special Forces materials; I love the shows about the SAS and the like but this is "old school."

Marian's wood-craft. Again, T. H. White is reminding us of what a warrior we are dealing with here. Wart's realization that it is easier to get around without sight is something I have felt a few times in my life.

The last stalk might have been a nightmare, but to the Wart it was heavenly. Suddenly he found himself filled with an exaltation of night, and felt that he was bodiless, silent, transported. He felt that he could have walked upon a feeding rabbit and caught her up by the ears, furry and kicking, before she knew of his presence. He felt that he could have run between the legs of the men on either side of him, or taken their bright daggers from their sheaths, while they still moved on undreaming. The passion of nocturnal secrecy was a wine in his blood. He really was small and young enough to move as secretly as the warriors. Their age and weight made them lumber, in spite of all their woodcraft, and his youth and lightness made him mobile, in spite of his lack of it.

It was an easy stalk, except for its danger. The bushes thinned and the sounding bracken grew rarely in the swampy earth, so that they could move three times as fast. They went in a dream, unguided by owl's hoot or bat's squeak, but only kept together by the necessary pace which the sleeping forest imposed upon them. Some of them were fearful, some revengeful for their comrade, some, as it were, disbodied in the sleep-walk of their stealth.

They had hardly crept for twenty minutes when Maid Marian paused in her tracks. She pointed to the left.

Neither of the boys had read the book of Sir John de Mandeville, so they did not know that a griffin was eight times larger than a lion. Now, looking to the left in the silent gloom of night, they saw cut out against the sky and against the stars something which they never would have believed possible. It was a young male griffin in its first plumage.

The front end, and down to the forelegs and shoulders, was like a huge falcon. The Persian beak, the long wings in which the first primary was the longest, and the mighty talons: all were the same, but, as Mandeville observed, the whole eight times bigger than a lion. Behind the shoulders, a change began to take place. Where an ordinary falcon or eagle would content itself with the twelve feathers of its tail, Falco leonis serpentis began to grow the leonine body and the hind legs of the beast of Africa, and after that a snake's tail. The boys saw, twenty-four feet high in the mysterious night-light of the moon, and with its sleeping head bowed upon its breast so that the wicked beak lay on the breast feathers, an authentic griffin that was better worth seeing than a hundred condors. They drew their breath through

their teeth and for the moment hurried secretly on, storing the majestic vision of terror in the chambers of remembrance.

I've had this sensation before: **"It was an easy stalk, except for its danger."** Wart is, in a modern phrase, "getting high" on the adventure. White's description here, "wine in his blood," artfully draws us both the forest, the raiders and the inner monologue of Arthur. There are times when White's writing transports us deep into the story.

When I first read this, I was envious of Wart. I would have loved this night woodcraft.

And, then, the Griffin (Griffon or Gryphon are both correct, too. Since Wart may have not read Mandeville, I insist that we do:

In that country be many griffins, more plenty than in any other country. Some men say that they have the body upward as an eagle and beneath as a lion; and truly they say sooth, that they be of that shape. But one griffin hath the body more great and is more strong than eight lions, of such lions as be on this half, and more great and stronger than an hundred eagles such as we have amongst us. For one griffin there will bear, flying to his nest, a great horse, if he may find him at the point, or two oxen yoked together as they go at the plough. For he hath his talons so long and so large and great upon his feet, as though they were horns of great oxen or of bugles or of kine, so that men make cups of them to drink of. And of their ribs and of the pens of their wings, men make bows, full strong, to shoot with arrows and quarrels.

Sir John Mandeville:

Griffin's were said to lay eggs and these nests contained gold nuggets, so some readers may know the color gold as associated with griffins. "Auric" is often used in relationship to gold; Goldfinger's villain is one of the best named bad guys in history "Auric Goldfinger."

The French soften "auric" into "or." And, as an Harry Potter geek (like me) knows that Harry belongs to Gryffindor. It's a variation of French griffon d'or ("golden griffon").

I am no longer amazed when I find parallels between Wart and Harry.

They drew their breath through their teeth and for the moment hurried secretly on, storing the majestic vision of terror in the chambers of remembrance.

They were close to the castle at last, and it was time for the outlaws to halt. Their captain touched hands silently with Kay and Wart, and the two went forward through the thinning forest, towards a faint glow which gleamed behind the trees.

They found themselves in a wide clearing or plain. They stood stock still with surprise at what they saw. It was a castle made entirely out of food, except that on the highest tower of all a carrion crow was sitting, with an arrow in its beak.

The Oldest Ones of All were gluttons. Probably it was because they seldom had enough to eat. You can read even nowadays a poem written by one of them, which is known as the Vision of Mac Conglinne. In this Vision there is a description of a castle made out of different kinds of food. The English for part of the poem goes like this:

A lake of new milk I beheld
In the midst of a fair plain.
I saw a well-appointed house
Thatched with butter.

Its two soft door-posts of custard.
Its dais of curds and butter,
Beds of glorious lard.
Many shields of thin pressed cheese.

Under the straps of those shields
Were men of soft sweet smooth cheese,
Men who knew not to wound a Gael,
Spears of old butter had each of them.

A huge cauldron full of meat
(Methought I'd try to tackle it),
Boiled, leafy kale, browny-white,
A brimming vessel full of milk.

A bacon house of two-score ribs,
A wattling of tripe—support of clans—
Of every food pleasant to man,
Meseemed the whole was gathered there.

Of chitterlings of pigs were made
Its beautiful rafters,
Splendid the beams and the pillars
Of marvellous pork.
End quote.

Gluttony, of course, is one of the Seven Deadly Sins. White seems to swing these Seven throughout his books. Certainly, Lust is going to be the theme of the three/four later books (whether one includes The Book of Merlyn is always a decision). The Oldest Ones of All are Pre-Christian, so perhaps they didn't learn the Christian Virtues based on Greek Philosophy.

The story behind this poem is interesting.

MacConglinne, a former scholar and now a poet, visits Cathal, King of Munster, who has issues; he is possessed. MC (MacConglinne) visits and stays at a local, and poor, monastery. The monks get mad when MC makes fun of their meager fare and want to crucify him...literally. But, MC steps up and deals with the demon that possessed Cathal. MC describes an angelic vision:

The fort we reached was beautiful,
With works of custards thick,
Beyond the loch.
New butter was the bridge in front,
The rubble dyke was wheaten white,
Bacon the palisade.

Stately, pleasantly it sat,
A compact house and strong.
Then I went in:
The door of it was dry meat,
The threshold was bare bread,
cheese-curds the sides.

Smooth pillars of old cheese,
And sappy bacon props
Alternate ranged;
Fine beams of mellow cream,
White rafters - real curds,
Kept up the house.

The monks relent and MC deals with the demon.

The demon is pulled out of Cathal in the same way I was told how they used to entice tapeworms...fast the host and then wave food in front of the mouth until the worm/demon comes out to eat. I have no idea if this is true, but it made me, like Wart and Kay:

“They drew their breath through their teeth and for the moment hurried secretly on, storing the majestic vision of terror in the chambers of remembrance.”

When the demon is subdued, it announced:

“I have been three half-years in Cathal's mouth, to the ruin of Munster and the Southern Half besides, and if I were to continue three half years more, I should ruin all Ireland.”

This line:

“They stood stock still with surprise at what they saw. It was a castle made entirely out of food, except that on the highest tower of all a carrion crow was sitting, with an arrow in its beak” was an attempt by White in the rewriting of the 1958 version to connect the story when Wart first met Merlyn a long time ago. But, in the original, the arrows were from a very vicious band of cannibals. I discussed this earlier, so let me quote:

“In the original British version of 1938, we meet the anthropophagi later in the book. These are mythical cannibals that make fine (dangerous) creatures of the night in Greek and Medieval stories. We find this note in William Shakespeare’s Othello:

And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders.

When we do meet the Anthropophagi in the 1938 edition, we will learn more about the poisonous arrows. We will also meet other forms of ancient evils. Later versions soften the stories and eventually eliminate much of the fun, frankly.”

Well, that’s my opinion anyway! It’s time for Wart and Kay to go inside to face extreme danger.

The boys stood there in wonder and nausea, before just such a stronghold. It rose from its lake of milk in a mystic light of its own—in a greasy, buttery glow. It was the fairy aspect of Castle Chariot, which the Oldest Ones—sensing the hidden knife blades after all—had thought would be tempting to the children. It was to tempt them to eat.

The place smelt like a grocer's, a butcher's, a dairy and a fishmonger's, rolled into one. It was horrible beyond belief—sweet, sickly and pungent—so that they did not feel the least wish to swallow a particle of it. The real temptation was, to run away.

However, there were prisoners to rescue.

They plodded over the filthy drawbridge—a butter one, with cow hairs still in it—sinking to their ankles. They shuddered at the tripe and the chitterlings. They pointed their iron knives at the soldiers made of soft, sweet, smooth cheese, and the latter shrank away.

In the end they came to the inner chamber, where Morgan le Fay herself lay stretched upon her bed of glorious lard.

She was a fat, dowdy, middle-aged woman with black hair and a slight moustache, but she was made of human flesh. When she saw the knives, she kept her eyes shut—as if she were in a trance. Perhaps, when she was outside this very strange castle, or when she was not doing that kind of magic to tempt the appetite, she was able to assume more beautiful forms.

The prisoners were tied to pillars of marvellous pork.

"I am sorry if this iron is hurting you," said Kay, "but we have come to rescue our friends."

Queen Morgan shuddered.

"Will you tell your cheesy men to undo them?"

She would not.

"It is magic," said the Wart. "Do you think we ought to go up and kiss her, or something frightful like that?"

"Perhaps if we went and touched her with the iron?"

This is the kind of scene I wished they used in the movies. The attempt to "seduce" with lard and butter with cow hairs is just so wrong, but the imagery here is amazing.

This line: **"She was a fat, dowdy, middle-aged woman with black hair and a slight moustache,"** really undoes the standard clichés of this kind of story. Almost universally, our enchantresses are beauties...sinister beauties, but always attractive and appealing.

White does a marvelous job of dismissing that image almost immediately. The prisoners are all friends of Wart and Kay (and Robin) and we will have good news soon. Wart's idea to kiss her and Kay's counter to "touch her with the iron" might sum up these two boys visions of the romantic adventure.

"Will you tell your cheesy men to undo them?"

She would not.

"It is magic," said the Wart. "Do you think we ought to go up and kiss her, or something frightful like that?"

"Perhaps if we went and touched her with the iron?"

"You do it."

"No, you."

"We'll go together."

So they joined hands to approach the Queen. She began to writhe in her lard like a slug. She was in agony from the metal.

At last, and just before they reached her, there was a sloshing rumble or mumble—and the whole fairy appearance of Castle Chariot melted together in collapse, leaving the five humans and one dog standing together in the forest clearing—which still smelt faintly of dirty milk.

"Gor-blimey!" said Friar Tuck. "Gor blimey and coo! Dash my vig if I didn't think we was done for!"

"Master!" said Dog Boy.

Cavall contented himself with barking wildly, biting their toes, lying on his back, trying to wag his tail in that position, and generally behaving like an idiot. Old Wat touched his forelock.

"Now then," said Kay, "this is my adventure, and we must get home quick."

And...that's it.

This is far different than the 1938 version of this story. Here, the boys walk up with iron...and, that's it. Now, yes, there is a bit more in the next chapter, but the original is a dangerous fight with poisoned arrows and a lot of danger.

The best part of the story for me has always been the budding relationship of Old Wat and Dog Boy. Cavall will remain true to Arthur literally "forever," if you read *The Book of Merlyn*. There isn't a happy ending yet as we have to cover one more chapter of this story.

We did pass a griffin on the way here!

The 1938 version includes the cannibal anthropophagi with their waspy, poisoned arrows. It is a vicious fight and considered too frightening for the American audience. I would have loved to see White discuss the change; literally, from the start of the book (Wart's quest for a tutor), we have had hints of the anthropophagi. Dog Boy and Wat have been part of the story since our first descriptions of the castle.

Here: Kay and Wart walk forward with iron and...the end. Now, I read a lot into this story, often way too much, but I can't get a grip on this finish.

She melts. As White is writing this, the Wizard of Oz has not even been filmed, so "I'm melting" isn't even a cultural reference yet.

And, this is just my opinion. We are not yet out of danger, of course.

So, I pulled out my American version from 1939, the Putman text, and discovered a bunch of songs that are found, I imagine, in just this version. We have twenty Moorish maidens singing about chocolate, twenty old maids singing about toast and scones, twenty men singing about caviar and cigars, and twenty "charming negro minstrels" singing about ice cream cones (to the

tune of "Way Down Upon the Swanee River"). I am beginning to think that no amount of redaction, rewriting and reediting could save this section.

Originally, my goal was to make all three versions of this available, but the more I read the three versions (1938 British Original, 1939 American revision, and 1958 cut and paste of The Sword in the Stone with some chapters from The Book of Merlyn) the more I think that this particular part of the book just never seemed settled between White and the publishers.

For whatever reasons, they just kept changing versions. They dropped the songs, added the poetry, changed it from an ambush on cannibals to a melting house of food. Let's continue.

Chapter XII

But Morgan le Fay, although in her fairy shape she could not stand iron, still had the griffin. She had cast it loose from its golden chain, by a spell, the moment her castle disappeared.

The outlaws were pleased with their success, and less careful than they should have been. They decided to take a detour round the place where they had seen the monster tied up, and marched away through the darksome trees without a thought of danger.

There was a noise like a railway train letting off its whistle, and, answering to it—riding on it like the voice of the Arabian Bird—Robin Wood's horn of silver began to blow.

"Tone, ton, tavon, tontavon, tantontavon, tontantontavon," went the horn. "Moot, troot, trourourout, troutourourout. Troot, troot. Tran, tran, tran, tran."

Robin was blowing his hunting music and the ambushed archers swung round as the griffin charged. They set forward their left feet in the same movement and let fly such a shower of arrows as it had been snow.

The Wart saw the creature stagger in its tracks, a clothyard shaft sprouting from between the shoulder blades. He saw his own arrow fly wide, and eagerly bent to snatch another from his belt. He saw the rank of his companion archers sway as if by a preconcerted signal, when each man stooped for a second shaft. He heard the bowstrings twang again, the purr of the feathers in the air.

It's odd to think that Robin tried to avoid the griffin here, but the griffin decided to make this a story. I studied longbowmen in the early 1980s. I had this idea of doing some advanced work on the importance of the longbow, but I really couldn't get a lot of materials. The Welsh longbowmen were more devastating than the armored knight, but the class society of the period seems to have kept the knights in the historical spotlight. The Battles of Crecy and Agincourt both show the value of the longbow in battle.

The great speech in Henry V (William Shakespeare) is before Agincourt:

*This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remember'd;
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition:
And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.*

You may also remember how White began this whole book with an explanation of the afternoon classes that Kay and Wart participated in:

In the afternoons the programme was: Mondays and Fridays, tilting and horsemanship; Tuesdays, hawking; Wednesdays, fencing; Thursdays, archery; Saturdays, the theory of chivalry, with the proper measures to be blown on all occasions, terminology of the chase and hunting etiquette.

I mentioned that these afternoon courses would also set up many of the stories of our book. Not long from now, we will see the importance of “hunting etiquette.

We have griffins to fight!

The Wart saw the creature stagger in its tracks, a clothyard shaft sprouting from between the shoulder blades. He saw his own arrow fly wide, and eagerly bent to snatch another from his belt. He saw the rank of his companion archers sway as if by a preconcerted signal, when each man stooped for a second shaft. He heard the bowstrings twang again, the purr of the

feathers in the air. He saw the phalanx of arrows gleam like an eyeflick in the moonlight. All his life up to then he had been shooting into straw targets which made a noise like Phutt! He had often longed to hear the noise that these clean and deadly missiles would make in solid flesh. He heard it.

But the griffin's plates were as thick as a crocodile's and all but the best placed arrows glanced off. It still came on. It squealed as it came. Men began to fall, swept to the left or right by the lashing tail.

The Wart was fitting an arrow to his bow. The cock feather would not go right. Everything was in slow motion.

He saw the huge body coming blackly through the moon-glare. He felt the claw which took him in the chest. He felt himself turning somersaults slowly, with a cruel weight on top of him. He saw Kay's face somewhere in the cartwheel of the universe, flushed with starlit excitement, and Maid Marian's on the other side with its mouth open, shouting. He thought, before he slid into blackness, that it was shouting at him.

They dragged him from under the dead griffin and found Kay's arrow sticking in its eye. It had died in its leap.

Wart, our hero, is crushed underneath the dead griffin and Kay killed the beast with a shot to the eye. Kay has spent much of this book being a jerk to Wart and here we have him as hero.

It took me years to appreciate this victory by Kay. I decided to reread Harry Potter and two things popped out to help me understand Kay better:

First, Dumbledore decides in the very first chapter of the very first book that Harry will have a much better life growing up with "muggles" than to be raised in the wizarding community. Dumbledore worries that this will go to the young boy's head.

Second, we meet young Dudley Dursley in the same chapter. He continues to be a dim-witted bully throughout the books...until, when the Dursley family is being put into protective care, he asks, worried, about the safety of Harry. In my view, it is one of the most touching scenes in the whole collection. Dudley comes off as heroic in this moment and made me want to revisit him again.

Dudley and Kay are similar characters: given so much at birth, without earning any of it, then having to deal with another person in their personal space. Both characters seem to break their bonds of spoiling and self-centeredness.

In this scene, Kay saves Wart. I'm going to spoil things here a bit, but Kay gets the griffin to mount on his wall. At Wart's coronation, we discover:

“Kay sent his own record griffin, with honest love.”

Redemption makes for lovely storytelling.

They dragged him from under the dead griffin and found Kay's arrow sticking in its eye. It had died in its leap.

Then there was a time which made him feel sick—while Robin set his collar-bone and made him a sling from the green cloth of his hood—and after that the whole band lay down to sleep, dog-tired, beside the body. It was too late to return to Sir Ector's castle, or even to get back to the outlaws' camp by the big tree. The dangers of the expedition were over and all that could be done that night was to make fires, post sentries, and sleep where they were.

Wart did not sleep much. He sat propped against a tree, watching the red sentries passing to and fro in the firelight, hearing their quiet passwords and thinking about the excitements of the day. These went round and round in his head, sometimes losing their proper order and happening backwards or by bits. He saw the leaping dragon, heard Marian shouting "Good shot!", listened to the humming of the bees muddled up with the stridulation of the grasshoppers, and shot and shot, hundreds and thousands of times, at popinjays which turned into griffins. Kay and the liberated Dog Boy slept twitching beside him, looking alien and incomprehensible as people do when they are asleep, and Cavall, lying at his good shoulder, occasionally licked his hot cheeks. The dawn came slowly, so slowly and pausingly that it was impossible to determine when it really had dawned, as it does during the summer months.

"Well," said Robin, when they had wakened and eaten the breakfast of bread and cold venison which they had brought with them, "you will have to love us and leave us, Kay. Otherwise I shall have Sir Ector fitting out an expedition against me, to fetch you back. Thank you for your help. Can I give you any little present as a reward?"

"It has been lovely," said Kay. "Absolutely lovely. May I have the griffin I shot?"

"He will be too heavy to carry. Why not take his head?"

"That would do," said Kay, "if somebody would not mind cutting it off. It was my griffin."

I'm not sure how old the boys are here, but this is truly an adventure. I have never broken my collarbone, but my friends have told me it is just miserable. Like broken toes and ribs, there is just not a lot that can be done, but no matter what you do...it hurts.

Robin Wood, remember “Hood” is the wrong way to say it according to Little John, seems to be right out of the Errol Flynn movie in this story. We will meet him again soon in a Christmas hunt, but I have always loved the Robin H/Wood character.

As I write this, there has been a down-down-down trajectory of the movies about Robin and His Merry Band. I must say though the episode "Qpid," from Star Trek: The Next Generation, does a fine job of playing around with space travel and the Flynn movie. As I noted before, my favorite Robin Hood is Bugs Bunny, but Daffy Duck also did his own role as Robin.

Wart's dreams, and the whole picture of them all sleeping together, takes us back to the night before we met Merlyn. White's ability to draw word pictures of night has always amazed me.

This is his night before meeting Merlyn:

The boy slept well in the woodland nest where he had laid himself down, in that kind of thin but refreshing sleep which people have when they begin to lie out of doors. At first he only dipped below the surface of sleep, and skimmed along like a salmon in shallow water, so close to the surface that he fancied himself in air. He thought himself awake when he was already asleep. He saw the stars above his face, whirling on their silent and sleepless axis, and the leaves of the trees rustling against them, and he heard small changes in the grass. These little noises of footsteps and soft-fringed wing-beats and stealthy bellies drawn over the grass blades or rattling against the bracken at first frightened or interested him, so that he moved to see what they were (but never saw), then soothed him, so that he no longer cared to see what they were but trusted them to be themselves, and finally left him altogether as he swam down deeper and deeper, nuzzling into the scented turf, into the warm ground, into the unending waters under the earth.

As I said before, this is simply lovely.

Reading this part of Robin's speech drove me back to Harry Potter:

"Well," said Robin, when they had wakened and eaten the breakfast of bread and cold venison which they had brought with them, "you will have to love us and leave us, Kay. Otherwise I shall have Sir Ector fitting out an expedition against me, to fetch you back.

It reminded me of that great line in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban:

"The ones who love us never really leave us, you can always find them in here." (J.K. Rowling) I'm still working on Sir Kay and "his" griffin. He seems to have come so far recently in the book and he seems to revert back to being a spoiled brat again. Having said that, he has done something remarkable, killing a griffin, so I supposed I will give him a break...this time.

"Well," said Robin, when they had wakened and eaten the breakfast of bread and cold venison which they had brought with them, "you will have to love us and leave us, Kay. Otherwise I shall have Sir Ector fitting out an expedition against me, to fetch you back. Thank you for your help. Can I give you any little present as a reward?"

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"He will be too heavy to carry. Why not take his head?"

"That would do," said Kay, "if somebody would not mind cutting it off. It was my griffin."

"What are you going to do about old Wat?" asked the Wart.

"It depends on what he wants to do. Perhaps he will like to run off by himself and eat acorns, as he used to, or if he likes to join our band we shall be glad to have him. He ran away from your village in the first place, so I don't suppose he will care to go back there. What do you think?"

"If you are going to give me a present," said the Wart, slowly, "I would like to have him. Do you think that would be right?"

"As a matter of fact," said Robin, "I don't. I don't think you can very well give people as presents: they might not like it. That is what we Saxons feel, at any rate. What did you intend to do with him?"

"I don't want to keep him or anything like that. You see, we have a tutor who is a magician and I thought he might be able to restore him to his wits."

"Good boy," said Robin. "Have him by all means. I am sorry I made a mistake. At least, we will ask him if he would like to go."

When somebody had gone off to fetch Wat, Robin said, "You had better talk to him yourself."

They brought the poor old man, smiling, confused, hideous and very dirty, and stood him before Robin.

"Go on," said Robin.

The Wart did not know quite how to put it, but he said, "I say, Wat, would you like to come home with me, please, just for a little?"

"AhnaNanaWarraBaaBaa," said Wat, pulling his forelock, smiling, bowing and gently waving his arms in various directions.

"Come with me?"

"WanaNanaWanawana."

"Dinner?" asked the Wart in desperation.

"R!" cried the poor creature affirmatively, and his eyes glowed with pleasure at the prospect of being given something to eat.

"That way," said the Wart, pointing in the direction which he knew by the sun to be that of his guardian's castle. "Dinner. Come with. I take."

"Measter," said Wat, suddenly remembering one word, the word which he had always been accustomed to offer to the great people who made him a present of food, his only livelihood. It was decided.

"Well," said Robin, "it has been a good adventure and I am sorry you are going. I hope I shall see you again."

"Come any time," said Marian, "if you are feeling bored. You only have to follow the glades. And you, Wart, be careful of that collar bone for a few days."

"I will send some men with you to the edge of the chase," said Robin. "After that you must go by yourselves. I expect the Dog Boy can carry the griffin's head."

"Good-bye," said Kay.

"Good-bye," said Robin.

"Good-bye," said Wart.

"Good-bye," said Marian, smiling.

"Good-bye," cried all the outlaws, waving their bows.

And Kay and the Wart and the Dog Boy and Wat and Cavall and their escort set off on the long track home.

As we come to the end of this adventure, perhaps the longest in the book, it's time to say goodbye of our forest friends for a bit. Robin will return for a Christmas adventure, but we won't see the whole troop again.

Wat will never truly heal up. He and Dog Boy will be on the fringes of a few events, but their story ends here too. I'm not sure how large the griffin's head would be, but I do feel for Dog Boy having to deal with it.

Kay and Wart will begin to split after this story. Kay's trajectory is heading for knighthood and taking over the castle and manor. Wart, everyone assumes, will be his squire.

We know better.

They had an immense reception. The return on the previous day of all the hounds, except Cavall and the Dog Boy, and in the evening the failure to return of Kay and Wart, had set the household in an uproar. Their nurse had gone into hysterics—Hob had stayed out till midnight scouring the purlieus of the forest—the cooks had burnt the joint for dinner—and the sergeant-at-arms had polished all the armour twice and sharpened all the swords and axes to a razor blade in case of an invasion. At last somebody had thought of consulting Merlyn, whom they had found in the middle of his third nap. The magician, for the sake of peace and quietness to go on with his rest, had used his insight to tell Sir Ector exactly what the boys were doing, where they were, and when they might be expected back. He had prophesied their return to the minute.

So, when the small procession of returning warriors came within sight of the drawbridge, they were greeted by the whole household. Sir Ector was standing in the middle with a thick walking-stick with which he proposed to whack them for going out of bounds and causing so much trouble; the nurse had insisted on bringing out a banner which used to be put up when Sir Ector came home for the holidays, as a small boy, and this said Welcome Home; Hob had forgotten about his beloved hawks and was standing on one side, shading his eagle eyes to get the first view; the cooks and all the kitchen staff were banging pots and pans, singing "Will Ye No Come Back Again?" or some such music, out of tune; the kitchen cat was yowling; the hounds had escaped from the kennel because there was nobody to look after them, and were preparing to chase the kitchen cat; the sergeant-at-arms was blowing out his chest with pleasure so far that he looked as if he might burst at any moment, and was commanding everybody in an important voice to get ready to cheer when he said, "One, Two!"

Sometimes, I have to pull out the dictionary when I read White. If you go back through all of these offerings, you will discover that White's vocabulary is expansive and I spend a fair amount of time trying to get even deeper into these words. For example, "purlieus" is the land at the edge of a forest. I am sure it is still in use, but I have never used it.

We can certainly blame English. English is a language that just hoards words. I'm sure in a typical day, I use Spanish, Arabic (admiral, algebra, alcohol) and maybe dozens of other "stolen" words and it doesn't even alert my Anglo-Saxon languages roots.

I thought of this the other day when my Uber driver explained his voyage through learning American English. We have idioms that we toss out that make little sense; he said: "Raining cats and dogs" and I had to laugh as it doesn't help to think about that too closely. I used to explain to my students that the Anglo-Saxon words tend to be three to four letters: neck, gut, butt, arm, leg, neck, hand, eye, ear, nose and head, but when the Normans showed up we inherited esophagus, diaphragms, and gluteus...for a start.

Since we live in a disposable society, and we probably need to change that, the idea that the nurse still has Sir Ector's "Welcome Home" sign from his youth probably sound a bit odd today.

My mom used to darn socks and repair clothes with regularity and these seem to be lost arts in my mind.

It's a good reminder.

The song being sung ("or some such tune") is a classic. Here are the lyrics:

Bonnie Charlie's noo awa
Safely o'er the friendly main
Mony a heart will break in twa
Should he ne'er come back again.

Chorus
Will ye no' come back again?
Will ye no' come back again?
Better lo'ed ye canna be
Will ye no' come back again?

Ye trusted in your Hielan' men
They trusted you, dear Charlie
They kent your hiding in the glen
Death or exile braving.

English bribes were a' in vain
Tho' puir, and puirer, we maurn be
Siller canna buy the heat
That beats aye for thine and thee.

We watch'd thee in the gloamin' hour
We watch'd thee in the mornin' grey
Tho' thirty thousand pound they gie
Oh, there is nane that wad betray!

The nap takes us back to the last chapter. You may remember Merlyn's excitement about his naps:

"Ah, don't plague me about a little thing like that. You run along now, there's a good boy, and mind you don't forget to take Kay with you. Why ever didn't you mention it before? Don't forget to follow beyond the strip of barley. Well, well, well! This is the first half-holiday I have had since I started this confounded tutorship. First I think I shall have a little nap before luncheon, and then I think I shall have a little nap before tea. Then I shall have to think of something I can do before dinner. What shall I do before dinner, Archimedes?"

"Have a little nap, I expect," said the owl coldly, turning his back upon his master, because he, as well as the Wart, enjoyed to see life.

As we come to the close of this chapter, I am starting to look ahead to what I consider White's best philosophical works.

"Huzza!" cried everybody obediently, including Sir Ector.

"Look what I have got," shouted Kay. "I have shot a griffin and the Wart has been wounded."

"Yow-yow-yow!" barked all the hounds, and poured over the Dog Boy, licking his face, scratching his chest, sniffing him all over to see what he had been up to, and looking hopefully at the griffin's head which the Dog Boy held high in the air so that they could not eat it.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Sir Ector.

"Alas, the poor Phillip Sparrow," cried the nurse, dropping her banner. "Pity his poor arm all to-brast in a green sling, God bless us!"

"It is all right," said the Wart. "Ah, don't catch hold of me. It hurts."

"May I have it stuffed?" asked Kay.

"Well, I be dommed," said Hob. "Be'nt thick wold chappie our Wat, that erst run lunatical?"

"My dear, dear boys," said Sir Ector. "I am so glad to see you back."

"Wold chuckle-head," exclaimed the nurse triumphantly. "Where be thy girt cudgel now?"

"Hem!" said Sir Ector. "How dare you go out of bounds and put us all to this anxiety?"

"It is a real griffin," said Kay, who knew there was nothing to be afraid of. "I shot dozens of them. Wart broke his collar-bone. We rescued the Dog Boy and Wat."

"That comes of teaching the young Hidea 'ow to shoot," said the sergeant proudly.

Sir Ector kissed both boys and commanded the griffin to be displayed before him.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "What a monster! We'll have him stuffed in the dinin'-hall. What did you say his measurements were?"

"Eighty-two inches from ear to ear. Robin said it might be a record."

"We shall have to get it chronicled."

"It is rather a good one, isn't it?" remarked Kay with studied calm.

"I shall have it set up by Sir Rowland Ward," Sir Ector went on in high delight, "with a little ivory card with KAY'S FIRST GRIFFIN on it in black letters, and the date."

"Arrah, leave thy childishness," exclaimed the nurse. "Now, Master Art, my innocent, be off with thee to thy bed upon the instant. And thou, Sir Ector, let thee think shame to be playing wi' monsters' heads like a godwit when the poor child stays upon the point of death. Now, sergeant, leave puffing of thy chest. Stir, man, and take horse to Cardoyle for the chirurgeon."

She waved her apron at the sergeant, who collapsed his chest and retreated like a shoo'd chicken.

"It is all right," said the Wart, "I tell you. It is only a broken collar-bone, and Robin set it for me last night. It does not hurt a bit."

"Leave the boy, nurse," commanded Sir Ector, taking sides with the men against the women, anxious to re-establish his superiority after the matter of the cudgel. "Merlyn will see to him if he needs it, no doubt. Who is this Robin?"

"Robin Wood," cried the boys together.

"Never heard of him."

"You call him Robin Hood," explained Kay in a superior tone. "But it is Wood really, like the Wood that he is the spirit of."

"Well, well, well, so you've been foragin' with that rascal! Come in to breakfast, boys, and tell me all about him."

"We have had breakfast," said the Wart, "hours ago. May I please take Wat with me to see Merlyn?"

"Why, it's the old man who went wild and started rootin' in the forest. Wherever did you get hold of him?"

"The Good People had captured him with the Dog Boy and Cavall."

"But we shot the griffin," Kay put in. "I shot it myself."

"So now I want to see if Merlyn can restore him to his wits."

"Master Art," said the nurse sternly. She had been breathless up to now on account of Sir Ector's rebuke. "Master Art, thy room and thy bed is where thou art tending to, and that this instant. Wold fools may be wold fools, whether by yea or by nay, but I ha'nt served the Family for fifty year without a-learning of my duty. A fliberty-gibbeting about wi' a lot of want-wits, when thy own arm may be dropping to the floor!

"Yes, thou wold turkey-cock," she added, turning fiercely upon Sir Ector, "and thou canst keep thy magician away from the poor mite's room till he be rested, that thou canst!

"A-wantoning wi' monsters and lunaticals," continued the victor as she led her helpless captive from the stricken field. "I never heard the like."

"Please someone to tell Merlyn to look after Wat," cried the victim over his shoulder, in diminishing tones.

Robert Altman was a movie director. I would say MASH is his most famous film, but he also did Popeye, McCabe and Mrs. Miller, and A Prairie Home Companion. His method was dialogue between actors became his "calling card." Often, several conversations would be going on the screen at once, like the surgery scenes in MASH, and as a viewer you quickly slid into following several things at once.

It is the way people speak in real life. Usually, people in movies speak in the "He Said" followed by "She Said" give and take, back and forth with distinction and clarity.

But, that's not the real world. I had an English teacher "shadow" me for a few days coaching football and the number one thing she noted was the not just the volume of noise, but the number of conversations swirling around at once and we all followed every single one of them.

She was thinking of writing a book about adolescence life and wanted to be honest about team sports. She realized that the task would be daunting.

T. H. White, in this scene, pulls an "Altman." The dialogue of the characters step on each other. There is a focus on a griffin, being out of bounds, an injury, worries, breakfast, a trophy, the proper name of Robin and a few other things all popping about like a string of firecrackers.

The nurse, of course, will have none of this nonsense. Wart needs mending! "Philip Sparrow" is a poem from before 1508 that is about a bird that makes a "Phip" sound and the bird's funeral, but is also critical of the medieval church.

Somtyme he wolde gaspe
Whan he sawe a waspe;
A fly or a gnat,
He wolde flye at that;
And prytely he wold pant
Whan he saw an ant;

Lord, how he wolde pry
After the butterfly!
Lorde, how he wolde hop
After the gressop!
And whan I sayd, "Phyp! Phyp!"
Than he wold lepe and skyp,
And take me by the lyp.
Alas, it wyll me slo,
That Phillyp is gone me fro!

Her statement: **"Stir, man, and take horse to Cardoyle for the chirurgeon,"** is a bit vague, but a "chirurgeon" is an old word for surgeon. Frankly, I don't understand much of what she is saying.

Then, I put on my inner Aileen John goggles. My mom, an Irish mom with all the clichés included, would sometimes bring out phrases I had never heard of when she was angry or worried in the moment. Reading this section with my mom as the nurse seemed to give me great clarity.

We only have a little bit left of this chapter and story. I have been literally doing this part for months and I am eager to move along. It's a great story, but...the next stuff is some of my favorites.

He woke up in his cool bed, feeling better. The old fire-eater who looked after him had covered the windows with a curtain, so that the room was dark and comfortable, but he could tell by the one ray of golden sunlight which shot across the floor that it was late afternoon. He not only felt better. He felt very well, so well that it was not possible to stay in bed. He moved quickly to throw back the sheet, but stopped with a hiss at the creak or scratch of his shoulder, which he had forgotten in his sleep. Then he got out more carefully by sliding down the bed and pushing himself upright with one hand, shoved his bare feet into a pair of slippers, and managed to wrap a dressing-gown round him more or less. He padded off through the stone passages up the worn circular stairs to find Merlyn.

When he reached the schoolroom, he found that Kay was continuing his First Rate Eddication. He was doing dictation, for as Wart opened the door he heard Merlyn pronouncing in measured tones the famous mediaeval mnemonic: "Barabara Celarent Darii Ferioque Prioris," and Kay saying, "Wait a bit. My pen has gone all squee-gee."

"You will catch it," remarked Kay, when they saw him. "You are supposed to be in bed, dying of gangrene or something."

Referring to the nurse as a “fire-eater” has always made me laugh. This is the story that never seems to end, but the conclusion here brings us to a refreshed Merlyn and a satisfied Kay. Basically, we have some happy times here.

Kay is copying the Fifteen Cousins of Deductive Arguments. I teach this in some of my courses and it is interesting for the students. Here is part of the handout we use:

Deductive and Inductive Arguments

“An argument whose conclusion is supposed, alleged, or claimed to be certain relative to its premisses is called *deductive*. Even if the argument has an error in it and does not do what it is supposed to do, we call it ‘deductive.’ Calling it ‘deductive’ does not make it good or bad. It just tells everyone what is to be expected of it.

An argument whose conclusion is supposed, alleged, or claimed to be more or less acceptable relative to its premisses is called **inductive**. Even if the argument has an error in it and does not do what it is supposed to do, we call it ‘inductive.’ Calling it ‘inductive’ does not make it good or bad. It just tell everyone what is to be expected of it.”

Alex C. Michalos. Improving Your Reasoning.

Valid Arguments and Argument Schemata

All cats are animals.
All tigers are cats.
So, all tigers are animals.

All humans are mortal.
All Greeks are humans.
So, all Greeks are mortals.

All _____ are _____.
All _____ are _____.
So, all . . . are

True	All dogs are animals.	Some polygons are triangles.
True	All cats are animals.	Some squares are polygons.
False	Hence, all cats are dogs.	Thus, some squares are triangles.

Unsound Arguments

1. Invalid Schema
2. False Premiss
3. Irrelevant or ‘Circular’ Premiss (The country needs a good five cent cigar)

The Catalogue of Valid Forms (The Fifteen ‘Cousins’)

<i>Barbara</i>	<i>Celarent</i>	<i>Darii</i>	<i>Ferio</i>	<i>Cesare</i>
All M is P.	No M is P.	All M is P.	No M is P.	No P is M.

All S is M.	All S is M.	Some S is M.	Some S is M	All S is M.
All S is P.	No S is P.	Some S is P.	Some S is not P.	No S is P.

<i>Camestres</i>	<i>Festino Baroco</i>	<i>Disamis</i>	<i>Datisi</i>	
All P is M.	No P is M.	All P is M.	Some M is P.	All M is P.
No S is M.	Some S is M.	Some S is not M.	All M is S.	Some M is S.
No S is P.	Some S is not P.	Some S is not P.	Some S is P.	Some S is P.
<i>Bocardo</i>	<i>Ferison Camenes</i>	<i>Dimaris</i>	<i>Fresison</i>	
Some M is not P.	No M is P.	All P is M.	Some P is M.	No P is M.
All M is S.	Some M is S.	No M is S.	All M is S.	Some M is S.
Some S is not P.	Some S is not P.	No S is P.	Some S is P.	Some S is not P.

Quick Assignment: Using the fifteen cousins, test these **syllogisms** using one of the following sets:

- M: rodents P: animals S: squirrels
- M: Christians P: Americans S: Priests.
- M: Students P: Humans S: Utahns

"Notional evidence is second-hand, academic, *probable*. Real evidence is first-hand, experiential, *certain*.

Reason argues from data that are certain to conclusions that are, in varying degrees, probable. *Induction* argues from consistent patterns to generalizations: every time I put out a pan of water when the temperature is below thirty-two degrees, the water goes stiff; every time I drink five martinis, I regret it; every time I've seen people treat sex like a game, it's lost its importance to them. *Deduction* applies generalizations to new cases: every time I drink five martinis, I regret it; but this is my fifth martini; therefore, Oops! *Analogy* tries to explain realities we do not understand in terms of realities we do understand.

Expert testimony is trustworthy, provided the person is speaking in his or her field of expertise.

Eyewitness testimony is trustworthy, but only to a point.

First-hand experience is the best evidence there is (even though it, too, is limited). Seeing is not believing, seeing is *knowing*.

Common Sense is also close to certain.

William J. O'Malley, S.J. [Becoming a Catechist: Ways to Outfox Teenage Skepticism](#)

End of handout.

Obviously, I use O'Malley a lot in my work. In strength training, especially in the history, you have to really throw your arms around Common Sense. The late Terry Todd and I once discussed at length the charlatans of our field. I shared with him the stories of one famous name that told the audience that the weight was misloaded and no one had ever done this before...but, amazingly, our hero made it.

I heard literally the same story from two different people at two different events with enough geography in between them to make a large country. So, eyewitness and first-hand is always an issue. I could go on and on about this, but common sense tells me to stop.

It's good to see Wart up and around. Now, he needs to catch up on the details of Wat (pun!) has happened during his rest.

"Merlyn," said the Wart. "What have you done with Wat?"

"You should try to speak without assonances," said the wizard. "For instance, 'The beer is never clear near here, dear,' is unfortunate, even as an assonance. And then again, your sentence is ambiguous to say the least of it. 'What what?' I might reply, taking it to be a conundrum, or if I were King Pellinore, 'What what, what?' Nobody can be too careful about their habits of speech."

Kay had evidently been doing his dictation well and the old gentleman was in a good humour.

"You know what I mean," said the Wart. "What have you done with the old man with no nose?"

"He has cured him," said Kay.

"Well," said Merlyn, "you might call it that, and then again you might not. Of course, when one has lived in the world as long as I have, and backwards at that, one does learn to know a thing or two about pathology. The wonders of analytical psychology and plastic surgery are, I am afraid, to this generation but a closed book."

"What did you do to him?"

"Oh, I just psycho-analysed him," replied the magician grandly. "That, and of course I sewed on a new nose on both of them."

"What kind of nose?" asked the Wart.

"It is too funny," said Kay. "He wanted to have the griffin's nose for one, but I would not let him. So then he took the noses off the young pigs which we are going to have for supper, and used those. Personally I think they will grunt."

"A ticklish operation," said Merlyn, "but a successful one."

"Well," said the Wart, doubtfully. "I hope it will be all right. What did they do then?"

"They went off to the kennels. Old Wat is very sorry for what he did to the Dog Boy, but he says he can't remember having done it. He says that suddenly everything went black, when they were throwing stones once, and he can't remember anything since. The Dog Boy forgave him and said he did not mind a bit. They are going to work together in the kennels in future, and not think of what is past any more. The Dog Boy says that the old man was good to him while they were prisoners of the Fairy Queen, and that he knows he ought not to have thrown stones at him in the first place. He says he often thought about that when other boys were throwing stones at him."

"Well," said the Wart, "I am glad it has all turned out for the best. Do you think I could go and visit them?"

"For heaven's sake, don't do anything to annoy your nurse," exclaimed Merlyn, looking about him anxiously. "That old woman hit me with a broom when I came to see you this forenoon, and broke my spectacles. Could you not wait until tomorrow?"

On the morrow Wat and the Dog Boy were the firmest of friends. Their common experiences of being stoned by the mob and then tied to columns of pork by Morgan le Fay served as a bond and a topic of reminiscence, as they lay among the dogs at night, for the rest of their lives. Also, by the morning, they had both pulled off the noses which Merlyn had kindly given them. They explained that they had got used to having no noses, now, and anyway they preferred to live with the dogs.

It's nice to have Merlyn in a good mood.

And so am I: It's nice to close this chapter. Wat and Dog Boy are happy; Merlyn uses "modern" techniques to save the day and we get a nice reminder that dogs are better than humans.

As much as I like Deductive and Inductive Reasoning, I found an article that really popped my eyes open. With Kay and Wart spending so much time on the Cousins (see the last offering), I should share this article, too:

<http://nautil.us/blog/the-problem-with-the-way-scientists-study-reason>

The reason is simple: Ethologists evaluate their experimental paradigm, or set-up, in light of its ecological validity, or how well it matches natural surroundings. An animal's true habitat, and its evolutionary history, have always centered the discussion. In contrast, most experimental paradigms in human reasoning, such as the Cognitive Reflexion Test (CRT) or syllogisms, are based on logic or mathematics. One of the most famous tasks of the CRT is the bat and ball problem: A bat and a ball cost \$1.10. The bat costs \$1 more than the ball. How much does the ball cost? Most participants fail at this task. The correct answer is not 10 cents, but 5 cents. Perhaps the ultimate tool psychologists use to study reasoning is the syllogism: For example, "Major premise: All men are animals. Minor premise: Some animals are aggressive. Conclusion: Some men are aggressive." (Does this conclusion follow?)

As I listened to talks relying on these methods, I wondered: Do people think like that in everyday life? Probably not. Did our Pleistocene ancestors? Very unlikely. Then, how should I interpret these results? Is using abstract logic on humans like asking a turtle to climb stairs?

Nikolaas Tinbergen, the founder of behavioral ecology, famously stated that ethology is the art of interviewing animals in their own language. This principle is simple but powerful. And there is no reason why it should not be applied to humans. Psychologists studying reasoning extensively rely on logic and philosophy, and neglect psychology's more natural ally: biology. The neglect stems in part from the ease with which humans can seem to understand one another. Our psychology is equipped with specialized cognitive systems, like theory of mind, that help us negotiate social life. We spontaneously attribute intentions, reasons, and beliefs to others. These heuristics help us to predict behavior, but they also parasitize our scientific understanding of the mind, blinding us to the necessity of using biology when studying ourselves. With turtles, there's no problem, because we have only weak intuitions about their behaviors, and it's difficult to ask them what they think.

Humans are, in other words, too familiar with one another. Fundamental laws of biology, like evolution by natural selection, are falsely believed to have weak constraints on human psychology—particularly for high-level cognitive functions, like reasoning. But the human brain, just like the turtle brain, has been shaped by millions of years of evolution. Reason is unlikely to have escaped its influence. What does it mean, then, to interview humans in their own language?

End quote.

Soon, very soon, we will be returning to Wart's animal transformations. Maybe Merlyn knows something about education.

Finally, the long story of Robin Wood, the Griffin and the Good People is behind us. Chapter Thirteen, sadly, was basically deleted in the 1958 version of the book(s) to bring in the story of the ants. The ants and geese story were to be in The Book of Merlyn (and, after 1975, they are) and they are long stories about lines on maps, fascism and the human love of warfare. I didn't like them when I read them in 1970 (my first reading) and they never really grew on me.

Although I will be reviewing the 1938 version (and it is a lot of work to retype two books), there are some things in the ants that I will share with you. I never understand dropping the original Chapter 13; it has, in my opinion, two of the best dreams in literature. I think T. H. White makes the same points as in the geese and ants versions...without the sledgehammer.

Chapter Thirteen (1938 version)

"The summer was over at last, and nobody could deny any longer that the autumn was definitely there. It was that rather sad time of year when for the first time for many months the fine old sun still blazes away in a cloudless sky, but does not warm you, and the hoar-frosts and the mists and the winds begin to stir their faint limbs at morning and evening, with the gossamer, as the sap of winter vigor remembers itself in the cold corpses which brave

summer slew. The leaves were still on the trees, and still green, but it was the leaden green of old leaves which have seen much since the gay colors and happiness of spring—that seems so lately and, like all happy things, so quickly to have passed. The sheep fairs had been held. The plums had tumbled off the trees in the first big winds, and here and there, in the lovely sunlight too enfeebled, a branch of beech or oak was turning yellow: the one to die quickly and mercifully, the other perhaps to hold grimly to the frozen tree and to hiss with its paper skeletons all through the east winds of winter, until the spring was here again.”
End quote.

White, as I have mentioned before, has this ability to paint a setting as a poet. As I read and reread this section, I tend to nod and say “Yes, I have seen this day...I know this kind of day.”

Wart, as we will discover next time, is mending. Merlyn and Wart go for walks which lead us directly to our next adventures in transformation.

The 1958 version breaks the rules, I think, of White’s transformations. In the other stories, if Wart is full (has eaten), he remains full. In this story, the 1958 version, the mending arm is basically ignored:

“In spite of his protests, the unhappy invalid was confined to his chamber for three mortal days. He was alone except at bedtime, when Kay came, and Merlyn was reduced to shouting his eddication through the key-hole, at times when the nurse was known to be busy with her washing.

The boy's only amusement was the ant-nests—the ones between glass plates which had been brought when he first came from Merlyn's cottage in the forest.

"Can't you," he howled miserably under the door, "turn me into something while I'm locked up like this?"

"I can't get the spells through the key-hole."

"Through the what?"

"The KEY-HOLE."

"Oh!"

"Are you there?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"What?"

"Confusion take this shouting!" exclaimed the magician, stamping on his hat. "May Castor and Pollux— No, not again. God bless my blood pressure...."

"Could you turn me into an ant?"

"A what?"

"An ANT!"

End quote.

As we will see, the Merlyn of the 1938 story is back to his gentle ways rather than swearing and stamping his hat. I think a compilation that has ALL the stories would be best, but I can only do so much.

The Wart's arm did not hurt any more, but he was not allowed to do his martial exercises under the sergeant-at-arms in the afternoons, for fear of spoiling it before it was properly mended. He went for walks instead, kept watch on a playing family of five hobbies, who shouted "Cui-Cui-Cui-Cui-Cui," and would be migrating any day now—they were late already—and he collected the enormous caterpillars of moths which had been through all their changes and now sought lumberingly for a convenient place in which to turn into a chrysalis. His best capture was the four-inch plum and apricot upholstery of a Goat Moth, which buried itself quite cheerfully among trails of silk in a box of loose earth which he kept beside his bed. It had taken three years to reach its present size and would lie perdue for another, before the big dun moth crept out of its old armor and pumped the blood into the veins of its expanding wings.

Merlyn caught a male grass snake on one of these walks. They met by chance, face to face, as each was turning the corner of a big bed of seeded nettles from opposite directions, and the magician pounced upon the reptile before it had time to flick its black tongue twice. He held it up, wriggling, hissing and smelling strongly of acetylene, while the Wart examined it in horror.

"Don't be afraid of it," said Merlyn. "It is only a piece of olive lightning with an ochre V behind its shining black head. It can't sting you and won't bite you. It has never done harm to anybody, and can only flee and stink."

"Hobbies" seem to be a kind of insect hunting falcon. In England, there are 2800 breeding pairs and they seem to be threatened a bit. Tiff and I spent a delightful day near Manchester visiting a massive bird center. It had buildings floating on a lake and it was a wonderful place for education, enlightenment and exercise.

The Goat Moth, was a Roman delicacy according to Pliny, and I will take his word for it. I learned a LOT about Moths this week and I am not sure the information will help me in much of my life. The Goat Moth is a big one with a big appetite.

Wart may have this moth for years, by the way. If it had been fed rotting fruit for a while, the change would take only months, but if the moth ate wood from trees, it takes years.

We are about to begin the history and dreams of the snake. I had no idea about these two stories until I went to a conference on British Studies. I presented a piece on Beowulf. That went well, but I was very excited to hear a talk on White and the Disney movie. The speaker had gone deep into the 1938/39 versions and I ran up to him after the talk to find out more.

My favorite book, it seems, needed a full rereading! I hope you enjoy these stories. From the 1958 version:

"Could you turn me into an ant?"

"A what?"

"An ANT! It would be a small spell for ants, wouldn't it? It would go through the key-hole?"

"I don't think we ought to."

"Why?"

"They are dangerous."

"You could watch with your insight, and turn me back again if it got too bad. Please turn me into something, or I shall go weak in the head."

"The ants are not our Norman ones, dear boy. They come from the Afric shore. They are belligerent."

"I don't know what belligerent is."

There was a long silence behind the door.

"Well," said Merlyn eventually. "It is far too soon in your education. But you would have had to do it sometime. Let me see. Are there two nests in that contraption?"

"There are two pairs of plates."

"Take a rush from the floor and lean it between the two nests, like a bridge. Have you done that?"

"Yes."

The place where he was seemed like a great field of boulders, with a flattened fortress at one end of it—between the glass plates. The fortress was entered by tunnels in the rock, and, over the entrance to each tunnel, there was a notice which said:

EVERYTHING NOT FORBIDDEN IS COMPULSORY

I may not be the biggest fan of the ant transformation, but I love that line.

It occurred to me that I have always seen myself as Wart and my brother, Phil, as Sir Kay. This just isn't the time for me to push on. Obviously, I will be back soon. (When I wrote this, I had just found out Phil had died in a bicycle accident. Reviewing this later, I felt that this absolutely needed to remain in the texts)

Oddly, I found this quote from our author, T. H. White comforting:

"Life is such unutterable hell, solely because it is sometimes beautiful. If we could only be miserable all the time, if there could be no such things as love or beauty or faith or hope, if I could be absolutely certain that my love would never be returned: how much more simple life would be. One could plod through the Siberian salt mines of existence without being bothered about happiness. Unfortunately the happiness is there. There is always the chance (about eight hundred and fifty to one) that another heart will come to mine. I can't help hoping, and keeping faith, and loving beauty. Quite frequently I am not so miserable as it would be wise to be."

T.H. White, *Ghostly, Grim and Gruesome*

"See," he said, and began stroking it from the head downwards: a touch which the poor creature tried to evade but soon accepted, in its ceaseless efforts to pour and pour away.

"Everybody kills them," said Merlyn indignantly. "Some by-our-lady fool once said that you could tell an adder because it had a V on its head, which stood for viper. It would take you five minutes to find the mark on an adder's head anyway, but these helpless beauties with their bright yellow black-bordered V get bashed to death in consequence. Here, catch hold of him."

The Wart took the serpent gingerly into his hands, taking care to hold it well away from the vent from which the white smell came. He had thought that snakes were slimy as well as dangerous, but this was not. It was as dry as a piece of living rope, and had, like rope, a pleasing texture to the fingers, on account of its scales. Every ounce of it was muscle, every plate of its belly was a strong and moving foot. He had held toads before, and they, the fat, philosophical warty creatures, had been a little clammy on account of their loose flesh. This

creature, on the other hand, was dry and delicately rough and liquid power. It was the same temperature as the ground in which it basked.

My issue, as always, with the 1958 version of our book is that it dropped out some of these brilliant sections. T. H. White's description of simply picking up a snake brings me deeply into the scene.

For those of you who know what is going to happen, Spoiler Alert!, when young Arthur pulls the Sword from the Stone, our snake friend here will sum history and strength training together as he urges Arthur along:

A Snake, slipping easily along the coping which bounded the holy earth, said, "Now then, Wart, if you were once able to walk with three hundred ribs at once, surely you can co-ordinate a few little muscles here and there? Make everything work together, as you have been learning to do ever since God let the amphibian crawl out of the sea. Fold your powers together, with the spirit of your mind, and it will come out like butter. Come along, homo sapiens, for we humble friends of yours are waiting here to cheer."

White's description of our ropey, muscled snake has always stood out to me:

Every ounce of it was muscle, every plate of its belly was a strong and moving foot.

It would be nice for me to be described like that...I'll pass on the doughnuts today!

We are in for one of the great transformations; Wart becomes a snake. The dreams and stories that we find are some of White's finest insights on history and humanity. As a child, my favorite scene was the fish transformation...as I age, I embrace our snake more and more.

"You asked to be turned into a snake once," said Merlyn.

"Do you still want that?"

"Yes, please."

"It isn't much of a life. I don't think you'll get anything very exciting to happen to you. This chap probably only eats about once a week or once a fortnight, and the rest of the time he dreams. Still, if I turned you into one, you might get him to talk. It won't be more than that."

"I should like it all the same."

"Well, it will be a rest after shooting griffins."

Merlyn loosed the grass snake, which immediately flashed off into the nettles. Then he exchanged a few words in Greek with an invisible gentleman called Aesculapius, and turned to the Wart.

He said, "I shall stay here for an hour or two, and perhaps I shall sit down against that tree and have a nap. Then I want you to come out to me when I call you. Good-by."

Merlyn and his naps. It always makes me smile when he references napping. There is a mention of Wart asking to be turned into snake earlier in our story, but that must be an episode that White didn't share with us.

You probably would know Aesculapius by his symbol, the snake entwined on the staff. It's the symbol for doctors and medicine traditionally. He was a Son of Apollo and you would recognize the names of two of his daughters, Hygiene and Panacea.

Wart is still recovering from the great fight with the Griffin and the snake will be a great teacher. When I was young, there was a lot of discussion about passive learning while sleeping. I'm not sure what ever came of it, but Wart is going this learn this art.

The Wart tried to say Good-by, but found that he was dumb. He looked quickly at his hands, but they were not there. Aesculapius had accepted him so gently that he had not noticed it, and he was lying on the ground.

"Pour off, then," said Merlyn. "Go and search for him in the nettles."

Some people say that snakes are deaf, and others that they deafen themselves in order to escape being charmed by music. The thoughtful adder, for instance, is said by many learned persons to lay one ear upon the ground and to stick the point of his tail into the other so that he cannot hear your music. Wart found that as a matter of fact snakes were not deaf. He had an ear anyway, which was conscious of deep roaring sounds that were approximate to the noises which he had learned as a boy. For instance, if somebody bangs on the side of the bath or if the pipes begin to gurgle when your ears are under water, you hear sounds which are different from those which would be heard in a normal position. But you would soon get accustomed to these sounds, and connect the roaring and bumbling with water-pipes, if you kept your head under water for long. In fact, although you heard a different kind of noise, you would still be hearing the pipes which human beings hear in the upper air. So the Wart could hear what Merlyn said, though it sounded very thin and high, and he therefore hoped to be able to talk to the snake. He darted out his tongue, which he used as a sort of feeler such as a long stick with which an explorer might probe the bogs in front of him, and he slid off into the nettles in search of his companion.

End quote.

J. K. Rowling use White's work as a bit of an example for her epic Harry Potter series. As I read through this, I am reminded of the scene in Goblet of Fire where Harry goes underwater in the bath to get the mer-people's hint.

White has this ability, it's clear here, to take a little trivial point (where or not snakes can hear) and expand it into an interesting piece. As I review this book basically paragraph by paragraph, I am beginning to see the "secret" of good writing.

Listen: we all "know" the plot. We all "know" Wart is Arthur and he becomes king. The delight is in the details. I've read dozens of Arthurian books and, usually, they are bad. They rush past the things like snake's hearing and rush to the finish line.

There is a lesson for writers and writing here: push the plot but color the background.

The other snake was lying flat on its face in a state of great agitation. It had managed to push itself into the very roots of the coarse grass among the nettles, for there is always a kind of empty layer between the green grass and the actual mud. The top green layer is supported on pillars of bleached roots, and it was in this secret acre-huge chamber, which covers every grass field, floored with mud and roofed with green, that the poor snake had sought concealment. It was lamenting to itself in a very sweet, cold simple voice and crying, "Alas, Alas."

It is difficult to explain the way in which snakes talk, except by this. Everybody knows that there are rays of light, the infra-red and the ultra-violet and those beyond them, in which ants, for instance, can see, and men cannot. Just so there are waves of sound higher than the bat's squeak, which Mozart once heard delivered by Lucrezia Ajugari in 1770, and lower than the distant thunder which pheasants hear (or is that they see the flash?) before man. It was in these profound melodious accents that the snake conversed.

"Who are you?" asked the snake, trembling, as Wart poured himself into the secret chamber beside it. "Did you see that human? It was an H. sapiens, I believe. I only just got away."

In the audiobook recordings, the narrator tends to squeak out the "Alas, Alas" quote and it does provide for more listening pleasure. Much like the talented Harry Potter book narrators, a bit of a change of pace in the reader's voice adds so much depth to the character.

When Wart became a fish, we were given a lovely explanation about how fish see. White's ability to describe the tiny details, as I have noted again and again, seems to take me by surprise every time. Modern writers, and I have to remind myself often that White wrote this before the Second World War, often miss the joy of fully painting a world for us. J. K. Rowling, of course, was not afraid to describe and add adventures to many minor characters that blended seamlessly into the greater narrative. Someone once told me that you could sum each Potter book in a page and I wondered out loud: "Now...why would you do that?"

White's snake is going to leave us with two of my favorite stories in the book and perhaps my second favorite quote ("Never Let Go" wins). As Wart and the snake begin their friendship, it starts off, as often with White, on shaky grounds.

It was in such a flutter that it did not wait for its question to be answered, but when on excitedly, "Oh, the horrid creature. Did you notice how it smelt? Well, I shan't go out again in a hurry, that I will say. Look what a mess I have got myself in. It was an H. Sapiens Barbatus, as far as I could see. They are quite common round here. You take my advice and lie close for a day or two. I just went out for a moment with the idea of getting a frog or two before hibernating, and it pounced upon me like a hedge-hog. I don't believe I was ever so frightened in my life. Do you think it would be best to hibernate at once?"

"I shouldn't worry," said the Wart. "That particular human is fond of snakes, as I happen to know."

"To eat?" stammered the serpent.

"No, no. He is friendly with them, and has some as pets. WE-he, I mean-that is, he spends most of the botany hours looking for frogs to feed them on. It's wonderful how few frogs there are, once you begin looking for them-only toads. And of course snakes don't eat toads."

"I ate a toad once," said the other, who was beginning to calm down. "It was a small one, you know, but it wasn't very nice. Still, I don't think I should like to be a pet of that creature's, however many frogs it caught. Do you happen to know its sex?"

"It was a male," said the Wart.

"H. sapiens barbatus male," repeated the snake, feeling safer now that he had got the subject classified. "And what is your name, my child?"

The Wart did not know what to answer, so he simply told the truth.

"It's a funny sort of name," said the snake doubtfully.

"What is yours?" asked the Wart.

"T. Natrrix."

"Does the T stand for anything?"

"Well, not Tommy," said the snake rather coolly, "if that's what you mean. It's Tropidonotus in my family always."

"I'm sorry."

End quote.

Our friend the grass snake is, well, a grass snake. The T. Natrrix is a European water snake that basically lives off of amphibians, but not toads as we discovered here, and can play dead and

even pretend to have a cobra's hood. They are harmless to humans but dinner for a number of birds and mammals.

I'm embarrassed to admit this after all of these years, but I always leaped over "barbatus" thinking that T. Natrix was calling Merlyn a barbarian. I was wrong and what it means actually makes the story better.

"Barbatus" means "bearded." That completely changes my thoughts on our timid friend, T. Natrix. He is probably, along with the Badger and Archimedes, my favorite animal characters in the book. Sure, Cavall always deserves a mention (Wart's favorite dog) but as we move through the dreams, you might appreciate Natrix more.

Natrix is good. He is just having a bit of a fright now and he will more than make up for his quick temper with our hero. As soon as Natrix realizes that Wart is "without family," he will warm up (as best snakes can) and help him in a wonderful way.

Keep that in mind, by the way: Wart's "lack of family" is part of the journey of the communal hero. Like Superman, Batman, Luke Skywalker, Moses, Jesus, Beowulf, Spiderman and others, the story of the orphan saving the community is part of the length and breadth of western civilization. It shouldn't be a surprise that the recent Wonder Woman movie gives us this same basic insight.

"If you don't mind my saying so," remarked the snake, "it seems to me that your education has been neglected. First you have a mother who calls you Wart, just as if you were one of those vulgar Bufonidae, and then you can't distinguish a T. natrix when you see him. Did you never have a mother?"

"As a matter of fact, I didn't.

"Oh, I am sorry," exclaimed the snake. "I hope I haven't hurt your feelings. Do you mean to say you never had anybody to teach you the Legends and Dreams and that?"

"Never."

"You poor newt. What do you do then when you hibernate?"

"I suppose I just go to sleep."

"And not dream?"

"No," said the Wart. "I don't think so. Not much."

End quote.

The "Bufonidae" are the toad family. Now, as we recall, T. Natrix doesn't eat toads and maybe there is a touch of frogism going on here.

T. Natrix softens his heart here for our friend, Wart. Of course, Wart had a mother and that is one of the great points of the later stories: since he doesn't know his mom, he makes an incestuous decision that will impact everyone's futures.

Usually, we talk about the question of fatherhood in epics. It's interesting, and refreshing, to see White discuss the issues with not having a mom. T. Natrix becomes a bit of a hero to me: welcoming the outcast and teaching him some life lessons.

I think that is what we are supposed to do.

The snake dreams and the upcoming owl's dreams are two of my favorite sections in the book.

It turned out that T. natrix was an affectionate and tender-hearted creature, for it now shed a small, clear tear-through its nose-and exclaimed indignantly, "What a shame? Fancy the poor little reptile crawling into its lonely hole for all those months with not a mother to remember, and not a single Dream to keep it company. I suppose they haven't even taught you History?"

"I know some history," said the Wart doubtfully. "About Alexander the Great, and that."

"Some trashy modern stuff, no doubt," said the snake. "How in earth you get through the winter I don't know. Did anybody tell you about Atlantosaurus immanis and Ceratorsaurus nasicornis?"

"I don't think so."

"Well, I don't know what to say."

"Couldn't you tell me about them yourself?"

"It certainly seems the kindest thing to do," replied the snake, "and, by Aesculapius, I will do it, too, if it takes me all the afternoon. Why, I should hardly be able to sleep the whole winter, thinking of you shivering in that hole with nothing to muse about."

"It would be very kind of you if you would."

"And I will," said the gentle reptile. "I will teach you the sort of thing that all snakes revolve in their small, slow, winter brains, what time the snow shuffles down outside, or for that matter in the summer too, as they snooze besides warm stones. Would you rather have History or Legends?"

"I think History," said the Wart.

End quote.

"History or Legends." I like that line. I have a Master's degree in History and spent much of my life teaching the subject, so I always liked Wart's choice here. One of the things I always spiced more courses in history with was the legends of each nation. There is always "truth" in legends and stories...and even fairy tales.

Of course, finding the "history" of King Arthur is always an issue. Last year, I took a King Arthur course and I found, once again, that discovering the "truth" about Arthur is always an issue.

And, it doesn't matter. I think that the Harry Potters and Warts often teach more truths than the history books...if those can be trusted. Thomas Cahill begins his book, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, by sharing a story about the King of the Lions. It's a nice little story that basically gives us the point that the winners write the histories and that is so often true.

Legends and Epics often open the door a bit more into the human heart and brain (and soul). Natrix here is more compassionate than many Homo Sapiens I know.

The dinosaurs mentioned are going to be part of our story here. "Immanis" will be recognized by most in the word, immense. Think "huge." This *Atlantosaurus* is now a contested dinosaur; did it exist or not is still up to debate (as I understand it). It is given the mantle of "dubious name."

Ouch!

Ceratosaurs were a family of horned dinosaurs. Again, as I understand it, they are now considered plant eaters or perhaps fish eaters, but they will have a different role in our story. The science and study of dinosaurs has completely flipped in my lifetime, so T. H. White earns a break here for any errors or omissions in dino-studies.

It's time to snooze. Until next time.

"History," murmured the snake, drawing a film over its eyes, because it could not close them. "History," it repeated softly. "Ah."

"I wonder," said the snake after a minute. Then it gave a gentle sigh and gave it up.

"You must forget about us," it said absently. "There is no History in me or you. We are individuals too small for our great sea to care for. That is why I don't have any special name, but only T. natrix like all my forefathers before me. There is a little history in T. natrix, but none in me."

It stopped, baffled by its own feelings, and then began again in its slow voice.

"There is one thing which all we snake remember, child. Except for two people, we are the oldest in the world. Look at that ridiculous H. sapiens barbatus which gave me such a fright

just now. It was born when? Ten or twenty thousand years ago. What do the tens and twenties matters? The earth cooled. The sea covered it..."

End quote.

We are falling asleep here. Soon, Wart will be deeply asleep and he will have a hard time waking up.

"Baffled by its own feelings." It's important to read this carefully. T. natrix is teaching Wart a life lesson about humanity's exaggerated vision of self. "The bearded human," Merlyn, is part of this young pack.

White straddles the fence on Genesis One's vision of creation and evolution. We will find both here as we continue along. As a scripture scholar, I have never had an issue with evolution and the way was paved by Saint Augustine.

T. natrix is going to give us a quick vision of the history of the world while also reminding Wart of the brief role of humans.

I love this line: "There is a little history in T. natrix, but none in me." It such a humble statement. As we move into the snake's dreams, remember that this chapter as well as the upcoming chapter on the owl are often considered some of White's best writing.

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"There is one thing which all we snake remember, child. Except for two people, we are the oldest in the world. Look at that ridiculous H. sapiens barbatus which gave me such a fright just now. It was born when? Ten or twenty thousand years ago. What do the tens and twenties matters? The earth cooled. The sea covered it. It was a hundred million years ago that Life came to the Great Sea, and the fishes bred within it. They were the oldest people, the Fish. Their children climbed out of it and stood upon the bosky newts. The third people, who sprang from them, were the Reptiles, of which we are one. Think of those old faces of the world upon which T. natrix moved in the slime, and of the millions of years. Why, the birds which you see every day are our descendants: we are their parents, but can persist to live among with them."

“Do you mean that when you were born there were no birds or men?”

“No birds or men: no monkeys or reindeer or elephants or any such animals: only the amphibia and the reptiles and the fishes and the Mesozoic world.”

“That’s History,” added the snake thoughtfully. “One of those H. sapiens barbatus male might think of that next time he murders T. natrix for being a viper.”

“There is something strange about the Will of the Sea. It is bound up with the history of my family. Did you hear the story of H. sapiens armatus georgius sanctus?”

“I don’t think I did,” said the Wart.

End quote.

“The Will of the Sea” still confounds me just a bit. I’ve searched for what our friend T is talking about here and I am just stumped a bit. Further reading might make it clearer, but this is another one of those questions I have for White.

The Mesozoic Age is often called, at least when I was young, the Age of Reptiles. It is also referred to as the Age of Conifers; a phrase I have never ever once used in my life. Most readers would know the Mesozoic’s famed Jurassic period with the great age of dinosaurs, the books by Michael Crichton’s Jurassic World books (Jurassic Park and Lost World...infinity better than the movie series) and the Hollywood movies and Flintstone cartoons that wildly get the history wrong.

Years ago, I addressed the issue of putting dinosaurs into human history:

A friend of mine has this book, ‘The Great Dinosaur Mystery and the Bible.’ The point of this book, basically, is that dinosaurs existed in the Garden of Eden, most were wiped out in the Flood, yet others survived and we find their stories in the legends of Saint George, Loch Ness, and, though the author doesn’t mention it, the last great fight of Beowulf. The author of the book found in ‘The History’ of Herodotus an interesting tidbit: In ancient Egypt, flying snake-like reptiles were described near Buto; the author contends that these ‘sound amazingly like the small Rhamphorhynchus.’ (For proper pronunciation, ask a five-year old.)

Once again, I have a liberal education, a Catholic worldview. So, I walked over to my bookshelves, opened my well highlighted and underlined copy of Herodotus and started reading ‘The History.’ Again. The author of the dinosaur book was right! Herodotus states that, as ‘the story goes,’ great numbers of these snakes fly from Arabia to Egypt.

There is more, of course. Lest the faint-hearted reader worry, these snakes are destroyed each year by large flocks of Ibises, crane-like birds who act as the Royal Air Force alone against the flying lizards of the Luftwaffe. Herodotus also mentions the sacred phoenix, a bird that lives for 500 years, after properly burying its parent. He also gives high praise to the mouse. It seems

that a despised monarch named Sethos defeated the Assyrians because a mouse army ate the bowstrings, quivers and thongs of the enemy the evening before battle.

End quote.

I recently picked up Herodotus again after reading "Travels with Herodotus" by Ryszard Kapuściński. The author reminds us repeatedly that Herodotus always explains that he "heard this" or was "told that" in each and every one of his reports. When he sees or witnesses something, he rings the bell of clarity and truth.

White's summary of evolution here is pretty good. I haven't kept up on evolution and dinosaur studies in a long time, but this explanation by White seems close enough for me.

Most readers, by the way, pick up "**H. sapiens armatus georgius sanctus**" as being St. George the Dragon Slayer. Shakespeare (Henry V) reminds us that St. George was very real to his viewing audience in Henry V: "The game's afoot: follow your spirit, and upon this charge cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!'" My Sherlock Holmes' fans will catch a favorite phrase in the first three words here, too.

It's time to discover why all history is sad.

"Once, very long ago, when even T. natrix was young and hopeful, there were two families called Atlantosaurus immanis and Ceratosaurus nasicornis. Atlantosaurus was a hundred and fifteen feet long. He had not many brains, although I did hear once that he had something like an extra brain at the other end of him, to take care of his tail, and he lived by browsing on the trees. He was timid, ruminant and harmless, except to the tree-frogs which he munched by mistake among the boughs. He lived very long and thought all the time, so that, although he did not think very well, he had generally thought a good deal by the end of it. So far as I can remember, he had solved the problem of being a giant, without breaking on account of his own weighty height of twenty feet, by having his bones hollow. The birds do that too, you know, for other reasons. However, perhaps I am muddling him up with another the Dinosauria.

"Ceratosaurus nasicornis was quite small. He was only seventeen feet long. But he had teeth, great, crushing and tearing teeth, which fitted into each other so badly that he leaped always with his slaughterous mouth half open, in a grin of terror. He leaped like a kangaroo, a death-dealing kangaroo, and he generally leaped upon poor Atlantosaurus immanis. He had a horn upon his nose, like a rhinoceros, with which he could rip and opening in that big and trundling old body, and his clashing teeth could meet in the flesh as in ripe fruit and tear it out in mouthfuls by the actions of his muscular neck. What is more terrible, he leaped in packs."
End quote.

Certainly, the books and movies of Jurassic Park have made these images fairly real in most of our minds. I can see the first movie in my mind and the toe tapping raptor in the kitchen is just about a perfect image of killing machine.

White mentions the birds here. He is a few decades too early to know that, basically, the birds are the dinosaurs.

I love this line:

He lived very long and thought all the time, so that, although he did not think very well, he had generally thought a good deal by the end of it.

I wrote this piece for the essays in danjohnworkouts.com:

In the 1940s, Raymond Catell came up with an amazing insight into how people think. Basically, he summarized intelligence into two kinds:

Fluid intelligence is the skill to reason, analyze, and solve unforeseen problems. Whether this is right or not, but some people would say this is the big engine of intelligence. Innovators seem to have this in abundance. I often use this quote from Warren Buffet to explain this:

“First come the innovators, who see opportunities that others don’t and champion new ideas that create genuine value. Then come the imitators, who copy what the innovators have done. Sometimes they improve on the original idea; often they tarnish it. Last come the idiots, whose avarice undermines the very innovations they are trying to exploit.”

Crystallized intelligence is the skill to use the accumulated knowledge of humankind. Some of us are libraries of knowledge (and wisdom) and easily know how to use these volumes. Crystallized intelligence tends to expand through life from both personal and community experiences. When we all lean in when grandpa talks, we are gathering crystallized intelligence.

Fluid and crystallized intelligence are important resources for walking through life. **Let me add one more thing: Warrior Thinking and King (Queen) Thinking.**

While attaining my first master’s degree, I did a deep dive into Beowulf, the epic poem, under the guidance of two professors, Norm Jones and Robert Cole. I went through every line looking for patterns; finally, one leaped out to me.

Speeches.

When Warriors speak, they only speak in the pure present. The past doesn’t matter and there may not be a future. Athletes, young children, and artists tend to do this: for athletes and artists you are often judged simply on your last performance.

Kings and Queens tend to speak differently, they discuss the past and what brought us here to the present and ideally how what we do here will impact the future. Lincoln’s Gettysburg

Address is the perfect example of this concept. Let's combine these concepts into a quadrant and discuss them.

	Warrior Thinking	King Thinking
Fluid Intelligence	Reaction to something new	Good coaching
Crystallized Intelligence	Yoda and the Martial Arts	Mentoring

Fluid Intelligence and Warrior Thinking

We were joking the other day that no one ever got “butt-dialed” with a rotary phone. If you could go back in time, *probably never a good idea*, explaining to your great-grandparents about “butt dialing” would probably be something worthy of sharing on social media...I mean video...wait, I mean, 8mm film. Wait...cave paintings?

Parents today have concerns that might not have been faced by any other generation. If your teen daughter strikes up a friendship with “my new bestest friend online and I want to go to Europe to meet her” is something no one ever said ever until now. By the way, I wouldn't let her go and I would alert the authorities.

When faced with novel problems, we still need to find answers. I often complain about how certain people are masters at finding problems; I want people who solve them.

In sports, things change radically now with the advent of GPS measurements, computers and video on the sidelines and massive databases with every possible output. Computer guys have radically changed professional baseball and basketball by showing the teams that conventional wisdom is often wrong in the face of facts.

In American football, there is a certain madness in the modern offense that doesn't huddle, doesn't pause, and throws the ball everywhere and anywhere on every play. The coaching staff can't take a timeout for every new trick formation nor can they prepare for literally everything.

This is the time for athletes, playing in the “now,” the pure present, need to make rapid, fluid decisions and...and in the time it took for me to type this the play started and the athletes made the play. It's that fast.

Certainly, it helps to have principles. For example, Bear Bryant used to try to keep his defenders working like spokes on a bicycle; everyone is connected to a central hub. This can be taught by “rules” as simple as “One can hurt me, two can kill me” or “He goes/I stay” or whatever summarizes fifty pages of a playbook in one quick phrase. But something new always shows up. Something different. Something strange. Something that breaks the rules.

Adapt. Decide. Go.

That's fluid intelligence and Warrior Thinking...adapt, decide, go.

Crystalized Intelligence and Warrior Thinking

In 1977, I sat in Gregor Winslow's Audi Fox as we pulled up to the speaker at the Drive-In Theater. We pulled out the lawn chairs and got ready for a new film to begin: Star Wars

Now, this is the original one and along with The Empire Strikes Back changed not only movie watching (along with Jaws, these became the summer blockbuster) but it changed the conversation for many people. Suddenly, people were talking a bit different:

"That is why you fail."

"Adventure. Excitement. A Jedi craves not these things."

"Do. Or do not. There is no try."

You might recognize the words of Master Yoda here. **The Jedi Knights, as well as most Martial Arts traditions, have generations of traditions that help shape the vision of the modern practitioner.** Much like religions, religion comes from the root "link back," these traditions link back to their founder's vision and keep the current generations true to these foundations.

This knowledge is brick and mortar: crystallized knowledge. But the actions must be in the now...no thinking, no judging, just action. Both Yoda and the Martial Arts masters would agree that we do.

Or we do not. There is no try.

True mastery is so simple, so elegant that we might miss what we see. There is a wonderful story by Ryszard Kapuscinski about watching the discus throwing great, Edmund Piatowski, during a practice session. Ryszard sits down next to a local man in a sweater. The local tells him that he has heard that today Edmund might break the world record. Piatowski throws and throws. Finally, his coach announces to all gathered that, indeed, one traveled over the world record. The local laments that he expected to see something more...something perhaps exciting.

When the foundations are set firmly and the effort is effortless, the audience often misses the excellence. It's too simple. It's too smooth. But the performance is lovely. We expect more and the "more" comes from less.

But the audience wants excitement.

Excitement. A Jedi craves not these things.

Fluid Intelligence and King/Queen Thinking

Change is hard. Especially as you age.

Yet, change also brings safety, health, wonder, and comfort. Clean drinking water, by itself, might be responsible for us being able to read this little point. Doctors fought against washing their hands before surgery...even after autopsies...for a long time. They didn't want change.

If you want to get into the Wisdom Business, that lucrative field where you give advice that no one takes but, later, wishes they did, you need to be able to embrace change....appropriately.

Years ago, a young man named Dick Fosbury came up with a very different method of high jumping. He battled his coaches daily to allow him to jump his way. The track and field world found him to be more of a circus sideshow than an actual athlete. His gold medal at the Olympics changed a few minds, but most still fought back against his method.

Today, literally every high jumper in the world embraces his technique. In an event that strains the human body against the most basic of Newton's laws and gravity, this technique has destroyed old marks using other methods.

My college coach, [Ralph Maughan](#), was a master of fluid intelligence and Kingly vision. When one of his athletes came up to him on a Monday and told him that he had added twenty feet to his best discus throw by having a "wide leg," Coach brought him out to the ring and had him demonstrate.

In minutes, Coach Maughan rethought and refocused his coaching on this idea. In track and field, we constantly face the challenge of faster and farther. It's been true since Ulysses won the discus throw in The Odyssey. Our "novel" problem, faster and farther, is a permanent challenge.

Coach had the skill to see that what happened in the past was good, but THIS is better. And, years later, he taught me this refinement.

Change is hard. Change is often better.

Unless it is not.

By keeping an eye on the lessons of the past, wisdom allows us to see how this new development may help us down the line. That's thinking like a King or Queen.

Crystalized Intelligence and King/Queen Thinking

Back in the 1980s, PBS offered us a show, *The Power of Myth*, with Bill Moyers interviewing Joseph Campbell. Moyers would ask a question and Campbell would sweep off into a dozen legends, myths and stories connecting the inner world with the self and the universe.

It became “Must See TV” before the invention of the word.

For most of human history, we had these wonderful people who could sit near the fire and tell the tales of what it means to be “us.” These storytellers reached deep into our collective history and extolled the virtues and values of our shared community and reminded us of “who we are.”

My mother’s most damaging condemnation of me happened after a football game where I picked up several personal foul penalties. She simply told me: “That’s not who we are.”

Telemachus’s teacher, Mentor, was so truthful and truth-seeking (with the help of the gods) that his name continues down to us as the wise elder who keeps us on the path. T. H. White’s Merlyn instructs young Arthur in the ways of the world through both experience and wise counsel.

We need both: experience and wise counsel. We must be allowed to make mistakes and enjoy success. We need those brick and mortar experiences from breaking a limb climbing to working together in team to cement our adult life. Our stories soon mix with the storyteller’s adventures and **we become what our community hoped for: a reasonable member able to help when needed and help when it is simply the right thing to do.**

Our legacies are the foundations of a future we probably will never see. Perhaps we shouldn’t see it; it’s up to the future storytellers to tell our stories without our meddling. I think the need for this deep wisdom of our collective wisdom is instinctive: **it is part of what make us human and it is the glue that makes humanity.**

End Article.

I think thinking is a good thing.

“Ceratopsaurus nasicornis was at war with Atlantosaurus immanis, in that strange war which the Spirit of the Waters wills, the war of competition and evolution which makes the trees fight upwards for the sun on the Amazon, and in the course of which, for the boon of life, many of my cousins have been content to sacrifice the benefits of limbs and teeth and eyesight.

“Ceratosaurus was savage and aggressive, Atlantosaurus timid and old. Their combat lasted for as many centuries as will be needed by H. sapiens also, in which to destroy himself. At the end of that time it was the defender who triumphed. The ferocious Kangaroo had dealt death on every side, had decimated his adversaries and fed upon their carcasses, but carcasses cannot continue their species, and in the end the Kangaroos had consumed the very flesh on which they lived. Too remorseless for the Spirit of Waters, too bloodthirsty for the hierarchy of progressive victims, the last Ceratosaurus roamed the thick-leaved jungles in a vain search for the food which could satisfy his fathers.

“The last Atlantosaurus thrust her forty-foot neck out of the jungle in which she had been hiding, and surveyed the emaciated corpse of her starved persecutor. She had preserved her life, as the sensible wood pigeon does, by specializing in escape. She had learned to flee, to hide, to stand still, to control her scent, to conceal herself in waters. By humility she had survived her enemy, who had slain her own husband; and now she carried the children of the latter inside her, the last of the victorious race. They would be born in a few years.

“H. sapiens had come meanwhile. He also had suffered from the terror of the Kangaroo. In order to protect himself from its rapine, he had developed a sub-class called H. sapiens armatus, a class which was concealed in metal scales and carried a lance by means of which it defended itself against the Dinosauria. This sub-class had perfected an order called H. sapiens armatus georgius sanctus, which was sufficiently unobservant to classify all the Dinosaurs together as its enemies.

“Atlantosaurus thrust out her neck, and thought with triumph of her unborn children. She had never killed in her life, and those, the future, would perpetuate a vegetarian race. She heard the clank of H. sapiens armatus georgius sanctus, and turned the comely reptile head towards him in her kindly curiosity.”

“Go on,” said the Wart.

“He killed her, of course,” concluded the serpent with sudden brevity, turning its own head away. “She was a reptile of my race.”

End quote.

I’m not sure a sentence ever impacted me more than “He killed her, of course.” It still just saddens me. As I look around and see people not just ignoring the destruction of our planet but actively making it worse, I feel like T. natrix.

In Stephen King’s book “On Writing,” he has a section on how he came up with the idea of Carrie that wounded my heart. I would put these two readings as the top of my list if I was the prosecution against humanity. White does something like this in The Book of Merlyn.

So, just for a moment, it is time to be sad.

Next time, Wart discovers that all of history is sad.

“He killed her, of course,” concluded the serpent with sudden brevity, turning its own head away. “She was a reptile of my race.”

“I am sorry,” said the Wart. “I don’t know what to say.”

“There is nothing, dear,” said the patient serpent, “that you can say. Perhaps I had better tell you a Legend or Dream, to change the subject.”

The Wart said, “I don’t think I want to hear it, if it is sad.”

“There is nothing sad,” said the other, “except History. All these things are only something to muse upon while you are hibernating.”

“Is it a good thing to muse?”

“Well, it passes the time. Even H. sapiens has museums, you know: and as far as that goes, he has put the chalky bones of Atlantosaurus in many of them, along with the scales of georgius sanctus.”

“If you knew a fairly cheerful Legend,” said the Wart, “I think I could bear to hear that.”

“Ridiculous newt,” said T. natrix affectionately-for Newt seemed to be one of his pet words. “I suppose I shall have to tell you a Legend of my dangerous cousins, for whom I suffer.”

“Is it cheerful?”

“Well, it just goes on to the end, you know, and then it stops-as Legends do.”

End quote.

“Well, it just goes on to the end, you know, and then it stops-as Legends do.”

I have always loved this section. Of course, if you know your literature, especially children’s classics, you know a line something like this:

“Begin at the beginning,” the King said, very gravely, “and go on till you come to the end: then stop.”

— Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

Go. Until you come to the end. That’s not only good storytelling; it’s a nice way to look at life.

“Then stop.” It’s a rare week, and last night I got notice of another friend’s death, that I don’t see, read or get a call that one of my friends or competitors (often friends!) died. Almost always

with former athletes, the news is too soon. Some of us make choices that are tough on longevity but good for short-term performance.

And, one day, we all stop. I keep pushing ahead on my story but I also know the end is probably nearer than farther.

I have used the quote, "There is nothing sad," said the other, "except History" as part of my teaching tools since the day I first read this sentence. It is profound...and something we should dream on.

Until next time.

"Tell it," said the Wart.

"This Legend," said the snake in its sing-song voice, after a preparatory cough, comes from Burma, a place of which you have probably never heard."

"Once upon a time there was only one poisonous serpent in the world, and this was the python. As you know, he is no longer venomous, and the story of how he lost his venom is an interesting one. In those days he was perfectly white. He happened to make the acquaintance of the wife of a human being, whose name was Aunt Eu, and in course of a time they fell in love with each other. Aunt Eu left her husband and went off to live with the python, whose name was P. reticulatus. She was in some ways an old-fashioned kind of person, the kind which delights in making carpet-slippers for curates among the humans, and she soon set about weaving a most handsome and closely woven skin for her python. It was an ornamental affair, what with black lozenges and yellow dots, and here and there at regular intervals cubes and cross-stiches of amber, such as the humans use in rug-making or working samplers. P. reticulatus was pleased with it, and wear it always, so that now he is not white any more.

"At this time the python was interested in making experiments with his unique venom. Since he was the only poisonous snake, he naturally contained within himself all the poison which is nowadays spread out among the snakes. So concentrated was this terrible poison, therefore, that he could a man, however far away he was, simply by biting any footprint which the man had happened to leave on the ground. P. reticulatus was naturally proud of this accomplishment, but he could never get ocular proof of it. He could not be there to see the man die, and at the same time three or four miles away to bite his footprint. Yet he wanted to establish the truth of the experiment.

"One day he decided that he would have to rely on evidence. He persuaded a crow that was a friend of his to go off to a village of the Karens-this was the name of the men in this district-and to watch and see if the man did die while he was biting the footprint.

"Now the Karens had a curious habit of celebrating a death or a funeral, not by tears and lamentations, but by laughing, singing, dancing, jumping and beating on drums. When the

crow arrived to watch events from a tree, and after the man had died, the Karens began to perform their usual rites in front of the hut in which he lay stricken. So the crow, after looking on for some time, returned to the python, and reported that, so far from slaying by the venom of his bit, it had only the effect of causing extreme joy to the human beings and of transporting them into the seventh heaven. The python was so furious that he climbed up to the very top of a tree and sicked up every ounce of his useless poison.

“Of course, the poison had to fall on something. Although the python had lost his power to sting, the tree itself became venomous-and its juice is used to this day to poison arrows-while several creatures which happened to be underneath it received a fair due. The Cobra, the Water Snake and the Frog were among them.

“Now Aunt Eu naturally had a soft spot for her fellow mortals, and, when it was discovered that the poison was venomous after all, she upbraided P. reticulatus for spreading the power to slay among so many beings. P. reticulatus who was grateful for his woven coat, felt remorse for what he had done, and hurried off to see how he could improve matters. He explained the nature of poison to all the creatures which had received it, and asked them to promise that their use of it should not be tyrannical.

“The Cobra agreed to the remarks of the python, and said, “If there be transgressions so as to dazzle my eyes, to make my tears fall seven times in one day, I will bite, but only then.” So said most of the kindlier creatures. But the Water Snake and the sill Frog said that they did not see what all this had to do with the python, and that they intended, for their part, to bite whenever they felt like it. The python immediately set upon them, chased them into the water, and there, of course, the poison was dissolved and washed away.”

End quote.

This is an interesting, but long story. Frankly, I never full caught the meaning of what was happening here, so I probably need to dream about it when I hibernate.

Oddly, “reticulatus” doesn’t mean what all I always assumed. I simply thought, wrongly, that the word had something to do with squeezing. Actually, it means “small net” and it relates to the pattern of the skin of the snake. Eu’s knitting gives us the name of the snake.

I need to stop assuming.

And, if you day needs to be ruined, look up the stories of python’s eating humans. You have been warned.

The Wart waited to see if there was any more of this story, but there was not. The voice of T. natrix had been getting slower and sleepier towards the end of it, for the afternoon was advancing and the wind was beginning to fall cold. The sing-song had seemed to get more and more wrapped up in its subject, if you can follow the idea, until it seemed that the story was telling itself while the serpent only drowsed-though it was not possible to tell whether he was really asleep, because snakes have no eyelids to close.

“Thank you,” said the Wart, “I think that was a good story.”

“Dream about it,” whispered T. natrix sleepily, “while you hibernate.”

“I will.”

“Good night,” said the snake.

“Good night.”

The funny thing was that the Wart really did feel sleepy. Whether it was the voice of the snake, or the cold, or the influence of the story, in two minutes he was dreaming himself, in a reptilian dream. He was old, as old as the veins of the earth, which were serpents like him, and Aesculapius with a beard as white as glaciers was lulling him to sleep. He was teaching him wisdom, ancient wisdom, by which the old snakes can walk with three hundred feet at once upon the same world in which their grandchildren the birds have learned to fly; he was singing to him the song of all the Waters:

**In the great sea the stars swing over
The eternal whirlpool flows.
Rest, rest, wild head, in the old bosom
Which neither feels nor knows.
She only rocks us, cradled in heaven,
The reptile and the rose.
Here waters which bore us will receive us.
Good night and sweet repose.**

**In the end it took Merlyn twenty shouts, in his high human voice, to wake the sleeping serpent up in time for tea.
End quote and End chapter.**

When I first read the 1938 version, if you recall I started with a later edition that (I think this is true...it was almost fifty years ago) skipped this chapter, that last line drifted over me as a thing of beauty. I wrote a poem years ago for a class:

The foam stood up and reached for me
And made the sea like milk for me.

My mother pulled me out in time to write this poem.

When I was about ten, I got caught in the heavy undertow in the Pacifica beaches and mom came in, she couldn't swim, and grabbed me and pulled me out. I was far too brave for the

Pacific Ocean and the conditions. After my mom died, I wrote a series of poems for a collection, long lost, and two of them won awards in poetry contests.

In the end it took Merlyn twenty shouts, in his high human voice, to wake the sleeping serpent up in time for tea.

I just think this line is lovely. White's simple contrast of the voice of the reptile and the "high human voice" is just great reading. "The Reptile and the Rose" is also a great name for a pub, in case anyone wants an investment idea.

I've been retyping this chapter for a long time. I've "heard" that rewriting great authors helps one's own writing; I certainly hope this is true. I have spent hours retyping *The Sword in the Stone* and I am constantly amazed by the care White puts into the small details that paint the landscape of this book.

He's been teaching me wisdom, ancient wisdom.

In the autumn everybody was preparing for the winter. At night they spent the time rescuing Daddy-long-legs from their candles and rushlights. In the daytime the cows were turned into the high stubble and weeds which had been left by the harvest sickles. The pigs were driven into the purlieus of the forest, where boys beat the trees to supply them with acorns. Everybody was at a different job. From the granary there proceeded an invariable thumping of flails; in the strip fields the slow and enormously heavy wooden ploughs sailed up and down for the rye and the wheat, while the sowers swung rhythmically along, with their hoffers round their necks, casting right hand for left foot and vice versa. Foraging parties came lumbering in with their spike-wheeled carts full of bracken, remarking wisely that they must:

**Get whome with ee breakes ere all summer be gone
For tethered up cattle to sit down upon,**

while others dragged in timber for the castle fires. The forest rang in the sharp air with the sound of beetle and wedge.

Everybody was happy. The Saxons were slaves to their Norman masters if you chose to look at it in one way—but, if you chose to look at it in another, they were the same farm labourers who get along on too few shillings a week today. Only neither the villein nor the farm labourer starved, when the master was a man like Sir Ector. It has never been an economic proposition for an owner of cattle to starve his cows, so why should an owner of slaves starve them? The truth is that even nowadays the farm labourer accepts so little money because he does not have to throw his soul in with the bargain—as he would have to do in a town—and the same freedom of spirit has obtained in the country since the earliest times. The villeins were labourers. They lived in the same one-roomed hut with their families, few chickens, litter of pigs, or with a cow possibly called Crumbocke—most dreadful and insanitary! But

they liked it. They were healthy, free of an air with no factory smoke in it, and, which was most of all to them, their heart's interest was bound up with their skill in labour. They knew that Sir Ector was proud of them. They were more valuable to him than his cattle even, and, as he valued his cattle more than anything else except his children, this was saying a good deal. He walked and worked among his villagers, thought of their welfare, and could tell the good workman from the bad. He was the eternal farmer, in fact—one of those people who seem to be employing labour at so many shillings a week, but who are actually paying half as much again in voluntary overtime, providing a cottage free, and possibly making an extra present of milk and eggs and home-brewed beer into the bargain.

Young writers can learn a lot from White. He is never afraid of painting a picture. I know most of the terms in this selection from our studies of the Domesday Book of the late eleventh century (and, yes, I spelled it correctly). There were so many names connected to the farmers and their relationship to the Lords, a term that should probably be dropped when referring to people.

White does a wonderful job describing the final work of the growing season. Like our friends in the Game of Thrones, these people know that “Winter is Coming.” They need food for both people and livestock as well as enough for the animals to lay down on...and eliminate on.

White does a nice job explaining the complicated relationship between the classes here. Sometimes, like in Braveheart, the lines are far too distinct. In Quentin Tarantino's Django Unchained, we get some images of this complex relationship. One of things I learned in an exhaustive year-long study of World War II offered at Utah State University: history is “messy.”

After the more philosophical chapter with T. matrix, we are entering into another adventure. We will be revisiting with some old friends here and there will be an interesting blend of fun and sadness. We will also learn to respect the rabbit more. Until then.

Before we get too far, let's go back to the second paragraph of this book. I warned you a few thousand words back that the first two paragraphs of the book set up the story:

In the afternoons the programme was: Mondays and Fridays, tilting and horsemanship; Tuesdays, hawking; Wednesdays, fencing; Thursdays, archery; Saturdays, the theory of chivalry, with the proper measures to be blown on all occasions, terminology of the chase and hunting etiquette. If you did the wrong thing at the mort or the undoing, for instance, you were bent over the body of the dead beast and smacked with the flat side of a sword. This was called being bladed. It was horseplay, a sort of joke like being shaved when crossing the line. Kay was not bladed, although he often went wrong.”

In this new story, being “bladed” becomes the focus of our story.

Let's pick up:

In other parts of Gramarye, of course, there did exist wicked and despotic masters—feudal gangsters whom it was to be King Arthur's destiny to chasten—but the evil was in the bad people who abused it, not in the feudal system.

Sir Ector was moving through these activities with a brow of thunder. When an old lady who was sitting in a hedge by one of the strips of wheat, to scare away the rooks and pigeons, suddenly rose up beside him with an unearthly screech, he jumped nearly a foot in the air. He was in a nervous condition.

"Dang it," said Sir Ector. Then, considering the subject more attentively, he added in a loud, indignant voice, "Splendour of God!" He took the letter out of his pocket and read it again.

**The Overlord of The Castle of Forest Sauvage was more than a farmer. He was a military captain, who was ready to organize and lead the defence of his estate against the gangsters, and he was a sportsman who sometimes took a day's joustin' when he could spare the time. But he was not only these. Sir Ector was an M.F.H.—or rather a Master of stag and other hounds—and he hunted his own pack himself. Clumsy, Trowneer, Phoebe, Colle, Gerland, Talbot, Luath, Luffra, Apollon, Orthros, Bran, Gelert, Bounce, Boy, Lion, Bungey, Toby, Diamond and Cavall were not pet dogs. They were the Forest Sauvage Hounds, no subscription, two days a week, huntsman the Master.
End quote.**

Oddly, Gramarye comes to us today as “Book of Spells.” It would be a patchwork of spells and woodcraft and fairy dust that would be recognizable to the fans of the Harry Potter films. White's point that feudalism was only evil when dealing with evil people reminds me of the issues with capitalism...and socialism...and...

Evil people do evil things. Boorish, rude, inept and rich are a combination for horrid behaviors. Arthur, as King, will preach “Might FOR Right,” but history tends to be full of “Might IS Right” thinkers.

I agree with Wart and I always have. I believe it is the role of the strong to defend the rights of others. I always have. I beg that I always will.

This is Ector's best chapter, save one of the very last scenes. He doesn't come off as a grandiose buffoon as he did in hay-making, nor is he slowly getting drunk. He is a kind man of action throughout here. White lays out his resume for us here and we are about to read the letter that keeps him deeply concerned.

Next time, we are off to the hunts!

This is what the letter said, if we translate it from Latin:

The King to Sir Ector, etc.

We send you William Twyti, our huntsman, and his fellows to hunt in the Forest Sauvage with our boar-hounds (canibus nostris porkericis) in order that they may capture two or three boars. You are to cause the flesh they capture to be salted and kept in good condition, but the skins you are to cause to be bleached which they give you, as the said William shall tell you. And we command you to provide necessaries for them as long as they shall be with you by our command, and the cost, etc., shall be accounted, etc.

Witnessed at the Tower of London, 20 November, in the twelfth year of our reign.

UTHER PENDRAGON

12 Uther.

Now the forest belonged to the King, and he had every right to send his hounds to hunt in it. Also he maintained a number of hungry mouths—what with his court and his army—so that it was natural that he should want as many dead boars, bucks, roes, etc., to be salted down as possible.

He was in the right. This did not take away the fact that Sir Ector regarded the forest as his forest, and resented the intrusion of the royal hounds—as if his own would not do just as well! The King had only to send for a couple of boars and he would have been delighted to supply them himself. He feared that his coverts would be disturbed by a lot of wild royal retainers—never know what these city chaps will be up to next—and that the King's huntsman, this fellow Twyti, would sneer at his humble hunting establishment, unsettle the hunt servants and perhaps even try to interfere with his own kennel management. In fact, Sir Ector was shy. Then there was another thing. Where the devil were the royal hounds to be kept? Was he, Sir Ector, to turn his own hounds into the street, so as to put the King's hounds in his kennels? "Splendour of God!" repeated the unhappy master. It was as bad as paying tithes.

Sir Ector put the accursed letter in his pocket and stumped off the ploughing. The villeins, seeing him go, remarked cheerfully, "Our wold measter be on the gad again seemingly." End quote.

So, we are on the edge of a new adventure. There is nothing magical about our upcoming story, but there is a lot of danger. Not every character survives this story (Wart lives...in case I made you nervous).

Twyti is going to be an interesting character for us. His skill set is voluminous, but he loves are quite simple.

I learned a great lesson years ago. I've relayed it before, but my father had come down to see me compete at the Mount Sac Relays. As I was warming up, this huge person handed me my discus. It was the famous basketball player, Wilt Chamberlain.

My dad yelled over, "Good luck, Bum" and Wilt invited my father, perhaps 5 foot six on a good day, to hang out. Watching my dad stand next to Wilt is still a great memory.

They stood and talked for hours. After, I asked Dad about if he talked about basketball. Dad gave me a life lesson: "The last thing a guy like Wilt (they were on a first name basis by then) wants to talk about is basketball."

We learn this same lesson soon with Master Twyti. The huntsman doesn't care about your boar or deer story, but there is something that warms Twyti's heart.

Until next time.

It was a confounded piece of tyranny, that was what it was. It happened every year, but it was still that. He always solved the kennel problem in the same way, but it still worried him. He would have to invite his neighbours to the meet specially, to look as impressive as possible under the royal huntsman's eye, and this would mean sendin' messengers through the forest to Sir Grummore, etc. Then he would have to show sport. The King had written early, so that evidently he intended to send the fellow at the very beginnin' of the season. The season did not begin till the 25th of December. Probably the chap would insist on one of these damned Boxin' Day meets—all show-off and no business—with hundreds of foot people all hollerin' and headin' the boar and trampin' down the seeds and spoilin' sport generally. How the devil was he to know in November where the best boars would be on Boxin' Day? What with sounders and gorgeaunts and hogsteers, you never knew where you were. And another thing. A hound that was going to be used next summer for the proper Hart huntin' was always entered at Christmas to the boar. It was the very beginnin' of his eddication—which led up through hares and what-nots to its real quarry—and this meant that the fellow Twyti would be bringin' down a lot of raw puppies which would be nothin' but a plague to everybody. "Dang it!" said Sir Ector, and stamped upon a piece of mud.

He stood gloomily for a moment, watching his two boys trying to catch the last leaves in the chase. They had not gone out with that intention, and did not really, even in those distant days, believe that every leaf you caught would mean a happy month next year. Only, as the west wind tore the golden rags away, they looked fascinating and difficult to catch. For the mere sport of catching them, of shouting and laughing and feeling giddy as they looked up, and of darting about to trap the creatures, which were certainly alive in the cunning with which they slipped away, the two boys were prancing about like young fauns in the ruin of the year. Wart's shoulder was well again.

The only chap, reflected Sir Ector, who could be really useful in showin' the King's huntsman proper sport was that fellow Robin Hood. Robin Wood, they seemed to be callin' him now—some new-fangled idea, no doubt. But Wood or Hood, he was the chap to know where a fine tush was to be found. Been feastin' on the creatures for months now, he would not be surprised, even if they were out of season.

End quote.

Wild boars in groups are called “sounders;” that’s not what I thought, of course. It’s like a murder of crows or a pod of whales: if you missed the day for plurals back in the third grade, you might be lost forever. (Pride of lions, anyone?)

As most people know (I’m joking), a gorgeaunts is a boar in its second year and, logically, a hogsteer is a third-year boar. “Harts” are deer and our good friend, Sir Ector, quickly realized that to be successful, he would need a master of deer, goreaunts and hogsteer. He turns, wisely, to our old friend, Robin Wood (Hood).

Robin is a great character in this book. Most people don’t remember him (and the whole gang of Merry Men and Women) after they close the whole four books of *The Once and Future King*. Yet, he is a major character.

Just one small thing remember that Ector thinks that chasing “hares” is a key part of the eddication of a hunting dog. It’s a key to understanding both Robin and the king’s huntsman.

Until next week!

The only chap, reflected Sir Ector, who could be really useful in showin' the King's huntsman proper sport was that fellow Robin Hood. Robin Wood, they seemed to be callin' him now—some new-fangled idea, no doubt. But Wood or Hood, he was the chap to know where a fine tush was to be found. Been feastin' on the creatures for months now, he would not be surprised, even if they were out of season.

But you could hardly ask a fellow to hunt up a few beasts of venery for you, and then not invite him to the meet. While, if you did invite him to the meet, what would the King's huntsman and the neighbours say at havin' a partisan for a fellow guest? Not that this Robin Wood was not a good fellow: he was a good chap, and a good neighbour too. He had often tipped Sir Ector the wink when a raiding party was on its way from the Marches, and he never molested the knight or his farming in any way. What did it matter if he did chase himself a bit of venison now and then? There was four hundred square miles of forest, so they said, and enough for all. Leave well alone, that was Sir Ector's motto. But that did not alter the neighbours.

Another thing was the riot. It was all very well for the crack hunts in practically artificial forests like those at Windsor, where the King hunted, but it was a different thing in the Forest Sauvage. Suppose His Majesty's famous hounds were to go runnin' riot after a unicorn or

something? Everybody knew that you could never catch a unicorn without a young virgin for bait (in which case the unicorn meekly laid its white head and mother-of-pearl horn in her lap) and so the puppies would go chargin' off into the forest for leagues and leagues, and never catch it, and get lost, and then what would Sir Ector say to his sovereign? It was not only unicorns. There was the Beast Glatisant that everybody had heard so much about. If you had the head of a serpent, the body of a leopard, the haunches of a lion, and were footed like a hart, and especially if you made a noise like thirty couple of hounds questin', it stood to reason that you would account for an excessive number of royal puppies before they pulled you down. Serve them right too. And what would King Pellinore say if Master William Twyti did succeed in killing his beast? Then there were the small dragons which lived under stones and hissed like kettles—dangerous varmints, very. Or suppose they were to come across one of the really big dragons? Suppose they was to run into a griffin?

Sir Ector considered the prospect moodily for some time, then began to feel better. It would be a jolly good thing, he concluded, if Master Twyti and his beastly dogs did meet the Questing Beast, yes, and get eaten up by it too, every one.

Cheered by this vision, he turned round at the edge of the ploughing and stumped off home.
End quote.

“Cheered by this vision.” Sir Ector is not a cardboard cutout character. He is deep and White develops him so well throughout the book. In the later books of *The Once and Future King*, we won't really see him much and his wisdom and depth won't be reflected in King Arthur's life. Of course, Arthur also loses Merlyn, until *The Book of Merlyn* IF you count that as part of the series, so Arthur has to go it alone a lot.

Ector sees the Forest as it should be: Savage. It occupies a lot of things:

- Robin Wood
- Unicorns
- Beast Glatisant (Questing Beast)
- Small Dragons
- Big Dragons
- Griffins

We, the readers, also know there are witches, “the good people,” giants and all varieties of dangerous real creatures. It's funny to add “real” here as there are places in the wild in the world where many of us would not survive long alone. Even well-trained boys like Wart and Kay have been in constant danger in the areas around the castle.

Yes, it makes for thrilling reading, but they are facing death constantly.

We are coming up to some of White's best comical writing but, as always, he comes tragedy close at hand.

Until next time.

Sir Ector considered the prospect moodily for some time, then began to feel better. It would be a jolly good thing, he concluded, if Master Twyti and his beastly dogs did meet the Questing Beast, yes, and get eaten up by it too, every one.

Cheered by this vision, he turned round at the edge of the ploughing and stumped off home. At the hedge where the old lady lay waiting to scare rooks he was lucky enough to spot some approaching pigeons before she was aware of him or them, which gave him a chance to let out such a screech that he felt amply repaid for his own jump by seeing hers. It was going to be a good evening after all. "Good night to you," said Sir Ector affably, when the old lady recovered herself enough to drop him a curtsey.

He felt so much restored by this that he called on the parish priest, half-way up the village street, and invited him to dinner. Then he climbed to the solar, which was his special chamber, and sat down heavily to write a submissive message to King Uther in the two or three hours which remained to him before the meal. It would take him quite that time, what with sharpening pens, using too much sand to blot with, going to the top of the stairs to ask the butler how to spell things, and starting again if he had made a mess.

Sir Ector sat in the solar, while the wintering sunlight threw broad orange beams across his bald head. He scratched and plattered away, and laboriously bit the end of his pen, and the castle room darkened about him. It was a room as big as the main hall over which it stood, and it could afford to have large southern windows because it was on the second story. There were two fireplaces, in which the ashy logs of wood turned from grey to red as the sunlight retreated. Round these, some favourite hounds lay snuffling in their dreams, or scratching themselves for fleas, or gnawing mutton bones which they had scrounged from the kitchens. The peregrine falcon stood hooded on a perch in the corner, a motionless idol dreaming of other skies.

If you were to go now to view the solar of Castle Sauvage, you would find it empty of furniture. But the sun would still stream in at those stone windows two feet thick, and, as it barred the mullions, it would catch a warmth of sandstone from them—the amber light of age. If you went to the nearest curiosity shop you might find some clever copies of the furniture which it was supposed to contain. These would be oak chests and cupboards with Gothic panelling and strange faces of men or angels—or devils—carved darkly upon them, black, bees-waxed, worm-eaten and shiny—gloomy testimonies to the old life in their coffin-like solidity. But the furniture in the solar was not like that. The devil's heads were there and the linen-fold panelling, but the wood was six or seven or eight centuries younger. So, in the warm-looking light of sunset, it was not only the mullions which had an amber glow. All the spare, strong chests in the room (they were converted for sitting by laying bright carpets on them) were the young, the golden oak, and the cheeks of the devils and cherubim shone as if they had been given a good soaping.

End quote.

“Mullions,” by the way, are those vertical slats in windows that divide the two panes...and, no, I didn’t know that before I read this section.

T. H. White is at his best in this relatively short chapter. Sir Ector is center stage and we join him in his deep thoughts as he balances his local needs with the wants and needs of his liege lord. I used to teach medieval history and getting the roles straight are nearly impossible as this was literally a society of “tapestry:” everyone and everything were interconnected at some level. Your life and safety were based on your communal health and that is still true today.

Today, though, we don’t tend to worry about dragons and griffins as much. One could argue that human beings have invented far worse creations than dragons and griffins.

As I write this, there is a new Star Wars show called Mandalorian. Obviously, I enjoy it. It fits my love of the heroic journey.

A critic noted that they did not like this new episodic television show as much as me because...well, because the story has all of these side stories that don’t push the narrative along.

And, the critic missed the whole point of epics. Epics, as I always tell my students, are BIG! Big stories about life, love, death, pain, suffering and the unfairness of mortality. In the great epics, and think Homer, Gilgamesh, and Beowulf here, the side stories are really THE story. Imagine how dull The Odyssey would be if Ulysses would have just gone home and reunited with his family.

Who needs Sirens, Cyclops and discus throwing competitions?

Well, we do!

This chapter, and it finished with the description of the furniture and woodwork, is a quiet little side story. We are walking around with Ector after he read a letter and responded to it. There is no danger to Wart, no magic, and no madcap adventure.

It’s quiet.

After the snake dreams of history, we have a quiet walk through the grounds, the Forest Sauvage and the castle.

And, this is the genius of White: he understands the epic. He doesn’t mind pausing the narrative to develop the story.

It’s epic!

Chapter XV

It was Christmas night, the eve of the Boxing Day Meet. You must remember that this was in the old Merry England of Gramarye, when the rosy barons ate with their fingers, and had peacocks served before them with all their tail feathers streaming, or boars' heads with the tusks stuck in again—when there was no unemployment because there were too few people to be unemployed—when the forests rang with knights walloping each other on the helm, and the unicorns in the wintry moonlight stamped with their silver feet and snorted their noble breaths of blue upon the frozen air. Such marvels were great and comfortable ones. But in the Old England there was a greater marvel still. The weather behaved itself.

In the spring, the little flowers came out obediently in the meads, and the dew sparkled, and the birds sang. In the summer it was beautifully hot for no less than four months, and, if it did rain just enough for agricultural purposes, they managed to arrange it so that it rained while you were in bed. In the autumn the leaves flamed and rattled before the west winds, tempering their sad adieu with glory. And in the winter, which was confined by statute to two months, the snow lay evenly, three feet thick, but never turned into slush.

It was Christmas night in the Castle of the Forest Sauvage, and all around the castle the snow lay as it ought to lie. It hung heavily on the battlements, like thick icing on a very good cake, and in a few convenient places it modestly turned itself into the clearest icicles of the greatest possible length. It hung on the boughs of the forest trees in rounded lumps, even better than apple-blossom, and occasionally slid off the roofs of the village when it saw the chance of falling on some amusing character and giving pleasure to all. The boys made snowballs with it, but never put stones in them to hurt each other, and the dogs, when they were taken out to scombre, bit it and rolled in it, and looked surprised but delighted when they vanished into the bigger drifts. There was skating on the moat, which roared with the gliding bones which they used for skates, while hot chestnuts and spiced mead were served on the bank to all and sundry. The owls hooted. The cooks put out plenty of crumbs for the small birds. The villagers brought out their red mufflers. Sir Ector's face shone redder even than these. And reddest of all shone the cottage fires down the main street of an evening, while the winds howled outside and the old English wolves wandered about slavering in an appropriate manner, or sometimes peeping in at the key-holes with their blood-red eyes. End quote.

First, I apologize for skipping this chapter. T. H. White has a way with adding these perfect little chapters that push the story ahead without a lot of chases, fights and battles. J. K. Rowlings does this with the Harry Potter series: if you read the first book, Sorcerer's or Philosopher's Stone, you might notice these neat little "one off" chapters that make perfect nighttime reading.

So, I made a mistake. Let's go back.

“The weather behaved itself.” This line is part of the magic of the whole book. The weather obeys some unseen law concerning the seasons. As we look back on life, very often you might find that you do this, too: we tend to knit things up into neat little tapestries in our mind about better times in the past.

I do this a lot. My youth, in my mind, was endless play and perfect evenings. When I remind myself to pop in the Vietnam War (huge impact on my family), the Civil Rights movement, Watergate, endless social issues, the rich kid runaways and “hippies” choking the streets of The City and the unchecked smog and pollution of the 1960s, I recheck my memories.

And, instantly, I forget all of it and my brain insists on a perfect youth.

Before we get into the specifics, it is fun to reread parts of this opening section as poetry: the last part and the color “red” will leap off the page.

The Boxing Day Meet is the largest fox-hunting day in England. Up to 250 different hunts take place that day.

Boxing Day is the Feast of Saint Stephen and it is celebrated in much of the world. In the past several centuries, many put together boxes of food and supplies for others, hence “Boxing Day.” In other parts of the world, this day is called Second Christmas.

My family celebrates Boxing Day with a general decluttering of clothes and housewares as well as financial donations. In addition, watching “Love Actually” each year brings us the version of the famous “Boxing Day song:”

“Good King Wenceslas looked out
on the feast of Stephen,
when the snow lay round about,
deep and crisp and even.
Brightly shone the moon that night,
though the frost was cruel,
when a poor man came in sight,
gathering winter fuel.

Hither, page, and stand by me.
If thou know it telling:
yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?
Sire, he lives a good league hence,
underneath the mountain,
right against the forest fence
by Saint Agnes fountain.”

We have seen the word Gramarye before; it is a magic or enchantment book from the medieval period. I think that much of this first part of the chapter becomes the base this song from the Broadway hit (and horrid movie), Camelot:

It's true! It's true! The crown has made it clear
The climate must be perfect all the year

A law was made a distant moon ago here
July and August cannot be too hot
And there's a legal limit to the snow here
In Camelot

The winter is forbidden till December
And exits March the second on the dot
By order, summer lingers through September
In Camelot

Camelot! Camelot!
I know it sounds a bit bizarre
But in Camelot, Camelot
That's how conditions are

The rain may never fall till after sundown
By eight, the morning fog must disappear
In short, there's simply not
A more congenial spot
For happily-ever-aftering than here
In Camelot

Camelot! Camelot!
I know it gives a person pause
But in Camelot, Camelot
Those are the legal laws

The snow may never slush upon the hillside.
By nine P. M. The moonlight must appear
In short, there's simply not
A more congenial spot
For happily-ever-aftering than here
In Camelot.

The songwriters, Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Lowe, did a marvelous job with the music. Of course, having Richard Burton, Julie Andrews and Robert Goulet (and Roddy McDowell) in the original cast seemed to help, too.

This line, “when there was no unemployment because there were too few people to be unemployed,” has always made me think. I’ve been sifting this through my head for a while as I still think there is plenty to do on this earth and not enough people to do it.

Until next time...and I promise to follow the book!

It was Christmas night and the proper things had been done. The whole village had come to dinner in hall. There had been boar's head and venison and pork and beef and mutton and capons—but no turkey, because this bird had not yet been invented. There had been plum pudding and snap-dragon, with blue fire on the tips of one's fingers, and as much mead as anybody could drink. Sir Ector's health had been drunk with "Best respects, Measter," or "Best compliments of the Season, my lords and ladies, and many of them." There had been mummers to play an exciting dramatic presentation of a story in which St. George and a Saracen and a funny Doctor did surprising things, also carol-singers who rendered "Adeste Fideles" and "I Sing of a Maiden," in high, clear, tenor voices. After that, those children who had not been sick from their dinner played Hoodman Blind and other appropriate games, while the young men and maidens danced morris dances in the middle, the tables having been cleared away. The old folks sat round the walls holding glasses of mead in their hands and feeling thankful that they were past such capers, hoppings and skipplings, while those children who had not been sick sat with them, and soon went to sleep, the small heads leaning against their shoulders. At the high table Sir Ector sat with his knightly guests, who had come for the morrow's hunting, smiling and nodding and drinking burgundy or sherries sack or malmsey wine.

After a bit, silence was prayed for Sir Grummore. He stood up and sang his old school song, amid great applause—but forgot most of it and had to make a humming noise in his moustache. Then King Pellinore was nudged to his feet and sang bashfully:

Oh, I was born a Pellinore in famous Lincolnshire.
Full well I chased the Questing Beast for more than seventeen year.
Till I took up with Sir Grummore here
In the season of the year.
(Since when) 'tis my delight
On a feather-bed night
To sleep at home, my dear.

"You see," explained King Pellinore blushing, as he sat down with everybody whacking him on the back, "old Grummore invited me home, what, after we had been having a pleasant joust together, and since then I've been letting my beastly Beast go and hang itself on the wall, what?"

"Well done," they told him. "You live your own life while you've got it."

End quote.

As most readers would know, I love the holidays. This is a marvelous little party and I particularly love the reference to the fact that turkeys had not been invented yet. I have seen many wild turkeys in the mountains around Los Gatos and Santa Cruz and those turkeys look nothing like the turkey I eat at Thanksgiving.

If you read *The Game of Thrones*, and I applaud you if you get through Book Four, you will see the term "mummer's farce" over and over. A mummer is basically an actor, maybe more like a street performer. I remember the "Punch and Judy" sequences of my television childhood (Captain Kangaroo!) and that might be a good example.

Growing up we used to play all kinds of games, outside, during parties. Tag, Hide and Go Seek, One Foot Off the Gutter, and all kinds of sports were just part of what we did. It seems to be disappearing a bit now. I like this game:

"Hoodman's Blind or Blind Man's Bluff in medieval times was a physical contact and rough game. The rules where one person was to be chosen to be "it" and blindfolded by having the hood of his litrapipe pulled down over the head. The player is then spun around several times and is to seek his tormentors. The tormentors are to actively torment him by pulling at his clothes, shoving him around, and whipping him. Once he has successfully captured a player, he is then released from the blindfold and the person he captured then becomes "it". There is not (sic) conclusion to the game."

<http://www.medieval.net/hoodmansblind.htm>

"Morris Dancing" is a kind of group dance often with bells and other gear. It is still popular and I have seen variations of this in my travels. Traditional dancing, and this is for my American readers, is still popular in many parts of this world. RTE, Irish television, hosts weekly "Trad" dancing shows.

"Adeste Fideles" might only be three or four centuries old...or maybe it goes back to some anonymous monks in the Middle Ages. Like most Christmas Carols, the song expands (and contracts) throughout history. I know the first two verses of dozens of Christmas songs...then I just hum along. "O Come, All Ye Faithful" is a good example: as I studied this week, I realized I knew very few of the lines past the first minute or so. "I Sing of a Maiden" is very old with the first written version from about 1400, but, obviously, the roots are much deeper.

1. Adeste Fideles laeti triumphantes,

Venite, venite in Bethlehem.

Natum videte, Regem Angelorum;

Refrain

Venite adoremus,

venite adoremus,

venite adoremus

Dominum!

2. Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine,

gestant puellae viscera.

Deum verum, genitum non factum; (refrain)

3. Cantet nunc io chorus Angelorum

cantet nunc aula caelestium:

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

4. Ergo qui natus, die hodierna,

Jesu, tibi sit gloria.

Patris aeterni Verbum caro factum;

5. En grege relicto, Humiles ad cunas,

vocati pastores approperant.

Et nos ovanti gradu festinemus;

6. Aeterni Parentis splendorem aeternum,

velatum sub carne videbimus.

Deum infantem, pannis involutum;

7. Pro nobis egenum et foeno cubantem,

piis foveamus amplexibus.

Sic nos anamtem quis non redamaret?

8. Stella duce, Magi, Christum adorantes,

aurum, thus, et myrrham dant munera.

Jesu infanti corda praebeamus;

"Oh Come All Ye Faithful"

1. O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!

O come ye, o come ye, to Bethlehem.

Come and behold Him, born the King of angels;

Refrain

O come, let us adore Him,

O come, let us adore Him,

O come, let us adore Him,

Christ the Lord!

2. God of God, Light of Light,

Lo! He abhors not the Virgin's womb.

Very God, begotten not created; (refrain)

3. Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation!

Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above:

Glory to God, glory in the highest!

4. Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning,

Jesu, to Thee be glory given.

Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;

5. See how the shepherds, summoned to His cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh to gaze.

We too will thither bend our hearts' oblations;

6. There shall we see Him, His eternal Father's
everlasting brightness now veiled under flesh.

God shall we find there, a Babe in infant clothing;

7. Child, for us sinners, poor and in the manger,
we would embrace Thee, with love and awe.

Who would not love Thee, loving us so dearly?

8. Lo! Star-led chieftains, Magi, Christ adoring,
offer Him frankincense, gold, and myrrh.

We to the Christ-child, bring our hearts oblations;

I don't think I recognize a third of these verses. As a child, we sang it in both languages, but I doubt you would hear Latin much today.

The other song hasn't remained as popular:

I sing of a maiden
That is makelees:
King of alle kinges
To her sone she chees.

He cam also stille
Ther his moder was
As dewe in Aprille
That falleth on the gras.

He cam also stille
To his modres bowr
As dewe in Aprille
That falleth on the flowr.

He cam also stille
Ther his moder lay
As dewe in Aprille
That falleth on the spray.

Moder and maiden
Was nevere noon but she:
Wel may swich a lady
Godes moder be.

King Pellinore seems happy to have the Beast behind him and he seems to love the feather bed.

We shall see.

William Twyti was called for, who had arrived on the previous evening, and the famous huntsman stood up with a perfectly straight face, and his crooked eye fixed upon Sir Ector, to sing:

**D'ye ken William Twyti
With his jerkin so dagged?
D'ye ken William Twyti
Who never yet lagged?
Yes, I ken William Twyti,
And he ought to be gagged
With his hounds and his horn in the morning.**

"Bravo!" cried Sir Ector. "Did you hear that, eh? Said he ought to be gagged, my dear feller. Blest if I didn't think he was going to boast when he began. Splendid chaps, these huntsmen, eh? Pass Master Twyti the malmsey, with my compliments."

The boys lay curled up under the benches near the fire, Wart with Cavall in his arms. Cavall did not like the heat and the shouting and the smell of mead, and wanted to go away, but Wart held him tightly because he needed something to hug, and Cavall had to stay with him perforce, panting over a long pink tongue.

"Now Ralph Passelewe." "Good wold Ralph." "Who killed the cow, Ralph?" "Pray silence for Master Passelewe that couldn't help it."

At this the most lovely old man got up at the furthest and humblest end of the hall, as he had got up on all similar occasions for the past half-century. He was no less than eighty-five years of age, almost blind, almost deaf, but still able and willing and happy to quaver out the same song which he had sung for the pleasure of the Forest Sauvage since before Sir Ector was

bound up in a kind of tight linen puttee in his cradle. They could not hear him at the high table—he was too far away in Time to be able to reach across the room—but everybody knew what the cracked voice was singing, and everybody loved it. This is what he sang:

Whe-an /Wold King-Cole /was a /wakkin doon-t'tstreet,
H-e /saw a-lovely laid-y a /steppin-in-a-puddle. /
She-a /lifted hup-er-skeat /
For to /
 Hop acrorst ter middle, /
An ee /saw her /an-kel.
Wasn't that a fuddle?/
Ee could'ernt elp it, /ee Ad to.

There were about twenty verses of this song, in which Wold King Cole helplessly saw more and more things that he ought not to have seen, and everybody cheered at the end of each verse until, at the conclusion, old Ralph was overwhelmed with congratulations and sat down smiling dimly to a replenished mug of mead.

End quote.

I am pretty sure that Horatio Hornblower drinks malmsey in his epic Naval stories. It's a sweet wine varietal and one of the four grapes in Madeira. And, with a nod to Crazy Jerry from my University days, I offer this version of Old King Cole from George Carlin:

Old King Cole was a merry old soul
 And a merry old soul was he;
He called for his pipe, and he called for his bowl -
 I guess we all know about Old King Cole...

The Old King Cole ditty is much older than its first appearances in print. Some argue it goes back to Roman Britain...which would bring us right into Arthur's Court.

Well, maybe.

I was reviewing my work (so far) on this book. I'm up to an eighth of a million words so far and...

Wow.

Well over 125,000 words.

My financial rewards: zero.
The amount of feedback: limited.

My need to continue: boundless.

Sorry!

As we move into this story, let's look back on the basic BIG stories so far:

Wart's "quest:" He finds Merlyn (After Meeting King Pellinore chasing the Beast Glatisant)
Fish (Perch) Transformation
Madam Mim
Tilting Lesson (King Pellinore and Sir Grummore)
Hawk Transformation

The "Middle of the Book:" Robin Wood and the Adventure with the Fairy People

Snake Transformation
Boar Hunt (King Pellinore finds the Beast Glatisant...again)
Owl Transformation
Galapas the Giant (King Pellinore is among the captured...all are saved by the Beast)
Badger Transformation

I keep hinting about Pellinore, but his days of feather beds is coming to a close soon. It's a question worth asking:

What's Pellinore's role? Is he a side-show clown White uses for an occasional laugh? Is he an example for Wart about the pitfalls of questing?

I'm working with a young man who wants to understand Scripture better. I have him reading the Gospel of Mark and I told him to highlight and note every mention of clothes. In addition, I asked him to note the use of the "Son of God."

You see, those are landmarks in the story. These help us understand the chiasmic structure of Mark. I've wondered for a while if Pellinore provides the same thing here in this story. He is the guidepost, the signpost, for our adventures.

He is the "You are Here" in our story.

And, for the record, we all need Old Ralphs in our world.

Maybe I am one of yours.

There were about twenty verses of this song, in which Wold King Cole helplessly saw more and more things that he ought not to have seen, and everybody cheered at the end of each verse until, at the conclusion, old Ralph was overwhelmed with congratulations and sat down smiling dimly to a replenished mug of mead.

It was now Sir Ector's turn to wind up the proceedings. He stood up importantly and delivered the following speech:

"Friends, tenants and otherwise. Unaccustomed as I am to public speakin'—"

There was a faint cheer at this, for everybody recognized the speech which Sir Ector had made for the last twenty years, and welcomed it like a brother.

"—unaccustomed as I am to public speakin', it is my pleasant duty—I might say my very pleasant duty—to welcome all and sundry to this our homely feast. It has been a good year, and I say it without fear of contradiction, in pasture and plow. We all know how Crumbocke of Forest Sauvage won the first prize at Cardoyle Cattle Show for the second time, and one more year will win the cup outright. More power to the Forest Sauvage. As we sit down tonight, I notice some faces now gone from among us and some which have added to the family circle. Such matters are in the hands of an almighty Providence, to which we all feel thankful. We ourselves have been first created and then spared to enjoy the rejoicin's of this pleasant evening. I think we are all grateful for the blessin's which have been showered upon us. Tonight we welcome in our midst the famous King Pellinore, whose labours in riddin' our forest of the redoubtable Questin' Beast are known to all. God bless King Pellinore. (Hear, hear!) Also Sir Grummore Grummursum, a sportsman, though I say it to his face, who will stick to his mount as long as his Quest will stand up in front of him. (Hooray!) Finally, last but not least, we are honoured by a visit from His Majesty's most famous huntsman, Master William Twyti, who will, I feel sure, show us such sport tomorrow that we will rub our eyes and wish that a royal pack of hounds could always be huntin' in the Forest which we all love so well. (View-haloo and several recheats blown in imitation.) Thank you, my dear friends, for your spontaneous welcome to these gentlemen. They will, I know, accept it in the true and warm-hearted spirit in which it is offered. And now it is time that I should bring my brief remarks to a close. Another year has almost sped and it is time that we should be lookin' forward to the challengin' future. What about the Cattle Show next year? Friends, I can only wish you a very Merry Christmas, and, after Father Sidebottom has said our Grace for us, we shall conclude with a singin' of the National Anthem."

The cheers which broke out at the end of Sir Ector's speech were only just prevented, by several hush-es, from drowning the last part of the vicar's Grace in Latin, and then everybody stood up loyally in the firelight and sang:

God save King Pendragon,
May his reign long drag on,
 God save the King.
Send him most gorious,
Great and uproarious,
Horrible and Hoarious,
 God save our King.

The last notes died away, the hall emptied of its rejoicing humanity. Lanterns flickered outside, in the village street, as everybody went home in bands for fear of the moonlit wolves, and The Castle of the Forest Sauvage slept peacefully and lightless, in the strange silence of the holy snow.

End quote.

Well, that will do. Gentle Reader: get some sleep before the Boar Hunt.

I love Ector's speech. I love the flow of a well known story, show, play, movie or speech. It's warm food on a cold day. It's time to settle down and sleep.

Chapter XVI

The Wart got up early next morning. He made a determined effort the moment he woke, threw off the great bearskin rug under which he slept, and plunged his body into the biting air. He dressed furiously, trembling, skipping about to keep warm, and hissing blue breaths to himself as if he were grooming a horse. He broke the ice in a basin and dipped his face in it with a grimace like eating something sour, said A-a-ah, and rubbed his stinging cheeks vigorously with a towel. Then he felt quite warm again and scampered off to the emergency kennels, to watch the King's huntsman making his last arrangements.

Master William Twyti turned out in daylight to be a shrivelled, harassed-looking man, with an expression of melancholy on his face. All his life he had been forced to pursue various animals for the royal table, and, when he had caught them, to cut them up into proper joints. He was more than half a butcher. He had to know what parts the hounds should eat, and what parts should be given to his assistants. He had to cut everything up handsomely, leaving two vertebrae on the tail to make the chine look attractive, and almost ever since he could remember he had been either pursuing a hart or cutting it up into helpings.

He was not particularly fond of doing this. The harts and hinds in their herds, the boars in their singulars, the skulks of foxes, the riches of martens, the be vies of roes, the cetes of badgers and the routs of wolves—all came to him more or less as something which you either skinned or flayed and then took home to cook. You could talk to him about os and argos, suet and grease, croteys, fewmets and fiants, but he only looked polite. He knew that you were showing off your knowledge of these words, which were to him a business. You could talk about a mighty boar which had nearly slashed you last winter, but he only stared at you with his distant eyes. He had been slashed sixteen times by mighty boars, and his legs had white weals of shiny flesh that stretched right up to his ribs. While you talked, he got on with whatever part of his profession he had in hand. There was only one thing which could move Master William Twyti. Summer or winter, snow or shine, he was running or galloping after boars and harts, and all the time his soul was somewhere else. Mention a hare to Master Twyti and, although he would still go on galloping after the wretched hart which seemed to be his destiny, he would gallop with one eye over his shoulder yearning for puss. It was the

only thing he ever talked about. He was always being sent to one castle or another, all over England, and when he was there the local servants would fête him and keep his glass filled and ask him about his greatest hunts. He would answer distractedly in monosyllables. But if anybody mentioned a huske of hares he was all attention, and then he would thump his glass upon the table and discourse upon the marvels of this astonishing beast, declaring that you could never blow a menee for it, because the same hare could at one time be male and another time female, while it carried grease and croteyed and gnawed, which things no beast in the earth did except it.

End quote

I wish I would have used the dictionary more the first few times I read *The Sword in the Stone*. I have to tell you that as a fourteen year old I would be using the terms "Fewmets," "Croteys," and "Fiants" in much of my conversations. They all mean excrement (poop!) and beg to be used in a school setting. "You Fewmet-face bowl of Crotey" seems a great thing to say to a receiver after a play.

The vocabulary in this chapter is really important and I finally decided to just share the section from *A Glossary of Names, Allusions, and Technical Terms* in T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* and *The Book of Merlyn* by Michael Anderson (Editor) and John William Sutton (Editor) from The Camelot Project 2003.

<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/t-h-white-glossary>

alaunts, p.145 - "allans or allautes, a large hound." (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 282)

beagling, p.148 - "hare hunting when the field follows on foot." (OED)

coverts, p.133 - A covert in this context is a "place which gives shelter to wild animals or game; esp. a thicket." (OED)

croteys, p.142 - excrements.

cy sa avaunt, p.148 - "a hunting cry, forward." (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 283)

fewmets, p.23 - "the droppings of the beast pursued."

fiants, p.142 - "excrements of the wild boar." (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 187)

gorgeaunts, p.133 - "wild boar in his second year." (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 288)

gralloch, p.260 - "The viscera of a dead deer." (OED)

grease, p.142 - "the fat of certain animals." (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 288)

harborer, p.23 - To harbor - "to trace the deer to its lair." (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 9)

hogsteers, p.133 - "hoggaster, wild boar in his third year, App." (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 289)

huske of hares, p.143 - "a number of hares, App." (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 289)

lesses, p.146 - "excrements of boars and wolves." (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 290)

mark to ground, p.11 - "Hounds indicate that a fox has gone to ground by giving tongue and digging (worrying) at an earth." (foxhunting.freeservers.com)

mask, p.149 - "Hunting. [T]he head-skin of any 'game'." (OED)

meet, p.134 - The hunt.

menee, p.143 - "note sounded on a horn; also the baying of a hound hunting." (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 291)

M.F.H., p.43 - The Master of Fox Hounds, the person in charge of the hounds in a fox hunt. (www.equestrianconnection.net)

mort, p.9 - a horn-note signaling that the quarry is killed. (Moran 24)

os, p.142 - The dew-claws of the stag and hind. (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 292)

prise, p.152 - "A horn signal . . . in England for the hart and buck after the kill." (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 293)

recheats, p.140 - a. "The act of calling together the hounds to begin or continue the chase of a stag." b. "The series of notes sounded on the horn for . . . these purposes." (OED)

sounders (of boars), p.18 - "What men call a trip of tame swine is called of wild swine a sounder, that is to say if there be passed five or six together." (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 53)

suet, p.142 - "The fat of the red-deer and the fallow-deer." (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 296)

swef, p.148 - "a hunting cry, meaning gently or softly." (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 296)

undoing, p.9 - "the flaying and butchering of the animal." (also the unmaking or breaking) (Cummins 41)

venery, p.134 - "derived in one sense from the Latin venari, 'to hunt'." (Cummins 81)

warrantable, p.23 - "Applied to a stag which is of an age to be hunted." (OED)

beviies of roes, p.142 - a group of small deer.

Master Twyti's interest in the hares always brings me back to the story of my dad and Wilt Chamberlain (see earlier WWs for the whole story). I've noted before that when I go out with famous strength coaches, we don't tend to talk about five sets of two or kipping pull ups. We talk about wine, life and laughs.

Remember Twyti next time you to try to impress someone!

Wart watched the great man in silence for some time, then went indoors to see if there was any hope of breakfast. He found that there was, for the whole castle was suffering from the same sort of nervous excitement which had got him out of bed so early, and even Merlyn had dressed himself in a pair of breeches which had been fashionable some centuries later with the University Beagles.

Boar-hunting was fun. It was nothing like badger-digging or covert-shooting or fox-hunting today. Perhaps the nearest thing to it would be ferreting for rabbits—except that you used dogs instead of ferrets, had a boar that easily might kill you, instead of a rabbit, and carried a boar-spear upon which your life depended instead of a gun. They did not usually hunt the boar on horseback. Perhaps the reason for this was that the boar season happened in the two winter months, when the old English snow would be liable to ball in your horse's hoofs and render galloping too dangerous. The result was that you were yourself on foot, armed only with steel, against an adversary who weighed a good deal more than you did and who could unseam you from the nape to the chaps, and set your head upon his battlements. There was only one rule in boar-hunting. It was: Hold on. If the boar charged, you had to drop on one knee and present your boar-spear in his direction. You held the butt of it with your right hand on the ground to take the shock, while you stretched your left arm to its fullest extent and kept the point toward the charging boar. The spear was as sharp as a razor, and it had a cross-piece about eighteen inches away from the point. This cross-piece or horizontal bar prevented the spear from going more than eighteen inches into his chest. Without the cross-piece, a charging boar would have been capable of rushing right up the spear, even if it did go through him, and getting at the hunter like that. But with the cross-piece he was held away from you at a spear's length, with eighteen inches of steel inside him. It was in this situation that you had to hold on.

He weighed between ten and twenty score, and his one object in life was to heave and weave and sidestep, until he could get at his assailant and champ him into chops, while the assailant's one object was not to let go of the spear, clasped tight under his arm, until

somebody had come to finish him off. If he could keep hold of his end of the weapon, while the other end was stuck in the boar, he knew that there was at least a spear's length between them, however much the boar ran him round the forest. You may be able to understand, if you think this over, why all the sportsmen of the castle got up early for the Boxing Day Meet, and ate their breakfast with a certain amount of suppressed feeling.

End quote.

“Hold on.”

Good advice for so much of life, especially when holding a boar at the end of a spear. In our house, we called this “raising daughters.”

White’s description of the war between hunter and boar is simply elegant. Years ago, an English teacher at a school I taught at was trying to write the next great American novel. She was flaying away at trying to describe a character who had played American football. She asked to come to a practice...of course, I said...and stand near the athletes.

I went over the ideas of a “system” versus the “plays” that most people miss when watching the game. Very quickly, from the Little Rascals through the Three Stooges and The Longest Yard, television and movies tend to make American football about a bunch of plays. In reality, most teams (I could say all) use a series of interconnected plays that allow you to do “this,” if they do “that.”

She understood the academic sense of all of this. She grasped the concepts, the symbols and the numbering system immediately.

“It’s so simple!”

Yes, it is. Then, she came to practice. Standing so close to the violence and energy and the absolute crashing noise of human bodies, she began to slowly step back. She didn’t cry, but she was clearly emotional.

Later, she told me that she understood everything with her brain; she couldn’t get a grasp of the terrible noise of the game.

I’m not sure if she ever finished the book, but she mentioned, months later, that her character’s clarity was so much better.

Joseph Campbell noted in the Power of Myth on how a man described a terrible battle in WWII:

“It was sublime.”

On the morning of the Boar Hunt, the drunken toasts and back room bravery are tested as we come to spear’s length with the 140-240 pound boar. This line is perfect: “The result was that

you were yourself on foot, armed only with steel, against an adversary who weighed a good deal more than you did and who could unseam you from the nave to the chaps, and set your head upon his battlements.”

White blends the academic discussion of boar hunting around a fireplace in a safe room with the realities, the terrors, of actually holding on to a boar spear.

Merlyn’s pants continue to be used (in a sense). The University Beagles still exist:

“The Royal Agricultural University (formerly College) Beagle pack was formed in 1890 and the country they hunt is within approximately a 10 mile radius of local market town Cirencester. The Leadon Vale Basset Hounds are a small pack based in Herefordshire.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ktV5L3mEaYo>

I think this section has some of the most beautiful writing of our book, but:

“Hold on.”

"Ah," said Sir Grummore, gnawing a pork chop which he held in his fingers, "down in time for breakfast, hey?"

"Yes, I am," said the Wart.

"Fine huntin' mornin'," said Sir Grummore. "Got your spear sharp, hey?"

"Yes, I have, thank you," said the Wart. He went over to the sideboard to get a chop for himself.

"Come on, Pellinore," said Sir Ector. "Have a few of these chickens. You're eatin' nothin' this mornin'."

King Pellinore said, "I don't think I will, thank you all the same, I don't think I feel quite the thing, this morning, what?"

Sir Grummore took his nose out of his chop and inquired sharply. "Nerves?"

"Oh, no," cried King Pellinore. "Oh, no, really not that, what? I think I must have taken something last night that disagreed with me."

"Nonsense, my dear fellah," said Sir Ector, "here you are, just you have a few chickens to keep your strength up."

He helped the unfortunate King to two or three capons, and the latter sat down miserably at the end of the table, trying to swallow a few bits of them.

"Need them," said Sir Grummore meaningly, "by the end of the day, I dare say."

"Do you think so?"

"Know so," said Sir Grummore, and winked at his host.

The Wart noticed that Sir Ector and Sir, Grummore were eating with rather exaggerated gusto. He did not feel that he could manage more than one chop himself, and, as for Kay, he had stayed away from the breakfast-room altogether.

End quote.

My sophomore year in high school, we blended four junior high schools football teams into one sophomore team. We had a lot of talent. Making it as a starter meant you had to beat out a lot of experienced people. Some of the starters simply won the race to puberty and would soon vanish as the rest of us caught up.

There was this one guy from Westborough Junior High that constantly talked like an NFL player. Most often, he would say: "I can't wait to get to some hitting."

Let's call him Charlie. Charlie loved to talk about hitting. He went to our coach and talked him into borrowing a helmet so when he jogged around the soccer field, he "be getting ready to hit."

At first, I feared him. Then, we started contact. If you hit him, he complained that it wasn't game time. If he hit you late after a play, he told you: "this is football."

He, and in hindsight this is so obvious to me, quit the next year. His mouth wrote checks that his body...and mind...couldn't cash! He grew his hair out and became a rocker.

Loud talking is an essential part of rocking.

"The Wart noticed that Sir Ector and Sir, Grummore were eating with rather exaggerated gusto." I've always been reminded of Charlie when I read this section.

Everyone is brave in the cafeteria.

The boar doesn't care. And the boar is waiting.

When breakfast was over, and Master Twyti had been consulted, the Boxing Day cavalcade moved off to the Meet. Perhaps the hounds would have seemed rather a mixed pack to a master of hounds today. There were half a dozen black and white alaunts, which looked like greyhounds with the heads of bull-terriers or worse. These, which were the proper hounds for boars, wore muzzles because of their ferocity. The gaze-hounds, of which there were two

taken just in case, were in reality nothing but greyhounds according to modern language, while the lymers were a sort of mixture between the bloodhound and the red setter of today. The latter had collars on, and were led with straps. The braches were like beagles, and trotted along with the master in the way that beagles always have trotted, and a charming way it is.

With the hounds went the foot-people. Merlyn, in his running breeches, looked rather like Lord Baden-Powell, except, of course, that the latter did not wear a beard. Sir Ector was dressed in "sensible" leather clothes—it was not considered sporting to hunt in armour—and he walked beside Master Twyti with that bothered and important expression which has always been worn by masters of hounds. Sir Grummore, just behind, was puffing and asking everybody whether they had sharpened their spears. King Pellinore had dropped back among the villagers, feeling that there was safety in numbers. All the villagers were there, every male soul on the estate from Hob the austringer down to old Wat with no nose, every man carrying a spear or a pitchfork or a worn scythe blade on a stout pole. Even some of the young women who were courting had come out, with baskets of provisions for the men. It was a regular Boxing Day Meet.

At the edge of the forest the last follower joined up. He was a tall, distinguished-looking person dressed in green, and he carried a seven-foot bow.

End quote.

Now, "we" all know that Robin Wood ("Hood" for the ill-informed) has joined our boar hunt. As Sir Ector doesn't mind Robin's habits of helping himself to the king's quarries, we also know that the king probably does.

I've written of the previous "dog" thing before and I don't mind reminding everyone that T. H. White's great love for dogs was a bit legendary during his life. He certainly did his homework on canine history. Let me repeat:

The title "Celtic Hound" probably is the best term to use when thinking of these kinds of dogs. The following is possibly one of the earliest known breed standards, dating as it does from the middle of the second century AD. This is from the Cynegeticus of Flavius Arrianus, usually known as Arrian although he liked to style himself "The Younger Xenophon". He was a native of Nicomedia in Bythina (Asia Minor) and was a keen huntsman.

"There is nothing more beautiful to see, whether their eyes or their whole body, or their coat and colour. In those that are pied there is a wonderful variegation and the whole coloured ones are no less pleasing to the sight." He says they may be rough or smooth haired and the larger the better. "A good Celt should be long, length being regarded as indicative of speed and good breeding, and should possess wide, supple hips and shoulders, broad loins and firm, sweeping haunches. The legs, of which the hind pair should be the longer, are required to be straight and well knit, the ribs strong, the back wide and firm without being fat, the belly well drawn up, the thighs hollow, the tail narrow, hairy, long and flexible, with thicker hair at the tip; the feet round and strong and the eyes large and clear and strikingly bright. Flame coloured eyes are best, next

to these dark; light eyes come last, yet a good dog may have light eyes. A light, well set on head is considered the hallmark of particular excellence but such a feature is by no means regarded as essential and a hound may have a head of any shape always provided it is not heavy, or with a broad muzzle, or with a hanging dewlap. A hound may have soft ears, that look as if they have been broken, or prick ears and still be a good hound to hunt. A good Celt should have a prominent brow and a proud look, should not be afraid of people or of noise, should never stand still once it has been slipped, and should come back to the hunter without a call."

Now, if you are trying to get your own Sir Ector kennel club, here are the modern explanations:

Lymers: Bloodhound and Red Setter mix

Alaunts: Greyhounds with thick heads

Brach(et): Beagles with all the joy that comes with beagles.

Gaze-hounds: Greyhounds

I just love this line: "The braches were like beagles, and trotted along with the master in the way that beagles always have trotted, and a charming way it is." I can't NOT see a beagle and not want to say: "Charming." Now, my friends who have beagles tell me the charm wears off fast whenever the doggie finds a smell that MUST be followed to the ends of the earth.

As a reminder about Hob's job title:

Falconers fly falcons, but austringers fly hawks. (Goshawks)

You are welcome.

Be sure to sharpen your spear.

At the edge of the forest the last follower joined up. He was a tall, distinguished-looking person dressed in green, and he carried a seven-foot bow.

"Good morning, Master," he said pleasantly to Sir Ector.

"Ah, yes," said Sir Ector. "Yes, yes, good mornin', eh? Yes, good mornin'."

He led the gentleman in green aside and said in a loud whisper that could be heard by everybody, "For heaven's sake, my dear fellow, do be careful. This is the King's own huntsman, and those two other chaps are King Pellinore and Sir Grummore. Now do be a good chap, my dear fellow, and don't say anything controversial, will you, old boy, there's a good chap?"

"Certainly I won't," said the green man reassuringly, "but I think you had better introduce me to them."

Sir Ector blushed deeply and called out: "Ah, Grummore, come over here a minute, will you? I want to introduce a friend of mine, old chap, a chap called Wood, old chap—Wood with a W, you know, not an H. Yes, and this is King Pellinore. Master Wood—King Pellinore."

"Hail," said King Pellinore, who had not quite got out of the habit when nervous.

"How do?" said Sir Grummore. "No relation to Robin Hood I suppose?"

"Oh, not in the least," interrupted Sir Ector hastily. "Double you, double owe, dee, you know, like the stuff they make furniture out of—furniture, you know, and spears, and—well—spears, you know, and furniture."

"How do you do?" said Robin.

"Hail," said King Pellinore.

"Well," said Sir Grummore, "it is funny you should both wear green."

"Yes, it is funny, isn't it?" said Sir Ector anxiously. "He wears it in mournin' for an aunt of his, who died by fallin' out of a tree."

"Beg pardon, I'm sure," said Sir Grummore, grieved at having touched upon this tender subject—and all was well.

"Now, then, Mr. Wood," said Sir Ector when he had recovered. "Where shall we go for our first draw?"

As soon as this question had been put, Master Twyti was fetched into the conversation, and a brief confabulation followed in which all sorts of technical terms like "lesses" were bandied about. Then there was a long walk in the wintry forest, and the fun began.

End quote.

I think we have all been in some kind of awkward conversation where everyone will be more comfortable if something is not said. Ector, of course, is fine with Robin's feasting in the forest, but Master Twyti works for the king who probably would frown on Ector's largess.

It's a death sentence, as I recall, to hunt the king's forests.

Wood with a W.

After all these years, I still think this is one of White's cleverest points.
Let's start the fun.

As soon as this question had been put, Master Twyti was fetched into the conversation, and a brief confabulation followed in which all sorts of technical terms like "lesses" were bandied about. Then there was a long walk in the wintry forest, and the fun began.

Wart had lost the panicky feeling which had taken hold of his stomach when he was breaking his fast. The exercise and the snow-wind had breathed him, so that his eyes sparkled almost as brilliantly as the frost crystals in the white winter sunlight, and his blood raced with the excitement of the chase. He watched the lymerer who held the two bloodhound dogs on their leashes, and saw the dogs straining more and more as the boar's lair was approached. He saw how, one by one and ending with the gazehounds—who did not hunt by scent—the various hounds became uneasy and began to whimper with desire. He noticed Robin pause and pick up some lesses, which he handed to Master Twyti, and then the whole cavalcade came to a halt. They had reached the dangerous spot.

Boar-hunting was like cub-hunting to this extent, that the boar was attempted to be held up. The object of the hunt was to kill him as quickly as possible. Wart took up his position in the circle round the monster's lair, and knelt down on one knee in the snow, with the handle of his spear couched on the ground, ready for emergencies. He felt the hush which fell upon the company, and saw Master Twyti wave silently to the lymerer to uncouple his hounds. The two lymers plunged immediately into the covert which the hunters surrounded. They ran mute.

There were five long minutes during which nothing happened. The hearts beat thunderously in the circle, and a small vein on the side of each neck throbbed in harmony with each heart. The heads turned quickly from side to side, as each man assured himself of his neighbours, and the breath of life steamed away on the north wind sweetly, as each realized how beautiful life was, which a reeking tusk might, in a few seconds, rape away from one or another of them if things went wrong.

The boar did not express his fury with his voice. There was no uproar in the covert or yelping from the lymers. Only, about a hundred yards away from the Wart, there was suddenly a black creature standing on the edge of the clearing. It did not seem to be a boar particularly, not in the first seconds that it stood there. It had come too quickly to seem to be anything. It was charging Sir Grummore before the Wart had recognized what it was.

The black thing rushed over the white snow, throwing up little puffs of it. Sir Grummore—also looking black against the snow—turned a quick somersault in a larger puff. A kind of grunt, but no noise of falling, came clearly on the north wind, and then the boar was gone. When it was gone, but not before, the Wart knew certain things about it—things which he had not had time to notice while the boar was there. He remembered the rank mane of bristles standing upright on its razor back, one flash of a sour tush, the staring ribs, the head held low, and the red flame from a piggy eye.

End quote.

“Lesses” is a good word to keep around; it’s the dung of prey. I think it is something I can add into a daily conversation. I think it will aid some talks, more or lesses.

Wart’s shaking off of the nervousness reminded me of high school football. We played games at night at South City and I can remember talking with Frank Caesar before a game and we both talked about how lousy we were with that strange stage fright nervousness we had before kick-off. Once the game started, usually with the first contact, it would vanish into that hyper state of alertness, like the “yarak” of our hawks in this story, and I don’t ever remember being more alive.

Football, American football, can end your career on one play. It’s a collision sport and the body gets knocked around, up and down, on almost every play. Yet, my eyes burned bright blue.

What I find most lovely about this selection is how Wart is buoyed by his neighbors. I think humans are hard-wired to be communal.

Listen to me talking about bravery: Wart and the band are facing a serious threat here:

“The boar did not express his fury with his voice. There was no uproar in the covert or yelping from the lymers. Only, about a hundred yards away from the Wart, there was suddenly a black creature standing on the edge of the clearing.”

“When it was gone, but not before, the Wart knew certain things about it—things which he had not had time to notice while the boar was there. He remembered the rank mane of bristles standing upright on its razor back, one flash of a sour tush, the staring ribs, the head held low, and the red flame from a piggy eye.”

Red flame from a piggy eye. The boar is a dangerous opponent. The nervous stomachs were well deserved. Now, the battle rages on.

Sir Grummore got up, dusting snow out of himself unhurt, blaming his spear. A few drops of blood were to be seen frothing on the white earth. Master Twyti put his horn to his lips. The alaunts were uncoupled as the exciting notes of the menee began to ring through the forest, and then the whole scene began to move. The lymers which had reared the boar—the proper word for dislodging—were allowed to pursue him to make them keen on their work. The braches gave musical tongue. The alaunts galloped baying through the drifts. Everybody began to shout and run.

"Avoy, avoy!" cried the foot-people. "Shahou, shahou! Avaunt, sire, avaunt!"

"Swef, swef!" cried Master Twyti anxiously. "Now, now, gentlemen, give the hounds room, if you please."

"I say, I say!" cried King Pellinore. "Did anybody see which way he went? What an exciting day, what? Sa sa cy avaunt, cy sa avaunt, sa cy avaunt!"

"Hold hard, Pellinore!" cried Sir Ector. "'Ware, hounds, man, 'ware hounds. Can't catch him yourself, you know. Il est hault. Il est hault!"

And "Til est ho," echoed the foot-people. "Tilly-ho," sang the trees. "Tally-ho," murmured the distant snow-drifts as the heavy branches, disturbed by the vibrations, slid noiseless puffs of sparkling powder to the muffled earth.

The Wart found himself running with Master Twyti.

It was like beagling in a way, except that it was beagling in a forest where it was sometimes difficult even to move. Everything depended on the music of the hounds and the various notes which the huntsman could blow to tell where he was and what he was doing. Without these the whole field would have been lost in two minutes—and even with them about half of it was lost in three.

Wart stuck to Twyti like a burr. He could move as quickly as the huntsman because, although the latter had the experience of a life-time, he himself was smaller to get through obstacles and had, moreover, been taught by Maid Marian. He noticed that Robin kept up too, but soon the grunting of Sir Ector and the baa-ing of King Pellinore were left behind. Sir Grummore had given in early, having had most of the breath knocked out of him by the boar, and stood far in the rear declaring that his spear could no longer be quite sharp. Kay had stayed with him, so that he should not get lost. The foot-people had been early mislaid because they did not understand the notes of the horn. Merlyn had torn his breeches and stopped to mend them up by magic.

End quote.

"Til est ho" or "Tally ho" is the traditional phrase to tell everyone that the quarry has been sighted. I am struggling to find the definitions of the other terms, but, essentially, I think our author is pointing out the confusion and the dangers of boar hunting.

You get a sense, again, of the character of the characters. Wart is using his woodcraft learned with Marian and Kay stays back.

It's obvious that Robin and Master Twyti know what they are doing. It's also painfully obvious that no one else seems to have enough experience and information to be of help. Actually, most of the people involved would probably lose a fight with the boar, so maybe it is better that they worry about their sharpened spears.

I'm sure, as always, that there is a life lesson here. I always note in workshops that it is better to call an expert than to try to go into your basement to capture that tribe of rattlesnakes that

moved in down there. I let first responders respond and I don't suggest things to airline pilots in flight.

Wart is with the big kids now.

Let's hope he makes it.

The sergeant had thrown out his chest so far in crying Tally-ho and telling everybody which way they ought to run that he had lost all sense of place, and was leading a disconsolate party of villagers, in Indian file, at the double, with knees up, in the wrong direction. Hob was still in the running.

"Swef, swef," panted the huntsman, addressing the Wart as if he had been a hound. "Not so fast, master, they are going off the line."

Even as he spoke, Wart noticed that the hound music was weaker and more querulous.

"Stop," said Robin, "or we may tumble over him."

The music died away.

"Swef, swef!" shouted Master Twyti at the top of his voice. "Sto arere, so howe, so howe!" He swung his baldrick in front of him, and, lifting the horn to his lips, began to blow a reheat.

There was a single note from one of the lymers.

"Hoo arere," cried the huntsman.

The lymer's note grew in confidence, faltered, then rose to the full bay.

"Hoo arere! Here how, amy. Hark to Beaumont the valiant! Ho moy, ho moy, hole, hole, hole, hole."

The lymer was taken up by the tenor bells of the braches. The noises grew to a crescendo of excitement as the blood-thirsty thunder of the alaunts pealed through the lesser notes.

"They have him," said Twyti briefly, and the three humans began to run again, while the huntsman blew encouragement with Trou-rou-root.

In a small bushment the grimly boar stood at bay. He had got his hindquarters into the nook of a tree blown down by a gale, in an impregnable position. He stood on the defensive with his upper lip writhed back in a snarl. The blood of Sir Grummore's gash welled fatly among the bristles of his shoulder and down his leg, while the foam of his chops dropped on the blushing snow and melted it. His small eyes darted in every direction. The hounds stood

round, yelling at his mask, and Beaumont, with his back broken, writhed at his feet. He paid no further attention to the living hound, which could do him no harm. He was black, flaming and bloody.

"So-ho," said the huntsman.

He advanced with his spear held in front of him, and the hounds, encouraged by their master, stepped forward with him pace by pace.

End quote.

Alas, poor Beaumont. His time is short.

If you have to summarize most of life's adventures, you could do worse than this section. The sergeant is leading the villagers in the wrong direction...loudly. We have injury, we have blood and we are at the arc just before the climax.

My junior college history professor, Norman Harold Friend, explained discobulus, the discus thrower statue, as being so prized not because of the action...but the hint of the action about to happen.

At this lecture, I learned a life truth: it is the moment BEFORE everything starts (good or bad) that needs to be captured. It's like the last minutes before a game that seem to drag on like days or the time between rounds at a track meet or lifting meet.

And then...poof! It's over.

It's about to begin now. It's about to be the end of this boar. But there is a price to pay.

Valiant Beaumont.

The scene changed as suddenly as a house of cards falling down. The boar was not at bay any more, but charging Master Twyti. As it charged, the alaunts closed in, seizing it fiercely by the shoulder or throat or leg, so that what surged down on the huntsman was not one boar but a bundle of animals. He dared not use his spear for fear of hurting the dogs. The bundle rolled forward unchecked, as if the hounds did not impede it at all. Twyti began to reverse his spear, to keep the charge off with its butt end, but even as he reversed it the tussle was upon him. He sprang back, tripped over a root, and the battle closed on top. The Wart pranced round the edge, waving his own spear in an agony, but there was nowhere where he dared to thrust it in. Robin dropped his spear, drew his falchion in the same movement, stepped into the huddle of snarls, and calmly picked an alaunt up by the leg. The dog did not let go, but there was space where its body had been. Into this space the falchion went slowly, once, twice, thrice. The whole superstructure stumbled, recovered itself, stumbled again, and sank down ponderously on its left side. The hunt was over.

End quote.

And, as swiftly as Robin stabs the boar, the hunt is over. I wanted to separate out the readings just a bit today as the finish of the successful hunt is not a celebration. As the others, the lost members of the hunting troop, slowly arrive, they will be much more enthusiastic about things.

Let's pick up on the reading to remind us why this small group is not so happy:

Master Twyti drew one leg slowly from under the boar, stood up, took hold of his knee with his right hand, moved it inquiringly in various directions, nodded to himself and stretched his back straight. Then he picked up his spear without saying anything and limped over to Beaumont. He knelt down beside him and took his head on his lap. He stroked Beaumont's head and said, "Hark to Beaumont. Softly, Beaumont, mon amy. Oyez a Beaumont the valiant. Swef, le douce Beaumont, swef, swef." Beaumont licked his hand but could not wag his tail. The huntsman nodded to Robin, who was standing behind, and held the hound's eyes with his own. He said, "Good dog, Beaumont the valiant, sleep now, old friend Beaumont, good old dog." Then Robin's falchion let Beaumont out of this world, to run free with Orion and roll among the stars.

The Wart did not like to watch Master Twyti for a moment.

End quote.

For a moment, let us remember Beaumont, the valiant. I have little to add save that I must say that White has an ability to write about a dog's death that fills my heart with sorrow.

Sleep now, Beaumont.

The Wart did not like to watch Master Twyti for a moment. The strange, leathery man stood up without saying anything and whipped the hounds off the corpse of the boar as he was accustomed to do. He put his horn to his lips and blew the four long notes of the mort without a quaver. But he was blowing the notes for a different reason, and he startled the Wart because he seemed to be crying.

The mort brought most of the stragglers up in due time. Hob was there already and Sir Ector came next, whacking the brambles aside with his boar-spear, puffing importantly and shouting, "Well done, Twyti. Splendid hunt, very. That's the way to chase a beast of venery, I will say. What does he weigh?" The others dribbled in by batches, King Pellinore bounding along and crying out, "Tally-ho! Tally-ho! Tally-ho!" in ignorance that the hunt was done. When informed of this, he stopped and said "Tally-ho, what?" in a feeble voice, then relapsed into silence. Even the sergeant's Indian file arrived in the end, still doubling with knees up, and were halted in the clearing while the sergeant explained to them with great satisfaction that if it had not been for him, all would have been lost. Merlyn appeared holding up his running shorts, having failed in his magic. Sir Grummore came stumping along with Kay, saying that it had been one of the finest points he had ever seen run, although he had not seen it, and then the butcher's business of the "undoing" was proceeded with apace.

Over this there was a bit of excitement. King Pellinore, who had really been scarcely himself all day, made the fatal mistake of asking when the hounds were going to be given their quarry. Now, as everybody knows, a quarry is a reward of entrails, etc., which is given to the hounds on the hide of the dead beast (sur le quir), and, as everybody else knows, a slain boar is not skinned. It is disembowelled without the hide being taken off, and, since there can be no hide, there can be no quarry. We all know that the hounds are rewarded with a fouail, or mixture of bowels and bread cooked over a fire, and, of course, poor King Pellinore had used the wrong word.

So King Pellinore was bent over the dead beast amid loud huzzas, and the protesting monarch was given a hearty smack with a sword blade by Sir Ector. The King then said, "I think you are all a lot of beastly cads," and wandered off mumbling into the forest.

End quote.

I actually have some emotions rereading this again. The death of Beaumont and Twyti's emotions have always just made me sad. I have had to "put to sleep" two dogs in my life, Paint and Lexie, and both events were tough days and weeks.

After Paint was dead, I drove up to the Pacifica Barbell Club. When I came in, Dick looked at my face and asked what was wrong. I told him.

He plopped on a bench. He began to talk about the day he had to do this with Reg, named after Reg Park. We both sat, sad shouldered, until Eric Seubert walked in. He asked what happened.

Dick look up, his voice broke: "Danny had to put down Paint." Eric sat down, too.

When my mom died, my brother Gary said: "It's not fair. I'm not over Paint yet."

So, forgive me if I find this part of the reading so moving.

T. H. White has been preparing us for this moment literally from the very first paragraph. Let's review:

"On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays it was Court Hand and Summulae Logicales, while the rest of the week it was the Organon, Repetition and Astrology. The governess was always getting muddled with her astrolabe, and when she got specially muddled she would take it out of the Wart by rapping his knuckles. She did not rap Kay's knuckles, because when Kay grew older he would be Sir Kay, the master of the estate. The Wart was called the Wart because it more or less rhymed with Art, which was short for his real name. Kay had given him the nickname. Kay was not called anything but Kay, as he was too dignified to have a nickname and would have flown into a passion if anybody had tried to give him one. The governess had red hair and some mysterious wound from which she derived a lot of prestige by showing it to all the women of the castle, behind closed doors. It was believed to be where

she sat down, and to have been caused by sitting on some armour at a picnic by mistake. Eventually she offered to show it to Sir Ector, who was Kay's father, had hysterics and was sent away. They found out afterwards that she had been in a lunatic hospital for three years.

In the afternoons the programme was: Mondays and Fridays, tilting and horsemanship; Tuesdays, hawking; Wednesdays, fencing; Thursdays, archery; Saturdays, the theory of chivalry, with the proper measures to be blown on all occasions, terminology of the chase and hunting etiquette. If you did the wrong thing at the mort or the undoing, for instance, you were bent over the body of the dead beast and smacked with the flat side of a sword. This was called being bladed. It was horseplay, a sort of joke like being shaved when crossing the line. Kay was not bladed, although he often went wrong."

Pellinore, of course, has been bladed: "If you did the wrong thing at the mort or the undoing, for instance, you were bent over the body of the dead beast and smacked with the flat side of a sword. This was called being bladed."

Pellinore wanders away. Once again, oddly(!), Pellinore will reignite the story. I have noted his role before, but let's review:

***Wart's "quest:" He finds Merlyn (After Meeting King Pellinore chasing the Beast Glatisant)
Fish (Perch) Transformation***

Madam Mim

Tilting Lesson (King Pellinore and Sir Grummore)

Hawk Transformation

The "Middle of the Book:" Robin Wood and the Adventure with the Fairy People

Snake Transformation

Boar Hunt (King Pellinore finds the Beast Glatisant...again)

Owl Transformation

Galapas the Giant (King Pellinore is among the captured...all are saved by the Beast)

Badger Transformation

After this, spoiler alert, Wart pulls the sword from the stone.

Pellinore seems to connect the stories and I wish I could sit down with White and ask him about this. King Pellinore could easily be dropped out an abridged edition (horrors!) but I think the story would be missing something very important.

The Sword in the Stone is a marvelous tapestry. I think the golden thread that holds everything together is Pellinore. White seems to know this and sets us up again and again with the King's entrances and exits. He is a different kind of hero.

We will soon see, and understand, his true loyalty.

So King Pellinore was bent over the dead beast amid loud huzzas, and the protesting monarch was given a hearty smack with a sword blade by Sir Ector. The King then said, "I think you are all a lot of beastly cads," and wandered off mumbling into the forest.

The boar was undone, the hounds rewarded, and the foot-people, standing about in chattering groups because they would have got wet if they had sat down in the snow, ate the provisions which the young women had brought in baskets. A small barrel of wine which had been thoughtfully provided by Sir Ector was broached, and a good drink was had by all. The boar's feet were tied together, a pole was slipped between his legs, and two men hoisted it upon their shoulders. William Twyti stood back, and courteously blew the prise.

It was at this moment that King Pellinore reappeared. Even before he came into view they could hear him crashing in the undergrowth and calling out, "I say, I say! Come here at once! A most dreadful thing has happened!" He appeared dramatically upon the edge of the clearing, just as a disturbed branch, whose burden was too heavy, emptied a couple of hundredweight of snow on his head. King Pellinore paid no attention. He climbed out of the snow heap as if he had not noticed it, still calling out, "I say. I say!"

End quote.

I say. I say.

I may have ruined what's about to happen with my big overviews of the story, but this section makes for a nice little picnic and break with some provisions and a nice bit of wine.

One of my secret training protocols, and please don't share this with anyone, is a Wine Walk. Tiffini and I have been doing these since the kids were old enough to leave alone for a bit. Bringing a dog, by the way, works out well...bringing kids is not so well.

We venture off into the park or woods and look for a quiet place. I carry a specialty backpack that I open when we sit down. I pop open a wine bottle, uncork it and serve us a glass.

Or two.

Or three.

Sometimes, we do cheeses or nuts. Fruit is excellent.

The joke is always that the walk home takes longer as we "wind around" a bit more with a belly full of wine.

This scene after the death of the boar is the first time we have relaxed since this chapter has begun.

Pellinore, however, has something to tell us!!!

"What is it, Pellinore?" shouted Sir Ector.

"Oh, come quick!" cried the King, and, turning round distracted, he vanished again into the forest.

"Is he all right," inquired Sir Ector, "do you suppose?"

"Excitable character," said Sir Grummore. "Very."

"Better follow up and see what he's doin'."

The procession moved off sedately in King Pellinore's direction, following his erratic course by the fresh tracks in the snow.

The spectacle which they came across was one for which they were not prepared. In the middle of a dead gorse bush King Pellinore was sitting, with the tears streaming down his face. In his lap there was an enormous snake's head, which he was patting. At the other end of the snake's head there was a long, lean, yellow body with spots on it. At the end of the body there were some lion's legs which ended in the slots of a hart.

"There, there," the King was saying. "I did not mean to leave you altogether. It was only because I wanted to sleep in a feather bed, just for a bit. I was coming back, honestly I was. Oh please don't die, Beast, and leave me without any fewmets!"

When he saw Sir Ector, the King took command of the situation. Desperation had given him authority.

"Now, then, Ector," he exclaimed. "Don't stand there like a ninny. Fetch that barrel of wine along at once."

They brought the barrel and poured out a generous tot for the Questing Beast.

"Poor creature," said King Pellinore indignantly. "It has pined away, positively pined away, just because there was nobody to take an interest in it. How I could have stayed all that while with Sir Grummore and never given my old Beast a thought I really don't know. Look at its ribs, I ask you. Like the hoops of a barrel. And lying out in the snow all by itself, almost without the will to live. Come on, Beast, you see if you can't get down another gulp of this. It will do you good.

"Mollocking about in a feather bed," added the remorseful monarch, glaring at Sir Grummore, "like a—like a kidney!"

"But how did you—how did you find it?" faltered Sir Grummore.

"I happened on it. And small thanks to you. Running about like a lot of nincompoops and smacking each other with swords. I happened on it in this gorse bush here, with snow all over its poor back and tears in its eyes and nobody to care for it in the wide world. It's what comes of not leading a regular life. Before, it was all right. We got up at the same time, and quested for regular hours, and went to bed at half past ten. Now look at it. It has gone to pieces altogether, and it will be your fault if it dies. You and your bed."

"But, Pellinore!" said Sir Grummore....

"Shut your mouth," replied the King at once. "Don't stand there bleating like a fool, man. Do something. Fetch another pole so that we can carry old Glatisant home. Now, then, Ector, haven't you got any sense? We must just carry him home and put him in front of the kitchen fire. Send somebody on to make some bread and milk. And you, Twyti, or whatever you choose to call yourself, stop fiddling with that trumpet of yours and run ahead to get some blankets warmed.

End quote.

I want to come back to this reading again. Simply, I want to point something out:

The Beast, without someone to chase it, began to die, fade away, whither.

Without a reason for being, we whither.

Chew on that for a bit.

"When we get home," concluded King Pellinore, "the first thing will be to give it a nourishing meal, and then, if it is all right in the morning, I will give it a couple of hours' start and then hey-ho for the old life once again. What about that, Glatisant, hey? You'll tak' the high road and I'll tak' the low road, what? Come along, Robin Hood, or whoever you are—you may think I don't know, but I do—stop leaning on your bow with that look of negligent woodcraft. Pull yourself together, man, and get that muscle-bound sergeant to help you carry her. Now then, lift her easy. Come along, you chuckle-heads, and mind you don't trip. Feather beds and quarry, indeed; a lot of childish nonsense. Go on, advance, proceed, step forward, march! Feather brains, I call it, that's what I do.

"And as for you, Grummore," added the King, even after he had concluded, "you can just roll yourself up in your bed and stifle in it."

End quote.

That was a long chapter. The whole story of the Boar Hunt, like the other story with Robin Hood (Wood!), took several chapters to bring to a conclusion.

Pellinore was a bit of a cartoonish figure in the Disney version of this story. I guess that makes sense, but you can see here that he does “come around” and show some serious leadership...and anger.

The Boar Hunt is over. It is time to move along again in our story. We will now come to some transfigurations and adventures that are not included in the 1958 version.

For the life of me, I can't explain why anyone would want to miss the stories we are about to read.

Chapter XVII

"I think it must be time," said Merlyn, looking at him over the top of his spectacles one afternoon, "that you had another dose of education. That is, as Time goes."

It was an afternoon in early spring and everything outside the window looked beautiful. The winter mantle had gone, taking with it Sir Grummore, Master Twyti, King Pellinore and the Questing Beast—the latter having revived under the influence of kindness and bread and milk. It had bounded off into the snow with every sign of gratitude, to be followed two hours later by the excited King, and the watchers from the battlements had observed it confusing its snowy footprints most ingeniously, as it reached the edge of the chase. It was running backward, bounding twenty foot sideways, rubbing out its marks with its tail, climbing along horizontal branches, and performing many other tricks with evident enjoyment. They had also seen King Pellinore—who had dutifully kept his eyes shut and counted ten thousand while this was going on—becoming quite confused when he arrived at the difficult spot, and finally galloping off in the wrong direction with his brachet trailing behind him.

End quote.

I find this small little paragraph to be an absolute delight. As a child, I loved Hide and Go Seek (which along with Tag are the two greatest games of all-time that I am sure go back to the ancient human hunter-gatherer times) and I feel I learned more about thinking, tactics and strategy outwitting my friends and family to get Home safely.

Counting to ten thousand, as Pellinore does, seems like a long task. The Beast is back and we, in the editions we follow, will meet this interesting creature again.

We are moving into Spring now. With the Boar Hunt and Christmas behind us, our story returns to teaching Wart. It's time for more education now. Honestly, the Boar Hunt and our adventure with Robin Hood and the Fairy People are long stories over many chapters and I miss the fun of the transfiguration stories. But we learn a lot during our little diversions.

I am “big” in this concept of destiny. Whether or not there is a Supreme Force in the universe guiding our lives, our destinies, is a conversation for another place and time, but what we find

her with Pellinore is interesting. His job is to seek the Questing Beast. He seems to “get it” a few times in our readings and, yet, we see him release the beast and start the chase again.

As those of us who have achieved a goal, and good for us(!!!), I have often noticed that the achievement of the goal isn’t nearly as, and I don’t have a good word for it, fun/good/joyful as the process in which when went through to get there.

Art Devany reminds us in his Evolutionary Fitness article that we should ignore goals completely and simply focus on the process. I tell my athletes and clients to “respect the process.”

Questing, the chase, seems to be Pellinore’s destiny. Whenever he catches the Beast, he lets it go. As we joke in theology: “everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die to get there.”

I’m sure there is a life lesson here. Maybe it’s time for another dose of education.

It was a lovely afternoon. Outside the schoolroom window the larches of the distant forest had already taken on the fullness of their dazzling green, the earth twinkled and swelled with a million drops, and every bird in the world had come home to court and sing. The village folk were forth in their gardens every evening, planting garden beans, and it seemed that, what with these emergencies and those of the slugs (coincidentally with the beans), the buds, the lambs, and the birds, every living thing had conspired to come out.

"What would you like to be?" asked Merlyn.

Wart looked out of the window, listening to the thrush's twice-done song of dew.

He said, "I have been a bird once, but it was only in the mews at night, and I never got a chance to fly. Even if one ought not to do one's education twice, do you think I could be a bird so as to learn about that?"

He had been bitten with the craze for birds which bites all sensible people in the spring, and which sometimes even leads to excesses like birds' nesting.

"I can see no reason why you should not," said the magician. "Why not try it at night?"

"But they will be asleep at night."

"All the better chance of seeing them, without their flying away. You could go with Archimedes this evening, and he would tell you about them."

"Would you do that, Archimedes?"

"I should love to," said the owl. "I was feeling like a little saunter myself."

End quote.

Saunter. This is such a great word. I was taught, and the dictionary doesn't support this, is that the term comes from how one walks to the Holy Lands, San Terra. It's a slow, whimsical journey where, as so often happens in life, the road is more important than the destination.

My high school football coach, Ray Dejong, yelled this at us if our offense didn't sprint up to the line of scrimmage.

"That's it, SAUNTER up, just saunter up to the line." Sarcasm dripped off his mouth.

As I type this, my office window has a nest just above it the corners of my roof. We have a vigilant sentinel who marks all of our comings and goings when warning chirps and tweets. The other day, my wife reported several heads popping up out of the nest that weren't there a few days ago.

The pop-pop-pop of little bird heads out of a nest are one of my signs of spring. The lawn needed mowing, the plants are suddenly green and the weather changes by the hour. It's spring again.

And it's time to fly.

"Do you know," asked the Wart, thinking of the thrush, "why birds sing, or how? Is it a language?"

"Of course it is a language. It is not a big language like human speech, but it is large."

"Gilbert White," said Merlyn, "remarks, or will remark, however you like to put it, that 'the language of birds is very ancient, and, like other ancient modes of speech, little is said, but much is intended.' He also says somewhere that 'the rooks, in the breeding season, attempt sometimes, in the gaiety of their hearts, to sing—but with no great success.'"

"I love rooks," said the Wart. "It is funny, but I think they are my favourite bird."

"Why?" asked Archimedes.

"Well, I like them. I like their sauce."

"Neglectful parents," quoted Merlyn, who was in a scholarly mood, "and saucy, perverse children."

"It is true," said Archimedes reflectively, "that all the corvidae have a distorted sense of humour."

Wart explained.

"I love the way they enjoy flying. They don't just fly, like other birds, but they fly for fun. It is lovely when they hoist home to bed in a flock at night, all cheering and making rude remarks and pouncing on each other in a vulgar way. They turn over on their backs sometimes and tumble out of the air, just to be ridiculous, or else because they have forgotten they are flying and have coarsely began to scratch themselves for fleas, without thinking about it."

"They are intelligent birds," said Archimedes, "in spite of their low humour. They are one of the birds that have parliaments, you know, and a social system."

"Do you mean they have laws?"

"Certainly they have laws. They meet in the autumn, in a field, to talk them over."

"What sort of laws?"

"Oh, well, laws about the defence of the rookery, and marriage, and so forth. You are not allowed to marry outside the rookery, and, if you do become quite lost to all sense of decency, and bring back a sable virgin from a neighbouring settlement, then everybody pulls your nest to pieces as fast as you can build it up. They make you go into the suburbs, you know, and that is why every rookery has out-lying nests all round it, several trees away."

"Another thing I like about them," said the Wart, "is their Go. They may be thieves and practical jokers, and they do quarrel and bully each other in a squawky way, but they have got the courage to mob their enemies. I should think it takes some courage to mob a hawk, even if there is a pack of you. And even while they are doing it they clown."

"They are mobs," said Archimedes, loftily. "You have said the word."

"Well, they are larky mobs, anyway," said the Wart, "and I like them."

End quote.

I'm never sure on how much to chew on from this story. When it comes to these conversations, I hate breaking them up too small, but I don't want to skip anything.

This conversation, and the next adventure of flying, really allows us to look at the very beginning again of this book. I have argued, and I am more convinced of it by the week, that this story is a love affair with education. When we began, Wart and Kay are in need of a tutor and we have a nicely mapped weekly approach to their education:

"On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays it was Court Hand and Summulae Logicales, while the rest of the week it was the Organon, Repetition and Astrology...In the afternoons the programme was: Mondays and Fridays, tilting and horsemanship; Tuesdays, hawking;

Wednesdays, fencing; Thursdays, archery; Saturdays, the theory of chivalry, with the proper measures to be blown on all occasions, terminology of the chase and hunting etiquette.
End quote.

As I have noted, the afternoon education has provided us with many of the tales of this book from Robin Wood to King Pellinore forgetting his hunting etiquette. These have framed the story. In our version, we also will get a chance to see some more of the morning sessions, too.

Wart, as always, brings some enthusiasm into our discussion. Enthusiasm, of course, means "God within" and we generally knit this in with people with lots of fun and "flair" (see Office Space for that reference).

Rooks like to fly and that appeals to Wart. As we have seen, Wart genuinely likes things. He liked hay-making (and was good at it, if you remember) and he seems to enjoy everything he learns in our stories. The only time we see him grumpy is when there is nothing to do.

Future readers might miss this, but as I write this part of the story, we are entering into our fourth week of quarantine with the Corona Virus and people are beginning to discover their "true selves." Nothing gives clarity more than being shut in.

White mentions the corvidae family of birds. This would be the crows and their cousins. In the Irish language, the word "Corva" is the word for crow.

As we go along in this conversation, it is fun to see the three pillars of opinion that Wart, Merlyn and Archimedes seem to sit on as they discuss their favorite birds. They are good friends now and the conversation is going to take us places.

"What is your favourite bird?" asked Merlyn politely, to keep the peace.

Archimedes thought this over for some time, and then said, "Well, it is a large question. It is rather like asking you what is your favourite book. On the whole, however, I think that I must prefer the pigeon."

"To eat?"

"I was leaving that side of it out," said the owl in civilized tones. "Actually the pigeon is the favourite dish of all raptors, if they are big enough to take her, but I was thinking of nothing but domestic habits."

"Describe them."

"The pigeon," said Archimedes, "is a kind of Quaker. She dresses in grey. A dutiful child, a constant lover, and a wise parent, she knows, like all philosophers, that the hand of every man is against her. She has learned throughout the centuries to specialize in escape. No

pigeon has ever committed an act of aggression nor turned upon her persecutors: but no bird, likewise, is so skilful in eluding them. She has learned to drop out of a tree on the opposite side to man, and to fly low so that there is a hedge between them. No other bird can estimate a range so well. Vigilant, powdery, odorous and loose-feathered—so that dogs object to take them in their mouths—armoured against pellets by the padding of these feathers, the pigeons coo to one another with true love, nourish their cunningly hidden children with true solicitude, and flee from the aggressor with true philosophy—a race of peace lovers continually caravanning away from the destructive Indian in covered wagons. They are loving individualists surviving against the forces of massacre only by wisdom in escape.

"Did you know," added Archimedes, "that a pair of pigeons always roosts head to tail, so that they can keep a look-out in both directions?"

"I know our tame pigeons do," said the Wart. "I suppose the reason why people are always trying to kill them is because they are so greedy. What I like about wood-pigeons is the clap of their wings, and how they soar up and close their wings and sink, during their courting flights, so that they fly rather like woodpeckers."

"It is not very like woodpeckers," said Merlyn.

"No, it is not," admitted the Wart.

End quote.

I read this as an Eighth Grader and I began to appreciate pigeons from that point on. It's funny how something this simple can change things.

There is a How I Met Your Mother episode where the characters discover that when you point out someone's flaw, it is like breaking glass. I think if you point out someone's qualities, the same happens but not as ground shaking.

This chapter made me look at birds differently. I still appreciate the LBJs (Little Brown Jobbers) who flit and flicker outside my window as I work. I appreciate the bravery of the Quail Father who lives here and protects his family. I also respect the Cooper's Hawk who uses my backyard as a lunch table.

This a marvelous conversation. Notice how White staggers three chapter BIG stories with these quiet little cozy discussions. Next time I reread the book, I will focus on this point.

Until then.

"And what is your favourite bird?" asked Archimedes, feeling that his master ought to be allowed a say.

Merlyn put his fingers together like Sherlock Holmes and replied immediately, "I prefer the chaffinch. My friend Linnaeus calls him coelebs or bachelor bird. The flocks have the sense to

separate during the winter, so that all the males are in one flock and all the females in the other. For the winter months, at any rate, there is perfect peace."

"The conversation," observed Archimedes, "arose out of whether birds could talk."

"Another friend of mine," said Merlyn immediately, in his most learned voice, "maintains, or will maintain, that the question of the language of birds arises out of imitation. Aristotle, you know, also attributes tragedy to imitation."

Archimedes sighed heavily, and remarked in prophetic tones, "You had better get it off your chest."

End quote.

Linnaeus, or Carl Von Linne, is one of those historical figures that, when studied, you become more amazed as you read. Basically, he invented how we name and organize animals into those familiar "trees." He was considered to be one of the most important figures in human history according to Rousseau, Goethe and Spinoza.

That's a level of praise that is pretty hard to match.

I do find Archimedes to be rather funny here. These are old friends talking. If you have been around some one for a while, you tend to know where some conversations are going. With Mike Warren Brown, we both groan when we start talking about Don Quixote as he loves Part Two and I see no value for it.

Let's just say that we have beaten this discussion to death. My friend, Chris Long and I used to go into long circular discussions about Hamlet (I give the guy a break) and, as I recall, Chris relented as I am always right.

Merlyn and Archimedes have probably danced this dance before this conversation. Retreading old stories and old arguments are part of the fun of being in relationships. I can get an eye roll from my friend, Mary, by simply mentioning how a microwave cooks things. It's a discussion from 1982!

So...sit back and enjoy.

Archimedes sighed heavily, and remarked in prophetic tones, "You had better get it off your chest."

"It is like this," said Merlyn. "The kestrel drops upon a mouse, and the poor mouse, transfixed with those needle talons, cries out in agony his one squeal of K-e-e-e! Next time the kestrel sees a mouse, his own soul cries out Kee in imitation. Another kestrel, perhaps his mate,

comes to that cry, and after a few million years all the kestrels are calling each other with their individual note of Kee-kee-kee."

"You can't make the whole story out of one bird," said the Wart.

"I don't want to. The hawks scream like their prey. The mallards croak like the frogs they eat, the shrikes also, like these creatures in distress. The blackbirds and thrushes click like the snail shells they hammer to pieces. The various finches make the noise of cracking seeds, and the woodpecker imitates the tapping on wood which he makes to get the insects that he eats."

"But all birds don't give a single note!"

"No, of course not. The call note arises out of imitation and then the various bird songs are developed by repeating the call note and descanting upon it."

"I see," said Archimedes coldly. "And what about me?"

"Well, you know quite well," said Merlyn, "that the shrew-mouse you pounce upon squeals out Kweek! That is why the young of your species call Kee-wick."

"And the old?" inquired Archimedes sarcastically.

"Hooroo, Hooroo," cried Merlyn, refusing to be damped. "It is obvious, my dear fellow. After their first winter, that is the wind in the hollow trees where they prefer to sleep."

"I see," said Archimedes, more coolly than ever. "This time, we note, it is not a question of prey at all."

"Oh, come along," replied Merlyn. "There are other things besides the things you eat. Even a bird drinks sometimes, for instance, or bathes itself in water. It is the liquid notes of a river that we hear in a robin's song."

"It seems now," said Archimedes, "that it is no longer a question of what we eat, but also what we drink or hear."

"And why not?"

The owl said resignedly, "Oh, well."

"I think it is an interesting idea," said the Wart, to encourage his tutor. "But how does a language come out of these imitations?"

"They repeat them at first," said Merlyn, "and then they vary them. You don't seem to realize what a lot of meaning there resides in the tone and the speed of voice. Suppose I were to say 'What a nice day,' just like that. You would answer, 'Yes, so it is.' But if I were to say, 'What a nice day,' in caressing tones, you might think I was a nice person. But then again, if I were to say, 'What a nice day,' quite breathless, you might look about you to see what had put me in a fright. It is like this that the birds have developed their language."

"Would you mind telling us," said Archimedes, "since you know so much about it, how many various things we birds are able to express by altering the tempo and emphasis of the elaborations of our call-notes?"

"But a large number of things. You can cry Kee-wick in tender accents, if you are in love, or Kee-wick angrily in challenge or in hate: you can cry it on a rising scale as a call-note, if you do not know where your partner is, or to attract their attention away if strangers are straying near your nest: if you go near the old nest in the winter-time you may cry Kee-wick lovingly, a conditioned reflex from the pleasures which you once enjoyed within it, and if I come near to you in a startling way you may cry out Keewick-keewick-keewick, in loud alarm."

"When we come to conditioned reflexes," remarked Archimedes sourly, "I prefer to look for a mouse."

"So you may. And when you find it I dare say you will make another sound characteristic of owls, though not often mentioned in books of ornithology. I refer to the sound 'Tock' or 'Tck' which human beings call a smacking of the lips."

"And what sound is that supposed to imitate?"

"Obviously, the breaking of mousy bones."

"You are a cunning master," said Archimedes, "and as far as a poor owl is concerned you will just have to get away with it. All I can tell you from my personal experience is that it is not like that at all. A tit can tell you not only that it is in danger, but what kind of danger it is in. It can say, 'Look out for the cat,' or 'Look out for the hawk', or 'Look out for the tawny owl,' as plainly as A.B.C."

"I don't deny it," said Merlyn. "I am only telling you the beginnings of the language. Suppose you try to tell me the song of any single bird which I can't attribute originally to imitation?"

"The night-jar," said the Wart.

"The buzzing of the wings of beetles," replied his tutor at once.

"The nightingale," cried Archimedes desperately.

"Ah," said Merlyn, leaning back in his comfortable chair. "Now we are to imitate the soul-song of our beloved Proserpine, as she stirs to wake in all her liquid self."

"Tereu," said the Wart softly.

"Pieu," added the owl quietly.

"Music!" concluded the necromancer in ecstasy, unable to make the smallest beginnings of an imitation.

"Hallo," said Kay, opening the door of the afternoon school room. "I'm sorry I am late for the geography lesson. I was trying to get a few small birds with my cross-bow. Look, I have killed a thrush."

End quote.

I didn't know when to cut that dialogue. I almost left the Kay part out but it finishes the chapter.

I never liked that little moment. I get it: we are reminded of Kay's basic cluelessness (and perhaps cruelty) but it just is so jarring to the mind's eye.

Maybe that's the point: academic discussions are just nice and fine and jolly, but the real world sits at the door. The real world is hungry...always hungry.

The discussion on language always intrigued me. This article came out a few years ago and I fell in love with it. These are the oldest words that we humans share.

<https://www.zmescience.com/research/oldest-words-in-world-15000/>

Here is that list: "thou, I, not, that, we, to give, who, this, what, man/male, ye, old, mother, to hear, hand, fire, to pull, black, to flow, bark, ashes, to spit, worm"

Listed by the number of language families in which they have cognates.

7 - thou

6 - I

5 - not, that, we, to give, who

4 - this, what, man/male, ye, old, mother, to hear, hand, fire, to pull, black, to flow, bark, ashes, to spit, worm

"You, hear me! Give this fire to that old man. Pull the black worm off the bark and give it to the mother. And no spitting in the ashes!"

White's conversation about the formation of birds' languages interested me as a kid. When this list came out, it got me thinking about how early humans went through this process of labeling things, agreeing on terms (or signs) and slowly built up into stories. Humans learned to imagine

a future, key to hunting and battle strategy, and began to tell stories. Story telling develops community and community values...and engages the imagination.

I never truly studied languages very well, but I have an odd love affair with it. I like the roots of words and the stories behind words.

Our chapter ends here. We will continue with the 1938 and 1939 version; those reading the 1958 story will have something from The Book of Merlyn.

I think it should have been kept there.

Start New:

Before I get started on our new chapter, starting this chapter got me to read The Book of Merlyn (White's "Fifth" book of this collection) again. When it came out in 1977, I was the first person at the bookstore to buy it and I didn't really have any money. I still have the edition.

This chapter is going to be from the original 1938 version for our discussion. The later version (the completed The Once and Future King) gives us the story of the geese. Both the story of the geese and the ants were cut and pasted into the 1958 single book "The Once and Future King."

The ants and the geese work well in The Book of Merlyn. They choke the story in The Sword in the Stone. With Arthur facing the loss of everything at the end of TBoM, his transformations into an ant and a goose open his eyes a bit. It gives some respite for our hero.

It's not happy.

This chapter, in all versions, begins with Wart becoming an owl. In the 1958 version, he changes from an owl to a goose and I couldn't figure out why when I first read it. In OUR version, we will have some amazing stories.

I rediscovered the older version, by the way, teaching English as a Second Language. An instructor left the scholastic version out and I picked it up and found all these stories that just made me deep dive again. It's funny how important rereading can be.

Let's begin.

Chapter XVIII

The Wart lay awake as he had been told to do. He was to wait until Kay was asleep, and then Archimedes would come for him with Merlyn's magic. He lay under the great bearskin and stared out of the window at the stars of spring, no longer frosty and metallic, but as if they had been new washed and had swollen with the moisture. It was a lovely evening, without

rain or cloud. The sky between the stars was of the deepest and fullest velvet. Framed in the thick western window, Alderbaran and Betelgeuse were racing Sirius over the horizon, the hunting dog-star looking back to his master Orion, who had not yet heaved himself above the rim. In at the window came also the unfolding scent of benighted flowers, for the currants, the wild cherries, the plums and the hawthorn were already in bloom, and no less than five nightingales within earshot were holding a contest of beauty among the bowery, the looming trees.

Wart lay on his back with his bearskin half off him and his hands clasped behind his head. It was too beautiful to sleep, too temperate for the rug. He watched out at the stars in a kind of trance. Soon it would be the summer again, when he could sleep on the battlements and watch these stars hovering as close as moths above his face—and, in the Milky Way at least, with something of the mothy pollen. They would be at the same time so distant that unutterable thoughts of space and eternity would baffle themselves in his sighing breast, and he would imagine to himself how he was falling upward higher and higher among them, never reaching, never ending, leaving and losing everything in the tranquil speed of space.

He was fast asleep when Archimedes came for him.

"Eat this," said the owl, and handed him a dead mouse.

The Wart felt so strange that he took the furry atomy without protest, and popped it into his mouth without any feelings that it was going to be nasty. So he was not surprised when it turned out to be excellent, with a fruity taste like eating a peach with the skin on, though naturally the skin was not so nice as the mouse.

"Now, we had better fly," said the owl. "Just flip to the window-sill here, to get accustomed to yourself before we take off."

End quote.

As someone who owns/has a dog named Sirius Black, I loved this selection:

Alderbaran and Betelgeuse were racing Sirius over the horizon, the hunting dog-star looking back to his master Orion

Of course, if you love Beetle Juice (the movie), you have to like it too.

Merlyn's use of magic continues to change. In the fish episode, he asked Neptune for help. He used wand magic for the transformation into a raptor. Here we eat a mouse.

Remember this mouse. An interesting side story will pop up concerning Wart's eating of this mouse and hunting. Of course, Wart eating a mouse is a discussion for another time.

Prepare for some great stories.

Wart jumped for the sill and automatically gave himself an extra kick with his wings, just as a high jumper swings his arms. He landed on the sill with a thump, as owls are apt to do, did not stop himself in time, and toppled straight out of the window. "This," he thought to himself, cheerfully, "is where I break my neck." It was curious, but he was not taking life seriously. He felt the castle walls streaking past him, and the ground and the moat swimming up. He kicked with his wings, and the ground sank again, like water in a leaking well. In a second that kick of his wings had lost its effect, and the ground was welling up. He kicked again. It was strange, going forward with the earth ebbing and flowing beneath him, in the utter silence of his down-fringed feathers.

"For heaven's sake," panted Archimedes, bobbing in the dark air beside him, "stop flying like a woodpecker. Anybody would take you for a Little Owl, if the creatures had been imported. What you are doing is to give yourself flying speed with one flick of your wings. You then rise on that flick until you have lost flying speed and begin to stall. Then you give another just as you are beginning to drop out of the air, and do a switch-back. It is confusing to keep up with you."

"Well," said the Wart recklessly, "if I stop doing this I shall go bump altogether."

"Idiot," said the owl. "Waver your wings all the time, like me, instead of doing these jumps with them."

The Wart did what he was told, and was surprised to find that the earth became stable and moved underneath him without tilting, in a regular pour. He did not feel himself to be moving at all.

"That's better."

End quote.

This moment will "return" to us (Spoiler Alert!) when Wart pulls the sword from the stone.

"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."

Throughout our book, lessons are piled on lessons. True, we are about to enter two of the more wonderful dreams (or whatever...honestly, it's hard to explain the magic sometimes) but, on our way there, White tosses in a flying lesson...for those of us who transform into owls.

White has a way of getting us in the air with Wart and Archimedes. Yes, certainly, just call it "good writing," but my imagination sails up and down with Wart as Archimedes tries to get him to fly right.

White has a magical ability to write right.

"How curious everything looks," observed the boy with some wonder, now that he had time to look about him.

And, indeed, the world did look curious. In some ways the best description of it would be to say that it looked like a photographer's negative, for he was seeing one ray beyond the spectrum which is visible to human beings. An infra-red camera will take photographs in the dark, when we cannot see, and it will also take photographs in daylight. The owls are the same, for it is untrue that they can only see at night. They see in the day just as well, only they happen to possess the advantage of seeing pretty well at night also. So naturally they prefer to do their hunting then, when other creatures are more at their mercy. To the Wart the green trees would have looked whitish in the daytime, as if they were covered with apple blossom, and now, at night, everything had the same kind of different look. It was like flying in a twilight which had reduced everything to shades of the same colour, and, as in the twilight, there was a considerable amount of gloom.

"Do you like it?" asked the owl.

"I like it very much. Do you know, when I was a fish there were parts of the water which were colder or warmer than the other parts, and now it is the same in the air."

"The temperature," said Archimedes, "depends on the vegetation of the bottom. Woods or weeds, they make it warm above them."

"Well," said the Wart, "I can see why the reptiles who had given up being fishes decided to become birds. It certainly is fun."

"You are beginning to fit things together," remarked Archimedes. "Do you mind if we sit down?"

End quote.

In the 1958 version, this discussion about the ground and the bird's eye view moves into a broader discussion (Wart is a goose) about nation-states. Here, though, we get a chance to revisit some lessons about locomotion and how other animals use their "tools." Later, when we meet Badger, we will get an interesting back story on how animals choose their tools.

If you ever snorkel, I am not sure you notice it as much swimming or using SCUBA equipment, you will begin to feel those temperature changes. I enjoy floating in tropical waters and having some of the fish come up to my shade. Not long ago, I had a platoon of Sergeant Majors following my slow movements in the Caribbean Sea.

I'm not sure if I change the temperature, give them a sense of protection or simply act as a novelty, but it is sure amazing.

I think it is also interesting that White describes night vision with a much more modern insight about the high-tech equipment we use today. Truly things appear “white” in our modern night vision goggles.

Wart loves to fly. If I had a superpower, it would be flying. I envy him a bit.

"You are beginning to fit things together," remarked Archimedes. "Do you mind if we sit down?"

"How does one?"

"You must stall. That means you must drive yourself up until you lose flying speed, and then, just as you feel yourself beginning to tumble—why, you sit down. Have you never noticed how birds fly upward to perch? They don't come straight down on the branch, but dive below it and then rise. At the top of their rise they stall and sit down."

"But birds land on the ground too. And what about mallards on the water? They can't rise to sit on that."

"Well, it is perfectly possible to land on flat things, but more difficult. You have to glide in at stalling speed all the way, and then increase your wind resistance by cupping your wings, dropping your feet, tail, etc. You may have noticed that few birds do it gracefully. Look how a crow thumps down and how the mallard splashes. The spoon-winged birds like heron and plover seem to do it best. As a matter of fact, we owls are not so bad at it ourselves."

"And the long-winged birds like swifts, I suppose they are the worst, for they can't rise from a flat surface at all?"

"The reasons are different," said Archimedes, "yet the fact is true. But need we talk on the wing? I am getting tired."

"So am I."

"Owls usually prefer to sit down every hundred yards."

End quote.

As I review this entire project, I wonder out loud sometimes why I do it? There wasn't a great deal of need, of begging, for me to start this review of *The Sword in the Stone*.

Yet, it captures me. I find myself watching birds land and I remember this small section. As I sit in my backyard, I enjoy watching the birds land on wires knowing the reasoning behind how they do this feat.

If you ask me how I know this stuff, I can tell you that an owl taught it to me.

It's the LOVE of education and learning in this book that brings me back. The most popular quote from White is this famous insight:

"The best thing for being sad," replied Merlyn, beginning to puff and blow, "is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honour trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then—to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the thing for you. Look at what a lot of things there are to learn—pure science, the only purity there is. You can learn astronomy in a lifetime, natural history in three, literature in six. And then, after you have exhausted a milliard lifetimes in biology and medicine and theology and geography and history and economics—why, you can start to make a cartwheel out of the appropriate wood, or spend fifty years learning to begin to learn to beat your adversary at fencing. After that you can start again on mathematics, until it is time to learn to plough."

"Apart from all these things," said the Wart, "what do you suggest for me just now?"
(Chapter 21, The Sword in the Stone)

As I type this, I am approaching the three-month mark of “shelter in place” with the Covid 19 virus. What keeps me sane is that I strive to “learn something.”

"Owls usually prefer to sit down every hundred yards."

The Wart copied Archimedes in zooming up toward the branch which they had chosen. He began to fall just as they were above it, clutched it with his furry feet at the last moment, swayed backward and forward twice, and found that he had landed successfully. He folded up his wings.

While the Wart sat still and admired the view, his friend proceeded to give him a lecture about flight in birds. He told how, although the swift was so fine a flyer that he could sleep on the wing all night, and although the Wart himself had claimed to admire the way in which rooks enjoyed their flights, the real aeronaut of the lower strata—which cut out the swift—was the plover. He explained how plovers indulged in aerobatics, and would actually do such stunts as spins, stall turns and even rolls for the mere grace of the thing. They were the only birds which made a practice of slipping off height to land—except occasionally the oldest, gayest and most beautiful of all the conscious aeronauts, the raven. Wart paid little or no attention to the lecture, but got his eyes accustomed to the strange tones of light instead, and watched Archimedes from the corner of one of them. For Archimedes, while he was talking, was absent-mindedly spying for his dinner. This spying was an odd performance.

A spinning top which is beginning to lose its spin slowly describes circles with its highest point before falling down. The leg of the top remains in the same place, but the apex makes circles which get bigger and bigger toward the end. This is what Archimedes was absent-mindedly doing. His feet remained stationary, but he moved the upper part of his body round and round, like somebody trying to see from behind a fat lady at a cinema, and uncertain which side of her gave the best view. As he could also turn his head almost completely round on his shoulders, you may imagine that his antics were worth watching.

"What are you doing?" asked the Wart.

End quote.

Wart seems to be a better student during hands on work than listening to lectures. Archimedes is continuing on the discussion of flying and, well, Wart is spinning his head around.

Archimedes is picking up on the topic we had been listening to in Merlyn's room. It's interesting about flying; pilots, in my experience, can't talk about it enough. Now that our characters are taking a break from flying, the conversation turns back to the art of flying.

Of course, Wart's head is spinning. Literally.

Archimedes is looking for something. What he finds is going to give us an interesting moral discussion. This discussion is going to take us deep into the entire Canon and world that T. H. White has built for us.

"What are you doing?" asked the Wart.

Even as he asked, Archimedes was gone. First there had been an owl talking about plover, and then there was no owl. Only, far below the Wart, there was a thump and a rattle of leaves, as the aerial torpedo went smack into the middle of a bush, regardless of obstructions.

In a minute the owl was sitting beside him again on the branch, thoughtfully breaking up a dead sparrow.

"May I do that?" asked the Wart, inclined to be blood-thirsty.

"As a matter of fact," said Archimedes, after waiting to crop his mouthful, "you may not. The magic mouse which turned you into an owl will be enough for you—after all, you have been eating as a human all day—and no owl kills for pleasure. Besides, I am supposed to be taking you for education, and, as soon as I have finished my snack here, that is what we shall have to do."

End quote

“Blood-thirsty.” “No owl kills for pleasure.”

That’s a powerful lesson. Throughout the rest of our books in the White tetralogy, we will see that King Arthur (our Wart) find ways to avoid murder and slaughter. In *The Book of Merlyn*, Arthur is willing to give up literally everything to avoid war.

I grew up in a military home. My mother feared that “knock on the door” while my brothers were in Vietnam. Frankly, those years of deployments were awful for our family.

Arthur was right in *The Book of Merlyn*. But, as we all know, youth’s hot blood (with a nod to my good friend, Dan Martin). This is small, but important, lesson for Wart. As we move back to the original sources in the next few sentences (the 1958 version has the Geese story), please note the vision of history that White is about to share with us. The geese certainly give us a strong anti-war vision, but I think it is better in *The Book of Merlyn* (along with the ants).

Next week, we meet a Goddess.

Just for clarity, if you have the 1958 version from *The Once and Future King*, the story moves to the story of the geese. In our earlier (and better) version, we are going to meet a Goddess.

“Where are you going to take me?”

Archimedes finish his sparrow, and wiped his beak politely on the bough, and turned his tender eyes full upon the Wart. These great eyes had, as a famous writer has expressed it, a bloom of light upon them like this purple bloom of powder on a grape.

“I am going to take you, said he slowly, “where no human being has ever been, to see my dear mother, Athene, the goddess of wisdom.

It was a long and terrible journey, passing beyond the solitude into the undiscovered country of Kennaquhair, whose latitude is 91 degrees north and longitude is 181 degrees west. Here, in the luminous hollow of a tree stump that had been blasted by lightning and whittled clean by the winds of knowledge, they alighted on the outstretched hands of the goddess. Athene was invisible, or at least the Wart never remembered having seen her afterwards. At the time he did not notice that she was invisible-it only struck him when he woke up next morning-because he was aware of her without seeing her. He was aware that her unthinkable beauty was neither that of age nor of youth. That her eyes were the only things you thought of looking at, and that to be her was terrible, whereas to be with her was only joy. If you can understand this, she was in herself so unhappy that words only melt in such temperatures, but towards other people she was the spirit of invincible mercy and protection. She lived, of course, beyond sorrow and solitude, and, if you follow me, the suffering which had brought her there had left her with a kind of supernatural *good manners*.

She was a conqueror.

End quote.

If I haven't been clear: White is an amazing writer. Rereading the description of Athene reminded me of my mother, of Blessed Memory, and her long days living while her husband, brothers, cousins and, later, sons were off fighting the various wars of this country.

If you are looking for something to write for a mother's eulogy, this might be too much, but it is lovely:

That her eyes were the only things you thought of looking at, and that to be her was terrible, whereas to be with her was only joy. If you can understand this, she was in herself so unhappy that words only melt in such temperatures, but towards other people she was the spirit of invincible mercy and protection.

Plato tells us that the name, Athene, may come from the root "she who knows divine things." She is a master strategist and, usually, considered the goddess of wisdom. Her symbols, still rich in Sorority life (my daughter informs me), are the owl (no surprise), snakes (which is interesting when you compare Wart's visions here with Athene and the dreams of T. Natrix), olive trees and a gorgon medal (for protection). She is a major influencer in the Iliad and the Odyssey.

The site of our meeting is interesting. I looked it up and found this:

Kennaquhair (literally, "know-not-where" in old Lowland Scots) is an imaginary locality in Walter Scott's novels The Monastery and The Abbot. In T. H. White's The Sword in the Stone, Kennaquhair is the land of Athene, mother-goddess of the owls, and is located at the doubly impossible co-ordinates of 91 degrees north and 181 degrees west.

<http://dictionary.sensagent.com/kennaquhair/en-en/>

That's just cool. "Know-not-where" is just a great word to keep in the quiver. The tree is "whittled clean" by the winds of knowledge. Again...beautiful writing. But I love this little point:

Suffering brought her good manners.

Sometimes I read something and instantly know that I am missing so much. I'm not sure what White means by this, but I can only remember how my parents (the Greatest Generation) acted different. Mom wore white gloves to the store and always wore a coat in public. Dad always...ALWAYS...had on a tie. There wasn't swearing, belching and farting around them. How did we lose simple "good manners" so quickly?

I might have to come back to this reading a few more times.

Archimedes kissed her tenderly. He was not overawed by her, but saluted her almost with pity, as if he were a man of the world visiting his sister, a num who did not understand how to get on in his world, or perhaps a prosperous banker who had always tried to be reasonably

decent, meeting the man whose destiny it was to be nailed up and left to die of sunstroke, agony and exhaustion, in order to save the prosperous banker.

Even Archimedes did not understand her.

She knew this.

“Hail mother,” said Archimedes. “I have brought you a young human, who is to learn things, by decree.”

When the Wart came to think about it afterwards, he realized that he had never seen the goddess but that he had also never heard her speak. The owl spoke, and he spoke; but the words of Athene did not come out of a mouth.

I'm reading the Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. Franklin discusses visiting a woman who lived upstairs from him who tried to live the convent life (nunnery) and, for reasons beyond this discussion, decided to live that life alone above her sister. Franklin's description of the woman ties in well with our image of Athene here.

I think this line is beautiful:

“or perhaps a prosperous banker who had always tried to be reasonably decent, meeting the man whose destiny it was to be nailed up and left to die of sunstroke, agony and exhaustion, in order to save the prosperous banker.”

I think this line rivals the work of W. R. Rogers' insights about Jesus in Roger's poem(s), A Resurrection Sequence. I've used this section before here:

In agony. Ebb and flow, to and fro, Yes and No;

Doubt assailed him. Which and what to do? This much must be

admitted,

We live between two worlds, faith and doubt,

Like breath. The air that one breathes does not care

Whether it's in or out; it's not in love with life

Or death. And yet we do not dare to hold it long,

But must let it go to find again. So with faith,

With love, with everything.
End quote.

The “reasonably decent banker” is something I need to sit back and reflect upon: am I a reasonably decent strength coach?

Am I worth the sacrifice? It’s a question that I don’t just want someone to have kindergarten answer: “Yes...yes, of course.” Reading Franklin and rereading this section has me on a deep dive into my “virtuous life.”

Is Athene “there?” Well, we have a talking owl and a boy transfigured into an owl, so go ahead and present your arguments.

Even Archimedes did not understand her.

She knew this.

“Hail, mother,” said Archimedes. “I have brought you a young human, who is to learn things, by decree.”

When the Wart came to think about it afterwards, he realized that he had not only never seen the goddess but that he had also never heard her speak. The owl spoke, and he spoke; but the words of Athene did not come out of a mouth.

“This part,” said Archimedes with a sort of purr, “is at the rate of thirty years in a minute. It is one of our owl’s dreams, you know, such as we gain our wisdom from the sighing on the night.”

Athene did not speak, but she held the Wart in the hollow of her kind hand, and he knew that he was to look in front of him.

He saw the world with his own eyes now, no longer using the strange spectrum which he had experienced since he came out with Archimedes, and no doubt this was done in order to make things easier for him. They needed to be made easier, for it was now his business to watch a world in which a year passed in two seconds. It was a world of trees.”
End quote.

Trees and Stones. When I finally got the “right” version, basically the 1938/1939 original version, of *The Sword in the Stone*, I fell in love with these two dreams. I still don’t understand the decision to drop these from the 1958 version as they represent White’s worldview perfectly. When I first came across these stories, I wondered why the Disney version skipped these...they have a Fantasia spirit about them and would make great animation.

Both the tree dream and the stone dream give us a different version of time. White loves playing with time. Merlyn lives backwards in time. With these dreams or visions, we will have the time used by trees and stones.

Their time takes more time.

“We dream of this,” explained Archimedes, “when we perch on a tree in the winds of winter, or sleep in its hollow in the rains of spring.”

Sometimes nowadays you can see a cinema film of a flower, for instance, in which one exposure has been taken every hour. In it you see the petals expand and throb open or shut for day or night, until the whole story is over and the seeds have been thrown out upon the wind. There was woodland now in front of the Wart, and in it an oak sapling grew, flourished and shed its leaves into nakedness, all the time during which you could slowly count three. A whole year had passed in that time, with all its human joys and sorrows.

“This,” said Athene, or at any rate it is what she seemed to be saying, in the most glorious of voices, “is called the Dream of the Trees.”

People don't think of trees as alive. We never see them moving unless the wind disturbs them, and then it is not their movement but the wind's. The Wart saw now that trees are living, and do move. He saw all that forest, like seaweed on the ocean's floor, how the branches rose and groped about and waved, how they panted forth their leaves like breathing (and indeed they were breathing) and, what is still more extraordinary, how they talked.

If you should be at a cinema when the talking apparatus breaks down, you may have the experience of hearing it start again too slowly. Then you will hear the words which would be real words at a proper speed now droning out unintelligibly in long roars and sighs, which give no meaning to the human brain. The same thing happens with a gramophone whose disc is not revolving fast.

So it is with humans. We cannot hear the trees talking, except as a vague noise of roaring and hushing which we attribute to the wind in the leaves, because they talk too slowly for us. These noises are really the syllables and vowels of the trees.

**“You may speak for yourselves,” said Athene.
End quote.**

Each week, as I retype White, I am reminded of the old trick that writers from Franklin to Hemingway have recommended: retyping great writing. As I worked today, I realized that White is not afraid to take his time explaining the situation. He walks us through the scene and situation and gives us a few ideas from the more modern era to understand the setting.

Some people, it seems at least from the internet posts, can't handle this:

TL,DR

Too long, didn't read.

And that is a pity. The lack of intellectual patience aside...well, I can't just put that aside, but I will be kind...I pity someone who lives just wanting to know the point. "Buy low, sell high" is the point, so why isn't everyone financially secure? "Less calories, more work" is the point, so why during my visits to Las Vegas and Disneyland, I feel like I am in the movie Wall-E? (Not the robot, but the people)

I guess that my point: there's more to everything than the point.

Oak spoke first, as became the noblest of all. He stood throbbing his leaves in the twilight, to which Time had mixed down day and night; stretching out his great muscular branches; yawning, as it were, like a noble giant of the earth who cracks his limbs in the morning when he wakes.

"Ah," said the oak. "It's good to be alive. Look at my biceps, will you? Do you see how the other trees are afraid of Gravity, afraid that he will break their branches off? They point them up in the air, or down at the ground, so as to give the old earth-giant his least purchase upon them. Now I am ready to challenge Gravity, and I can stretch my branches straight out in a line parallel to the earth. He may swing on them for all I care, but, bless you, they won't break. Do you know how long I live? A thousand years is my expectation. Three hundred years to grow, three hundred years to live, and three hundred years to die. And when I am dead, what of that? They make me into timber, into ships and house beams that will be good for another thousand. My leaves come the last and go the last. I am a conservative, I am; and out of my apples they make ink, whose words may live as long as me, even as me, the oak."
End quote.

When I finally read this vision of Athene, I think my mind memorized it. The thousand years of the oak, the great biceps, the fighting against gravity and the ink from the apples just filled my imagination.

We will meet the rest of the trees, but I love this paragraph. I should wake up and announce this daily:

"It's good to be alive. Look at my biceps, will you?"

We will meet the Oak again at the moment Wart gets to the sword in the stone (Spoiler alert!) and pulls it out on his third try. But, for now, let's let the Oak speak.

Ash said softly, "I am the Venus of the forest. I am pliable."

"My dear Madam," said a rather society box, in smirking, urban, scholastic, eighteenth-century accents, "a decoration of boxwood promotes the growth of hair, while the oil distilled from its shavings is a cure for haemorrhoids, toothache, epilepsy, and stomach worms. So, at least, we are told."

"If it comes to being sarcastic," replied a homely hazel, who was a good fellow at heart, although he was inclined to snap, "May I mention that hazel chips will clear turbid wine in twenty-four hours, and twigs of hazel twisted together will serve for yeast in brewing? You may be a sort of Lord Chesterfield, but at least you will have to yield to me in the matter of genteel tipsyfication practiced by the elegant gentlemen of your century."

"As far as drink goes," said an impossible female ivy, who was always clinging to her husband, putting her oar in, and making his life a misery, "ground ivy is used for clarifying beer."

She simpered when she said the word "beer" in the most unpleasant way. She was a sour creature in any light.

"I don't know why we are talking about drink," said a dignified beech. "But, if we are talking about it I may as well mention that Virgil's drinking bowl, *divini opus Alcimedontis*, was turned out of my wood.

"Great men," remarked a close-grained svelte lime, "are always going back to the trees. Grindling Gibbons would never carve his nets and basket out of anything but me."

"And Salvator Rosa," said a chestnut, "was always painting me."

"Corot," said a willow sighing, "was fond of me."

"How your humans do spin about," remarked a crafty elm coldly. "What a speed they live at. It is rather good sport trying to spot them, and then to drop an old bough on their heads if you can get them directly underneath. But of course you have to stand very still and give no signs of dropping it till the actual moment. The cream of the joke is that they make the coffins out of me afterwards."

End quote.

There is more here, of course, but I wanted to stop for just a moment. Reading this as an adult and then putting my mind into White's life in probably 1937 or so got me thinking that this is exactly how American readers would think a typical British cocktail party would engage during the period.

Certainly, I am influenced by the movies and television shows about British royalty et al but I actually laughed out loud reading (and transcribing this) today. I tend to have this image of the snooty upper crust Brits being played by trees. The boxwood fits the image perfectly.

As for Lord Chesterfield, yes, he is the guy named for the couch and cigarette. He balanced an interesting life of writing, adultery and civil service. Samuel Johnson himself commented on his writing as being the delicate balance between whore and dancemaster (I'm just quoting...don't shoot the messenger). He wrote this to his son:

There is nothing that people bear more impatiently, or forgive less, than contempt; and an injury is much sooner forgotten than an insult. If, therefore, you would rather please than offend, rather be well than ill spoken of, rather be loved than hated; remember to have that constant attention about you which flatters every man's little vanity; and the want of which, by mortifying his pride, never fails to excite his resentment, or at least his ill will.

Oddly, still true. Chesterfield died just as those horrid colonials in the Americas were making trouble.

Virgil has been quoted with this in other sources, but it really just means a master wood carver.

“Pocula ponam
Fagina, cœltum divini opus Alcimedontis.”

Virgil: Eclogue, iii. 36.

Grindling Gibbons, basically a contemporary of Lord Chesterfield, was also a master woodcarver with his work displayed in Windsor Castle. Salvator Rosa, an Italian painter and artistic rebel, would be part of the “proto-Romantic” period of art.

The trees are doing a masterful job of name-dropping here. It reminds of a dinner I had with Tom Hanks and President Obama...

Our trees are going to be discussing themselves just a bit more and our first dream will come to an end.

“You always were a treacherous fellow,” replied an old yew. “What’s the point of it? Surely it’s better to help than hinder? Now Oak here, and a few others of us, we take pride in keeping faith. We like to be steadfast. Everybody prizes me because, like Alder, I scorn to rot in water. My gateposts are more durable than iron, for they do not even rust.”

“Yes,” chimed in some cypresses, sycamores and others, “Live and let live, that’s the best motto. We and our sisters are always pleased to see the grass growing under our shade.”

“On the contrary,” said a fir who always killed the grass beneath him, and a nervous aspen joined in, “kill or be killed, that’s the way to get on.”

“But please don’t talk of killing,” added the aspen. “The cross was made out of me, and I have trembled ever since. I only kill, you know, because I am frightened. It is a terrible thing always to be afraid.”

A cedar decided to cheer her up. “Oh, come,” he remarked, twinkling his dusty spines. “What’s the point of all this argument and boasting about your powers? It seems to me that you all take life too seriously. Look at my old friend Sequoia here, who has had the humorous idea of constructing himself a very hard-looking bark out of soft blotting-paper, so you can punch him without hurting yourself. If it comes to that, look at me. What is my mission in life? You might think it a humble one, considering my size, but I find it amusing. I am antipathetic to fleas.”

I was going to continue on, but there is something discussed here that will be coming up in White’s other books. Here you go:

Live and let live
Kill or be killed

This “false dichotomy,” if you will, dominates much of Arthur’s world in the upcoming books.

I’m not sure if White saw all the way into his fifth book, *The Book of Merlyn*, but these two extremes seem to bounce around certainly in the next book, *The Queen of Air and Darkness* (originally, *The Witch in the Woods*), too.

The title of the next book in our King Arthur series is lifted from A. E. Houseman’s “Final Poems.”

Her strong enchantments failing,
Her towers of fear in wreck,
Her limbecks dried of poisons
And the knife at her neck,

The Queen of air and darkness
Begins to shrill and cry,
'O young man, O my slayer,
To-morrow you shall die.'

O Queen of air and darkness,
I think 'tis truth you say,
And I shall die to-morrow;

But you will die to-day.

Houseman's Final Poems has a darkness about it as he was giving tributes to the dead of World War I.

These two conflicting thoughts, Live and Let Live/Kill or be Killed, dance through the dialogues of the rest of collection of White. Arthur's intentions were to make "Might FOR Right," not "Might MAKES Right," and this noble idea gets cast out because of the sins of the flesh (things I dare not say!)

The Book of Merlyn runs this through some more animal transfigurations (ant and geese) as well as long discourses from Wart's animal friends. I liked the book; I seem to be in a minority.

Steadfast. Trembling. Live and let live. Flea prevention. Kill or be killed. Our trees discuss big themes here and their approach to life reflects their vision of life.

Like many of us, our trees are trying to figure out where they stand in this world. For the trees, it tends to be in one place.

For clarity:

What is my mission in life? You might think it a humble one, considering my size, but I find it amusing. I am antipathetic to fleas."

Let's pick up on the story:

All the trees laughed at this-it resulted in a splendid summer that year-and decided to go on with their dance. It was a sort of Indian dance, in which they moved their bodies but not their feet, and a very graceful one it was. The Wart watched while the whole troop of them rippled their twigs like serpents, or made slow ritual gestures about their heads and bodies with the larger boughs. He saw how they grew big and lusty in their dancing, how they threw their arms out towards heaven in an ecstasy of being alive. The younger trees tired first. The little fruit trees stopped waving, hung their weary heads for a moment, then fell down on the ground. The big ones moved more slowly, faltered and fell one by one, till only Oak was left. He stood with his chin sunk upon his chest, kept upright by his mighty will, thinking of the lovely dance which now was over. He sighed and looked upwards to Athene, stretched out his bare arms sorrowfully to her, to ask her why, and then he also fell on sleep.

End quote.

"Fell on sleep."

Not "fell asleep." I never understood this. Why is Oak sorrowful? What is the "why?" In the next line, we begin the Dream of the Stones, but this has always puzzled me.

No matter. The lovely dance is over.

“The next dream,” said Athene, “is called the Dream of the Stones.”

“It is the last dreams she will give you,” added Archimedes, “and this one goes at two million years a second. You will have to keep your eyes skinned.”

Wart saw a darkness in front of him, with lights in it. The ark was so dark that it was like lampback, and the lights so light that the coldest blue fire of diamonds could not touch them. The harsh contrast between them made his eyes ache. He was looking at Sirius, actually, just as he had been looking at him a few hours before, but it took him quite a time before he realized that he was looking at a star at all. There were none of the mellow velvet which he had been accustomed to see through the earth’s atmosphere, but only this fierce emptiness of black and white, and, besides this fact, the constellations were in different positions. It was a few thousand years ago and all the shapes of the evening have altered since then.

The nearest star, which looked the biggest for that reason, burned with a roar of terrible gases, and another star was coming towards it. You could see them surging on their endless paths into eternity, marking their aimed but aimless courses across the universe with straight lines of remembered fire-like the meteors with which the Creator sometimes stiches together the weak seams of our dome, the bright darning-needles suddenly darted in and out of the velvet by a finger on the other side.

As the two stars came closer together a huge mountain of flame was dragged out by attraction from each. When they were at their closest point the top of the mountain broke off from the smaller star and streamed through the emptiness towards the bigger. Some of it reached its destination; but the bigger star was proceeding quickly on its way, and some of it was left behind. This part hung in space, lost to both its parent and its seducer, a whirling cigar of fire. Its mists of flame began to crystallize as they cooled, to turn into drops, as water does when it is cooled from steam. The drops took up a circular path of their own, spinning round the star from which they had been dragged.

End quote.

I decided to pause here. White’s reinvention of the Big Bang, along with the “Creator’s knitting” should probably be read breathlessly straight through. I think some of White’s best poetry is seen here:

“You could see them surging on their endless paths into eternity, marking their aimed but aimless courses across the universe with straight lines of remembered fire”

“Aimed but aimless courses” seem to be a nice way to think about life in general and goals specifically.

I find the Dreams of the Trees and the Stones marvelous reading. Wart, as a review, is standing with an owl and a goddess and living in dreams. I’ve had a few conversations with people about Wart’s adventures in these books and it always takes me back to an afternoon in Ohio.

On a break at discus camp, we were watching Star Wars. We had an obnoxious teen (as if there were any others?) who had been a sarcastic pain all week. When the Death Star exploded, he exclaimed:

“That’s so fake.”

I had had enough.

So, the Wookiee? That was real? The spaceships? The aliens in the cantina?

I went on a bit longer but I had made my point. Exactly what is “real” when it comes to science-fiction or fantasy.

I will venture to say: not much.

But everything.

I used to use Aesop’s Fables as a way to convey this conundrum when I was teaching high school. There are things that happened...we can call that history. Yet, as we all know, history focuses on unbelievably “big” things and the day to day lives of most of us will never be recorded or remembered.

Don’t take that wrong.

The story of the Fox and the Grapes involves a talking fox. I haven’t encountered many talking foxes, but I have seen “Sour Grapes” many times in my life. Here is the story, if you don’t know it:

A Fox one day spied a beautiful bunch of ripe grapes hanging from a vine trained along the branches of a tree. The grapes seemed ready to burst with juice, and the Fox’s mouth watered as he gazed longingly at them.

The bunch hung from a high branch, and the Fox had to jump for it. The first time he jumped he missed it by a long way. So he walked off a short distance and took a running leap at it, only to fall short once more. Again and again he tried, but in vain.

Now he sat down and looked at the grapes in disgust.

“What a fool I am,” he said. “Here I am wearing myself out to get a bunch of sour grapes that are not worth gaping for.”

And off he walked very, very scornfully.

So...this is so fake.

The Wart found himself closer to the third drop. Its haze of incandescent worms crawled in and out of it, formed into funnels and whirlpools, crept over its round surface, sometimes leaped out into space, curled over, and rained back. They were flames. The light died down from far beyond white to blue, to red, to a dim brown. It became a ball of steam. Out of this steam a smaller ball shot out. The first ball shrank and was a globe of boiling water.

The water began to cool but the fires still burned inside it. They convulsed the surface of the water, threw up great continents and islands of the interior rock. The centuries were passing so quickly that even these continents seemed to bubble like porridge, as the volcanoes and mountains and earthquakes came and went. The unbridled furnace within was still unstable, and, till quite late in the dream, the globe did not always spin on the same axis, but lurched over sideways as some stress gave way inside. The lurches destroyed continents and made more.

The Wart found himself closer still. He was actually on the globe and facing an enormous cliff. At two million years a second, the cliff's mountain moved. It was alive as the trees had been, and roared most dreadfully. It fell, it folded on itself, it shoved itself along the surface of the globe, pushing a bow wave of its own folds for miles. Its great rock split and powdered, pouring stone torrents into the heaving sea. The sea itself grew tired of the mountain, made it to sink down and to be covered. Another convulsion threw up the remains again, streaming.

Round the foot of the chastened mountain there lay its powder and its pebbles, great rocks worn smooth by the sea. The rocks themselves broke and were scattered, the sea always rolling and rolling them together between its hands until the tiny fragments were often as round as their mother had been, the globe.

A green scum formed over the sinking mountain, a haze of color which was still sometimes dipped under the water or lifted high above it, as the earth undulated. The trees came but their voices were quite drowned by the slower howling of the mineral world, which twitched through the millennia like a dog's skin in sleep.

"Hold fast," was what the rocks thundered. "Hold, cohere."

End quote.

"Hold fast." That's the motto of the MacLeod family and we see it tattooed on a sailor in "Master and Commander."

I've been looking forward to getting here. In the next part of this dream, White will make his point about the dream of the stones. It's a powerful point, but I want to just stop for a moment.

For years, my family finished summer with the Loch Aikle Games. It was a family Highland Games and I miss it dearly. Jeff MacLeod hosted the event and he proudly held fast to his family's motto. My kids grew up at the games and learned the fun of this family tradition. We all kilted up, marched in a parade, threw the implements and ate our shared meals. We drank a "wee bit," too...as appropriate to tradition.

Hold fast.

The stones are doing their best in this dream not to move along with the forces of nature. I see both sides of this in my life: I vigorously hold tight to my past and the ways things used to be back in the good old days (that honestly weren't that good) and look forward with hope to all that is fresh and new. As I retype White's work with a laptop that is more powerful than probably all the world's computers just a few decades ago, I sit astride both of these feelings and beliefs.

I love thinking about the Loch Aikle Games and the tradition of "Hold Fast" of the host family. It's also over and the athletes, fans and friends have scattered. Some have died.

At my daughter's wedding rehearsal, she asked for a Highland Games. We brought out everything including our family caber.

I mean, honestly, doesn't everyone have a family caber?

Afterwards, as we had a massive pig roast with nearly a hundred guests, many asked me to make this an annual event. And...I would have. Sadly, the COVID 19 virus interrupted the following summer and, I fear, the enthusiasm for continuing it.

I tried to hold fast. But the earth kept moving.

"Hold fast," was what the rocks thundered. "Hold, cohere."

But all the time they were broken apart, thrown down, and their hold broken. There was nothing to be seen the mountain except a flat green plain which had some pebbles on it. They were bits of the cliff which he had first watched.

The dream, like the one before it, lasted about half an hour. In the last three minutes of the dream some fishes, dragons and such-like ran hurriedly about. A dragon swallowed one of the pebbles, but spat it out.

in the ultimate twinkling of an eye, far tinier in time than the last millimeter on a six-foot rule, there came a man. He split up the one pebble which remained of all that mountain with blows, then made an arrowhead of it, and slew his brother.

End quote.

The dream ends here. This chapter concludes in a moment with Wart and Kay fighting about snoring.

Of course, this dream of stones ends with a fairly heavy-handed moral. When I first read it, I thought it was interesting how White brought us to this one moment of murder, but I don't seem to be emotionally invested any more.

I do think that the "hold fast" point was very good and I wish White would have spent more time on the stones. But this is just me nitpicking.

These two dreams are removed from the 1958 version and I think that is a mistake. First, Archimedes is central to this story and we really don't get a chance to learn much about our owl friend. Second, I think these dreams are good reading and, even as I reread them again, they make me think.

I think thinking is a good thing.

"Well, Wart," said Kay in an exasperated voice. "Do you want all the rug? And why do you have and mutter so? You were snoring too>"

"I don't snore," replied the Wart indignantly.

"You do."

"I don't."

"You do. You snore like a volcano."

"I don't."

"You do."

"I don't. And you snore worse."

"No, I don't."

"Yes, you do."

"How can I snore worse if you don't snore at all?"

By the time they had thrashed this out, they were nearly late for breakfast. They dressed hurriedly and ran out into the spring.

End quote.

With this, we close Chapter Eighteen. We don't have far to go. We have a fun adventure coming up next with more magic and a giant, a transfiguration and a visit to London.

If you ever wondered how my brother, Philip, and I talked, you get a sense of it here. I am watching my grandkids bicker and it reminds of my children bickering and it takes me back to my youth with my brother.

There are some cycles (the Circle of LIFE, sing it with me) in this world that don't need to be kept going. I'm sure someone has a cure for sibling fighting.

Maybe not.

We began this chapter with Wart waiting for Kay to sleep. We went past Kennaquhair to meet Athene, we saw the owls' dreams and we now have arrived in the morning. I find this chapter to knit much of White's vision of the universe and we get a front row seat on his vision of nature. Nature is very much alive in *The Sword in the Stone*.

I think this is part of the reason I love the book. Certainly, this book is a testament to the value of education and the importance of things like kindness and courage but I also like how "alive" the book is for me. We talk with everyone.

Including trees and stones.

Chapter Nineteen

In the evenings, except in the very height of summer, they used to meet in the solar after the last meal of the day. There the parson, Reverend Sidebottom, or if he were busy over his sermon then Merlyn himself, would read to them out of some learned book of tales, to calm their spirits. It was glorious in the winter, while the big logs roared in the fire-the beech blue-flamy and relentless, the elm showy and soon gone, the holly bright, or the pine with his smoking scents-while the dogs dreamed of conquest, or the boys imagined those sweet maidens letting down their golden hair so that their rescuers might save them out of towers. But almost at any time of the year it was a s good.

The book they usually used was *Gesta Romanorum*, whose fascinating tales began with such provoking sentences as "There was a certain King who had a singular partiality for little dogs that barked loudly," or "A certain noblemen had a white cow, to which he was extremely partial: he assigned two reasons for this, first because she was spotlessly white, and next, because..."

The "solar" of a castle was usually an upper room for the Lord's family. It was a private room and when I was in Wales, these rooms were called Lord's Rooms or Ladies' Rooms. Logically, these rooms might seem to come from the Latin word for the sun, "solaris," but more likely it

comes from a similar sounding word, “solus,” meaning “alone.” Neil Diamond would have found inspiration for his song, Solitary Man, here.

The Gesta Romanorum, or “Deeds of the Romans,” is probably from a time AFTER our story, although White doesn’t seem to ever worry about the exact dates of anything in our book. The “deeds” is also misleading, but the stories from the books are used by Chaucer and Shakespeare. King Lear and The Merchant of Venice contain stories from the Gesta Romanorum.

The title of the book changed to Geste during the period where the Franks became French and pronunciation of Celt went from Kelt to Selt. Oddly, you may use this word “Geste” in your daily language. Many of the later versions of this collection had funny and “over the top” stories that made them even more popular and gave us a word you probably have used recently.

Surely, you jest.

I don’t jest and stop calling me “Shirley!”

So, yes, this book is important even if we want to have a laugh. I’m just jesting.

As always, retyping has made me see something I had missed countless times reading this book. I never noticed that the wood in the fireplace were characters from our last chapter. From Athene’s Dream of the Trees, we still see their personalities burning brightly (so to speak).

This is also why I paused here. White’s wit is just illuminating.

Like the trees in the fireplace.

The boys, and for that matter the men, would sit as quiet as church mice while the marvels of the story were unfolded, and, when the unpredictable narrative had come to an end, they would look towards Reverend Sidebottom (or Merlyn-who was not so good at it) to have the story explained. Reverend Sidebottom would draw a deep breath and plunge into his task, explaining how the certain King was really Christ, and the barking dogs zealous preachers, or how the white cow was the soul and her milk represented prayer and supplication. Sometimes, indeed generally, the unfortunate vicar was hard put to it to find a moral, but nobody ever doubted that his explanations were the right ones; and anyway most of his listeners were soon asleep.

It was a fine summer night, the last night which would give any excuse for fires, and Reverend Sidebottom was reading out of his tale. Wart lay snoozing among the lean ribs of the gaze-hounds: Sir Ector sipped his wine with his eyes brooding on the log which lit the evening” Kay played chess with himself rather badly: Merlyn, with his long beard saffron in the firelight, sat cross-legged knitting, beside the Wart.

So. Life before television and the internet.

I kinda like it.

Since the (literally!) the first paragraph of this book, we have been exposed to story that loves education. Let's review the weekly schedule:

"On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays it was Court Hand and Summulae Logicales, while the rest of the week it was the Organon, Repetition and Astrology.

In the afternoons the programme was: Mondays and Fridays, tilting and horsemanship; Tuesdays, hawking; Wednesdays, fencing; Thursdays, archery; Saturdays, the theory of chivalry, with the proper measures to be blown on all occasions, terminology of the chase and hunting etiquette."

If you add this daily session of reading, reviewing and discussion, one can get a sense of the amount of material our little friends Wart and Kay are receiving. It's a lot.

One of my favorite memories of raising my girls is when Tiffini would sit in the front room and read to us. She read a chapter a night of Harry Potter. I would often steal the book and jump ahead. We often talked about the books and wondered what was coming next.

In a sense I "feel" for kids who have all seven books now...they don't have the fun of spending two or three years ripping clues out of the past books to figure out what comes next. They just put down the finished book and pick up the next. We, as a family, debated and discussed every line seeking the most nuanced of insights.

For the record, I was right about Snape while reading the first book. Severus Snape is shaped as the worst of people throughout the books, but he is, as Harry notes in the end, the bravest man he ever met.

Snape did what he did for love. Love is a powerful thing.

In a moment, the Reverend will begin to read about a giant. We've seen a giant discussed before in the same conversation that begins our book.

"Isn't so much the distance," said Sir Ector, "but that giant What's-'is-name is in the way. Have to pass through his country, you understand."

"What is his name?"

"Can't recollect it at the moment, not for the life of me. Fellow that lives by the Burbly Water."

"Galapas," said Sir Grummore.

"That's the very chap."

We are about to meet Galapas.

"There was once discovered at Rome," read Reverend Sidebottom through his nose, "an uncorrupted body, taller than the wall of the city, on which the following words were inscribed-'Pallas, the son of Evander, whom the lance of a crooked soldier slew, is interred here.' A candle burned at his head which neither water nor wind could extinguish, until air was admitted through a hole made with the point of a needle beneath the flame. The wound of which this giant had died was four feet and a half long. Having been killed after the overthrow of Troy, he remained in his tomb two thousand two hundred and forty years."

"Have you ever seen a giant?" asked Merlyn softly, so as not to interrupt the reading. "No, I remember you haven't" Just catch hold of my hand a moment, and shut your eyes."

The vicar was droning on about the gigantic son of Evander, Sir Ector was staring into the fire, and Kay was making a slight click as he moved one of the chessmen, but the Wart and Merlyn were immediately standing hand in hand in an unknown forest.

"This is the Forest of the Burbly Water," said Merlyn, "and we are going to visit the giant Galapas. Now listen. You are invisible at the moment, because you are holding my hand. I am able to keep myself invisible by an exercise of will-power-an exceedingly exhausting job it is-and I can keep you invisible so long as you hold on to me. It takes twice as much will-power, but there. If, however, you let go of me even for a moment, during that moment you will become visible, and, if you do it in the presence of Galapas, he will munch you up in two bites. So hold on."

"Very well," said the Wart.

"Don't say 'Very well.' It isn't very well at all. On the contrary, it is very ill indeed. And another thing. The whole of this beastly wood is dotted with pitfalls and I should be grateful if you will look where you are going."

End quote.

Harry Potter fans should instantly recognize those scenes where Dumbledore travels with Harry using magic. We first see this with the adventure of meeting Professor Slughorn but we also find this in the adventures of finding a fake horcrux.

Like the story of the Pike (in the underwater adventure) and Wart's evening with the raptors, this is dangerous business. We leaped from a cozy fireplace to the edge of the giant's realm. There are dangers ahead.

Merlyn never feels afraid to put Wart in harm's way.

Dumbledore never feels afraid to put Harry in harm's way.

Oddly, I have coached teens who have both mother and father "helicoptering" around them at every turn (Ha! Discus coach joke) and protecting them from some of the safest moments of life. One of these kinds of parents would then stock the house full of alcohol and let Junior have a massive bash at the house without adult supervision.

I would take my chances with a giant.

"Don't say 'Very well.' It isn't very well at all. On the contrary, it is very ill indeed. And another thing. The whole of this beastly wood is dotted with pitfalls and I shall be grateful if you will look where you are going."

"What sort of pitfalls?"

"He digs lots of pits about ten feet deep, with smooth clay walls, and covers them with dead branches, pine needles and such-like. Then, if people walk about, they tumble into them, and he goes round with his bow every morning to finish them off. When he has shot them dead, he climbs in and collects them for dinner. He can hoist himself out of a ten-foot pit quite easily."

"Very well," said the Wart again, and corrected himself to, "I will be careful."

Being invisible is not so pleasant as it sounds. After a few minutes of it you forget where you last left your hands and legs-or at least you can only guess to within three or four inches-and the result is that it is by no means easy to make your way through a brambly wood. You can see the brambles all right, but where exactly you are in relation to them becomes more confusing. The only guide to your legs, for the feeling in them soon becomes complicated, is by looking for your footprints-these you can see in the neatly flattened grass below you-and, as for your arms and hands, it becomes hopeless unless you concentrate your mind to remember where you put them last. You can generally tell where your body is, either by the unnatural bend of a thorn branch, or by the pain of one of its thorns, or by the strange feeling of *centralness* which all human beings have, because we keep our souls in the region of our liver.

"Hold on," said Merlyn, "and for glory's sake don't trip up."
End quote.

As I reread this, I suddenly realized that White is describing, in detail, an experience that no one has ever had. Sure. Obvious.

That's what I missed on previous readings: White describes again and again in this book things that are pure imagination. And, just as obvious, that would be what all fiction writers do.

It's the detail that brings me back. Seeing your footprints "through" your invisible body is simply something I find lovely to read.

They proceeded to tread their tipsy way through the forest, staring carefully at the earth in front of them in case it should give way, and stopping very often when an extra large bramble fastened itself in their flesh. When Merlyn was stuck with a bramble, he swore, and when he swore he lost some of his concentration and they both became dimly visible, like Autumn mist. The rabbits upwind of them stood on their hind legs at this, and exclaimed, "Good gracious!"

"What are we going to do?" asked the Wart.

"Well," said Merlyn. "Here we are at the Burbly Water. You can see the giant's castle on the opposite bank, and we shall have to swim across. It may be difficult to walk when you are invisible, but to swim is perfectly impossible, even with years of practice. You are always getting your nose under water. So I shall have to let go of you until we have swum across in our own time. Don't forget to meet me quickly on the other side."

The Wart went down into warm starlit water, which ran musically like a real salmon stream, and struck out for the other side. He swam fast, across and down river, with a kind of natural dog-stroke, and he had to go about a quarter of a mile below his landing-place along the bank before Merlyn also came out to meet him, dripping. Merlyn swam the breast-stroke, very slowly and with great precision, watching ahead of him over the bow wave of his beard, with that faintly anxious expression of a faithful retriever.

"Now," said Merlyn, "catch hold again, and we will see what Galapas is about."

They walked invisible across the sward, where many unhappy-looking gardeners with iron collars round their necks were mowing, weeding and sweeping by torchlight, although it was so late, in what had begun to be a garden. They were slaves.

"Talk in whispers," said Merlyn, "if you have to talk."

There was a brick wall in front of them, with fruit tress nailed along it, and this they were forced to climb. They did so by the usual method of bending over, climbing on each other's backs, giving a hand up from on top, and so forth, but every time that the Wart was compelled to let go of his magician for a moment he became visible. It was like an early cinematograph flickering very badly, or one of those magic lanterns where you put in slide after slide. A slave gardener, looking at that part of the wall, sadly tapped himself on the head and went away into a shrubbery to be sick.

“Hush,” whispered Merlyn from the top of the wall, and they looked down upon the giant in person, as he took his evening ease by candlelight upon the bowling green.

“But he’s not big at all,” whispered the Wart disappointedly.

End quote.

Just a quick pause here in our reading. Right before us is the GIANT! And, Wart is not impressed at all!

Years ago, at the Upper Limit Gym, Mark Eaton, the Utah Jazz center would come in and train with me. I’m bigger than most people but Mark was on a different scale. He stands well over seven feet but built like a thrower.

When people would come in the gym, they would often see Mark and NOT be impressed. From the far end of the facility they would see him driving weights overhead and think “But he’s not big at all.”

Of course, as they walked into the facility and got closer, they would think it was an optical illusion: somehow, like a Willie Wonka hallway, the room was built to trick the eyes. Only when they got close did they realize that this wasn’t a normal ceiling, it was much higher than usual. Mark needed to train in this area and not in the shorter eight-foot ceiling area as he would have driven the weights through the roof.

Finally, the visitor would say: “Wow.”

You have to get close. Wart and Merlyn will be close very soon.

One final thing before we move on: **“but every time that the Wart was compelled to let go of his magician for a moment he became visible.”**

My personal motto, from our visit with Hawks so many chapters ago, is “Never Let Go.”

It’s good advice when you are near a giant.

“But he’s not big at all,” whispered the Wart disappointedly.

“He is ten feet high,” hissed Merlyn, “and that is *extremely* big for a giant. I chose the best one I knew. Even Goliath was only six cubits and a span-or nine feet four inches. If you don’t like him you can go home.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be ungrateful, Merlyn, only I thought they were sixty feet long and that sort of thing.”

“Sixty feet,” sniffed the necromancer.

The giants had heard something at the top of the wall, and looked up towards them, remarking in a rumbling tone, "How the bats squeak at night?" Then he poured himself out another hornful of madeira and tossed it off in one draught.

Merlyn lowered his voice and explained. "People find the teeth and bones of creatures like your friend, *Atlantosaurus*, and then they tell stories about human giants. One of them found a tooth weighing two hundred ounces. It's dragons, not giants, that grow really big."

"But can't humans grow bit too?"

"I don't understand it myself, but it is something about the composition of their bones. If a human was to grow sixty feet high, he would simply snap his bones with the weight of their own gravity. The biggest real giant was Eleazar, and he was only ten feet and a half."

"Well," said the Wart. "I must say that it is rather a disappointment."

"I don't mean being brought to see him," he added hastily, "but that they don't grow like I thought. Still, I suppose ten feet is quite big when you come to think of it."

"It's twice as high as you are," said Merlyn. "You would just come up to his navel, and he could pitch you up to a corn rick about as high as you can throw a sheaf."

They had become interested in this discussion, so that they got less and less careful of their voices, and now the giant rose up out of his easy-chair. He came towards them with a three-gallon bottle of wine in his hand, and stared earnestly at the wall on which they were sitting. Then he threw the bottle at the wall rather to their left, said in an angry voice, "Beastly screech owls!" and proceeded to stomp off into the castle.

"Follow him," cried Merlyn quickly.

They scrambled down off the wall, joined hands, and hurried after the giant by the garden door.

End quote.

Wart continues to be a little boy here. He wants a sixty-foot giant. Well, they don't make them that big.

I think this is one of White's best "loops." The giant is drinking madeira. This wine varietal takes us back to the Boar Hunt celebration and our first evening drinking with Sir Ector. "Pass the port" and all of that.

On that first evening that starts our story, there is a mention of a giant, Pass the Port, and here we finally meet him.

As we follow Galapas into his keep, we are going to meet a lot of the giant's prisoners. And...we know one of them!

In the beginning the downstairs were reasonably civilized, with green baize doors behind which butlers and footmen-though with iron collars around their necks-were polishing silver and finishing off the decanters. Later on there were strong-rooms with ancient safes in them, that contained the various gold cups, epergnes and other trophies won at jousts and horse-races by the giant. Next there were the dismal cellars with cobwebs over the wine bins, and dreary-looking rats peeping thoughtfully at the bodiless footprints in the dust, and several corpses of human beings hanging up in the game cupboards until they should be ready to eat. It was like the place for adults only in the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tassaud's.

At the very bottom of the castle they came upon the dungeons. Here the chalky walls dripped with greasy moisture, and there were pathetic messages and graffiti scratched upon the stone. "Pray for my poor Priscilla," said one, and another said, "Oh, if I had only paid for my dog licence honestly, I should have never come to this pass." There was a picture of a man hanging from a gallows, with arms and legs sticking out like those of a Guy Fawkes in all directions, and another of a demon with horns. A fifth carving said, "Midnight Sun for the two-thirty," while the sixth said, "Oh yeah?" and a seventh exclaimed, "Alas, that I should have forgotten to feed my poor canary: now I am in the same dread doom." A message which had been scratched out said, "Beastly old Galapas loves Madame Mim, the dirty hound," and somebody else had written, "Repent and be saved, for the Kingdom of Hell is at hand." There were kisses, dates, pious ejaculations, mottoes such as "Waste not, want not" and "Good-night, ladies," also hearts with arrows in them, skulls and crossbones, pictures of pigs drawn with the eyes shut and pathetic messages such as, "Don't forget to take the potatoes off at half-past twelve," "The key is under the geranium," "Revenge me on stinking Galapas, by whom I am foully slain," or merely "Mazawatee Mead for Night Starvation." It was a grimly place.

I only stop here to marvel at White's work. We are following a giant into a dungeon and White pauses to describe, in great detail, prison graffiti. I am retyping this book word for word and every so often I discover why many great writers note that retyping and rewriting teaches a lot of the art and science of writing.

This pause in the action, as I ruminate on this again, gives us a sense of despair about the dungeon which might be better than continuing on the discussion of chains, bars and death. We just passed some hanging dead humans waiting to be eaten and I can't imagine we will need to work much harder on finding something more frightening or disgusting.

So, we discuss the graffiti. The words on the walls give us the sense of gloom and doom. This adventure is going to move quite quickly compared to the Pike (Luce) story, Madam Mim or our adventure with Robin Wood. White's pause highlights the danger, and the terribleness, that we find Wart and Merlyn descending into here.

Madame Tassaud's, of course, dropped the apostrophe a long time ago. It's waxworks of famous people still bring crowds. I have walked past the one in San Francisco and wondered always why tourists need to see these, but I digress. It is interesting to note that the most famously vandalized sculpture was the one resembling Adolf Hitler. In White's original drawings in the British edition, Galapas has both a Swastika and a Hammer and Sickle on his clothes.

White was no fan of the Nazis or Stalin...nor their followers.

I had never seen the term "epergnes" before this book but I had picked one up in Cairo, Egypt years ago. As daylight was falling, I heard some tinkering...literally. As I rounded a corner, completely lost (as was normal in this city of circles), I stopped and watched a man make this lovely piece that was fairly tall, I think made of tin, with branches off of it that held bowls. This was a fancy food serving platform. I ended up buying a much less expensive bowl which was also far easier to transport.

Mazawatee (it might mean "Fun Garden") was a brand of tea that was advertised throughout Britain for much of the period before White took to writing this book. The company got into chocolate and cocoa and that might be our "mead." This was actually fun to look into as the tea industry in England parallels much of the history of the last four hundred years or so.

"Ha!" cried Galapas, stopping outside one of his cells. "Are you going to give me back my patent unbreakable helm, or make me another one?"

"It's not your helm," answered a feeble voice. "I invented it, and I patented it, and you can go sing for another one, you beast."

"No dinner to-morrow," said Galapas cruelly, and went on to the next cell.

"what about that publicity?" asked the giant. "Are you going to say that the Queen of Sheba made an unprovoked attack upon me and that I took her country in self-defence?"

"No, I'm not," said the journalist in the cell.

"Rubber truncheons for you," said Galapas, "in the morning."

"Where have you hidden my elastic says?" thundered the giant at the third cell.

"I shan't tell you," said the cell."

"If you don't tell me," said Galapas, "I shall have your feet burnt."

"You can do what you like."

“Oh, come on,” pleaded the giant. “My tummy hangs down without them. If you will tell me where you put them I will make you a general, and you will go hunting in Poland in a fur cap. Or you can have a pet lion, or a comic beard, and you can fly to America with an Armanda. Would you like to marry any of my daughters?”

“I think all of your propositions are foul,” said the cell. “You had better have a public trial of me for progaganda.”

“You are just a mean, horrible bully,” said the giant, and went on to next cell.”

Ah. Finally. We come to the “next cell.” Our story explodes from here as we meet the person in the next cell.

The Queen of Sheba, probably Yemen, is as rich in its own folklore tradition as our Arthurian stories. The term, and the woman, is a fertile ground for the literary world.

Galapas is an interesting giant. His bargains with his inmates seem, well, interesting.

“Now then,” said Galapas, “What about that ransom, you dirty English pig?”

“Ay’m not a pig,” said the cell, “and Ay’m not dirty, or Ay wasn’t until I feel into that beastly pit. Now Ay’ve got pine needles all down my back. What have you done with my tooth-brush, you giant, and where have you put more poor little brachet, what?”

“Never mind about your brachet and your tooth-brush,” shouted Galapas, “what about that ransom, you idiot, or you too steeped in British sottishness to understand anything at all?”

“Ay want to brush my teeth,” answer King Pellinore obstinately. “They feel funny, if you understand what I mean, and it makes me feel not very well.”

“Uomo bestiale,” cried the giant. “Have you no finer feelings?”

“No,” said King Pellinore. “Ay don’t thin Ay have. Ay want to brush my teeth, and Ay am getting cramp through sitting all the time on this bench, or what you call it.”

“Unbelievable sot,” screamed the master of the castle. “Where is your soul, you shop-keeper? Do you think of nothing but your teeth?”

“Ay think a lot of things, old boy,” said King Pellinore. “Ay think of how nice it would be to have a poached egg, what?”

“Well, you shan’t have a poached egg, you shall just stay there until you pay my ransom. How do you suppose I am to run my business if I don’t have my ransoms? What about my concentration camps, and my thousand-dollar wreaths at funerals? Do you suppose that all

this is run on nothing? Why, I had to send a wreath for King Cwythno Garanhir which consisted of a Welsh Harp forty feet long, made entirely of orchids. It said, “Melodious Angels Sing Thee to Thy Rest.”

“Ay think that was a very good wreath,” said King Pellinore admiringly. “But couldn’t Ay have my tooth-brush, what? Dash it all, really it isn’t much compared with a wreath like that. Or is it?”

“Imbecile,” exclaimed the giant, and moved to the next cell.

End quote.

The return of King Pellinore. I warned you, Gentle Reader, in the beginning that this story flows from our visits with Pellinore.

In the original *The Sword in the Stone* from 1938 especially, the pattern of transformation stories and reality stories (if you understand what I mean by “reality” here):

Wart’s “quest:” He finds Merlyn (After Meeting King Pellinore chasing the Beast Glatisant)

Fish (Perch) Transformation

Madam Mim

Tilting Lesson (King Pellinore and Sir Grummore)

Hawk Transformation

The “Middle of the Book:” The Adventure with Robin Wood

Snake Transformation

Boar Hunt (King Pellinore finds the Beast Glatisant...again)

Owl Transformation

Galapas the Giant (King Pellinore is among the captured...all are saved by the Beast)

Badger Transformation

Wart becomes King Arthur (and receives gifts from all of his friends, (including Pellinore and the Beast)

Pellinore, in my simple opinion, is the thread that connects all of our story.

A few quick points:

Gwyddno Garanhir was the ruler of a sunken land off the coast of Wales, known as Cantre'r Gwaelod. He was the father of Elffin ap Gwyddno, the foster-father of the famous Welsh poet, Taliesin. Taliesin is responsible for many of the early Arthurian(ish) stories.

I “think” the reference on the wreath comes from Shakespeare, as White is clearly an expert:

"Good night, sweet prince.

May flights of angels sing thee to thy rest" Hamlet, Act 5, Scene 2.

Sottishness, by the way, is drunk. It's a great word to use.

“We shall have to rescue him,” whispered the Wart. “It is poor old King Pellinore, and he must have fallen into one of those traps you were telling me about, while he was after the Questing Beast.”

“Let him stay,” said Merlyn. “A chap who doesn’t know enough to keep himself out of the clutches of one of these giants isn’t worth troubling about.”

“Perhaps he was thinking about something else,” whispered the Wart.

“Well, he shouldn’t have been,” hissed the Magician.

End quote.

Merlyn is about to defend the giant’s actions here. I just wanted to stop here as this discussion brings me back to something I have discussed before:

Merlyn is NOT some befuddled elderly man with a hint of magic. Like Albus Dumbledore, whom J. K. Rowling clearly admits is based on Merlyn, Merlyn is a wizard with amazing powers.

Including honesty.

Giants are part of this world and getting caught by a giant is, in Merlyn’s mind, YOUR fault.

It’s a point I don’t want you to miss. Art Devany once answered the question: “What’s the best way to lose fat?” He answered:

“Don’t get fat in the first place.”

Of course, as I have noted before, the audience member wanted to kill him.

It’s hard in life to accept this lesson. I have worked in schools nearly my entire life and parents can lose their minds when little Billy or Suzy isn’t allowed graduation, the field trip or the class pizza party. Understanding that one’s child has somehow done something wrong is a complete shock to some of these moms and dads.

Years ago, a woman came in to talk with my brother, the school principal. She actually said the following;

“I’m sorry that your house burned down and your father died but what is the deal with cancelling the sixth-grade pizza party.”

You can’t make this stuff up.

Merlyn is teaching Wart a good lesson. Wart won’t listen, of course, as all of us grapple with this idea of personal responsibility. Certainly, we might march waving signs arguing for personal responsibility for other people but, alas, like my mom used to say: “When you point your finger, three point back at you.”

Just so you know, Pellinore will be saved. But our hero won’t be Wart or Merlyn.

“Perhaps he was thinking about something else,” whispered the Wart.

“Well, he shouldn’t have been,” hissed the Magician. “Giants like this do absolutely no harm in the long run, and you can keep them quite quiet by the smallest considerations, such as giving them back their staves. Anybody knows that. If he got himself into trouble with Galapas, let him stay in it. Let him pay the ransom.”

“I know for a fact,” said the Wart, “that he hasn’t got the money. He can’t even afford to buy himself a feather bed.”

“Then he should be polite,” said Merlyn doubtfully.

“He is trying to be,” said the Wart. “He doesn’t understand very much. Oh, please, King Pellinore is a friend of mine and I don’t like to see him in these forbidding cells with a single helper.”

“Whatever can we do?” cried Merlyn angrily. “The cells are firmly locked.”
End quote.

Yelling near a giant is probably not the smartest decision Merlyn has made.

I love Merlyn’s defense of the giant. If you are nice to a giant, they tend to leave you alone. Write that down; it’s a valuable life lesson.

In White’s original text, he drew small pictures for each chapter. Galapas has the Nazi Swastika and the Soviet Union’s Hammer and Sickle on his outfit. I would say that is, ahem, “Not subtle.”

And, frankly, this is what confuses me. Giants are easy to deal with reasonably, according to Merlyn. In 1938, is White arguing to give the Nazi's and USSR "what they want?" Or is he making a simple point with his drawing that I am simply missing.

I am probably simply missing it.

There was really nothing to do, but the magician's louder cry had altered matters into a crisis. Forgetting to be silent as well as invisible, Merlyn had spoken too loudly for the safety of his expedition.

"Who's there?" shrieked Galapas, wheeling round at the fifth cell.

"It's nothing," cried Merlyn. "Only a mouse."

The giant Galapas whipped out his mighty sword, and stared backwards down the narrow passage with his torch held high above his head. "Nonsense," he pronounced. "Mouses don't talk in human speech."

"Eek," said Merlyn, hoping that this would do.

"You can't fool me," said Galapas. "Now I shall come for you with my shining blade; and I shall see what you are, by yea or by nay."

He came down towards them, holding the blue glittering edge in front of him, and his fat eyes were brutal and piggish in the torch-light. You can imagine that it was not very pleasant having a person who weighed thirty-five stone looking for you in a narrow passage, with a sword as long as yourself, in the hopes of sticking it in your liver.

"Don't be silly," said Merlyn. "It is only a mouse, or two mice. You ought know better."

"It's an invisible magician," said Galapas. "And as for invisible magicians, I slit them up, see? I shed their bowels upon the earth, see? I rip them and tear them, see, so that their invisible guts fall out upon the earth. Now, where are you, magician, so that I may slice and rip?"

"We are behind you," said Merlyn anxiously. "Look in that furthest corner behind your back."

"Yes," said Galapas grimly, "except for your voice."

"Hold on," cried Merlyn, but the Wart in the confusion had slipped his hand.
End quote.

A "stone" is 14 pounds. The Highland Game events reflect this, mostly, with the 28 and 56-pound weight throws. 35 stone would be 490 pounds and that is a fairly large amount of mass

to contend with any time...and terrible in a dungeon hallway. Hand our giant a human sized sword and Wart and Merlyn are facing a lot of danger.

Again. This is a dangerous book for boys!

Remember: I warned everyone about speaking loudly when invisible near a giant. I thought I was clear about this and Merlyn makes this fundamental error. His imitation of a mouse has always been funny to me. I think all of us have some experience where we tried to throw a conversation into another direction so we can make an escape.

It's like when you go to your accountant's annual pool party or neighbor's fourth wedding or whatever event you attended and snuck out the bathroom window. Reminder: unlock the bathroom door before you dive out the window. It's called "polite."

"A visible magician," remarked the giant, "this time. But only a small one. We shall see whether the sword goes in with a slide."

"Catch hold, you idiot," cried Merlyn frantically, and with several fumbings they were hand in hand.

"Gone again," said Galapas, and swiped with his sword towards where they had been. It struck blue sparks from the stones.

Merlyn put his invisible mouth right up to the Wart's invisible ear, and whispered. "Lie flat in the passage. We will press ourselves one to each side, and hope that he will go beyond us."

This worked; but the Wart, in wriggling along the floor, lost contact with his protector once again. He groped everywhere but could not find him, and of course he was now visible again, like any other person.

"Ha!" cried Galapas. "The same small one, equally visible."

He made a swipe into the darkness, but Merlyn had snatched his pupil's hand again, and just dragged him out of danger.

"Mysterious chaps," said the giant. "The best thing would be to go snip-snap along the floor."

"That's the way they cut up spinach, you know," added the giant, "or anything you have to chip small.

Merlyn and the Wart crouched hand in hand at the furthest corner of the corridor, while the horrible giant Galapas slowly minced his way towards them, laughing from the bottom of his thunderous belly, and not sparing a single inch of the ground. Click, click, went his razor

sword upon the brutal stones, and there seemed to be no hope of rescue. He was behind them now and cut them off.

“Good-bye,” whispered the Wart. “It was worth it.”

End quote.

Good-bye. It was worth it.

Maybe this will be on my tombstone.

If this were a Black and White serial film from my youth (usually Westerns or Science Fiction), I would cut the episode right here. Will Wart and Merlyn survive? Is this truly The End?

Come back next week: Same Bat Time...Same Bat Channel.

That just aged me, I think.

Gentle reader, don't worry...I think our heroes might make it out.

“Good-bye,” whispered the Wart. “It was worth it.”

“Good-bye,” said Merlyn. “I don't think it was worth it at all.”

“You may well say Good-bye,” sneered the giant, “for soon this choppy blade will rip you.”

“My dear friends,” shouted King Pellinore out of his cell, “don't you say Good-bye at all. Ay think Ay can hear something coming, and while there is life there is hope.”

“Yah,” cried the imprisoned inventor, also coming to their help. He feebly rattled the bars of his cell. “You leave those persons alone, you grincing giant, or I won't make you an unbreakable helmet, ever.”

“What about your stays?” exclaimed the next cell fiercely, to distract his attention. “Fatty.”

“I am not fat,” shouted Galapas, stopping half way down the passage.

“Yes, you are,” replied the cell. “Fatty.”

**“Fatty!” shouted all the prisoners together. “Fat old Galapas,
“Fat old Galapas cried for his mummy
He couldn't find his stays and down fell his tummy!”**

“All right,” said the giant, looking perfectly blue in the face. “All right, my beauties. I'll just finish these two off and then it will be truncheons for supper.”

“Truncheons yourself,” they answered. “You leave those two alone.”

“Truncheons,” was all the giant said. “Truncheons and a few little thumb-screws to finish up with. Now then, where are we?”

There was a distant noise, a kind of barking; and King Pellinore, who had been listening at his barred window while this was going on, began to jump and hop.

“It’s it!” he shouted in high delight. “It’s it.”

End quote.

Most readers would know “Billy Club” or “Police Baton” more than the older name of “truncheon.” Thumb-screws are a form of torture used historically on slaves and heretics. They are also known as “perrywinks,” but I would avoid using them no matter their name.

From the beginning of this, I noted that Pellinore is the odd thread that ties this whole story together. We met him before we met Merlyn, he teaches us about tilting, he is part of the Boar Hunt and here we find him in the depths of the dungeons.

What does he hear? Who can make him yell, in delight, “It’s it?”

Hmmm?

While he was explaining, the noise had come nearer and now was clamouring just outside the dungeon door, behind the giant. It was a pack of hounds.

“Wouff!” cried the door, while the giant and all his victims stood transfixed.

“Wouff! cried the door again, and the hinges creaked.

“Wow!” cried the giant Galapas, as the door crashed to the stone flags with a tremendous slap, and the Beast Glatisant bounded into the corridor.

“Let go of me, you awful animal,” cried the giant, as the Questing Beast fixed its teeth into the seat of his pants.

“Help! help!” squealed the giant, as the monster ran him out of the broken door.

“Good old Beast!” yelled King Pellinore, from behind his bars. “Look at that, Ay ask you! Good old Beast. Leu, leau, leu, leu! Fetch him along then, old lady; bring him on then, bring him on. Good old girl, bring him on: bring him on then, bring him on.

“Dead, dead,” added King Pellinore rather prematurely. “Bring him on dead, then: bring him on dead. There you are then, good old girl. Hie lost! Hie lost! Leu, leu, leu, leu! What do you know about that, for a retriever entirely self-trained?”

Hourouff,” barged the Questing Beast in the far distance. “Hourouff, hourouff.” And they could just hear the giant Galapas running round and round the circular stairs towards the highest turret in his castle.

Merlyn and Wart hurriedly opened all the cell doors with the keys which the giant had dropped-though the Beast would no doubt have been able to break them down if he had not- and the pathetic prisoners came out blinking in the torchlight. They were thin and bleached like mushrooms, but their spirits were not broken.

“Well,” they said. “Isn’t this a bit of all right?”

“No more thumbscrews for supper.”

“No more dungeons, no more stench,” said the inventor. “No more sitting on this hard bench.”

“Ay wonder where he can have put my tooth-brush?”

“That’s a splendid animal of yours, Pellinore. We owe her all our lives.”

“Three cheers for Galisant!”

“And the brachet must be somewhere about.”

“Oh, come along, my dear fellow. You can clean your teeth some other time, with a stick or something, when we get out. The thing to do is to set free all the slaves and to run away before the Beast lets him out of the Tower.”

“As far as that goes, we can pinch the epergnes on the way out.”

“Lordy, I shan’t be sorry to see a nice fire again. That place fair gives me the rheumatics.”

“Let’s burn all his truncheons, and write what we think of him on the walls.”

“Good old Glatissant!”

“Three cheers for Pellinore!”

“Three cheers for everybody else!”

“Huzza! Huzza! Huzza!

End quote.

A “leu,” meaning “lion” is the monetary unit of Romania, so I am sure the king must be saying something else. He plays with language a bit...so...

I dunno.

In the later editions, both the Galapas story and the Madam Mim adventure are dropped. One of the prisoner’s etched on the wall:

“Beastly old Galapas loves Madame Mim, the dirty hound,”

I think these two stories intertwine quite a bit. The witch and the giant are classic western bad guys and show up in fairy tales and the Brothers Grimm works. Both are major parts of Celtic stories and show up the Odyssey.

I’m not sure why these two stories were edited out. As I look over both...again..., I see that both stories have action packed finales and, overall, a lot of fun.

Now, in almost an instant, we will return to the solar. Our time with Galapas may have been more exciting than the religious reading.

Merlyn and the Wart slipped away invisibly from the rejoicings. They left the slaves thronging out of the Castle while King Pellinore carefully unlocked the iron rings from their necks with a few appropriate words, as if he were distributing the prizes on speech day. Glatissant was still making a noise like thirty couple of hounds questing, outside the Tower door, and Galapas, with all the furniture piled against the door, was leaning out of the Tower window shouting for the fire brigade. The occupant of cell No. 3 was busily collected the Ascot Gold Cup and other trophies out of the giant’s safe, while the publicity man was having a splendid time with a bonfire of truncheons, thumbscrews and anything else that looked as if it would melt the instruments of torture. Across the corridor of the now abandoned dungeons the inventor was carving a rude message with hammer and chisel, and this said, “Sucks to Galapas.” The firelight and the cheering, and King Pellinore’s encouraging remarks, such as “Britons never shall be slaves,” or “I hope you will never forget the lessons you have learned while you were with us here,” or “I shall always be glad to hear from any Old Slaves, how they get on in life,” or “Try to make it a rules always to clean your teeth twice a day,” combined to make the leave-taking a festive one, from which the two invisible visitors were sorry to depart. But time was precious, as Merlyn said, and they hurried off towards the Burbly Water.

Considering the things that had happened, there must have been something queer about Time, as well as its preciousness, for when the Wart opened his eyes in the solar, Kay was still clicking his chessmen and Sir Ector still staring into flames.

End quote.

The adventure of the Giant Galapas comes to an end and, dare I say “magically,” time has been stretched to accommodate our heroes. Everyone, save the giant, is safe and sound.

We still have a little bit to go in this chapter as the Vicar and Merlyn will be discussing the theological impact of the Vicar’s evening reading. Ideally, everyone will practice dental hygiene twice a day as recommended by Pellinore.

Pellinore reminds me of Lord Polonius in his exhortations here. In 1982, I took a course on Shakespeare. I had this idea...correctly...that a teacher should always take courses. The essay questions were all fairly open ended and I struggled with a question about Polonius. So, I asked Chris Long, my best friend and English teacher and wrestling coach, about this speech:

Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine ownself be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell: my blessing season this in thee!

Chris summed it simply: “The guy is a blowhard. It is a speech of cliches.”

Ah! Enlightenment. As everyone is seeking revenge of the giant and scrambling to leave with whatever boons they can collect, Pellinore is giving speeches.

Having said that, I have always cared for Pellinore. He is always around Wart and provides him with a lot of opportunities to learn. And, no matter what, cleaning your teeth twice a day is good advice.

“Well,” said Sir Ector, “what about the giant?”

Merlyn looked up from his knitted, and the Wart opened a startled mouth to speak, but the question had been addressed to the vicar.

Reverent Sidebottom closed his book about Pallas, the son of Evander, rolled his eyeballs wildly, clutched his thin beard, gasped for breath, shut his eyes, exclaimed hurriedly, “My beloved, the giant is Adam, who was formed free from all corruption. The wound from which he died is transgression of the divine command.”

Then he blew out his cheeks, let go of his beard and glanced triumphantly at Merlyn.

“Very good,” said Merlyn. Especially that bit about remaining uncorrupted. But what about the candle and the needle?”

The vicar closed his eyes again, as if in pain, and all waited in silence for the explanation.

After they had waited for several minutes, Wart said, "if I were a knight in armour, and met a giant, I should smite off both his legs by the knees, saying "Now art thou better of a size to deal with an thou were," and after that I should swish off his head."

"Hush," said Sir Ector, "Never mind about that."

"The candle," said the vicar wanly, "is eternal punishment, extinguished by means of a needle-that is the passion of Christ."

"Very good indeed," said Merlyn, patting him on the back.

The fire burned merrily, as it were a bonfire which some slaves were dancing around, and one of the gaze-hounds next to the Wart now went "Houroff, hourouff" in its sleep, so that it sounded like a pack of thirty couple of hounds questing in the distance, very far away beyond the night-lit woods.

End quote.

It's occasionally fun to come back and discuss whether or not Wart's adventures are "real." I don't necessarily like the conversation as it sort of kills the whole idea of fictional reading. I've discussed this before and, like what Sherlock Holmes once told me, it seems that we can only keep so much in our mental attic. So, I dismiss the conversation.

These things happen to Wart!

We end this chapter. I think this chapter with Galapas and the story of Mim make a nice up ramp and down ramp into our overall story. Each is a traditional bad guy. In both stories, help comes from an unexpected source, the goat and the beast, and when the story finishes, the story finishes.

Editors cut them out. That's not my choice. In our next chapter, time travels very fast...six year in a sentence.

Chapter XX

It was hay-making again, and Merlyn had been with them a year. The wind had visited them, and the snow, and the rain, and the sun once more. The boys looked longer in the leg, but otherwise everything was the same.

Six other years passed by.

Sometimes Sir Grummore came on a visit. Sometimes King Pellinore could be descried galloping over the purlieu after the Beast, or with the Beast after him if they happened to have got muddled up. Cully lost the vertical stripes of his first year's plumage and became greyer, grimmer, madder, and distinguished by smart horizontal bars where the long stripes had been. The merlins were released every winter and new ones caught again next year. Hob's hair went white. The sergeant-at-arms developed a pot-belly and nearly died of shame, but continued to cry out One-Two, in a huskier voice, on every possible occasion. Nobody else seemed to change at all, except the boys.

These grew longer. They ran like wild colts as before, and went to see Robin when they had a mind to, and had innumerable adventures too lengthy to be recorded.

Merlyn's extra tuition went on just the same—for in those days even the grown-up people were so childish that they saw nothing uninteresting in being turned into owls. The Wart was changed into countless different animals. The only difference was that now, in their fencing lessons, Kay and his companion were an easy match for the pot-bellied sergeant, and paid him back accidentally for many of the buffets which he had once given them. They had more and more proper weapons as presents, when they had reached their 'teens, until in the end they had full suits of armour and bows nearly six feet long, which would shoot the clothyard shaft. You were not supposed to use a bow longer than your own height, for it was considered that by doing so you were expending unnecessary energy, rather like using an elephant-gun to shoot an ovis ammon with. At any rate, modest men were careful not to over-bow themselves. It was a form of boasting.

As the years went by, Kay became more difficult. He always used a bow too big for him, and did not shoot very accurately with it either. He lost his temper and challenged nearly everybody to have a fight, and in those few cases where he did actually have the fight he was invariably beaten. Also he became sarcastic. He made the sergeant miserable by nagging about his stomach, and went on at the Wart about his father and mother when Sir Ector was not about. He did not seem to want to do this. It was as if he disliked it, but could not help it.

The Wart continued to be stupid, fond of Kay, and interested in birds.

Merlyn looked younger every year—which was only natural, because he was.

Archimedes was married, and brought up several handsome families of quilly youngsters in the tower room.

Sir Ector got sciatica. Three trees were struck by lightning. Master Twyti came every Christmas without altering a hair. Master Passelewe remembered a new verse about King Cole.

The years passed regularly and the Old English snow lay as it was expected to lie—sometimes with a Robin Redbreast in one corner of the picture, a church bell or lighted window in the

other—and in the end it was nearly time for Kay's initiation as a full-blown knight. Proportionately as the day became nearer, the two boys drifted apart—for Kay did not care to associate with the Wart any longer on the same terms, because he would need to be more dignified as a knight, and could not afford to have his squire on intimate terms with him. The Wart, who would have to be the squire, followed him about disconsolately as long as he was allowed to do so, and then went off full miserably to amuse himself alone, as best he might.
End quote.

In a sense, “nothing” happens in this chapter. If I could only get you to read two chapters, it would be this chapter and Wart’s visit to the raptors at night. I think the evening with the hawks is discussion of how to navigate life...this chapter discusses how to navigate life when things don’t go the way you want.

Merlyn and Wart’s relationship has been growing older colder, in a sense. Wart’s ambitions don’t align with Merlyn’s vision of the world.

They will disagree in this chapter. Merlyn will dispel some myths. Wart will speak of his hopes and dreams. Merlyn will try to crush them. Wart will keep his vision.

I have had people try to stomp on my goals. Hell, I think it is part of the process of achieving a goal; nay-sayers seem to love to pop the goal balloons. Overcoming friend, family and foe is all part of the goal-achieving process.

Later, those same people will tell you that they “meant well” and they didn’t want you to be disappointed.

Disappointment? I’m not necessarily agreeing with Peggy Lee, but she sang it better:

I know what you must be saying to yourselves
"If that's the way she feels about it, why doesn't she just end it all?"
Oh, no. Not me
I'm not ready for that final disappointment
Cause I know just as well as I'm standing here talking to you
And when that final moment comes and I'm breathing my last breath,
I'll be saying to myself

Is that all there is?
Is that all there is?
If that's all there is my friends, then let's keep dancing
Let's break out the booze and have a ball
If that's all there is

Maybe this why so few people live the life of their dreams. There will be disappointment in life; there will be disappointment when you strive for your dreams.

Oddly, simply striving to gain your goal is far better than letting life click by you minute by minute, hour by hour.

I agree with Wart. But I listen to Merlyn, too.

The years passed regularly and the Old English snow lay as it was expected to lie—sometimes with a Robin Redbreast in one corner of the picture, a church bell or lighted window in the other—and in the end it was nearly time for Kay's initiation as a full-blown knight.

Proportionately as the day became nearer, the two boys drifted apart—for Kay did not care to associate with the Wart any longer on the same terms, because he would need to be more dignified as a knight, and could not afford to have his squire on intimate terms with him. The Wart, who would have to be the squire, followed him about disconsolately as long as he was allowed to do so, and then went off full miserably to amuse himself alone, as best he might.

He went to the kitchen.

"Well, I am a Cinderella now," he said to himself. "Even if I have had the best of it for some mysterious reason, up to the present time—in our education—now I must pay for my past pleasures and for seeing all those delightful dragons, witches, fishes, cameleopards, pismires, wild geese and such like, by being a second-rate squire and holding Kay's extra spears for him, while he hoves by some well or other and jousts with all comers. Never mind, I have had a good time while it lasted, and it is not such bad fun being a Cinderella, when you can do it in a kitchen which has a fireplace big enough to roast an ox."

And the Wart looked round the busy kitchen, which was coloured by the flames till it looked like hell, with sorrowful affection.

The education of any civilized gentleman in those days used to go through three stages, page, squire, knight, and at any rate the Wart had been through the first two of these. It was rather like being the son of a modern gentleman who has made his money out of trade, for your father started you on the bottom rung even then, in your education of manners. As a page, Wart had learned to lay the tables with three cloths and a carpet, and to bring meat from the kitchen, and to serve Sir Ector or his guests on bended knee, with one clean towel over his shoulder, one for each visitor, and one to wipe the basins. He had been taught all the noble arts of servility, and, from the earliest time that he could remember, there had lain pleasantly in the end of his nose the various scents of mint—used to freshen the water in the ewers—or of basil, camomile, fennel, hysop and lavender—which he had been taught to strew on the rushy floors—or of the angelica, saffron, aniseed, and tarragon, which were used to spice the savouries which he had to carry. So he was accustomed to the kitchen, quite apart from the fact that everybody who lived in the castle was a friend of his, who might be visited on any occasion.

Wart sat in the enormous firelight and looked about him with pleasure. He looked upon the long spits which he had often turned when he was smaller, sitting behind an old straw target soaked in water, so that he would not be roasted himself, and upon the ladles and spoons whose handles could be measured in yards, with which he had been accustomed to baste the meat. He watched with water in his mouth the arrangements for the evening meal—a boar's head with a lemon in its jaws and split almond whiskers, which would be served with a fanfare of trumpets—a kind of pork pie with sour apple juice, peppered custard, and several birds' legs, or spiced leaves sticking out of the top to show what was in it—and a most luscious-looking frumenty. He said to himself with a sigh, "It is not so bad being a servant after all."

"Still sighing?" asked Merlyn, who had turned up from somewhere. "As you were that day when we went to watch King Pellinore's joust?"

End quote.

In 1982, I taught a mini-course on Anglo-Saxon England. I often used the opportunity to teach a specialized course to force me to clarify my work. At the time, I had just finished presenting a paper on Beowulf to a convention and I wanted to work on knitting Beowulf and Arthur.

I didn't utilize *The Sword in the Stone* as well as I should but I offered the text as part of the whole package. I offered the students an interesting assignment:

Simply, write up one of the transformations that we skipped over the six years that White sprinted past here in just a sentence. Here are some options:

"now I must pay for my past pleasures and for seeing all those delightful dragons, witches, fishes, cameleopards, pismires, wild geese."

White, as we have discussed, did expand wild geese (and ants) in the *Book of Merlyn*. Once again, the geese and ants BELONG in the *Book of Merlyn*!

Not a single student took this task. It would have been an amazing thing to tag onto a college application, but we can discuss how people get into America's select universities at some other time and place.

I still think this would be a delightful thing. I see all kinds of Sherlock and Harry Potter fan fiction. Wart fan fiction needs a place.

As we sigh away from this delightful meal, Wart and Arthur have a very important conversation.

"Still sighing?" asked Merlyn, who had turned up from somewhere. "As you were that day when we went to watch King Pellinore's joust?"

"Oh, no," said the Wart. "Or rather, oh yes, and for the same reason. But I don't really mind. I am sure I shall make a better squire than old Kay would. Look at the saffron going into that frumenty. It just matches the fire-light on the hams in the chimney."

"It is lovely," said the magician. "Only fools want to be great."

"Kay won't tell me," said the Wart, "what happens when you are made a knight. He says it is too sacred. What does happen?"

"Only a lot of fuss. You will have to undress him and put him into a bath hung with rich hangings, and then two experienced knights will turn up—probably Sir Ector will get hold of old Grummore and King Pellinore—and they will both sit on the edge of the bath and give him a long lecture about the ideals of chivalry such as they are. When they have done, they will pour some of the bath water over him and sign him with the cross, and then you will have to conduct him into a clean bed to get dry. Then you dress him up as a hermit and take him off to the chapel, and there he stays awake all night, watching his armour and saying prayers. People say it is lonely and terrible for him in this vigil, but it is not at all lonely really, because the vicar and the man who sees to the candles and an armed guard, and probably you as well, as his esquire, will have to sit up with him at the same time. In the morning you lead him off to bed to have a good sleep—as soon as he has confessed and heard mass and offered a candle with a piece of money stuck into it as near the lighted end as possible—and then, when all are rested, you dress him up again in his very best clothes for dinner. Before dinner you lead him into the hall, with his spurs and sword all ready, and King Pellinore puts on the first spur, and Sir Grummore puts on the second, and then Sir Ector girds on the sword and kisses him and smacks him on the shoulder and says, 'Be thou a good knight!'"

"Is that all?"

"No. You go to the chapel again then, and Kay offers his sword to the vicar, and the vicar gives it back to him, and after that our good cook over there meets him at the door and claims his spurs as a reward, and says, 'I shall keep these spurs for you, and if at any time you don't behave as a true knight should do, why, I shall pop them in the soup.'"

"That is the end?"

"Yes, except for the dinner."

End quote.

Wart doesn't seem too enthused about being a squire. We will next read what he really wants...kighthood. Merlyn, of course, living backwards in time, knows that Wart will skip that step and become the king.

I never liked this line from Merlyn, although I appreciate it:

"Only fools want to be great."

When I first read this as a kid, I wanted to be great. On my journey into sports and academics, I think I wanted to be great...it can be murky to look back through the dark mirror of memory.

I always found something stirring from this line from L. Frank Baum's Land of Oz:

"That proves you are unusual," returned the Scarecrow; "and I am convinced that the only people worthy of consideration in this world are the unusual ones. For the common folks are like the leaves of a tree, and live and die unnoticed."

I'm certainly not discussing the worth of each and every human person but as I look over my life, the "unusual ones" tend to be the people I enjoy my meals. Choosing to train eight hours a day in the weightroom and throwing sector is not a normal life. One of my favorite professors labeled his files "Eye of Newt," "Toe of Frog" and "Jabberwocky."

And...he knew exactly where everything was in his file cabinet.

As a schoolteacher for almost four decades, I got exhausted by the use of Robert Frost's poem, The Road Not Taken. Trust me, I know the struggles of teenage independence both from personal and professional experience but, sadly, it can also be a cliché.

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Sitting with a teenager discussing their vision of the less traveled road is always interesting. I had one student whose grandparents and parents all graduated from the school I was teaching at and had also decided to go to the same university that the whole family attended was vehemently explaining to me that they were trotting down the less traveled road.

And, maybe so.

I couldn't follow my family into college. I am a first-generation college student. No one in my family ever threw the discus...or played American football.

I wanted to be great. Here is my great (ha!) life insight:

The Road to Greatness is a very well-traveled road. It's long but the road is clear and wide. There are not a lot of secrets; just keep putting one foot in front of the other.

"No. You go to the chapel again then, and Kay offers his sword to the vicar, and the vicar gives it back to him, and after that our good cook over there meets him at the door and

claims his spurs as a reward, and says, 'I shall keep these spurs for you, and if at any time you don't behave as a true knight should do, why, I shall pop them in the soup.'

"That is the end?"

"Yes, except for the dinner."

"If I were to be made a knight," said the Wart, staring dreamily into the fire, "I should insist on doing my vigil by myself, as Hob does with his hawks, and I should pray to God to let me encounter all the evil in the world in my own person, so that if I conquered there would be none left, and, if I were defeated, I would be the one to suffer for it."

"That would be extremely presumptuous of you," said Merlyn, "and you would be conquered, and you would suffer for it."

"I shouldn't mind."

"Wouldn't you? Wait till it happens and see."

"Why do people not think, when they are grown up, as I do when I am young?"

"Oh dear," said Merlyn. "You are making me feel confused. Suppose you wait till you are grown up and know the reason?"

"I don't think that is an answer at all," replied the Wart, justly.

Merlyn wrung his hands.

"Well, anyway," he said, "suppose they did not let you stand against all the evil in the world?"

"I could ask," said the Wart.

"You could ask," repeated Merlyn.

He thrust the end of his beard into his mouth, stared tragically at the fire, and began to munch it fiercely.

End quote.

And, with that tragic look and beard munching, this chapter ends. I continue to be amazed by this rather short, quiet chapter. I have referenced "I could ask" probably daily since I first read this line. It sits quietly in my mind as the answer to so many of life's questions; you don't have to wait to be grown up.

I've asked students to be kind and they strived to be kind. I asked one young man to please stop choosing poorly.

He stopped.

I asked.

I'm not sure this always works but asking seems to help.

Chapter XXI

The day for the ceremony drew near, the invitations to King Pellinore and Sir Grummore were sent out, and the Wart withdrew himself more and more into the kitchen.

"Come on, Wart, old boy," said Sir Ector ruefully. "I didn't think you would take it so bad. It doesn't become you to do this sulkin'."

"I am not sulking," said the Wart. "I don't mind a bit and I am very glad that Kay is going to be a knight. Please don't think I am sulking."

"You are a good boy," said Sir Ector. "I know you're not sulkin' really, but do cheer up. Kay isn't such a bad stick, you know, in his way."

"Kay is a splendid chap," said the Wart. "Only I was not happy because he did not seem to want to go hawking or anything, with me, any more."

"It is his youthfulness," said Sir Ector. "It will all clear up."

"I am sure it will," said the Wart. "It is only that he does not want me to go with him, just at the moment. And so, of course, I don't go."

"But I will go," added the Wart. "As soon as he commands me, I will do exactly what he says. Honestly, I think Kay is a good person, and I was not sulking a bit."

"You have a glass of this canary," said Sir Ector, "and go and see if old Merlyn can't cheer you up."

"Sir Ector has given me a glass of canary," said the Wart, "and sent me to see if you can't cheer me up."

"Sir Ector," said Merlyn, "is a wise man."

End quote.

Merlyn's next speech, I think, is the best part of this whole book...which, from me, is high praise. It's worth reading ahead.

I think we have all been in Wart's shoes today. Canary, by the way, would be called "sherry" today. It is/was a fortified wine with grapes from Spain or the Canary Islands. It was also called Sack Wine.

A glass of wine, a slap on the back and "off to your tutor" is pretty good advice in most of *The Sword in the Stone*. Merlyn, of course, offers more than just a lesson. It's time for Wart's last transfiguration.

"Sir Ector has given me a glass of canary," said the Wart, "and sent me to see if you can't cheer me up."

"Sir Ector," said Merlyn, "is a wise man."

"Well," said the Wart, "what about it?"

"The best thing for being sad," replied Merlyn, beginning to puff and blow, "is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honour trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then—to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the thing for you. Look at what a lot of things there are to learn—pure science, the only purity there is. You can learn astronomy in a lifetime, natural history in three, literature in six. And then, after you have exhausted a milliard lifetimes in biology and medicine and theo-criticism and geography and history and economics—why, you can start to make a cartwheel out of the appropriate wood, or spend fifty years learning to begin to learn to beat your adversary at fencing. After that you can start again on mathematics, until it is time to learn to plough."

"Apart from all these things," said the Wart, "what do you suggest for me just now?"
End quote.

I will leave Wart's "snarky" comment here just so we can all realize that the student doesn't always recognize the brilliance. This, however, deserves a rereading. It's deserves several lifetimes.

"The best thing for being sad," replied Merlyn, beginning to puff and blow, "is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your

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"Apart from all these things," said the Wart, "what do you suggest for me just now?"

"Let me see," said the magician, considering. "We have had a short six years of this, and in that time I think I am right in saying that you have been many kinds of animal, vegetable, mineral, etc.—many things in earth, air, fire and water?"

"I don't know much," said the Wart, "about the animals and earth."

"Then you had better meet my friend the badger."

"I have never met a badger."

"Good," said Merlyn. "Except for Archimedes, he is the most learned creature I know. You will like him.

"By the way," added the magician, stopping in the middle of his spell, "there is one thing I ought to tell you. This is the last time I shall be able to turn you into anything. All the magic for that sort of thing has been used up, and this will be the end of your education. When Kay has been knighted my labours will be over. You will have to go away then, to be his squire in the wide world, and I shall go elsewhere. Do you think you have learned anything?"

"I have learned, and been happy."

"That's right, then," said Merlyn. "Try to remember what you learned."

I don't even know how to comment on this section. I have read and reread this selection countless times in my life. "I have learned, and been happy." I'm not sure I know of a more simple way to sum these amazing adventures of Wart and Merlyn.

The story is almost over. Well, THIS story is almost over. As we move forward, this is the last transfiguration, Wart is going to have a life-staggering change here in just a few pages. So, enjoy our last visit. Wart, by the way, won't instantly go visit the badger and his reluctance to finish his "edication" is understandable.

"That's right, then," said Merlyn. "Try to remember what you learned."

He proceeded with the spell, pointed his wand of lignum vitae at the Little Bear, which had just begun to glow in the dimity as it hung by its tail from the North Star, and called out cheerfully, "Have a good time for the last visit. Give love to Badger."

The call sounded from far away, and Wart found himself standing by the side of an ancient tumulus, like an enormous mole hill, with a black hole in front of him.

"Badger lives in there," he said to himself, "and I am supposed to go and talk to him. But I won't. It was bad enough never to be a knight, but now my own dear tutor that I found on the only Quest I shall ever have is to be taken from me also, and there will be no more natural history. Very well, I will have one more night of joy before I am condemned, and, as I am a wild beast now, I will be a wild beast, and there it is."

So he trundled off fiercely over the twilight snow, for it was winter.

If you are feeling desperate, a badger is a good thing to be. A relation of the bears, otters and weasels, you are the nearest thing to a bear now left in England, and your skin is so thick that it makes no difference who bites you. So far as your own bite is concerned, there is

something about the formation of your jaw which makes it almost impossible to be dislocated—and so, however much the thing you are biting twists about, there is no reason why you should ever let go. Badgers are one of the few creatures which can munch up hedgehogs unconcernedly, just as they can munch up everything else from wasps' nests and roots to baby rabbits.

End quote.

"Try to remember what you learned." I don't want to spoil the rest of White's work, but King Arthur doesn't remember much. That is the beauty of the fifth book, *The Book of Merlyn*, when Arthur has two more adventures with the ants and the geese.

The description of the badger is lovely. Not long ago, the Honey Badger became an internet sensation and most people might instantly add "Honey Badger don't give a shit." (Sorry Gentle Reader...I'm quoting)

Wart is quitting. He's moping and he's angry. His sole dream, to become a knight, isn't going to happen. He is about to meet two new characters that will walk with him maybe for the last time.

It so happened that a sleeping hedgehog was the first thing which came in the Wart's way.

"Hedge-pig," said the Wart, peering at his victim with blurred, short-sighted eyes, "I am going to munch you up."

The hedgehog, which had hidden its bright little eye-buttons and long sensitive nose inside its curl, and which had ornamented its spikes with a not very tasteful arrangement of dead leaves before going to bed for the winter in its grassy nest, woke up at this and squealed most lamentably.

"The more you squeal," said the Wart, "the more I shall gnash. It makes my blood boil within me."

"Ah, Measter Brock," cried the hedgehog, holding himself tight shut. "Good Measter Brock, show mercy to a poor urchin and don't 'ee be tyrannical. Us be'nt no common tiggly, measter, for to be munched and mumbled. Have mercy, kind sir, on a harmless, flea-bitten crofter which can't tell his left hand nor his right."

"Hedge-pig," said the Wart remorselessly, "forbear to whine, neither thrice nor once."

"Alas, my poor wife and childer!"

"I bet you have not got any. Come out of that, thou tramp. Prepare to meet thy doom."

"Measter Brock," implored the unfortunate pig, "come now, doan't 'ee be okkerd, sweet Measter Brock, my duck. Hearken to an urchin's prayer! Grant the dear boon of life to this most uncommon tiggly, lordly measter, and he shall sing to thee in numbers sweet or teach 'ee how to suck cow's milk in the pearly dew."

"Sing?" asked the Wart, quite taken aback.

"Aye, sing," cried the hedgehog. And it began hurriedly to sing in a very placating way, but rather muffled because it dared not uncurl.

"Oh, Genevieve," it sang most mournfully into its stomach, "Sweet Genevieve,

Ther days may come,
Ther days may go,
But still the light of Mem'ry weaves
Those gentle dreams
Of long ago."

It also sang, without pausing for a moment between the songs, Home Sweet Home and The Old Rustic Bridge by the Mill. Then, because it had finished its repertoire, it drew a hurried but quavering breath, and began again on Genevieve. After that, it sang Home Sweet Home and The Old Rustic Bridge by the Mill.

"Come," said the Wart, "you can stop that. I won't bite you."

"Clementious measter," whispered the hedge-pig humbly. "Us shall bless the saints and board of governors for thee and for thy most kindly chops, so long as fleas skip nor urchins climb up chimbleys."

Then, for fear that its brief relapse into prose might have hardened the tyrant's heart, it launched out breathlessly into Genevieve, for the third time.

"Stop singing," said the Wart, "for heaven's sake. Uncurl. I won't do you any harm. Come, you silly little urchin, and tell me where you learned these songs."

"Uncurl is one word," answered the porpentine tremblingly—it did not feel in the least fretful at the moment—"but curling up is still another. If 'ee was to see my liddle naked nose, measter, at this dispicuous moment, 'ee might feel a twitching in thy white toothsomes; and all's fear in love and war, that we do know. Let us sing to 'ee again, sweet Measter Brock, concerning thic there rustic mill?"

"I don't want to hear it any more. You sing it very well, but I don't want it again. Uncurl, you idiot, and tell me where you learned to sing."

"Us be'nt no common urchin," quavered the poor creature, staying curled up as tight as ever. "Us wor a-teuk when liddle by one of them there gentry, like, as it might be from the mother's breast. Ah, doan't 'ee nip our tender vitals, lovely Measter Brock, for ee wor a proper gennelman, ee wor, and brought us up full comely on cow's milk an' that, all supped out from a lordly dish. Ah, there be'nt many urchins what a drunken water outer porcelain, that there be'nt."

"I don't know what you are talking about," said the Wart.

"Ee wor a gennelman," cried the hedgehog desperately, "like I tell 'ee. Ee teuk un when us wor liddle, and fed un when us ha'nt no more. Ee wor a proper gennelman what fed un in ter parlour, like what no urchins ha'nt been afore nor since; fed out from gennelman's porcelain, aye, and a dreary day it wor whenever us left un for nought but wilfulness, that thou may'st be sure."

"What was the name of this gentleman?"

"Ee wor a gennelman, ee wor. Ee hadden no proper neame like, not like you may remember, but ee wor a gennelman, that ee wor, and fed un out a porcelain."

"Was he called Merlyn?" asked the Wart curiously.

"Ah, that wor is neame. A proper fine neame it wor, but us never lay tongue to it by nary means. Ah, Mearn ee called to iself, and fed un out a porcelain, like a proper fine gennelman."

"Oh, do uncurl," exclaimed the Wart. "I know the man who kept you, and I think I saw you, yourself, when you were a baby in cotton wool at his cottage. Come on, urchin, I am sorry I frightened you. We are friends here, and I want to see your little grey wet twitching nose, just for old time's sake."

"Twitching noase be one neame," answered the hedgehog obstinately, "and a-twitching of that noase be another, measter. Now you move along, kind Measter Brock, and leave a poor crofter to teak 'is winter drowse. Let you think of beetles or honey, sweet baron, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest."

"Nonsense," exclaimed the Wart. "I won't do you any harm, because I knew you when you were little."

"Ah, them badgers," said the poor thing to its stomach, "they go a-barrowing about with no harm in their hearts, Lor bless 'em, but doan't they fair give you a nip without a-noticing of it, and Lor bless 'ee what is a retired mun to do? It's that there skin of theirs, that's what it be, which from earliest childer they've been a-nipping of among each other, and also of their

ma's, without a-feeling of anything among theirselves, so natural they nips elsewhere like the seame. Now my poor gennelman, Measter Mearn, they was allars a-rushing arter his ankels, with their yik-yik-yik, when they wanted to be fed like, those what ee kept from liddles—and, holy church, how ee would scream! Aye, 'tis a mollocky thing to deal with they badgers, that us may be sure.

"Doan't see nothing," added the hedgehog, before the Wart could protest. "Blunder along like one of they ambling hearth rugs, on the outsides of their girt feet. Get in their way for a moment, just out of fortune like, without nary wicked intention and 'tis snip-snap, just like that, out of self-defence for the hungry blind, and then where are you?"

"On'y pleave us can do for un," continued the urchin, "is to hit un on ter noase. A killee's heel they neame un on ter scriptures. Hit one of they girt trollops on ter noase, bim-bam, like that 'ere, and the sharp life is fair outer him ere ee can snuffle. 'Tis a fair knock-out, that it is.

"But how can a pore urchin dump un on ter noase? When ee ha'nt got nothing to dump with, nor way to hold 'un? And then they comes about 'ee and asks 'ee for to uncurl!"

"You need not uncurl," said the Wart resignedly. "I am sorry I woke you up, chap, and I am sorry I frightened you. I think you are a charming hedgehog, and meeting you has made me feel more cheerful again. You just go off to sleep like you were when I met you, and I shall go to look for my friend badger, as I was told to do. Good night, urchin, and good luck in the snow."

"Good night it may be," muttered the pig grumpily. "And then again it mayern't. First it's uncurl and then it's curl. One thing one moment, and another thing ter next. Hey-ho, 'tis a turvey world. But Good night, Ladies, is my motter, come hail, come snow, and so us shall be continued in our next."

With these words the humble animal curled himself up still more snugly than before, gave several squeaky grunts, and was far away in a dream-world so much deeper than our human dreams as a whole winter's sleep is longer than the quiet of a single night.

"Well," thought the Wart, "he certainly gets over his troubles pretty quickly. Fancy going to sleep again as quick as that. I dare say he was never more than half-awake all the time, and will think it was only a dream when he gets up properly in the spring."

He watched the dirty little ball of leaves and grass and fleas for a moment, curled up tightly inside its hole, then grunted and moved off toward the badger's sett, following his own oblong footmarks backward in the snow.

End quote.

"Brock" is a term for badger. The name is seen in many town names and remains a popular name for children.

I usually chop up the paragraphs a bit more, but I think this part should be read straight through. This minor story reminds us that Merlyn's tiny zoo in his tower seems to contain a fair number of Wart's future adventures. We saw this with T. Natrix (the snake) and now our little hedgehog is a common companion.

In *The Book of Merlyn*, we will find our friend the hedgehog again. He and Cavall, Wart's favorite dog, will seem to defend King Arthur at every turn. If you read the original version of *The Sword in the Stone*, *The Book of Merlyn* will be a delight with the long stories of Ant and Geese, but I just don't think these stories fit in *The Sword in the Stone*. MOST people read the cobbled 1958 edition (that pulls out many of the best stories and replaces them with the ants and geese) and sadly won't appreciate *The Book of Merlyn's* transfiguration stories.

We are about to meet Badger. It's still a favorite of mine.

"So Merlyn sent you to me," said the badger, "to finish your education. Well, I can only teach you two things—to dig, and love your home. These are the true end of philosophy."

"Would you show me your home?"

"Certainly," said the badger, "though, of course, I don't use it all. It is a rambling old place, much too big for a single man. I suppose some parts of it may be a thousand years old. There are about four families of us in it, here and there, take it by and large, from cellar to attics, and sometimes we don't meet for months. A crazy old place, I suppose it must seem to you modern people—but there, it's cosy."

He went ambling down the corridors of the enchanted sett, rolling from leg to leg with the queer badger paddle, his white mask with its black stripes looking ghostly in the gloom.

"It's along that passage," he said, "if you want to wash your hands."

Badgers are not like foxes. They have a special midden where they put out their used bones and rubbish, proper earth closets, and bedrooms whose bedding they turn out frequently, to keep it clean. The Wart was charmed with what he saw. He admired the Great Hall most, for this was the central room of the tumulus—it was difficult to know whether to think of it as a college or as a castle—and the various suites and bolt holes radiated outward from it. It was a bit cobwebby, owing to being a sort of common-room instead of being looked after by one particular family, but it was decidedly solemn. Badger called it the Combination Room. All round the panelled walls there were ancient paintings of departed badgers, famous in their day for scholarship or godliness, lit from above by shaded glow-worms. There were stately chairs with the badger arms stamped in gold on their Spanish leather seats—the leather was coming off—and a portrait of the Founder over the fireplace. The chairs were arranged in a semi-circle round the fire, and there were mahogany fans with which everybody could shield their faces from the flames, and a kind of tilting board by means of which the decanters could

be slid back from the bottom of the semi-circle to the top. Some black gowns hung in the passage outside, and all was extremely ancient.

"I am a bachelor at the moment," said the badger apologetically, when they got back to his own snug room with the flowered wallpaper, "so I am afraid there is only one chair. You will have to sit on the bed. Make yourself at home, my dear, while I brew some punch, and tell me how things are going in the wide world."

"Oh, they go on much the same. Merlyn is well, and Kay is to be made a knight next week."

"An interesting ceremony."

End quote.

There was something magical about this room the very first time I read this book. I think this Combination Room became my mental image of what kind of place I wanted to have in my home when I was an adult.

Well, "I'm a dult." I have a massive area in the bottom floor of my home that is ideal for intelligent conversation and discussion. The foundation of my house bends due to the number of books (hyperbole is my best quality).

If you choose to venture into The Book of Merlyn, you will find this room still waiting for us to sit down and enjoy conversation. Intelligent discourse is something we need to water and fertilize. I think it helps to have a warm fire, portraits on the wall, and comfortable chairs.

I used to belong to a Men's Group, and I just realized how much I miss it, and we had a small tool that really helped us share:

A talking stick.

When you held the stick, you were the one talking. Cross-talk was not allowed, interruptions were not allowed. We were allowed to sit and reflect before we spoke; we were allowed to pause. For many of my group, the talking stick allowed them to speak, perhaps for the first time, from the heart.

Yeah, I know it sounds all "whatever." But it was delightful and insightful. So, what did we learn? Probably the only two things we need to know:

"So Merlyn sent you to me," said the badger, "to finish your education. Well, I can only teach you two things—to dig, and love your home. These are the true end of philosophy."

"I am a bachelor at the moment," said the badger apologetically, when they got back to his own snug room with the flowered wallpaper, "so I am afraid there is only one chair. You will

have to sit on the bed. Make yourself at home, my dear, while I brew some punch, and tell me how things are going in the wide world."

"Oh, they go on much the same. Merlyn is well, and Kay is to be made a knight next week."

"An interesting ceremony."

"What enormous arms you have," remarked the Wart, watching him stir the spirits with a spoon. "So have I, for that matter." And he looked down at his own bandy-legged muscles. He was mainly a tight chest holding together a pair of forearms, mighty as thighs.

"It is to dig with," said the learned creature complacently. "Mole and I, I suppose you would have to dig pretty quick to match with us."

"I met a hedgehog outside."

"Did you now? They say nowadays that hedgehogs can carry swine fever and foot-and-mouth disease."

"I thought he was rather nice."

"They do have a sort of pathetic appeal," said the badger sadly, "but I'm afraid I generally just munch them up. There is something irresistible about pork crackling.

"The Egyptians," he added, and by this he meant the gypsies, "are fond of them for eating, too."

"Mine would not uncurl."

"You should have pushed him into some water, and then he'd have shown you his poor legs quick enough. Come, the punch is ready. Sit down by the fire and take your ease."

"It is nice to sit here with the snow and wind outside."

"It is nice. Let us drink good luck to Kay in his knighthood."

"Good luck to Kay, then."

"Good luck."

"Well," said the badger, setting down his glass again with a sigh. "Now what could have possessed Merlyn to send you to me?"

"He was talking about learning," said the Wart.

"Ah, well, if it is learning you are after, you have come to the right shop. But don't you find it rather dull?"

"Sometimes I do," said the Wart, "and sometimes I don't. On the whole I can bear a good deal of learning if it is about natural history."

"I am writing a treatise just now," said the badger, coughing diffidently to show that he was absolutely set on explaining it, "which is to point out why Man has become the master of the animals. Perhaps you would like to hear it?"

"It's for my doctor's degree, you know," he added hastily, before the Wart could protest. He got few chances of reading his treatises to anybody, so he could not bear to let the opportunity slip by.

"Thank you very much," said the Wart.

"It will be good for you, dear boy. It is just the thing to top off an education. Study birds and fish and animals: then finish off with Man. How fortunate that you came! Now where the devil did I put that manuscript?"

End quote.

I have been delighted by the badger since I first read this book. Badger, and his wonderful den, have inspired me to continue to learn and discuss through all these decades.

I'm not sure how much influence White, Tolkien and Lewis had on each other as White refused the other two's invitations to gather, but Tolkien's Hobbit Holes remind me of the badger's den.

"In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort."

J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

Tolkien goes on to describe the Hobbit dwellings well and I think one of the highlights of Peter Jackson's films was his ability to capture the beauty of these homes. My imagination and his feature films seem to follow the same vision.

Wart's interest in education still makes me smile. The badger will provide him (us) with an interesting vision of Creation. As always, White is going to place cleverness over might.

"It will be good for you, dear boy. It is just the thing to top off an education. Study birds and fish and animals: then finish off with Man. How fortunate that you came! Now where the devil did I put that manuscript?"

The old gentleman scratched about with his great claws until he had turned up a dirty bundle of papers, one corner of which had been used for lighting something. Then he sat down in his leather armchair, which had a deep depression in the middle of it; put on his velvet smoking-cap with the tassel; and produced a pair of tarantula spectacles, which he balanced on the end of his nose.

"Hem," said the badger.

He immediately became paralysed with shyness, and sat blushing at his papers, unable to begin.

"Go on," said the Wart.

"It is not very good," he explained coyly. "It is just a rough draft, you know. I shall alter a lot before I send it in."

"I am sure it must be interesting."

"Oh no, it is not a bit interesting. It is just an odd thing I threw off in an odd half-hour, just to pass the time. But still, this is how it begins.

"Hem!" said the badger. Then he put on an impossibly high falsetto voice and began to read as fast as possible.

End quote.

My first public reading was for the Phi Alpha Theta society, the history fraternity. I was our Chapter President (with ALL the rights and responsibilities!) and I organized our regional conference. I had been working on Beowulf but Doctor Jones advised me to branch out into more of my work on Arthur. So, I refocused on the various endings (I found twenty-six different endings for Arthur and none of them lined up with each other) of the Arthurian Cycle.

I knew the material. It was logical and interesting. And then, I began. I was like Badger:

"Oh no, it is not a bit interesting. It is just an odd thing I threw off in an odd half-hour, just to pass the time. But still, this is how it begins.

"Hem!" said the badger. Then he put on an impossibly high falsetto voice and began to read as fast as possible.

Anyone who thinks that public speaking is some kind of gift probably has never been before an audience. Like our friend, the badger, when your ideas and intellect are suddenly on display for everyone to hear, it's tough to not find the earth shifting under your feet.

I survived. I have found this section, I guess like so much of this book, to reflect the reality of life.

Hem.

Let's continue.

"People often ask, as an idle question, whether the process of evolution began with the chicken or the egg. Was there an egg out of which the first chicken came, or did a chicken lay the first egg? I am in a position to say that the first thing created was the egg.

"When God had manufactured all the eggs out of which the fishes and the serpents and the birds and the mammals and even the duck-billed platypus would eventually emerge, he called the embryos before Him, and saw that they were good.

"Perhaps I ought to explain," added the badger, lowering his papers nervously and looking at the Wart over the top of them, "that all embryos look very much the same. They are what you are before you are born—and, whether you are going to be a tadpole or a peacock or a cameleopard or a man, when you are an embryo you just look like a peculiarly repulsive and helpless human being. I continue as follows:

"The embryos stood in front of God, with their feeble hands clasped politely over their stomachs and their heavy heads hanging down respectfully, and God addressed them.

"He said: 'Now, you embryos, here you are, all looking exactly the same, and We are going to give you the choice of what you want to be. When you grow up you will get bigger anyway, but We are pleased to grant you another gift as well. You may alter any parts of yourselves into anything which you think would be useful to you in later life. For instance, at the moment you cannot dig. Anybody who would like to turn his hands into a pair of spades or garden forks is allowed to do so. Or, to put it another way, at present you can only use your mouths for eating. Anybody who would like to use his mouth as an offensive weapon, can change it by asking, and be a corkindrill or a sabre-toothed tiger. Now then, step up and choose your tools, but remember that what you choose you will grow into, and will have to stick to.'

"All the embryos thought the matter over politely, and then, one by one, they stepped up before the eternal throne. They were allowed two or three specializations, so that some chose to use their arms as flying machines and their mouths as weapons, or crackers, or drillers, or spoons, while others selected to use their bodies as boats and their hands as oars. We badgers thought very hard and decided to ask three boons. We wanted to change our skins for shields, our mouths for weapons, and our arms for garden forks. These boons were granted. Everybody specialized in one way or another, and some of us in very queer ones. For instance, one of the desert lizards decided to swap his whole body for blotting-paper, and one of the toads who lived in the drouthy antipodes decided simply to be a water-bottle.

"The asking and granting took up two long days—they were the fifth and sixth, so far as I remember—and at the very end of the sixth day, just before it was time to knock off for Sunday, they had got through all the little embryos except one. This embryo was Man.

"'Well, Our little man,' said God. 'You have waited till the last, and slept on your decision, and We are sure you have been thinking hard all the time. What can We do for you?'

"'Please God,' said the embryo, 'I think that You made me in the shape which I now have for reasons best known to Yourselves, and that it would be rude to change. If I am to have my choice I will stay as I am. I will not alter any of the parts which You gave me, for other and doubtless inferior tools, and I will stay a defenceless embryo all my life, doing my best to make myself a few feeble implements out of the wood, iron and the other materials which You have seen fit to put before me. If I want a boat I will try to construct it out of trees, and if I want to fly, I will put together a chariot to do it for me. Probably I have been very silly in refusing to take advantage of Your kind offer, but I have done my very best to think it over carefully, and now hope that the feeble decision of this small innocent will find favour with Yourselves.'

"'Well done,' exclaimed the Creator in delighted tones. 'Here, all you embryos, come here with your beaks and whatnots to look upon Our first Man. He is the only one who has guessed Our riddle, out of all of you, and We have great pleasure in conferring upon him the Order of Dominion over the Fowls of the Air, and the Beasts of the Earth, and the Fishes of the Sea. Now let the rest of you get along, and love and multiply, for it is time to knock off for the week-end. As for you, Man, you will be a naked tool all your life, though a user of tools. You will look like an embryo till they bury you, but all the others will be embryos before your night. Eternally undeveloped, you will always remain potential in Our image, able to see some of Our sorrows and to feel some of Our joys. We are partly sorry for you, Man, but partly hopeful. Run along then, and do your best. And listen, Man, before you go...'

"'Well?' asked Adam, turning back from his dismissal.

"'We were only going to say,' said God shyly, twisting Their hands together. 'Well, We were just going to say, God bless you'."

End quote.

When I used to teach Sacred Scripture, I used to share this reading, along with various Native American creation stories, with my students. Personally, I always found this reading very satisfying to me.

This might be some of White's best writing. I love this section here (and I have always loved it):

Eternally undeveloped, you will always remain potential in Our image, able to see some of Our sorrows and to feel some of Our joys. We are partly sorry for you, Man, but partly hopeful. Run along then, and do your best. And listen, Man, before you go...'

"Well?' asked Adam, turning back from his dismissal.

"We were only going to say,' said God shyly, twisting Their hands together. 'Well, We were just going to say, God bless you'."

Sorrows and Joys. Lovely.

It's a good story," said the Wart doubtfully "I like it better than Merlyn's one about the Rabbi. And it is interesting, too."

The badger was covered with confusion.

"No, no, dear boy. You exaggerate. A minor parable at most. Besides, I fear it is a trifle optimistic."

"How?"

"Well, it is true that man has the Order of Dominion and is the mightiest of the animals—if you mean the most terrible one—but I have sometimes doubted lately whether he is the most blessed."

"I don't think Sir Ector is very terrible."

"All the same, if even Sir Ector was to go for a walk beside a river, not only would the birds fly from him and the beasts run away from him, but the very fish would dart to the other side. They don't do this for each other."

"Man is the king of the animals."

"Perhaps. Or ought one to say the tyrant? And then again we do have to admit that he has a quantity of vices."

"King Pellinore has not got many."

"He would go to war, if King Uther declared one. Do you know that Homo sapiens is almost the only animal which wages war?"

"Ants do."

"Don't say 'Ants do' in that sweeping way, dear boy. There are more than four thousand different sorts of them, and from all those kinds I can only think of five which are belligerent. There are the five ants, one termite that I know of, and Man."

"But the packs of wolves from the Forest Sauvage attack our flocks of sheep every winter."

"Wolves and sheep belong to different species, my friend. True warfare is what happens between bands of the same species. Out of the hundreds of thousands of species, I can only think of seven which are belligerent. Even Man has a few varieties like the Esquimaux and the Gypsies and the Lapps and certain Nomads in Arabia, who do not do it, because they do not claim boundaries. True warfare is rarer in Nature than cannibalism. Don't you think that is a little unfortunate?"

"Personally," said the Wart, "I should have liked to go to war, if I could have been made a knight. I should have liked the banners and the trumpets, the flashing armour and the glorious charges. And oh, I should have liked to do great deeds, and be brave, and conquer my own fears. Don't you have courage in warfare, Badger, and endurance, and comrades whom you love?"

The learned animal thought for a long time, gazing into the fire.

In the end, he seemed to change the subject.

"Which did you like best," he asked, "the ants or the wild geese?"
End quote.

This entire section is NOT part of the original. In the original work, we stopped, brilliantly in my opinion, with God saying:

"'We were only going to say,' said God shyly, twisting Their hands together. 'Well, We were just going to say, God bless you'."

In the 1958 version, White is trying to tie the unfinished fifth book, The Book of Merlyn, into the other four books that make up The Once and Future King. White is connecting the chapters of The Book of Merlyn where Arthur's friends sit around discussing humans and warfare.

It's fine. I just think that the original ending was just so clean. So sharp.

Next, we discover that the king is dead and our story moves to London. There is not much time left in our story and not long from now, I will just have to say "God Bless you."

Chapter XXII

King Pellinore arrived for the important week-end 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 demned 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, aye, and stuck up over the mantel. From the time when he was in swaddling bands, 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."

"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-mast the banners."

"That's right," said Sir Ector. "Somebody go and tell the sergeant-at-arms."

It was obviously the Wart's 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 solar 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 cognizances which made gay the snowy turrets of the Forest Sauvage.

"How did you hear?" asked Sir Ector.

"I was pricking through the purlieus of the forest after that Beast, you know, when I met with a solemn friar of orders grey, 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 heir. 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 heir and no next of kin, 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."

"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," 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 mead 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."

"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."

"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 grey."

"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 sceptically.

"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 for ever, what, I say?"

"Oh, father," cried Kay. "The man who pulls that 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, damn it 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 palm of everybody and be a great knight!"

"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 Good-bye, 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, say Good-bye to the company."

"Good-bye," said Archimedes tenderly to the Wart.

"Good-bye," 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 greyish light—and in a few seconds there was no one there at all.

"Good-bye, Wart," cried two faint voices outside the solar window.

"Good-bye," said the Wart for the last time—and the poor fellow went quickly out of the room.

End quote.

I couldn't figure out where to cut this chapter. So, I didn't. It's not me being lazy (okay, maybe a little) but this chapter is all dialogue and, spoiler alert, we see the end of this book just over the horizon.

The King is Dead. Merlyn leaves. Wart cries.

The title of the book might help you figure out what is about to happen next. (If you don't know what is "about to happen next," it's a great ending!)

Many people who look at White's work find these Pellinore moments to be the funny parts of the book. Certainly, I enjoy the Pellinore and Grummore discussions and debates and they resound throughout the book. After reading this book over and over, I think I get numb to the constant confusion of these discussions and start to miss the humor a bit.

I don't remember liking or disliking this when I first read the book. I know that I struggled with reading the book as I wasn't yet a good reader. It's one thing to read what is assigned to read and another to read for the pure joy of reading.

This style, a chapter of just dialogue, seemed tough for a struggling reading, if I recall correctly. Even as I read and reread this now, I can hear my young teenage brain telling White: "Get to the point!"

He does. The next chapter, and it's amazing to realize that we are almost finished with the book, knits and ties everything together.

Oddly, it won't be happy. In the same way that school graduations are both sad and sweet, our ending will answer many questions, bring up a few new questions, and thrust our hero into a place he never wanted to be.

Much like life.

(Note: be SURE that you notice that Wart missed the bulk of the discussion)

Chapter XXIII

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 worn-out 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 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 armour 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 traveller 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 sign-board 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.

End quote.

The fléchette is an interesting thing. These darts were also early bullets and I found it interesting to study them a bit. Of course, rifling and modern ballistics make these anachronisms.

Don't miss White's little point about the date. The twelfth century, or whatever it was, has made me smile again as I read this section. White isn't writing a history book and, well, just get used to that.

I think this selection has impacted my brain somehow. Every time I think about the trip from the castle to London, I have this expanded memory that makes me think that these few paragraphs are like several chapters. White lit up my imagination with this trip and my mind has colored a lovely adventure where White's words and my mind danced. Honestly, I have to always reread this section as I can't believe it is only a few sentences.

We'll be in London very soon. Kay is going to forget his sword. Wart is going to find one. We don't have far to go.

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.

For country people, who only knew the dismantled tilting ground 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 colour 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 chequered. The pennons and pennoncells which floated everywhere in the sharp wind were flapping with every colour of the rainbow, as they strained and slapped at their flag-poles, 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 armour 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 joyances 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 a damned mistake to make! Here, squire, ride hard back to the inn and fetch my sword. You shall have a shilling 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 palfrey against the stream of newcomers. He began to push his way toward their hostelry 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 it was impregnable. 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.

End quote.

The shilling. This shilling becomes such a great little plot engine. Wart wants to punch Kay, then realizes his station in life.

My life, my education and upbringing, has always focused around a pillar I had taught to me and tattooed on my heart. It is simply that I believe in the absolute dignity of every human person. I always warn(ed) my daughters to observe how people treat others that "seem" to be of a lower station. Trust me, I tell them, one day they will treat you the same...or worse.

Wart's insight about Kay's fears and misery are probably true. His insights about humanity, carefully groomed by Merlyn, will be something he carries, often heavily, through his life.

For just a few more minutes, Wart's time is worth a shilling. Spoiler alert: this is all about to change.

While Kay waits for a sword, any sword, Wart is about to find one.

Our time reading this book is quickly coming to an end.

"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 armourer 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, 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 gargoyles 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 yew 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?"

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 consort 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 Judy 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.

“Remember my biceps,” said the Oak, “which can stretch out horizontally against Gravity, when all the other trees go up or down.”

"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, 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?"

"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."

“Cohere,” said a Stone in the church wall.

A Snake, slipping easily along the coping which bounded the holy earth, said, “Now then, Wart, if you were once able to walk with three hundred ribs at once, surely you can coordinate a few little muscles here and there? Make everything work together, as you have been learning to do ever since God let the amphibian crawl out of the sea. Fold your powers together, with the spirit of your mind, and it will come out like butter. Come along, homo sapiens, for 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.

End quote.

Well then. There you go. The sword in the stone.

We've anticipated this moment, if you have been reading along, for a long time. White's skill here is knitting an entire book into a single moment. Wart's friends are all here and his education is complete.

He probably will never be completely happy again. White balances the tragedy of the next three (four) books with some funny interludes but, overall, Wart's life is going to be difficult.

As an athlete, I have used this scene countless times as a literary reference to elite performance.

Never let go. That's my life motto and I have been using it for decades. As I reread this section, I see my coaching career listed out.

I often use this in my presentations. I model my whole approach to coaching from the help of Wart's friends.

Of course, the whole story changes, for good, now. I'm sad.



My Career

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. T. H. White

1. Power springs from the nape of the neck.
2. Use those forearms held together by the chest.
3. Find your tool.
4. Never Let Go.
5. Keep up a steady effort.
6. Fold your powers together, with the spirit of your mind.

1. Olympic lifting and Kettlebell Ballistics
2. Anaconda Training
3. "Killer App" (See "Can You Go?")
4. "Never Let Go" is my signature line and title of my first bestseller
5. "Little and Often over the Long Haul"
6. Mental Training in all its forms

There was a lot of cheering, a noise like a hurdy-gurdy 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.

"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 first-born 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 gouty 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 wote well ye are of an higher blood than I wend ye were."

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

"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, seneschal 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.

End quote.

Sir Kay has provided us with an interesting growth story as we go through our story. White has given us a spoiled bully with occasional fits of bravery. In the Harry Potter series, we have Draco Malfoy and Dudley Dursley to compare with Kay.

Dudley, "Big D," completely redeems himself in the last book when he worries about Harry. Their parting is one of the finest moments of the book.

Of course, the movie skipped it.

This is classic Kay. Ector, of course, seems to know better.

The job Ector asks for Kay would today be translated as “mayor.” The title, mayor-domo (head of the household), later became the head of a town or city. Kay will run Wart’s house.

Wait? Wart?

No one will call him that again.

It’s time to discuss King Arthur.

Chapter XXIV

Perhaps there ought to be a chapter about the coronation. The barons naturally kicked up a fuss, but, as the Wart was prepared to go on putting the sword into the stone and pulling it out again till Doomsday, and as there was nobody else who could do the thing at all, in the end they had to give in. A few of the Gaelic ones revolted, who were quelled later, but in the main the people of England and the partizans like Robin were glad to settle down. They were sick of the anarchy which had been their portion under Uther Pendragon: sick of overlords and feudal giants, of knights who did what they pleased, of racial discrimination, and of the rule of Might as Right.

The coronation was a splendid ceremony. What was still more splendid, it was like a birthday or Christmas Day. Everybody sent presents to the Wart, for his prowess in having learned to pull swords out of stones, and several burghers of the City of London asked him to help them in taking stoppers out of unruly bottles, unscrewing taps which had got stuck, and in other household emergencies which had got beyond their control. The Dog Boy and Wat clubbed together and sent him a mixture for the distemper, which contained quinine and was absolutely priceless. Lyo-lyok sent him some arrows made with her own feathers. Cavall came simply, and gave him his heart and soul. The Nurse of the Forest Sauvage sent a cough mixture, thirty dozen handkerchiefs all marked, and a pair of combinations with a double chest. The sergeant sent him his crusading medals, to be preserved by the nation. Hob lay awake in agony all night, and sent off Cully with brand-new white leather jesses, silver varvels and silver bell. Robin and Marian went on an expedition which took them six weeks, and sent a whole gown made out of the skins of pine martens. Little John added a yew bow, seven feet long, which he was quite unable to draw. An anonymous hedgehog sent four or five dirty leaves with fleas on them. The Questing Beast and King Pellinore put their heads together and sent some of their most perfect fewmets, wrapped up in the green leaves of spring, in a golden horn with a red velvet baldrick. Sir Grummore sent a gross of spears, with the old school crest on all of them. The cooks, tenants, villeins and retainers of The Castle of the Forest Sauvage, who were given an angel each and sent up for the ceremony in an ox-drawn char-a-banc at Sir Ector's charge, brought an enormous silver model of cow Crumbrocke, who had won the championship for the third time, and Ralph Passelewe to sing

at the coronation banquet. Archimedes sent his own great-great-grandson, so that he could sit on the back of the King's throne at dinner, and make messes on the floor. The Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London subscribed for a spacious aquarium-mews-cum-menagerie at the Tower in which all the creatures were starved one day a week for the good of their stomachs—and here, for the fresh food, good bedding, constant attention, and every modern convenience, the Wart's friends resorted in their old age, on wing and foot and fin, for the sunset of their happy lives. The citizens of London sent fifty million pounds, to keep the menagerie up, and the Ladies of Britain constructed a pair of black velvet carpet slippers with the Wart's initials embroidered in gold. Kay sent his own record griffin, with honest love. There were many other tasteful presents, from various barons, archbishops, princes, landgraves, tributary kings, corporations, popes, sultans, royal commissions, urban district councils, czars, beys, mahatmas, and so forth, but the nicest present of all was sent most affectionately by his own guardian, old Sir Ector. This present was a dunce's cap, rather like a pharaoh's serpent, which you lit at the top end. The Wart lit it, and watched it grow. When the flame had quite gone out, Merlyn was standing before him in his magic hat.

"Well, Wart," said Merlyn, "here we are—or were—again. How nice you look in your crown. I was not allowed to tell you before, or since, but your father was, or will be, King Uther Pendragon, and it was I myself, disguised as a beggar, who first carried you to Sir Ector's castle, in your golden swaddling bands. I know all about your birth and parentage and who gave you your real name. I know the sorrows before you, and the joys, and how there will never again be anybody who dares to call you by the friendly name of Wart. In future it will be your glorious doom to take up the burden and to enjoy the nobility of your proper title: so now I shall crave the privilege of being the very first of your subjects to address you with it—as my dear liege lord, King Arthur."

"Will you stay with me for a long time?" asked the Wart, not understanding much of this.

"Yes, Wart," said Merlyn. "Or rather, as I should say (or is it have said?), Yes, King Arthur."

As I sneak up on 180,000 words and well over 400 pages of type, I am finished. White's ability to bring back all the characters in the coronation gifts is a wonderful technique that any writer should adopt.

It's been a wonderful journey. I've been doing this for four years and, frankly, I have no idea what to do now.

The story of King Arthur will continue, with White, for four more books. They are beloved by many and I think Uncle Dap is a great character. But...they aren't The Sword in the Stone.

And that is fine.

Thank you, T. H.. You changed my life.

