

The Knight of the Little Cask

translated by Isabel Butler

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The Knight of the Little Cask.

Aforetime, in the wild land between Normandy and Bretaine there dwelt a mighty lord who was of much great fame. Near to the border and beside the sea, he let build a castle full well embattled, and so strong and so well garnished that he feared neither count nor viscount, neither prince nor duke nor king. And the high man whereof I speak, was, the tale saith, most comely of body and countenance, rich in goods and noble of lineage; and from his face it seemed that in all the world was no man more debonair, but of a sooth, he was all falseness and disloyalty, so traitorous and so cruel, so fierce and so proud, so fell and of so great disdain he feared neither God nor man; and all the country round about him he had laid waste, this is the sum thereof.

No man might he meet, but he did him some outrage of his body, so great was his licence; he held all the roads and waylaid the pilgrims and did the merchants annoy; and many were oft sore discomforted thereby.

He spared neither churchman nor cloistered monk, neither canon nor eremite; and monks and nuns, whereas they are most bound unto God, he made to live shamefully whensoever he had them in his might; and likewise dames and damsels, and widows and maids. He spared neither the wise nor the simple; and he laid his hand upon both the rich and the poor; and many folk had he driven forth in dishonour, and of those he had slain the tale may not be told. Nor would he ever take to him a wife but thought to be abased thereby, for had he been married to a woman he had deemed himself much shamed. And always he ate flesh, nor would he observe any fast day; no will had he to hear either mass or sermon or holy writ, and all good men he held in despite. Methinketh there was never yet man so fulfilled with vile customs; for all the evil a man may do in deed or word or thought he devised, and all were brought together in him. And so he lived for more than thirty years and there was no let to his ill doing.

So the days came and went until a certain lenten tide, upon the morning of Good Friday. He that was nowise tender of God had risen full early, and said to his household after his wont: "Make ready now the venison, for this is the hour to break our fast; I would eat betimes and then we will ride out to win somewhat. The kitchen knaves were all abashed; doubtful and troubled they made answer: "We will do your command, lord; yet we would ye had said otherwise." But when his knights, whose hearts were more inclined to God, heard him, they straightway said to him: "Fool, what say ye? This is lent, a holy time, and it is that high Friday whereon God endured the Passion to bring us to salvation; every man should abstain this day, and you, you would break your fast and eat meat in evil wise. The whole world is under chastisement, in fasting and abstinence; yea, the very children do penance, and you would eat flesh this day. God must revenge himself upon you, and certes, he will in time." "By my faith," he made answer, "it will not be straightway, nor before I have done much malice, and many a man hath been hanged and burned and undone." "Have ye no respite in doing despite to God?" quoth they then. "Now ought ye incontinent to cry upon our Lord Jesus Christ and bewEEP the sins with which ye are tainted." "Weep?" quoth he, "what jest is this? I have no mind for such folly. But do ye make moan and I will laugh, for certes weep will I never."

"Hearken, sir," they make answer, "in this wood dwelleth a right holy man, and to him those folk who would turn

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from their sin, go to make Confession; come, let us confess to him and give up our evil life; man should not always live sinfully but rather should turn again to God." "A hundred devils!" saith he. "Confess? shall I become a jest and a byword? Cursed be he that turneth his footsteps thither with such intent, but if there be any spoils to be got I will go hang this hermit." "Nay, sir,"

quoth they, "prithee come with us. Do this kindness for our sake." "For your sake," he then made answer, "I will follow you, but for God will I do nought; 't is but for fellowship I go with ye. Bring up my horse, and I will forth with these hypocrites. But liefer had I two good mallards, nay, two tiny sparrows than all their confessions; yet will I go thither to make a jape of them. Whenso that they are shriven they will go rob here or there; it is even as the confession made between Reynard and the hen-hawk, such repentance falleth at a breath." "Sir," quoth they, "now mount your horse, that God who knows no lie may do his will with you and give you true humility." "By my faith," saith he, "may it never so fall that I become mild and debonair and be feared of no man." And straightway thereafter they set forth. He who is possessed of the devil rideth behind singing, and his fellows go before weeping. And as his men fare on before him, ever he gives them ill words, pricks and prods and misprises them; but they, on their part, to humour him, say whatsoever he will.

And they ride on by the straight paved way so long they come into the forest to the hermitage. There they enter, and within the chapel they find the holy man; but their lord has stayed without, for he was fell and stark and full of malice, and fiercer than mad dog or werewolf; oftentimes he looketh down at his feet and proudly he straighteneth himself.

"Lord," they say, "now light ye down and come within, amend your ways, or at the least, pray God's mercy."
"Nay, I will not stir hence,"

quoth he; "and why should I pray his mercy when nought would I do for his sake? But now speed ye your affair for therein have I no part or portion; and much I fear lest I lose all my day through this dallying. For even now the merchants and pilgrims, whom it behooveth me to bring to ground, fare along the highroad, and now they will go their way unhindered; and as God may aid me, this weighs heavy upon me. By Saint Remi, I had liefer that ye were never shriven than that they go hence unshamed."

His men perceive that he will do no otherwise, and they pass into the chapel before the altar and speak with the holy hermit. Each hath said his matter as fairly as he might, and the hermit, as his wont was, assoiled them full sweetly but only by making covenant with them to wit, that ever thenceforth they should withhold them from evil so much as they might. Fairly they pledged them, and then gently they besought him:

"Lord, our master is without; for God's sake now call ye him, for he would not come within for our asking, and who knoweth if he will come for you." "Certes, lords," saith he, "I know not, but gladly will I make assay; yet do I greatly fear him."

So he issued out, leaning upon his staff, for he was feeble of body, and saith forthright to the baron: "Sir, be ye welcome. It is meet we put all evil from us, repent us and confess, and think full sweetly of God."

"Think ye of him, who forbiddeth you? But I will think of him no whit."

"Yea, that ye shall, fair sir, for you should be gentle of heart, you that be a knight. A priest am I, and I require you, for the sake of him who suffered death and offered up himself for us upon the cross, that ye speak with me a little." "Speak? In the devil's name what would ye I should say, and what have ye to make known to me? I am hot to depart from your house and you, for by a fat bellwether would I set more store." "Sir," the hermit made answer, "I believe ye, wherefore do it not for my sake but only for that of God." "Proud and persistent are ye,"

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quoth the knight; "but if I go within, it will be for neither prayer nor orison nor almsgiving." "Sir, at the least, ye will see our chapel and convent." "I will go," he saith, "but on such conditions that I shall give no alms nor say no paternoster." "Now come but within," he maketh answer, "and if it pleases you nought, return again." And for very weariness the knight lighteth down from his horse: "Methinks ye will not have done to-day; to no good did I come hither this morn, and alack that I rose so early."

But the good man took him by the hand, and urging him on full gently, led him into the chapel before the altar. "Sir," saith he then, "there is no help, here are ye in my prison; now take it not ill of me that ye perforce must speak with me. Ye may cut my head from off my body, but for nought you may do shall you escape from me until that ye have told me of your life." He that was stark and full of malice maketh answer: "Certes, that will I not, and for this were I like to slay ye; never shall ye learn aught from me, so let me go and that speedily." "My lord,"

saith he then, "go you shall not, so please you, before you tell me of your life and the sins with which you are tainted; I would know all your deeds." "No, certes, that will I not, sir priest," saith he. "Never shall you know my doings. I am not so drunken with wine that I will tell you aught." "Not for me, but for the sake of God the Glorious, speak, and I will hearken." "Nay, certes, I will have nought to do therewith. Is it to this end that you brought me hither? I am like to slay you, and in truth the world were well rid of you. Methinks you are either mad or besotted with wine that you would know my life, and moreover would drive me to speak by force; now are you over-masterful, in sooth, you that would make me say that to which I am not minded." "Yet will ye do it," quoth he, "fair friend; and may he who was nailed upon the cross bring you to true penitence, and grant you so deep repentance that ye shall know your sin; now begin and I will listen."

Then looked hard upon him the tyrant who was fell and a seeker of evil. The good man was in sore dread, and every moment feared the knight would strike him, but he set all at adventure, and calling to mind the scriptures, said right gently: "Brother, for the sake of God omnipotent tell me but one sin; and when you have once begun I know well God will aid ye to tell truly all your life from end to end." "Nay, in sooth, nought shall ye hear thereof," quoth the knight. "Yea, but in truth I will." "Nay, ye shall not." "How now, ye will tell me nought! Have ye then no mind for well doing?" "No, in sooth, ye may die in your lament but nought shall ye hear from me." "Yet shall ye do my bidding, whomsoever it grieves; rather shall ye stay here until nightfall than that I hear nought. And now to make an end, I conjure you by God himself and by his most high virtue; this is the day whereon Christ suffered death and was nailed upon the cross, and I conjure you by that death that slew and destroyed the arch enemy, and by the saints and martyrs, that you open your heart to me; yea, I command you," so spake the hermit, "that ye tell me all your sins. Now delay ye no longer." "Nay, ye go too far with me," quoth the baron, sore moved; and so confounded and astonied was he that he became all shamed. "How now," said he, "are ye such that I must perforce tell my story, may it be no other wise? Despite me then I will speak, but, certes, no more will I do."

Then wrathfully he began to tell over the tale of his sins one after the other, word by word he told them, nor did he fail of any. And when he had made his confession he said to the hermit: "Now have I told you all my deeds; are ye well content, and wherein are ye bettered? By St.

James, meseems ye had not been appeased and if I had not told you the whole tale of my deeds. But now all is said, and what then? Will ye leave me in peace henceforth? Now methinks I can go. By St. James, I have no will to talk more with you, nor to let my eyes rest longer upon you. Certes, without sword ye have won the day of me, ye that have made me speak perforce."

The good man had no will to laugh, but he weepeth full sorrowfully in that the knight doth not repent him. "Sir," he maketh answer, "well have ye said your say, save that it is without repentance; but now if you will do some penance I shall hold me well repaid." "And a fair return ye would make me," quoth he, "ye that would make me a penitent. Foul fall him who hath aught to do herein or who would desire it of me. But if it were my will so to do, what penance would ye lay on me?" "In sooth, even that which ye would." "Nay, but tell me." "Sir, with good

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will; to overcome your sins you should fast a space, each Friday these seven years." "Seven years!" quoth he, "nay, that I will not." "Then for three."

"Nay, in sooth."

"Each Friday for but a single month." "Hold your peace, nought will I do herein for I may not achieve it." "Go barefoot for but one full year."

"No, by Saint Abraham!" "Go all in wool without linen." "Anon my body would be preyed upon and devoured of vermin." "Do but chastise yourself with rods each night." "That is ill said," quoth he; "know that I may not endure to beat or mutilate my flesh." "Then go a pilgrimage over sea," quoth the hermit. "That is too bitter a word," answered the knight; "say no more of it; herein ye speak idly, for full of peril is the sea." "Go but to Rome, or to the shrine of Saint James." "By my soul,"

said he, "thither will I never." "Go then each day to church and hear God's service, and kneel till that ye have said two prayers, an ave and a pater noster, that God may grant you salvation." "That labour were over great," made he answer. "All this ado avails not, for certes, no one of these things will I agree unto." "How now! Ye will nought of good? yet shall ye do somewhat, and it please God and please you, before we twain dispart. Now do but take my water cask to yonder stream for the love of God omnipotent, and dip it into the fountain, no hurt will that be to you, and if ye bring it to me full, ye shall be freed and absolved of both your sins and your penance, no more need you be in doubt, but I will take upon myself all the burden of your iniquity; lo, now your penalty is meted out to you."

The baron heard him and laughed out in scorn, and then he spoke, saying: "No great toil will it be and if I do go to the fountain; and speedily will this penance be done. Now give me the cask forthwith for I am in haste." The good man brought it to him, and lightly, as one untroubled, he received it, saying: "I take it on this covenant, that, until I have brought it back full to you I will never rest me." "And on this covenant I give it unto you, friend." So the knight fared forth, and his men would fain have followed him, but he would have none of them:

"No, in sooth, abide where ye are," he saith.

So he cometh to the fountain and dippeth in the cask, but not a single drop runneth into it, although he turns it this way and that until he is well nigh beside himself. Then he thinketh something hath stopped the opening and thrusteth in a stick, but finds it all free and empty. So again in his wrath, he that was proud of heart dipped the little cask into the fountain, but not a drop would enter therein. "God's death!" saith he, "how is it that nought comes into it?" Then yet again he thrust the cask into the water; yet were he to lose his head thereby no whit might he fill it.

Then in his chagrin he ground his teeth, and rose up in great wrath, and went again to the hermit. Hot and ireful he hardened his heart, and spoke, saying: "God! I have not a single drop. I have done my uttermost, yet I could not contrive or so dip the cask that so much as a tear-drop of water came therein; but by him who made my soul never will I rest, nor will I cease night or day till that I have brought it to you again filled to overflowing." And again he spoke to the hermit, saying: "Ye have brought me into sore trouble by this cask of the devil. Cursed be the day whereon it was shaped and fashioned, since by reason of it so great toil must be mine, that never may I rest, nor know solace or ease by day or by night, nor let my face be washen, nor my nails trimmed, nor my hair or my beard be cut, till that I have fulfilled my covenant; afoot will I travel, and penniless will I go, nor take with me so much as a farthing in my doublet, nor yet bread nor meat."

The hermit heareth him and weepeth full gently: "Brother," quoth he, "in an ill hour were ye born, and most bitter are your days. Certes, and if a child had lowered this cask into the fountain he would have drawn it forth full to overflowing, and you have not gathered a single drop.

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Wretch, it is by reason of your sins that God is in anger against you, but now in his mercy he would that you should do your penance, and torment your body for his sake; now be not unwise but serve God full sweetly." But in wrath the baron made answer: "For God, certes, will I do nought, but I will do it for very pride, and in wrath and vexation: it is done neither for good, nor for the sake of my fellows." Then all in pride he turned to his men, saying: "Now get ye gone forthright, and take with you my horse, and bide you quiet in your own of land. And if you hear men talk of me, mind that ye tell them nought, neither one nor other, nor this man nor his fellow, but hold your peace and be silent, and live after your wont; for I have become such that never henceforth shall I know a day without travail and toil, by reason of this cask which is of the fiend, may the cursed fire and the cursed flame devour it! Meseems the devils have had it in their care and have laid a spell upon it; but I tell you of a sooth that rather will I seek out all the waters of all the world than not bring it back again full to overflowing."

Then without taking leave he fared forth, and passed out of the door with the little cask hung about his neck. But know ye of a truth that, save only the garments he wore, he took not with him so much treasure as would buy him four straws; and alone he set forth, for none went with him save God only. Now know ye what anon he will know, what hardships will fall to him by night and by day, at morning and evening, for he goeth forth into strange lands. Few will he have of those delights to which he is wont, and he must lie hard and lodge ill, and cold victual I will be his and scanty bread; poverty will be oftentimes his neighbor, and much toil and trouble will be his.

So over hill and dale fared he, and to whatsoever water he cometh he thrusteth in his cask and testeth it, but it avails him not, for nought can he gather up. And his great wrath, that sways him overmuch, is ever kindled and burning. Well nigh half a week it was before he bethought him of food or had any desire thereof. Ever his great wrath consumed him, but when he saw that hunger so beset him that he might not defend him, it behooved him to sell and barter his robe, whatever else anyone should tell you, for a paltry tunic that was worn and tattered and shameful for so high a man. Nor had he any sleeves, whether full or narrow, and neither hood nor capuchon. So he wandered by valley and plain until his face, which of old had been fresh and fair, grew changed and tanned and blackened. But whatsoever water he came unto ever he thrust in his cask and proved it, but little his labour profited him, for howsoever much he toiled, he might not gather up a single drop; and much he suffered and endured thereby.

His sorry raiment soon grew worn and tattered. Barefooted he crossed many a great hill and many a valley. He wandereth in cold and in heat: he fareth through briars and thorns, and among the wild beasts; his flesh is torn in many a place, and many a drop of blood falleth from him, and sore pain and trouble is his. Now he passeth ill days and ill nights: now he is poor and a-beggared; now rebuffs and ill words are his portion, and he hath neither robe nor chattle; now he findeth no hostel, and again he meeteth with folk full harsh, churlish and cruel, for in that they see him so denuded, so stark and tall and great of limb, so hideous and tanned and blackened, and bare legged even to the thighs, many a one, forsooth, feareth to give him lodging, so that oft-times he must lie in the fields. Neither jest nor song had he, but ever great wrath and sore torment. And I may tell you thus much, that never could he humble himself, or lighten his sore heart, save in so far as he made lament to God of the great travail and misease he endured; yet it was, but for bewilderment, for he was nowise repentant.

1 When that he had spent the money he won by the sale of his raiment, he had not wherewith to buy bread; and if he would eat he must perforce learn to beg. Now are all his woes exceeded, for never again shall he know solace, but woe only so long as he liveth. Often he fasteth for two days or three, and when his heart is so weakened that he may no longer endure his hunger, in wrath he goeth aside to seek for bread or some crumb or morsel, and then he fares on for a space.

Thus he sought through all of Anjou, Maine, Touraine, and Poitou, Normandy and France and Burgundy, Provence and Spain and Gascony, and all of Hungary and Moriane, and Apulia and Calabria and Tuscany, and Germany, and Romagna, and all the plain of Lombardy, and all Lorraine and Alsace; and everywhere he setteth his heart to the task.

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Methinketh I need not tell you more; the day long I might tell ye of the woes he endured, but in a word, from the sea that circles and encloses England even unto Baretta that lieth on the Eastern shore, ye cannot name a land that he hath not searched, nor any river that he hath not tested; nor lake, nor mere, nor spring, nor fountain, nor any water fowl or fresh, into which he hath not dipped his cask, but never might he draw a single drop; never would any whit come into it, howsoever much he strove; and yet he did all his endeavour, and more and still more he laboured.

And amid all his woe which was so great and grievous, a marvel befell him, for never by any chance of adventure did he find any man who did him aught of kindness, or spoke him fair in fellowship, but all men hated him and mocked and chid him, nor spake with him, whether in field or wood or hostel, and it were not to revile him; yet whatsoever shame men might say to him, he would neither dispute with any nor defame any, for he held them overmuch in scorn, and all men he hated and despised.

What more should I tell you? He fared for so long, up and down, here and there, that his body grew so tanned and stained and blackened that scarce had any man known him that had seen him aforetime. His hair was long and tangled and hung in locks about his shoulders; his fair hair and face and forehead grew black as a flitch of bacon, and his neck that had been great and thick, was long and thin to the bone. All lean from hunger he was and hairy; his eyebrows had grown shaggy, his eyes sunken; his sides were all uncovered, and his skin so hung about his bones that you might count the ribs beneath; his legs were bared and brown and lean and shrunken; his veins showed and his sinews, and from toe to groin no shred of raiment had he, and black and brown and stained he was. Thereto had he waxed so weary and spent that scarce might he stand upright; he needs must have a stick to lean on as he walked, and much the cask, that he had carried night and day for a year, now weighed upon him. What more need I tell you? His body had been in so great torment the year through that marvel it was how he had brooked it; and so much had he borne and suffered that he knew right well he might not longer endure. Yet was there a thing he must do. He holdeth he must return again, never will the hermit laugh when he seeth him, rather will he weep. So the knight set forth leaning upon his staff, and often he maketh lament in a loud voice, yet he strove so much that still he held on his way to the hermitage. At the end of the year on the same day he had departed from that most holy place, the high day of Good Friday, even in such guise as I have told you, he came thither again. Now hear ye what befell him.

All dolorous he entered; and the hermit, who had no thought of him, was alone within, and he looked at him in wonder for that he saw in him a man so weary and wasted. Him he knew not, but the cask, which was hung about his neck, he knew right well that aforetime he had seen it.

And the holy man spoke, saying:

"Fair brother, what need brings thee here, and who gave thee this cask? Ofttimes have I seen it, and this same day, a year past, I gave it forsooth to the fairest man in all the Empire of Rome and to the starkest, methinketh, but if he be alive or dead I know not, for never since hath he returned hither again; but tell me now of thy courtesy, who thou art and how men call thee, for never did I see so weary a man as thou seemest, nor one so poor and disgarished. Had the Saracens had you in their prison even so stripped and denuded had ye seemed; whence thou art come I know not, but of a sooth thou hast fallen among ill folk." But the other brake out in anger, for still was his wrath great, and irefully he spoke: "Even to such a plight hast thou thyself brought me!" "I, how so, friend? For methinks I have never before set eyes upon thee. What wrong have I done thee? Prithce tell me, and if I can, I will amend it."

"Sir," quoth he, "I will tell thee: I am he whom a year ago this day thou didst confess, and gave me as a penance this cask which has brought me to such straits as ye see." Then he told him all the tale of his travels, of all the lands and countries he had travelled through, of the sea and the rivers and the great and mighty waters. "Sir," saith he, "everywhere have I sought, and everywhere have I tested the cask, but never a drop hath entered therein, and yet I have done mine uttermost; and well I know that anon I must die, and may endure no more."

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The good man heard him and was sore moved, and all in sorrow he began to speak, saying: "Wretch, wretch," so spake the hermit, "thou art worse than a Sodomite, or dog or wolf or any other beast. By the eyes of my head, methinketh that had a dog dragged the cask to so many waters, and through so many fords, he had drawn it full, and thou hast not taken up a single drop! Now I see of a sooth God hateth thee, and thy penance is without savour, for that thou hast done it without repentance, and without love or pity." Then he wept and lamented and wrung his hands, and so rent was his heart that he cried aloud, "God, thou who seest and knowest all things and canst do all, look now upon this creature who has led so toilsome a life, who has lost both body and soul, and spent his time to no purpose. Blessed Mary, sweet mother, now pray God your sovereign father that it be his will to keep this man, and to rest his fair eyes upon him. If ever I did aught of good, sweet and dear God, or aught pleasing in thy sight, I pray thee here and now that thou grantest mercy to this man who hath been brought to so great distress through me; God, in thy mercy let not his misery be wasted, but lead him to repentance. God, if he were to die through me, I must render account thereof, and my grief were greater than I could bear. God, if thou takest to thee one of us twain, leave me here at adventure, and take thou this man." And he wept right tenderly.

1 The knight looked long upon him yet spake no word, but all low within himself he said: "Lo, here in sooth is a strange thing, whereof my heart hath great marvel, that this man who is not of my house, and hath no kinship with me save in God, should so harass himself for my sake, and weep and lament for my sins. Now of a surety, I am the basest man living, and the vilest sinner, that this man holds my soul so dear that he destroyeth himself because of my offences, and am so spotted with evil, and have in me so little goodness that I have no compunction thereof; and yet he is full of sorrow because of them. Ah, sweet God, and thou wilt, through thy might and thy power, grant me such repentance that this good man who is so out of all cheer may be given solace. God, let not all my travail be vain and profitless to my soul; when all is said, by reason of my sin was this cask laid upon me, and for my sins I took it, sweet God, if I have done wrong herein, now do thou thy will; lo, I am ready." And God straightway so wrought in him that his heart was freed and discombered of all pride and hardness, and fulfilled with humility and love and repentance, and fear and hope, whereby his spirit melteth, and he weepeth. Then he cast away the world from him, and the tears flowed forth from his heart, that nought might staunch them, all burning they were with repentance, and he drew such great sighs that at each it seemed his spirit must issue out of him. His repentance was so puissant that his very heart had been broke had it not been lightened by tears; but he shed them in so great plenteousness his relief is no marvel. Such dolour laid hold of his heart that he might not speak with his lips, but he made covenant with God within his heart full sweetly, that thenceforth he would sin no more, nor do more wrong towards him.

Now God seeth well that he repents him. The cask which had caused him such woe still hangeth about his neck, but still it was empty, and it was all his desire that it should be filled. And God seeth his longing, that his mind was bent on well-doing, and that he was no wise feigning; and then God did a great bounty and a fair kindness, but what need to say it, for never did he unkindness. But now hear you what God did to comfort his friend who had cause to be out of all comfort. In his sore distress there sprang from his eyes a great tear which God drew forth 1 from a true source; with the flight of a bolt it sprang straight into the cask, and the book telleth us that the cask was filled so full by the tear that the overflow gushed out and ran down on all sides, for this tear was so hot with repentance, and so boiling, that the froth over-ran.

And the hermit hastened to him, and cast himself down at his feet, and kissed them both all naked as they were. "Brother," said he, "fair sweet friend, the holy Ghost hath entered into thee. Brother, God hath heard thee, God hath saved thee from hell's pit, never henceforth shalt thou be defiled. God hath pardoned thee thy sins, now rejoice and be glad, for thine expiation is complete." Men was the knight so glad methinketh never again shall I see such joy in any man; and still he weepeth, this is the sum thereof. Then he spake to the holy hermit, and told him all his desire: "Father," saith he, "I am wholly thine; father, all good hast thou done me. Fair, sweet father, and I might, how gladly would I stay with thee. Never in sooth would I leave thee; but ever would I serve thee and love thee; but I may endure no longer and I needs must suffer death, most sweet father, through God's mercy. This day a year past I was here, as vain and foolish as thou knowest, fair sweet father, and told thee all my sins in anger and sore wrath, without fear or repentance; and now I would tell them again in great love and great compunction,

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if it may be that God, who is life eternal, grant me to-day a good end." Saith the hermit: "Fair sweet brother, blessed be God who hath given thee this thought; and behold, now I am ready, speak and I will listen."

Then the knight beginneth, and from his very heart telleth all his life, weeping and with joined hands; nought did he mis-say, and from his heart he sigheth full softly, and his tears spring forth in great plenty.

When the good man saw it was time to shrive him, he gave him absolution and granted him great treasure, the body of Jesus Christ, to wit, and well he showed its great virtue. "Dear son, lo, here is thy salvation, lo, here is thy life and thy healing. Believest thou so?" "Yes, fair father, well do I believe that this is my Redeemer and he that may save us all; but haste thee, for death is near me." And the holy man giveth him all the body of God; and the other taketh it, nor doth he 1 delude himself, and in all excellence receiveth it, in love and in truth, and in right great humility.

When he was houseled, and so cleansed and purified that there remained in him no drop of the lees of folly and sin, he spake to the hermit, and told him all his desire, saying: "Fair sweet father, now I go hence, pray for me for I am near my end; here I may not tarry, but must seek another dwelling; my heart faileth me, sweet father, and no more may I speak with thee. Most sweet father, I commend thee to God, and now at the last I pray thee that thou put thy arms about me." And straightway the good man embraced him full gently and gladly and with good will.

The knight lieth him down before the altar, and hath given all his heart to God. He closeth his eyes and saith his mea culpa and setteth all his hopes in God. His little cask that had done him more good than ill, lay upon his breast, nor would he let it be taken from him, for it was all his desire to keep it in death as in life. So upon his heart lieth his penance, and a flood of repentance hath so shaken him that God hath wholly pardoned him all sin and sorrow. His heart travaileth and his body is anguished, and it behooveth the twain to dispart, and the soul to leave the body. And it hath issued forth so purged and cleansed and purified that there is neither spot nor sin therein. So soon as the soul is freed of the body and hath gone forth, the blessed angels that have come thither, have received it. Great comfort hath come to the soul that was snatched by the holy angels, and sore peril hath it escaped, for the devil was waiting for it, and he thought to have it, in all certainty and surety, but now he goeth thence discomfited. And all this was seen of the good man from point to point to the end, for he was illumined by the Holy Spirit. All clear he saw the angels that bore away the soul, the while the body resteth barefoot and naked, and lieth under a sorry covering.

But hear ye now what adventure befell upon his death, for his knights, who had been with him just a year before and to whom he had done so great annoy, came that day by reason of prayer, as was right and fitting, for it was the high day of Good Friday. Close upon noon the men of arms came within and found their lord dead; well they 1 recognized him by his stature and all his form and seeming, and the cask they knew right well; and that it was their lord whose body was so wasted, they doubted not. Then were they sore troubled in that they knew not how he came to his end, whether well or ill, and every man maketh great lament; but the good man comforteth them and told them all the truth. From point to point, he told them all as it befell, how their lord had come to him, and the hour and the time when he confessed and was repentant, and how his soul was ravished above into life perdurable, and how he had seen the angels all clearly that had borne it away. Then the knights made great joy, and honoured the body full nobly, right gently they shrouded it, and after mass, gave it due burial. And when that they had eaten and drunk they took leave of the good man, and each went again to his own land, and everywhere they told and recounted all they knew of their lord; and the folk of that land had great joy thereof and great pity, and gave thanks to Our Lord.

Now have I told you all the tale of this high man, even as it hath come down to us from holy men who mistell nought herein, but all they accord in true telling, and disagree in nought of good. These men tell us how the knight strove and how God redeemed him, and ever God knoweth how to work in this wise, and to ransom sinners who would return to him, for no man may do so great wrong, but, if it be his desire to turn again to God, God will not pardon him. And none should despise his fellow, but should hold himself to be the worst, and God who hath

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power to create men, knoweth their hearts, and hath the power rightfully to judge them; and subtle are his judgments. Here endeth the story of the cask, and in this wise the knight came to his death. Now let us pray God who created all things that it be his will to lead us to that glory wherein he dwelleth.