Abenteuer zweier Ritterknaben, Die

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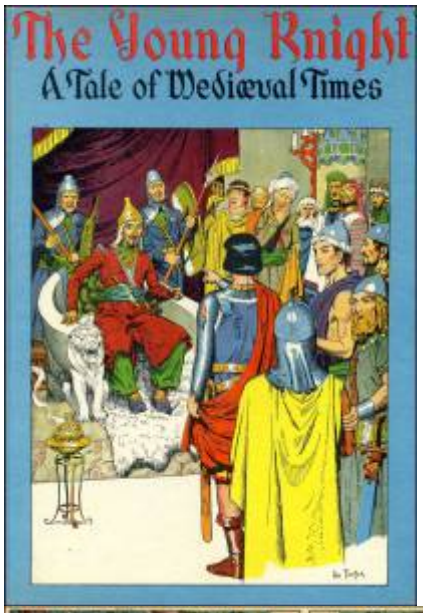
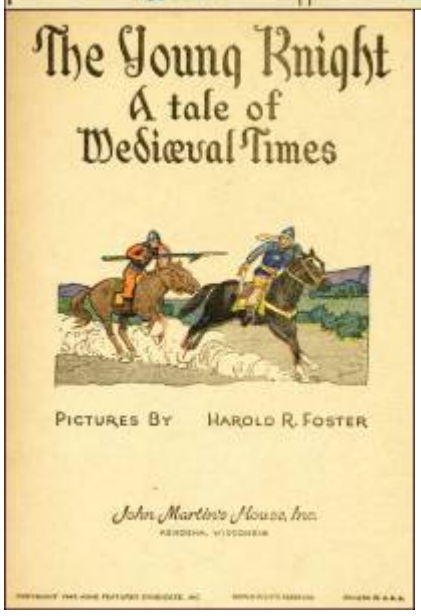
The Young Knight ~ A Tale of Mediæval Times - Published by John Martin's House ~ 1945









IN THE DAYS of King Arthur and his knights, it was the custom for every boy of noble birth who desired to be a knight, to pass through several years of training as a page. Many of the knights exchanged their sons with each other for this education.

Young Arn's father sent him to the castle of his good friend, Sir Gregory.

"Now remember to do everything told you by Sir Gregory," he advised his son as Arn was about to depart. "That is the first rule in the training of a page."

Sir Gregory was a valiant knight of great renown. Young Arn was fortunate in starting his education there. Sir Gregory had promised Arn's father that he would do his best for the boy.



One of the first things a page must learn is to be humble. Young Arn began his work by waiting on tables. All the knights of the castle gathered there for the feasts. The young boy worked hard bringing the food from the kitchen and refilling the dishes as they were emptied by the hungry knights.

During the long winter evenings, when the days closed early, Young Arn and some of his companions, watched games of chess, with their kings and queens, their bishops and knights, and their castles and pawns, which were a popular sport at this season of the year. At this time also the page boys would eagerly await the wandering minstrels who entertained the inhabitants of the castle. Such pastimes were welcome to everyone. The page boys scattered about



their various chores at the conclusion of the performances. Young Arn sometimes wished that there would be more in store for him in the way of amusements.

But he realized that some day all the menial tasks would be ended and that he would ride forth from this very same castle, resplendent in his shiny armor and astride his noble charger, a full-fledged knight. Such thoughts and visions kept him going when the drudgery of his work almost overwhelmed him.

Sometimes he was not happy as he worked over the heat turning the spit, or as he washed the great piles of dishes following a big meal.

However, there were pleasanter things awaiting him. Sir Gregory had a young daughter, Melisande, who was anxious to select a hero



from the pages at her father's castle. She noticed that Young Arn worked harder than most of the other boys. He was to be her hero, she decided.

"Why don't you wait until I am a knight?" asked Arn. "Then maybe I will be your hero."

"I am going to have a hero now and also then," answered Melisande. "My hero must be brave."

She persisted in following him at all times and to all places. There was nothing he could do. After all, she was the daughter of his master, Sir Gregory.

From the kitchen and Melisande, Young Arn turned his attention to the serious work of learning to be a knight. Sir Toby, a fat



but clever swordsman at the court, showed him how to use the double-edged weapon. His opponent, Young Montrose, also was adept at sword-fighting. Arn parried blows with his shield so well that even Sir Toby praised him.

During the little spare time the boy had, Sir Gregory taught Arn many points about defending a castle against enemy attack. He would take the time to teach the boy, and he used a model castle to point out the strength and weakness of both offense and defense.

"If you are inside, be sure to have plenty of provisions," said the knight. "Then when the castle is besieged, you can hold out for a long time. When attacking, use your bowmen with flaming arrows. The catapult and the battering ram also are fine offensive weapons."



To Arn this was the best time of the day. He liked Sir Gregory and paid strict attention to the great knight's lessons.

"Has this castle ever been besieged?" he asked Sir Gregory during the course of a lesson.

"No, but a long time ago, your father's castle was," answered the knight. "He held out and the enemy left, thoroughly exhausted after failing to storm the walls."

There were many skills and arts which Young Arn learned. He received instruction in religion and heard stories of saints. Reading and writing also were taught to the boy. The huntsman and the falconer showed him the beginnings in the art of hunting. How to ride was also included in his lessons. The squires at the castle

taught him these arts. Above all, he was always cautioned to remember that he must respect those who were his elders. The ideals of service, loyalty, fearlessness in the cause of right, and generosity and consideration were also stressed in his daily training. These principles were essentially Christian, and as such were interwoven into the education of those who aspired to knighthood—which was the highest order of the day.

Young Arn also learned many things from Sir Gregory's wife. He was taught how to dance, sing, and compose music. She told him stories of knights and heroes.

"Some day you will be a knight and fight as bravely as they did," she concluded.

"And will I be his lady fair, mother?" asked Melisande who was hanging around again. But her mother said nothing. She only looked at Young Arn and smiled.

On a following day, the boy page had to work out in the stables. His job was to clean the bridle for Sir Gregory's horse. Melisande again trailed behind him.

"Can't you stay by your mother and help her?" asked Arn in disgust as she watched him.

"No, I want to watch my hero work," she replied.

"Oh, all right," said Arn gruffly, "but don't get in my way."

He remembered that he must be courteous to her. A knight-to-be had to respect the ladies. That was an important part of his training.

Arn cleaned the bridle until the leather shone. Melisande looked on with approval.

"Father will certainly like that," she said.

Arn did not answer, but proceeded to return to the kitchen where there were many dishes to be washed. Some of the other page boys were already at the task.

Arn never could see much sense in doing dish washing. It was one of the most distasteful jobs as far as he was concerned. Why should he, the son of a great noble, do such servant's work? Never



would he be happy at this task. But there was nothing as effective as the work in the kitchen to make the page boy realize that he must do any duty assigned to him. So he began to do his share until sweat poured out from all over him. Young Arn was learning not to shirk his just duty. He was a subject to his lord before he himself assumed the nobleness of his knightly calling.

After the dishes were finished, Young Arn hurried over to the stables again. The horses had to be watered and fed. He carried a big bucket of water. Right behind him and in step with him was Melisande.

"You here again?" he asked.

"Yes, I want to see the horses. May I?"



"Well, come on in, I guess nothing will happen to you," remarked Arn. He continued to work.

Several buckets of water soon finished the job. Arn was quite tired. But all this work was developing a strong body. The boy was growing up and learning well. He longed for the time when he would be a man and become a knight.

Another day Sir Roderick instructed the page boys in the art of using the battle ax. Stripped to the waist, Young Arn was swinging the ax with both hands. The ax could not fly out of his hands. There was a leather thong attached to it and this in turn was slipped over Arn's arm. Sir Roderick complimented his work.

Not missing anything, Melisande watched in admiration as her



hero swung the double-edged battle ax in a half circle. Already she could see him using the ax against wicked knights and robbers. Yes, he would be her hero, all right, she thought.

The weeks and months passed by and Young Arn became more and more accustomed to his life at the castle.

His tasks no longer irked him. He now knew well that a knight must understand and know many things. He learned that women were to be protected because they were not as strong as men. So he began to have a new outlook about Melisande. Then, too, he saw that it was not easy to get rid of her. She just tagged along everywhere he went. Even when he was sweeping out the stables, she sat by and watched him. She was everywhere.



But he was not going to show too much friendliness. Though he did not scold her, he pretended to ignore her. More and more he was taking care of the horses and the stables. It was a hard job but he did not complain. He liked horses.

"You are doing fine," Sir Gregory told him one day. "When it's time, I shall make you my squire."

"Thank you, Sir Gregory," answered the boy, glad that his master liked him.

With that praise, Young Arn resolved to do his work even better. All the knights at the castle who taught him many skills were his friends. He liked them all.

Before Young Arn had left his home, his father had presented



him with a beautiful knife. "Let this knife be to you as a sword is to a knight," his father had said when he gave it to him. It was Young Arn's most treasured possession. He wore it always. Even when he was swinging the double-edged battle ax. He usually carried it in a sheath affixed to his belt. It was a proud gift from his father and he would keep it always—or, at least, until he became a knight and won his sword.

His tasks grew heavier as he grew stronger. Now he had to carry water to the kitchen. He did this by means of a yoke placed on his shoulders. Two ropes were suspended on its ends. The buckets rode on the yoke by means of hooks. When filled with water, it was quite a load even for a husky boy like Young Arn. He made several trips

walking with steady stride. He was tired.

As he carried the buckets to the kitchen, he looked around.

"I wonder where Melisande can be," he thought.

She was nowhere to be seen. Arn worried and thought that something must have happened to her. Melisande always trailed him, no matter what he was doing. It was strange not to have her following him. By late afternoon, he realized that he missed her.

At first he thought that she might have gone on a trip to another castle. However, he had seen no one depart. In fact the drawbridge of the castle had not been let down during the day. He had walked around on top of the thick walls of the castle that day and had talked to the guards at the tower near the bridge. Looking around the huge structure, he admired the moat which surrounded the castle. Young Arn wondered how anyone could ever enter the castle if Sir Gregory and his men decided to try and keep them out.

No, as far as he could tell, Melisande must still be inside. He thought that he had better make an investigation. No use in appearing too inquisitive about her, though, he resolved to himself.

As soon as he finished all of his work, Arn decided to see Melisande's mother. He presented himself at the castle looking anxiously about.

"Is Melisande in her room?" he asked.

"Yes, she is very sick and will not be able to come out for some time," Lady Gregory informed Arn.

"Could I go in and see her for a while?" Arn pleaded.

"By all means. I am sure she will welcome you," answered Melisande's mother.

Arn entered the room and saw Melisande in bed. She looked pale, but at his entrance, she smiled.

"Hello, Melisande. I heard you were sick," said Arn. "I hope it's nothing serious and trust you will be well soon."

"Thank you, my knight-to-be," said Melisande. "Thank you for coming!" She was happy to see him.

Arn felt somewhat embarrassed and didn't quite know what to



do. He thought that it would be best not to say too much lest he betray his emotions. After all, he had been rather cool towards Melisande in most of their encounters, and truthfully, he could not change his behavior suddenly. His next action was done almost without thought and yet he was most happy inside that he accomplished it.

"I wonder if you would accept this gift," said Arn handing her his cherished knife.

The girl's eyes lit up in appreciation of his generosity.

"Oh, but that's the knife your father gave you," she protested. "You should keep it at least until you are a knight."

"I would rather that you take it as a sign of our friendship,"



insisted Arn. And with that, he walked out leaving Melisande happy with the knife. She felt flattered.

He couldn't stay in her room any longer. Seeing her was an ordeal in itself. Yet it was most pleasant. He knew now that Melisande would be his true friend for life. And that was how he wanted it to be. Knowing her and having her around was a real part of his life at the castle. She was bound up in his work and in his play. He felt better now. In fact, he did not regret giving up his most dearest possession to her. He hoped that she would soon recover and come out to join him.

When Melisande was well again, she began following Arn once more as he did his usual work. She carried the knife proudly. Her parents saw how much she liked the knife. Sir Gregory realized that it must have been a great sacrifice for Arn to part with his treasured



gift. He admired Arn for the deed.

"For a boy to do that," he remarked to his wife, "is certainly something almost unbelievable."

"Yes," answered Melisande's mother, "I am sure he must think a lot of her."

"Not only that," said Sir Gregory, "but it shows a worthwhile trait in him, a deep respect and reverence for women. He is learning well his lessons of knighthood."

"I am sure that he will make a splendid knight," said the mistress of the castle. "I think we should repay him in some way."

"Indeed, we shall," answered Sir Gregory.

Melisande had a lot of fun playing with the knife. She spent



much time shaving sticks with it and whittling. Arn used to watch her whenever he wasn't too busy with his duties as a page boy.

It was weeks after he had given his knife to Melisande that Sir Gregory sent word to Arn that he wanted to see him. The boy appeared before his master and bowed.

"Well, my son, your progress is good and you will have little trouble in becoming a knight," said Sir Gregory, "but that isn't what I want to see you about." In his hand, the knight held a sheathed knife.

"I found out that you gave your prized knife to Melisande when she was ill," continued Sir Gregory. "I want to return the favor. Here, take this knife with my thanks," he concluded.



Bowing graciously Young Arn accepted the gift saying, "This knife is even more beautiful than the one I had. Thank you, Sir Gregory." With that, he left the room.

When he returned to his own room, Arn buckled the knife to his belt. "Some day I shall be worthy of such a gift," he said to himself. He was proud of the gift.

The months and years slipped by for Arn. At the end of seven years, Sir Gregory felt that the boy had served his apprenticeship. He therefore made Arn his squire. This meant that he must attend his master in every way. It was the next step on his road to knighthood. As a page, he had worked at many jobs. Now he had to see that all of his master's things were in order.

He polished Sir Gregory's armor, and kept it always bright. He rode with his lord to the tournaments and carried his shield and weapons for him.

From now on he received more thorough training in all the arts and skills of knighthood. The finer points of using his sword were shown him and constant practice, under expert supervision, soon made him an excellent fighter with the sword. It was now that he learned to tilt and to use a lance skillfully.

It was his new duty to help Sir Gregory get into his heavy armor. Young Arn assisted him well. He travelled a good deal and put to use many of the things he had learned as a page.

Sir Gregory summoned him one day.

"Prepare my horse," he said, "there is trouble at your father's castle. A messenger has just arrived with the news that a band of outlaw knights is trying to attack and rob your father."

All the knights at the castle with their squires assembled in the courtyard. Sir Gregory told them the news he had imparted to Young Arn. When they were ready to depart, a trumpet sounded and the drawbridge was let down over the moat. Sir Gregory's band rode out fully armed.

Young Arn was excited. He was glad to be of help to his father. When they came to the castle, a few well directed charges dispersed the outlaw knights and most of them were killed or captured.

Young Arn was happy to see his father. It had been a long time since he had been with him. However, they did not have much time together. Sir Gregory had been slightly wounded in the fighting. His squire had to help him take off the heavy armor. It was a trying and difficult task because he had to be gentle in order not to hurt his lord.

Sir Gregory's wound was bandaged and the retinue again set off for their master's castle. Young Arn was pleased at the turn of events which had enabled him to see his father and also to be of assistance to him. It was nice to see his family.

While he was away, he also thought quite a lot about Melisande.



No longer did he have much time to spend with her. Only when he returned with Sir Gregory from some long trip, did he play with her.

After an unusually long journey to a tournament, Arn and Sir Gregory returned, tired and worn. The knight took the time at this point to give the young squire a bow and arrow. He also taught him how to use it.

"Whenever you have a chance, go out into the woods and practice shooting with the bow," advised Sir Gregory.

"Can I take Melisande with me?" asked Arn.

"Why yes, if you don't stay out there too long, and if you look after her," said his master.

Arn and Melisande soon set out. He carried a quiver full of ar-



rows. Melisande had the knife Arn had given her. They came to the woods. The castle was far behind.

Young Arn tried some practice shots at the target. Then he let go an arrow and it pierced the popin-jay swaying on its tall pole squarely in the middle.

"Good shooting!" shouted the girl, "May I try it?"

"Sure, go ahead," said Arn.

But when she tried to pull the bow, she could barely bend it. As a result, her shot missed completely.

"I don't think the bow and arrow is for me," she remarked.

"No, I guess not," said Arn laughing. He took the bow from her and let go another arrow through the target. Then they both stood



there and Melisande admired Arn's marksmanship.

As they were walking away from the target, a sudden growl sounded from the near-by trees. Whirling around, Arn saw that it was a young lion. In a moment it bounded out of the woods and into the open field where Melisande and Arn were standing. The girl became frightened. Fear was in her eyes as she looked at Arn. But young Arn was already in action. He fitted an arrow to his bow. The lion was still a good distance away. Taking careful aim, he let fly the arrow. It caught the animal squarely between the eyes. The lion gave a leap of agony and fell dead, a full fifty yards from them. Melisande, still shivering from fright was too shaken to say anything.

Arn picked up the quiver of arrows and let her carry them,

They had become inseparable friends by now. Arn vowed that she would be his lady fair when he attained knighthood. And she in turn, agreed that he should be her hero for always.

When Sir Gregory heard of Arn's feat in killing the lion, he said, "We shall not wait for you to attain your full age, you shall be dubbed a knight now. Your courage and bravery have been proven. Your deed qualifies you for the honor of knighthood."

When the young squire was to be knighted, he spent the night before the ceremony in a vigil at the chapel. He knelt before the altar. His sword and helmet were laid before him.

In the morning he bathed and clothed himself in white. Attending Mass, he received the sacrament. After that he made his knightly vows. Young Arn promised to use his sword in defense of the church; he would help all those who were in distress.

On leaving the chapel, he was given his shining armor, piece by piece. Then he received his knightly spurs and finally his sword and belt. Then Sir Gregory, his lord, bestowed knighthood upon him with three taps using the flat of his sword on Young Arn's shoulder.

Now all his dreams and struggles were realized and Young Arn was extremely happy. He received his helmet, a shield, a lance, and a horse. Mounting his horse without touching the stirrup, Young Arn demonstrated his prowess in horsemanship which he had learned during his training at Sir Gregory's castle. Then he galloped around and around while everyone watched his superb riding skill.

Sir Gregory had prepared a great feast for the event. Young Arn's father had been invited and he rejoiced to see his son receive the great honor of becoming a knight. There was also a tournament and some jousting. Only two opponents fought in the latter. Young Arn gave a good account of himself. Melisande's smiling face followed his every action. She smiled with approval.

As soon as the ceremonies were over, Young Arn decided that he would go out and seek adventures. He felt that only in that way could he prove his claim to knighthood which he had so recently attained.

Melisande was not enchanted over the prospect of his becoming a



knight-errant, as wandering knights were called, but she could say nothing. The choice was Arn's. He promised to return as soon as possible and then to ask Sir Gregoryfor her hand. She promised to accept him, and both of them knew that Sir Gregory would give them his own blessing at the proper time.

Riding out from the castle, Young Arn took a final look at all that he was leaving behind.

So Young Arn became one of the knights in the great Court of King Arthur. And he performed many brave deeds.





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