

**N**ow that Arthur's realm was at peace and free of his enemies, there were many barons who pressed him to take a wife. In all things Arthur was guided by Merlin's counsel, so one time he asked his friend, 'My barons are eager for me to take a wife so that they might have a queen; what is your advice?'

'They are right,' said Merlin. 'A man of your position should not be without a wife, nor should the realm be without a queen. Tell me, is there anyone you love above all others?'

'Yes,' said Arthur without a pause, 'I love my lady Guenevere, daughter of King Leodegrance of the land of Camelard; he who owns the Round Table that my father Uther gave him. Guenevere is the fairest, kindest lady in all the world.'

Merlin was evidently troubled. For he could see that this course threatened stormy times ahead.

'Certainly she is very lovely,' he said. 'Had you not loved her as you do, I would have found you a wife that would love and please you well. Your union with Guenevere may one day bring your downfall and that of the kingdom. However, since your heart is set, I shall arrange the marriage.'

So Merlin went to King Leodegrance and told him of Arthur's wish to seek his daughter's hand.

'This is the most welcome news I have ever heard,' said the king. 'That so noble and brave a man as King Arthur should wish to wed my daughter pleases me greatly. I shall send him a gift that will please him above all others: the Round Table given to me by Uther Pendragon.'

King Leodegrance entrusted his daughter Guenevere to Merlin, and the Round Table too, and they returned by land and water to King Arthur's court at Camelot. Arthur was overjoyed and made arrangements for the wedding to be held at Whitsuntide.

Meanwhile, much pleased with the Round Table, Arthur bade Merlin choose fifty knights, the worthiest in the realm, to take their places at the Table. Within a short time Merlin had gathered at court forty-six men, the bravest and most valiant knights in all the land.

At Whitsuntide the Archbishop of Canterbury journeyed to Camelot to marry King Arthur and the Lady Guenevere in the Church of St. Stephen. The knights cheered as the magnificent ceremony ended with peals of bells ringing out all over Camelot.

As they left the church Arthur asked the Archbishop to come with them to the court and to bless each seat at the Round Table. As each place was blessed with due solemnity, a knight took that seat, until all the places were filled save four.

When all the knights were seated around the Table, and Arthur and Guenevere had taken their place at the high table, Merlin addressed them thus: 'Sir knights, stand now and bow to your king and queen.'

As each knight did so, letters of gold mysteriously appeared on his chair, spelling out the name of the knight whose place it was.

'I shall now explain the wonders of the Round Table,' said Merlin. 'At this Table, no man can complain that he is at the head or foot, lower or higher

than another. Every man is equal. And when a knight is slain in battle, a new knight will take his place and have his name inscribed upon the chair. The names of all the knights who sit at King Arthur's Table will live forever.'

'But four seats remain unfilled,' broke in King Arthur. 'For whom are they intended?'

'One place is for your recent foe, the bold Sir Pellinor, who waits outside,' replied Merlin.

With that he opened the door for Sir Pellinor, who knelt before King Arthur, then took his seat at the Table.

'Two more are for two of the bravest knights in the kingdom who are not yet come,' continued Merlin. 'As for the one remaining, that is the Perilous Seat. Only on pain of death shall that seat be taken by any man save he for whom it is intended. And he will be the best knight of them all.'

Merlin looked so stern that none of the knights, not even Arthur, dared ask Merlin who was the best knight of them all.

Then Arthur looked at his knights seated round the Table, and said, 'You must swear that you will never act unfairly, never in any way be unjust, and always show mercy to those who ask you for it. If you break your vow you must forfeit your place at the Round Table. Further, knights of my court, you must always be chivalrous to women, rich or poor. Do not battle without good cause, and never for worldly goods.'

This was the vow taken by all the Knights of the Round Table. And every year they renewed their vow at the high festival of Whitsuntide.