

# **Camlan**

ROBERT BUCHANAN

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## I.

"I may not trust false Mordred,"  
    'Twas thus did Arthur say,  
"He will not stint to treason do,  
    His uncle—King to slay;  
So watch ye well when we are met,  
    And but ye chance to see  
One sword unsheathed, upon them!  
    Be sure 'tis treachery!"  
"I may not trust mine uncle,"  
    'Twas thus did Mordred say,  
"This trick of truce and parleying  
    But hides some crooked play;  
So watch ye well when we are met,  
    And but ye chance to see  
One sword unsheathed, upon them!  
    Be sure 'tis treachery!"

**II.**

O gallant sight and goodly,  
    It was that morn, I ween,  
To see these lords their barbed steeds  
    Rein proudly o'er the green!  
Twelve knights on each attended,  
    Was each a knight renown'd,  
Had Saxon slain, and Saracen,  
    And sat at Table Round.

**III.**

And kindly sped their parley,  
    And courteous was their cheer,  
Nor sign was there from word or look  
    Betokened evil near;  
But knight with knight of bye-gone times  
    Held converse blythe and free,  
And passed the blood-red Gascon  
    In pledge of amity.

**IV.**

The arrow shot at random  
    May reach a royal prey;  
A wandering spark, in ashes hot,  
    May tower and temple lay;  
The mole may set the torrent free  
    That sweeps o'er grove and glen,  
And swamps the corn-green valley  
    Into a deadly fen!

\*

**V.**

To search for toy or trinket  
    Dropped from his careless hand,  
Amid the tufted heath alights  
    A knight of Mordred's band,

II.

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An adder stung him fiercely,  
In agony he drew  
His sword, and severed sheerly  
That evil worm in two.

### VI.

But when they saw that faulchion's flash,  
Burst one loud thunder yell  
From either host! and on they dash  
In deadly strife to mell.  
"As easy bar the proud spring-tide  
O'er Solway's sand to run,  
Or back the lightning's volley,  
As man his weird to shun."  
Thus mused Sir Arthur as he turned  
His horse's head, and sighed,  
Then cheered his host and headlong plunged  
Midmost the battle's tide!  
Him followed knights three hundred,  
Through Christentie renown'd,  
The bravest knights in Logres-land, 1  
And of the Table Round.

### VII.

And thrice through Mordred's battle  
A pass did Arthur clear  
With Pridwin, and Escaliber, 2  
And Rone, his deadly spear:  
No word was there of parley,  
No thought was there to yield:  
Ere night a five-score thousand  
Lay stark on Camlan's field.

### VIII.

A moment paused Sir Arthur  
To cool his burning brow;  
Three hundred knights had followed him  
How many follow now?  
But only two! And wounded sore,  
Beside a brook ran near,

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He spied the false Sir Mordred,  
    Was leaning on his spear.  
"Now pay me full, false traitor,  
    The debt thy treasons owe;  
Would'st reive thine uncle's crown, and force  
    His Queen thy bed-fellowe!"  
Then on the false Sir Mordred  
    Like wolf on fawn he flew,  
And Rone his spear a full fathome  
    He thrust his body through.

## IX.

Shrieked wild for pain that traitor knight,  
    And in his dying throe  
On Arthur's helmet blindly strake  
    So furious fell a blow,  
That blow nor bone nor basnet  
    Might stay its force nor stand:  
Then dropped the shivered weapon  
    From Mordred's lifeless hand!

## X.

The moon is cold on Camlan,  
    And on its thousands slain,  
Save but the pillers pille the dead,  
    None trode that silent plain!  
To help Sir Arthur at his need  
    But only two were found,  
Of all that brave three hundred  
    Sat at his Table Round!  
His boteler and his chamberlain  
    Sir Lucan and Bedwere  
And many a gash, and ghastly,  
    The fainting brothers bare.  
Alas for good Sir Lucan!  
    His wound burst open wide,  
And out thereat his bowels gushed,  
    He groaned aloud, and died!

**XI.**

And when Sir Arthur's trance was pass'd,  
    He gazed, and him beside,  
Of all his many thousands, none  
    Save brave Bedwere espied.  
And thus he spake "Sir Bedwere,  
    Go get thee haste, and take  
My trusty sword Escaliber,  
    And cast in yonder lake;  
And fling it far will all thy might,  
    What thereupon shall be  
Observe it well, and speed thee  
    To truly tell it me."

**XII.**

That sword of worth and wonder,  
    Whose sweep in Arthur's hand  
Nor shirt of mail, nor plate of brass,  
    Nor casque of steel might stand,  
A priceless gift gave Merlin,  
    Won from his peerless make.  
Within their bower of pleasure,  
    The Lady of the Lake.

**XIII.**

Embossed was hilt and handle  
    With gem and jewel rare,  
And scrolled the blade with magic sign,  
    And mystic character.  
"Ah pity were," Sir Bedwere thought,  
    To fling in yonder lake  
So goodly thing!" and hid it  
    Within hazle-brake.

**XIV.**

"What sawest thou, Sir Bedwere?"  
    "But wave and water free;"  
"Nay, nay, thy vision wandered,  
    Go look more heedfully.

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What sawest thou now?" "Nor token  
Nor sign the water gave,  
But silverly and softly  
Did wap with wind and wave."

### XV.

He looked a look of anger,  
"Shame on the knight would say  
A soothless tale twice over,  
All for a sword's inlay!  
But haste, my life is ebbing fast,  
Thy fault and folly through "  
This time the charmed weapon  
Far o'er the waters flew.

### XVI.

But ere it reached the water,  
A giant arm upreared,  
And clutched it fast, and waved it thrice  
On high, then disappeared;  
And when Sir Bedwere told that sign,  
"Must now no tarrying  
Haste, lay me down beside the lake,  
They're nigh will succour bring."

### XVII.

And swift as arrow shoots from bow,  
Shot barge of beauty rare,  
Nor steerer had, nor rower,  
That barge, but ladies fair:  
And of these ladies crowns of gold  
Upon their head had three,  
And glittered in the moonlight  
Their jewelled bravery!

### XVIII.

Aloud she wept that queenliest seemed

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That crowned three among  
"Alas! alas! my brother dear,  
    Why tarried'st thou so long?  
Nor weeting gavest, nor warning.  
    Of thine so evil cheer,  
Nor spedst that token sooner  
    When help was all so near!  
Light task had been, and speedy,  
    Thy gashes green to close,  
And by mine art, and with mine herbs  
    To work thy pain's repose;  
But now long time and sorely  
    My leech's art 'twill strain,  
And many a year must circle  
    Ere thou see earth again!"

## XIX.

His fainting head they pillowed  
    That lady's lap upon;  
"Now row ye, sisters, row ye  
    With speed for Avalon!"  
As meteor shoots or moon-beam  
    Across the waters blue,  
It shot, that bark of mystery,  
    Then melted from the view.  
And long with fear and wonder  
    Looked Bedwere from the shore  
Across that silent water,  
    But ne'er saw Arthur more!