SIR TRISTREM

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The Scottish Text Society

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ADVOCATE

"Over gestes it has the stoom,
Over all that is or was."
—*Robert Mannyng of Brunne.*

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INTRODUCTION.

I.

THE STORY.

AN outline of the main events and episodes of the love-story of Tristrem and Ysonde will fitly precede what has to be said by way of introduction to the Scottish version of the tale. This is the story, rapidly sketched.

Roland of Ermonie cherished a secret love for Maiden Blanchefleur, sister to King Mark of England, and was treacherously murdered by Duke Morgan. Maiden Blanchefleur, on hearing of his death, gave birth to his son, whom she named Tristrem, and handed over to the care of Rohand, a trusty steward. Then, leaving him a ring for a sign of the boy's parentage, Maiden Blanchefleur died of a broken heart. Rohand was faithful to his trust. He passed the child off under the name of Tramtris as his own son, and educated him for fifteen years, teaching him venery and minstrelsy, and old and new laws. The boy studied assiduously, to the joy of all who knew him; but a great misfortune was at hand. The captain of a Norwegian ship, touching at Ermonie, sent out a challenge to chess-players, which Tristrem accepted. Defeated again and again by the skilful youth, he refused to pay his stake, and

treacherously bearing his victor out to sea, put him ashore in an unknown land. Tristrem wandered with a heavy heart over hill and through forest, till he came upon a pathway where he met two pilgrims. As they went through the forest, telling him that he was now in England, they met a party of huntsmen breaking up the stags: and now Tristrem's training stood him in good stead; for, shocked at the rude fashion in which the huntsmen bungled their work, he was constrained to interpose. He made his quarry so deftly, that all present saw in him a youth of no common order. They took him to King Mark of England, and told of his adroitness. The king received him with royal hospitality, and soon was won by the charm of the youth's skill in sport and minstrelsy. Thus, after all his troubled wanderings, Tristrem at length became the darling of a brilliant court.

But the trusty Rohand was desolate at the loss of his master's child, and could not rest at home. He went through seven kingdoms to seek the boy. He was reduced to rags, when, by good fortune, he met the same two pilgrims who had encountered Tristrem, and was by them directed to Tristrem's presence. The youth welcomed his foster-father, and commended him to his benefactor, King Mark. Rohand, moved at the strange fate which had brought Tristrem into the care of his kinsman, told the king the true story of the boy's parentage. The ring of Maiden Blanchefleur had never left her son's finger; and seeing in it a confirmation of Rohand's tale, the king gladly acknowledged Tristrem as his nephew. But Tristrem, too, had heard the story of his birth, and was now aflame to avenge the foul murder of his father. King Mark reluctantly equipped him for his expedition against Duke Mor-