

PARSIVAL

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Parsival by Gerhart Hauptmann & Oakley Williams

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GERHART HAUPTMANN & OAKLEY WILLIAMS

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BY
GERHARD  HAUPTMANN

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION
BY
OAKLEY WILLIAMS

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1915


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I

ARSIVAL'S mother's name was Heartache. I should hate to make anyone feel sad, but I believe we might call every mother, or at any rate, very, very many mothers by this name. What Heartache's other name was, and of what stock she came, we do not know. Some people say that her family was of knightly degree, others speak of her as a peasant woman, so Parsival in his youth, would have then been nothing more than a common country lad. Of whatever stock he might be, Parsival himself knew nothing about it, and his mother, who may well have known, never said a word to him on the matter. Her name was not Heartache for nothing.

Parsival's early childhood was very happy, for Heartache lived in a little log hut, hidden

deep in the solitude of the woods: a hut that Heaven knows who had built for her. Maybe Heartache herself had built it, for she was deft in handling not only the spade and hoe, but the axe as well, and, furthermore, Parsival had never set eyes on human being other than her. "There is no work Heartache shirks," was a favourite adage of hers.

Parsival was very fond of his mother, and was, as I have said, very happy under her care, although she was not gay and was never able to laugh whole-heartedly, but at best force a painful smile to her lips. The merry, sturdy boy gave it no further thought; he enjoyed his meals, felt safe and snug when his mother had tucked him up in bed, and in the day-time made the little herb and flower garden round about the house, the forest and green solitude all around his splendid playground.

Parsival passed the first twelve or thirteen, or maybe, even fourteen years of his life in the games of childhood. Every child knows what games mean, and that they are just about the most precious thing in the world. As for the

grown-ups, many of them have, I am sorry to say, become wholly unknowledgeable in this matter. Now and then, one or other of the grown-ups who is able to value games at their proper worth, has troubled his head about the deeper meaning of play; it is an emprise which no one lays upon us, and no one constrains, which is devoid of sordid profit, and, perhaps for this very reason, is pure joy all through.

Parsival was a strong lad. He revelled in the sunshine, in the flowers of the forest, in the birds, in climbing trees, in the oak apples, in the wood-pigeons' nests, in the snow, in the storm, not to forget the wild beasts, great and small, which dwelt in the forest, and which, from his ninth and tenth year onwards, he began to hunt with craft and courage. Traffic with nature after this fashion is like to make your blood clean, your eye steady and far-seeing, your bones firm and the muscles of your body tough. Therefore it was as well that no rude louts from the towns, who might have made game of him, crossed his path, for he would have man-handled them terribly.

It would not have been hard to make game of him on several counts. Whether it had been of his mother, Heartache's intent, or whether circumstances had brought it about in her despite, the boy knew nothing of God nor of the Devil, and, if he had given the matter a thought at all, he would have taken it for granted that no human beings other than Heartache and himself, lived in the world, and that, starting from the log hut, the world would come to an end a few bow-shots away in every direction. But, as you know, this is not the case. The world is exceeding wide-spread, and is peopled by a multitude of folk, who are split up into nations, each one of which speaks its own proper tongue, and also differs from others in many ways. For these, and other reasons, the lad Parsival might have passed for a dunce, even among boys of his own age, although his stupidity was, in fact, only lack of experience.

He would, maybe, have taken a bearded man that might have crossed his path, for a dangerous wild animal; he would have held a bishop in his cope for something kin to a big strange