

ADAM of the ROAD

by ELIZABETH JANET GRAY



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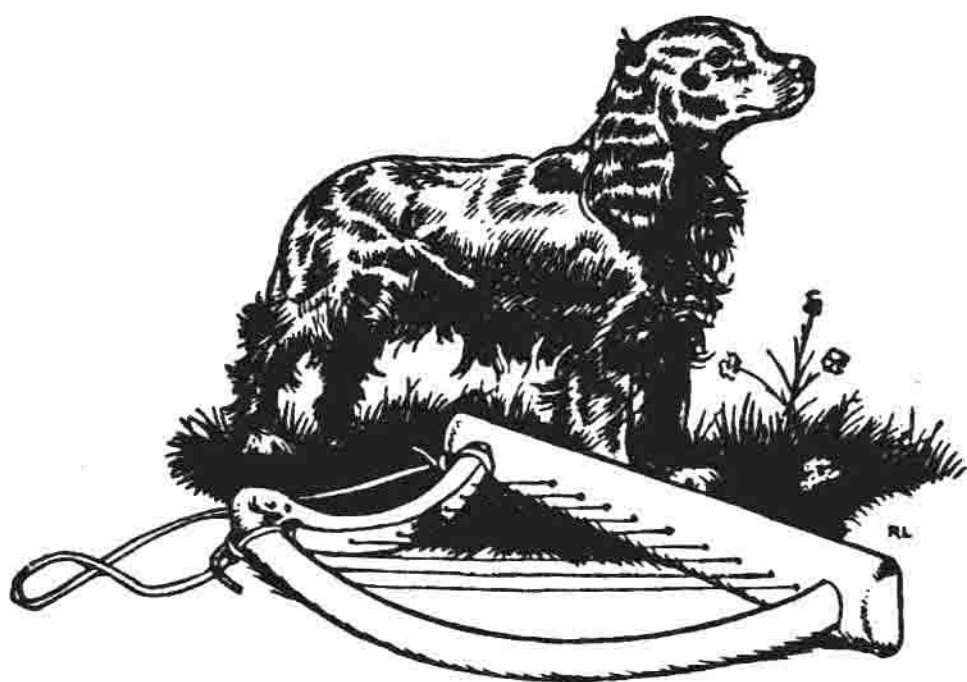
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by ELIZABETH JANET GRAY



Illustrated by Robert Lawson

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Song

*The road runs straight up hill and down,
Beyond the bridge and mill wheel brown,
Through field and forest, dale and town —
But here stay I.*

*Wayfarers pass with never a care,
They walk or ride, or stand and stare,
Meeting, no doubt, adventurers rare —
They pass me by.*

*Under the sky the birds fly free,
Squirrels and foxes have their glee,
Free as air is the humble bee —
I can but sigh.*

*Matins to nones the bell goes Dong,
From nones again to evensong,
Latin and prayers the whole day long —
I think I'll die.*

*I want to sing and jump and run,
Mile on mile in the wind and sun,
Sleep somewhere else when day is done —
But here I lie.*

*The cuckoo now has changed his tune,
Each passing day leaves less of June,
Roger, sure, will be coming soon —
Away we'll fly!*

ENDED
OXFORD
APRIL, 1295



A MAP
of the
TRAVELS of
ADAM



WINCHESTER

MARTYR'S
WORTHY

AIRESFORD

ALTON

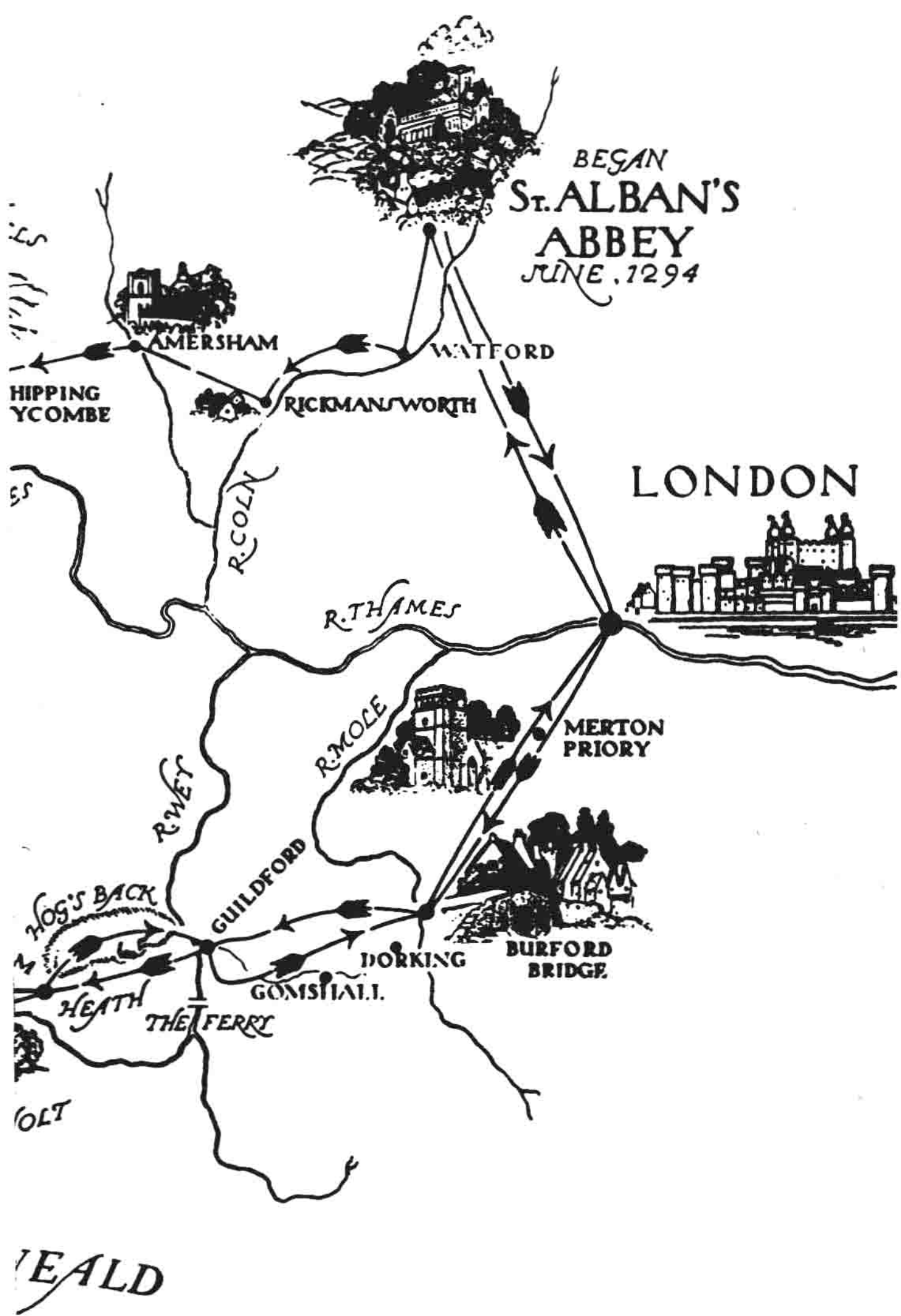
ST. GILES'S
HILL

FORE

TH

RITCHEN

BEGAN
ST. ALBAN'S
ABBEY
JUNE, 1294



HIPPING
YCOMBE

AMERSHAM

WATFORD

RICKMANSWORTH

R. COLN

R. THAMES

R. MOLE

R. WEY

HOG'S BACK

HEATH

THE FERRY

GUILDFORD

GOMSTALL

DORKING

BURFORD
BRIDGE

MERTON
PRIORY

LONDON

WHEAT

WHEAT

Adam

AFTER a May as gray and cold as December, June came in, that year of 1294, sunny and warm and full of birds and blossoms and all the other happy things the songs praise May for. Adam Quartermayne, who had been looking for his father ever since Easter, thought that now he would surely come. Every morning when he rolled out of his bed in the long dormitory where the schoolboys slept, he said to himself, "Today he's coming! I know it!" and every night, disappointed but not daunted, he put himself to sleep making up stories about how his father would come next day.

Sometimes he made him come just at the end of choir practice, sometimes at the beginning of the lesson in grammar, sometimes

in the middle of dinner when the boys ate their meat and pottage in silence while a master read aloud in Latin from the lives of the saints. However Adam's stories began, they all ended with Roger the minstrel taking Adam right out of school. Across the courtyard they would go striding, Adam with his own harp over his shoulder and his father's viol under his arm; through the gateway they would pass and over the river to the highway that led to London and all the wide, free world.

It was a famous school that the monks kept in the Abbey of St. Alban, but Adam had had enough of it. Five long months ago his father had left him there while he himself went to France, to the minstrels' school held during Lent each year at Cambrai, where he would learn new romances to tell to the lords and ladies of England.

Roger Quartermayne was no ordinary minstrel, picking up an uncertain penny telling rough yarns in innyards and marketplaces, filling in gaps in his memory with juggling and tumbling and piping as the poorer sort did. He could play the viol; he could chant long romances in French about King Ali-saunders, or Charlemagne and his knights, or the British King Arthur and the search for the

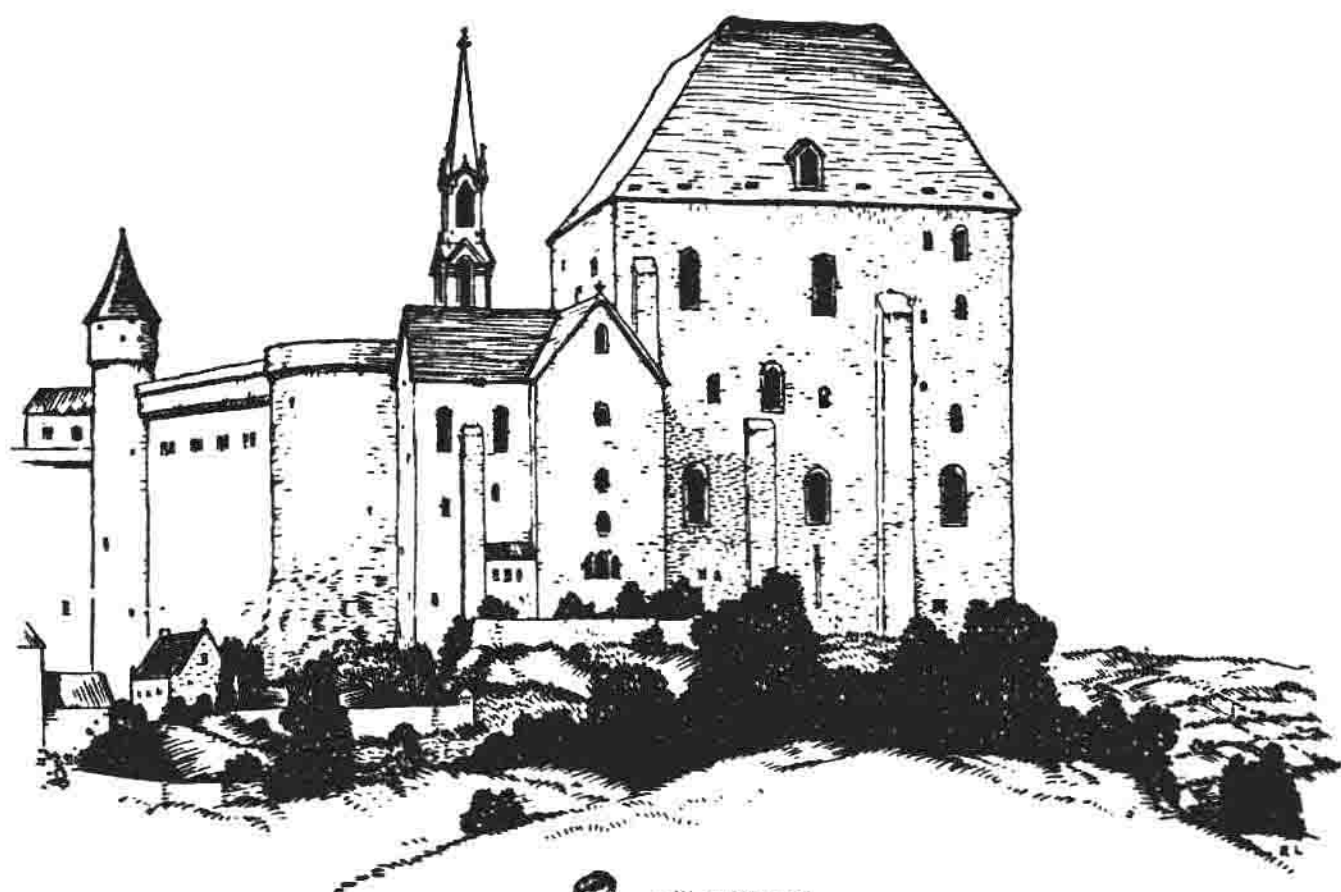
Holy Grail. He was welcome at manor houses and at great feasts in castles, and everywhere people gave him rich gifts, a length of cloth for a surcoat, a purse full of silver pennies, or a gold clasp to fasten his mantle. He went attended by a boy to carry his viol and to sing with him when there were songs in the tales, or harp a little in the interludes, and that boy, from his eighth birthday till his eleventh last February, had been Roger's son Adam.

So Adam watched eagerly for his father and talked endlessly about him to the other boys in school. He always spoke of him as Roger the minstrel, as if everyone must have heard of him, and if he was a little cocky about being the son of such a man, they forgave him. They liked Adam, because he was tousle-headed and snub-nosed, wide-mouthed and square-jawed, because his gray eyes were honest and twinkling, because he sang so well and knew so many stories, and because, though he boasted about Roger, he had a humble enough opinion of himself. They watched for Roger too, and they all expected him, from Adam's description, to be as handsome as Earl Gilbert, who came sometimes to the abbey, but kinder, as brave as the king, but younger, and as grand as the abbot himself, but more comfortable.

Three things Adam had to comfort him while the good June days went slowly to waste: his harp, his friend Perkin, and his dog Nick.

His harp was the small harp of the time, which he carried slung by a thong over his shoulder. His father had taught him to play it when he was a very little boy, living up in the north in a stone house in the shadow of York Minster. Here at the abbey school he kept it on the shelf at the head of his bed. On rainy days when they had free times in the hall after the long hours of lessons, the boys would send him to get it, and he would pluck its strings and tell what he could remember of the tales he had heard from Roger the minstrel. At first the boys from the midlands made fun of his northern dialect, but he turned to French a few times and silenced them. Not many of these sons of franklins and burgesses knew the language of the court folk. Or he would sing the verses of a song they all knew and they would join in on the refrains. Sometimes they would make up more stanzas of their own.

The masters didn't like it very well, for the church officially disapproved of minstrels' tales. If they heard him they would stop him, or make him tell stories about the saints in-



stead; but oftener they just pretended not to hear him. His stories were about courtesy and chivalry, never the rude fabliaux making mock of holy things that the poorer sort of minstrel told.

Perkin, his friend, who slept in the cot next to his, was a thin, tall, dark-haired boy with a high nose and an intense, brooding look in his brown eyes. He looked a little like a hawk, except when he smiled; then his white teeth would flash and his whole face would light up. He was a year older than Adam, and a great deal farther on in learning. He was looking forward to going on to the university at Oxford. "I shall study the law," he whispered once to Adam, "and someday I'll be chief adviser to the king, like Walter Langton. He started a poor man. You will see."

Perkin's father was a plowman in Ewelme, and Perkin would have had to be a plowman too if it had not been for the parish priest. He first taught Perkin his letters and then persuaded his father to let him go on and take as much learning as he could hold; it would be a good deal, the priest thought. The plowman had to pay a fine to the lord of the manor to set his son free, and the parish priest had to persuade his brother, who was a monk at St. Alban's, to make some special efforts to