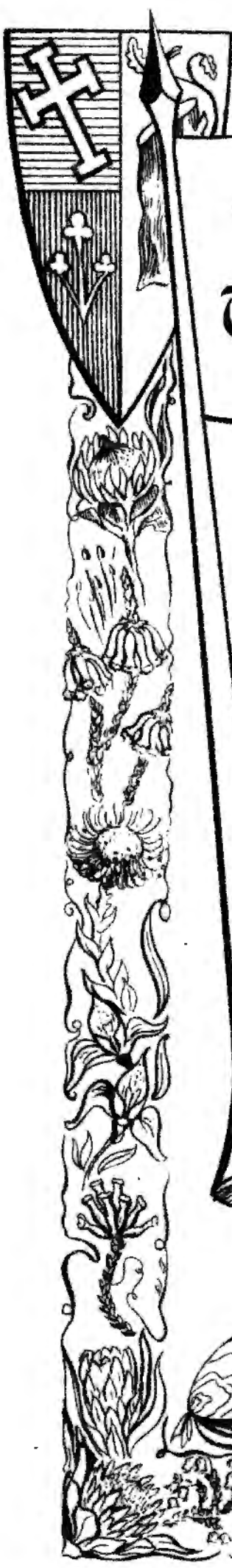


The Arthurian Legend



The Arthurian Legend

A SURVEY

by

MICHAEL WALLENDORF SMUTS, M.A.

THESIS

PRESENTED UNDER THE PROMOTERSHIP OF

PROF. R. E. DAVIES, M.A. Ph.D

FOR THE DEGREE OF

Doctor Litterarum

IN THE UNIVERSITY OF POTCHEFSTROOM

FOR CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

NOVEMBER 1953

*"In books I find the dead
as if they were alive"*

Richard of Bury: PHILOBIBLON

In hym that shold say or thynke
that there was neuer such a
Kynge callyd Arthur myght well be
aretted grete folye and blyndnesse
Caxton -

--- P R E F A C E ---

The present study has grown out of a similar one entitled "Growth and Evolution of Arthurian Romance from Chrétien to Malory", which was presented by the present writer some three years ago as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of South Africa.

Little apology need, I think, be made for adding yet another work to the existing multitude of works devoted to the Arthurian Legend. The subject, from the relatively important place it occupies in Western European literature and from its own intrinsic interest, is one that must ever and inevitably retain its interest for students and scholars alike.

There are tales that can be told again, and one such is the story of Arthur. And in so far as it has never yet been fully told in one book, to that extent this work --- which attempts to do just so much --- may claim to be justified. Many interesting questions that arose in the earlier study, and which had to remain unanswered, many fascinating side-tracks that branched off and beckoned and lured, could not be explored. All these had to wait, and in the present instance the famous old story, so well-known and ever-fresh, and yet so shrouded in mystery with the many unresolved difficulties relating to its various parts is once more traced from its beginnings in the light of all important relevant research⁽¹⁾. The findings

(1) Research, that is, in English publications. For purposes of the present study the great mass of critical literature in French and German, besides that in Italian, Spanish and the Scandinavian languages etc., has been left out of consideration. Arthur, like Shakespeare, it seems, belongs to all Europe, but in this thesis we are concerned chiefly with the Arthur of the English-speaking nations.

are here presented in order to provide a fairly complete and self-contained, lucid account within the covers of a single volume. It is a subject whose different aspects have provided the material for a whole library of dissertations and monographs, most of which are not readily accessible to all readers, and the sum of whose contents together illuminate the subject only for the specialist students who have the opportunity, the time and the desire to consult them all.

In this study the eclectic method has been followed and the cream of Arthurian research and criticism has been collected and summarised and included, so that what follows may fairly be described, in part, as a Digest of Arthuriana for those --- and their number is not inconsiderable --- who love Arthurian Romance.

From this follows that the present treatise is not, and was not intended to be, entirely an original contribution to the elucidation of all, or even one, of the problems pertaining to the Arthurian Legend. Neither is it, however, a mere compilation or a symposium of the theories and conclusions of the great Arthurian scholars. It hopes to be rather more than the latter. While providing a great mass of the most important views and findings, and presenting them in a compact form, it also offers some original thoughts on a few of the vexed questions in relation to Arthur and Arthurian romance, which I trust will not be without value in helping to provide enlightenment, and making easier the final conclusions of later Arthurian students.

That the work should be a guide, a Companion,

through the complex mazes of the Arthurian Legend and romance and related Arthurian problems, has at least been my intention. In how far the work will serve as an Arthurian Handbook, and what its merits as such a guide in a difficult subject may be, the opinion of those competent to judge must determine. If it enables the students of the literature of Chivalry to obtain a clearer idea and firmer grasp of the subject from such a brief survey, then it will have achieved the purpose for which it was written, and will the labour involved in its composition not have been merely so much wasted effort.

It is a pleasant obligation to express thanks for help received in the execution of this study.

My thanks are due, in the first place, to my instructor and promotor Professor R.E. Davies, M.A., Ph.D., Head of the Department of English in the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, for his unfailing interest and encouragement throughout the course of my studies, for reading the manuscript, and for many valuable suggestions.

Then thanks, too, to that great company of earlier Arthurian scholars of whose labours I have made full and grateful use: my indebtedness to them has been indicated throughout in the text and footnotes.

I am very grateful to the following people and/or institutions, whose interest and assistance have made my task easier and pleasanter:

Mrs. W.A.C. Bester of Philadelphia (Pa.), U.S.A., for procuring books and obtaining loan facilities for me ; Mr. Walter W. Wright, Librarian of the

University of Pennsylvania; Mr. H.C. van Rooy, M.A., B.Sc., Librarian, and the staff of the Potchefstroom University Library; the Librarian and the staff of the State Library, Pretoria; my booksellers here and in England for tracing and supplying many rare works long out of print.

Then thanks which I hardly know how to express adequately, to Dr. Margaret J.C. Reid of Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, England, for encouraging me in many ways: by a stimulating correspondence, the generous gift of books, valuable suggestions and notes from the wealth of her own knowledge of the subject, and general guidance on the path of Arthurian romance which she herself has so ably helped to mark out with her own book on the subject.

Lastly, thanks to my wife, for often beating the jaded horse and so helping to ensure the successful conclusion of this work, but mostly for her painstaking and accurate help in compiling the index.

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And where all human cunning, endeavour and achievement end, devout thanks to the Ultimate Source of all Knowledge and Wisdom SOLI DEO GLORIA.

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CONTENTS

	Page.
PREFACE	vii
INTRODUCTION : THE SCOPE OF THE WORK	1
- CHAPTER I : THE HISTORICAL ARTHUR	14
- CHAPTER II : THE MYTHOLOGICAL ARTHUR	33
- CHAPTER III : EXCURSUS: THE GODS OF THE GOIDELS AND THE BRYTHONS.	52
CHAPTER IV : THE MEDIAEVAL SCENE	85
CHAPTER V : COURTLY LOVE	106
- CHAPTER VI : THE ROMANTIC ARTHUR	139
- CHAPTER VII : CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES AND HIS SUCCESSORS	164
- CHAPTER VIII : EXCURSUS: THE BRANCHES OF THE LEGEND	200
- CHAPTER IX : MALORY AND THE TWILIGHT OF CHIVALRY	238
- CHAPTER X : THE ARTHUR OF THE ENGLISH POETS 1500 to 1950	258
- CHAPTER IX : THE ARTHUR OF THE GREAT VICTORIANS.	301
- CHAPTER XII : CONCLUSIONS	342
- - - - -	
Appendix I : Tristan and Iseult	381
Appendix II : The British Isles at the first Roman Invasion, and Note on Ogam Script	402
. Appendix III : The gods of the Goidels Genealogical Table	403
Appendix VI : The gods of the Brythons Genealogical Table	404
- - - - -	
BIBLIOGRAPHY : <u>List A : Critical Works</u>	405
<u>List B : Texts</u>	410
<u>List C : Miscellaneous</u>	412
- - - - -	
I n d e x I. : Index of Critics	415
I n d e x II : General Subject Index	417

THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND.

INTRODUCTION: The scope of the work.

"I am redye to reuoke my sayenge, if anythyng
have passed my moute for want of lernynge, and to
submytte my-selfe to correction, and my boke to
reformatyon".

H. Fitzherbert: Boke of Husbandry.



UCH has been written of and
about Arthur and all the
numerous aspects of the
Arthurian Legend; much re-
mains to be written, for
finality has not been reach-

ed on many of the problems arising from the subject,
one of the most vexed in all literature. In fact, it
is doubtful whether finality ever can be reached where
so much remains to be discovered.

Yet the great mass of literature that has
been evoked by the heroic British king and the gestes
of his followers is so extensive, and the particular
facts treated in any one work so specialized, that it
is difficult, if not almost impossible, for the general
reader to get a satisfactory conspectus of the whole
interesting subject.

There can be very few lovers of reading who
have not at some time or other been under the spell of
the chivalrous king and his court, whose members rode
abroad to destroy evil customs and follow adventurous
quests, and who sought finally to attain the mystic
Talisman whose attainment was only for the wholly pure
in heart. Even to-day Arthur holds his ever-fresh
fascination for all who love books and noble deeds and

keep a youthful heart. None of these enthusiasts, however, can obtain a clear picture of the hero they all admire except by means of wearisome consultation of many, many works.

Those who would know whence he came and how he was apotheosized -- this Arthur who ruled the noblest and most famous court in all Christendom -- must search in places difficult of access in order to satisfy their curiosity. And even the little that may chance to be read by any one person who desires to go somewhat farther afield than the pages of Malory --- even that little raises problems, contradictions, hiatuses and lacunae which excite the curiosity and lead on to further and more specialized study.

It was a similar unsatisfied curiosity to know more of a childhood hero that moved the present writer to search in the narrow paths and byways of mythology and legendary lore, and in the treatises of other Arthur seekers, for a straightforward, coherent, complete and intelligible account of the whole Arthur, and the acta of his men.

The result of this course of study -- whose completion, from the magnitude of the task set, might have been postponed almost indefinitely if certain self-imposed limits had not been rigidly observed although much remained to be said -- is set out in the following pages. It is the fruit of extensive reading, the collection and collation of innumerable details and interesting sidelights and facets of an amazingly complex subject. It is an essay in condensation, in order to include within a reasonable limit most of what

is known thus far of :-

- (a) the origin and evolution of the figure of Arthur;
- (b) the development and evolution of the legend into the shape in which it is known by the general reader to-day;
- (c) some of the many interesting theories and views of the great array of scholars who have given a life-time of study, learning and infinite pains to the elucidation of difficult problems arising from the legend; and further to indicate
- (d) some of the suggestive and tantalizing questions that still await solution -- if they can ever be satisfactorily solved at all -- problems that are as mysterious and elusive as the vision of the Holy Grail itself.

The study as originally planned had a two-fold purpose. The first was to collect and summarize in a handy compass the chief facts concerning the Arthurian Legend as elucidated and compiled from the fruits of past research, in order to obtain and provide a succinct yet clear and complete picture of the whole field covered by the subject. In this respect this work, as regards its first part (represented in Chapters I to III and VI to IX) is, then, admittedly a pastiche, and contributes little that is new, yet one or two modest views, bearing on the discussions, are advanced for what they are worth. To this has been added the discussion, after mature thought, of some of the problems raised by the opposing views of different scholars, and an attempt to assess them and give what

seems to the writer of this essay the sum of the results obtained by all the enquiries, or the most acceptable view after all the evidence on a particular matter has been sifted and weighed. It is not suggested that such conclusions will represent final and authoritative views, but they will at least serve as evidence of an independent opinion, and may provide certain enlightenment and provoke further thought.

In the second part, embracing Chapters X to XII, an attempt has been made to give a sympathetic account and critical appreciation of the interpretation and treatment of the matter of the legend by some poets of note in English literature, especially the four great nineteenth century poets who have handled Arthurian themes: Arnold, Morris, Tennyson and Swinburne. This part will, it is hoped, contribute some original views to the extant criticism. It is a short, and admittedly subjective, examination of the accomplishment of a few poets under the inspiration of the legend. It does not profess to more than it attempts to be: a modest contribution to the views stated with great wisdom and erudition by others, and a tribute to some great poetry on a great theme. Whatever merits these views may have, neither they nor any other can make later criticisms superfluous, or deter others who love romance and poetry from also interpreting and assessing the value of modern poetry on Arthurian themes. The subject of Arthurian criticism is by no means exhausted, for this aspect of Arthurian study has not so fully occupied the attention of those fitted thereto as has, for example, the editing and textual criticism of old Arthurian romances in manuscripts.

The criticism of the more modern Arthurian poetry (that poetry, namely, that has been inspired by the original mediaeval French romance themes) is not extensive, being confined, as far as the researches of the present writer have discovered, to about three important books (in English) at most, namely:

William M. Maccallum: Tennyson's Idylls and Arthurian Story, 1894.

G. Howard Maynadier: The Arthur of the English Poets. 1906.

Margaret J.C. Reid: The Arthurian Legend, 1938.⁽¹⁾

It is a pity that the crop should be so small. Of studies on textual matters there is no dearth. A great number have seen the light: some are painstaking and very erudite essays, which have duly earned for their begetters the desired Doctor's degrees, but painfully dry reading. It is in the field of criticism of the more modern Arthurian poetry that much can still be done. Fortunately the stream of Arthurian studies shows as yet no sign of drying up. In the course of the last century, and even long before the Idylls of the King became, for a time, the standard literary fare of the English-speaking world, there was a revival of interest in mediaeval romance, and especially Arthurian romance.

This was one of the fruits of the Romantic Revival. The discovery of the antiquarian interest attaching to the old legendary matter of Britain led to

(1) And more recently C.S. Lewis has published a commentary on the two volumes of Arthurian poetry of his (deceased) friend Charles Williams, namely: Taliessin through Logres and The Region of the Summer Stars.

a study of these old remains - not only superficially for their contents but also scientifically and critically in order to determine their exact nature and extent.

The literary result of this renewed interest will be noted in Chapter X below. Here we need only note that Sir Walter Scott brought out an edition of Sir Tristram in 1805. Sir Frederick Madden collected and printed all the romances dealing with Gawain in 1839. The second decade of the nineteenth century saw three editions (including Southey's) of Malory's Morte D'Arthur -- the first since 1634. Five more editions followed in the second half of the century and there have been others since. Many European scholars, chiefly French and German, wrote monographs and commentaries on various Arthurian subjects, or brought out critical editions, with introductions and notes, of the great number of old romance manuscripts, or wrote reviews of, and commentaries on, such works of other scholars, in the many literary periodicals of Europe⁽¹⁾.

Among so many we may name the chief:

In England: Eugene O'Curry, Kuno Meyer, W.A. Nitze, Alfred Nutt, John Rhys, Jessie L. Weston; in France: J. Bédier, Ferdinand Lot, J. Loth, Gaston Paris, Paulin Paris, Charles Potvin; in Germany: E. Brugger,

(1) It is significant of the universal appeal of the legend that the old Celtic matter should have so interested the scholars of France and Germany and so many other countries. A French scholar, M. D'Arbois de Jubainville wrote a nine-volume Cours de Littérature Celtique, besides his Le Cycle Mythologique Irlandais.

Wendelin Foerster, W. Golther, H. Oskar Sommer, R. Thurneysen, Heinrich Zimmer. And latterly the Americans seem to have taken Arthurian romance as their special province, while the scholars of Europe maintain a temporary silence, and among a host of them we may mention: A.C.L. Brown, J.D. Bruce, R.H. Fletcher, G.L. Kittredge, R.S. Loomis, Gertrude Schoepperle, W.W. Newell and W.H. Schofield.

The nineteenth century saw, too, the formation of societies for the study and preservation of old literary matter: The Early English Text Society (shades of Skeat and Furnivall), the Folklore Society, The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion and the Arthurian Society.

Many literary and philological periodicals devoted their columns almost exclusively to the discussion of romantic (and chiefly Arthurian) subjects, and their headquarters were, besides England, also France and Germany: Revue Celtique, Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie, Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Litteratur, Romania, etc. Here was proof, indeed, that the Matter of Britain was an international possession. The stream of Arthurian works has been uninterrupted from about the middle of the last century: the appearance even yet, at varying intervals, of works treating of Arthur and related subjects, proves that something more always remains to be said, nor has the last word been said. The intrinsic value and interest of the subject itself, the immortal nature of the central theme of the story -- these of necessity create the writers and their books.

An examination of the findings of the following pages will bear out the fact that Arthurian romance is no mere isolated theme in the literature of England: it is one of the richest sources of inspiration in the literature of all Western European nations. More, it leads back to the very well-spring of civilized consciousness, for it transports one to that dim region and period of mythology when the Celtic races were wrestling with their cosmogony, when hazy and formless pagan thought was taking shape in articulate religion and civilized culture.

What a wealth of mythical lore does not remain to await contemplation and exposition! Any one aspect of the great vista which the Arthurian legend unfolds would provide matter for a life-time of study and research, compared to which this summary survey is a mere dilettante trifle. Yet the work has attempted the seemingly impossible, namely to provide a Vulgate or Variorum Arthuriana -- a "popular" recension of as much of the whole subject as could be disciplined, with due proportion, into the compass of a dissertation of this nature.

The way in which this task has been attempted is as follows :-

Chapter I collates all the evidence bearing on the existence, once, of a historical person, Arthur.

Chapter II examines the mythological Arthur reflected in the earliest British prose tales and other Welsh writings.

Chapter III is a short study of the nature

of Celtic heathen religion, in order to ascertain Arthur's place in the early divine British dynasties, and an explanation is advanced to account for the fusion of the two figures, the historical and the mythological, into the one legendary hero of romance.

Chapter IV. A pause is made in order to sketch the historical background against which the romance of chivalry developed, and which romance, in its turn, to a certain extent reflects. We glance rapidly at Feudalism, Chivalry and the social conditions that gave birth to the convention of Courtly Love.

Chapter V examines the Amour Courtois, the courtly love of romance, a little more closely, in an attempt to define clearly its origin, nature and influence on contemporary literature.

Chapter VI resumes the development of the Arthurian legend as seen in the framework of pure romance: the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth and its influence.

Chapter VII traces the growth of the legend from the work of Chrétien de Troyes through the period of the great prose compilations down to the start of the decline of Arthurian romance.

Chapter VIII examines the "five branches" of the prose romances more fully, and notes how all the elements of the legend, with extraneous themes, became fused into one tale.

Chapter IX shortly considers the value of Malory's book - a treatise on chivalry.

In Chapter X the post-Malorean English poetry based on the Arthurian themes, sixteenth to twentieth centuries, is briefly historically and critically examined, and in

Chapter XI, discussed in rather greater detail, the Arthurian poems of Matthew Arnold, William Morris, Lord Tennyson and Algernon Charles Swinburne.

Chapter XII sums up the findings of this study: the essentially Celtic origins of the legend and most of its accretions; Arthur's real nature; a glance at the nature and future possibilities of the legend as a theme in literature.

It is hoped that this study may be found to contain some contribution, however trifling, to the fund of knowledge that surrounds the subject of Arthur and his Knights. Had I found such a work as this at the start of my studies it would have made this particular piece of work superfluous. It is, thus, my attempt to answer some of the questions which presented themselves to me when I set out to find out what I could about this intensely interesting and important subject.

In the course of my researches I discovered that one full, complete book, to supply the answers to all my questions, did not exist. And this "discovery" was not due to lack of search, nor to ignorance: J.D. Bruce's full Bibliography (with later additions and supplementation) did not list one either. When I did succeed in tracing, towards the end of my studies, the two or three works that provide one or the other

of the following:-

- (a) a chronological survey of the historical facts concerning Arthur's origins;
- (b) a clear and consecutive account of the development of Arthurian romance;
- (c) a discussion, and criticism, of modern Arthurian poetry;

I saw to my satisfaction that

- (a) they had not yet provided everything I needed (and so made my own work unnecessary);
- (b) they bore out most of my own conclusions, to which I had come independently by slow and painful labour, when I lacked such works to guide me through the immense profusion of Arthurian romance and criticism;
- (c) there remained something more for me to say, especially on the question of Arthur's mythic origins, which had not yet been so pertinently noted by other earlier writers.

An immense amount of research -- let me say it at once -- has been done during the past seventy-five years or so, in the field of Arthurian romance, as the extensive bibliography of Bruce referred to above attests. So much, indeed, is it that one would almost think not very much remained for anyone else to discover, edit, discuss or reason out. Yet the sum of all this enquiry and research -- as far as I could find -- comes to the following :-

"That Arthur must have flourished about the beginning of the sixth century in England; he probably was a British war captain who may or may not have been known as Arthur, and he perhaps helped to fight against

the Saxons; he has little claim to be considered a Celtic divinity, and the extent to which Arthurian romance is Celtic or Norman-French in origin has not yet been satisfactorily determined".

I was not content with this vague estimate of Britain's greatest legendary hero. His identity, I felt, could be more nearly and satisfactorily determined, and on that basis I pushed on my research, to the end which will be set out in the following pages. It will, I hope, be found provocative and suggestive; not devoid of all interest and merit; and in the last instance, of some value as indicating lines of thought that may be fruitfully followed up by a more penetrating study.

It is the main thesis of this dissertation

(a) that the Arthurian legend had its origin in a primitive and simple order of society, such as that of the pre-Christian Brythonic Celts, rather than the sophisticated society of the Norman-French court;

(b) that the origin of Arthur's person is primarily mythical and partly historical, but that he was not necessarily the dux bellorum of the anti-Saxon wars of the sixth century;

(c) that the Norman-French romancers, in trying to idealize Arthur's story, although they created a vast heroic cycle, the Matter of Britain, yet were led woefully astray and shifted the interest from its real point of focus, and so failed to realize and perpetuate its great literary and dramatic qualities; and as a corollary later poets, too, could not use the old matter to its fullest advantage.

This is the reason why the Matter of Britain did not survive the Middle Ages and provide the source of inspiration which it might have done, and should have done, to the greatest writers in modern English literature. This is why such a great heritage has been lost, and has the heroic matter of a heroic age been relegated to the sphere of idle tales for children.

These are my conclusions, that I shall set out in the following pages. The amateur has rushed in where experts have trodden with caution. Yet it is a singular gratification for the writer to have traversed, awkwardly, it may be, but reverently, the same ground as have the select and distinguished forerunners in the Arthurian field. Their admirable works have been the beacons which have marked out the road and made the journey pleasant and even possible. To the memory of those who by their enlightened labours have made the way of all later researchers less hard, this essay must necessarily serve as a piece of grateful homage, as well as a memorial to the immortal Arthur of Britain.

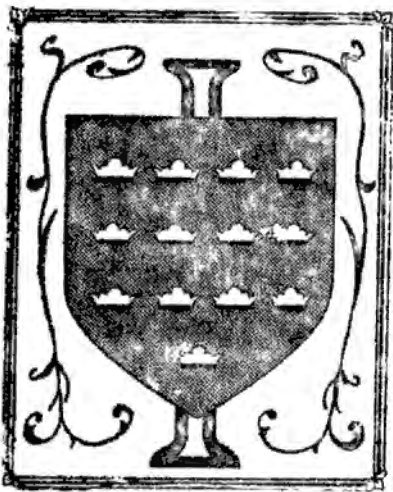
Incipit li commencement de lestoire del Roi Artus

CHAPTER I : The Historical Arthur.

"Bet y march, bet y guythur
bet y gugaun cletyfrut
anoeth bid bet y arthur - - -

A grave for March, a grave for Gwythur,
A grave for Gwgaun of the Ruddy Sword,
Not wise the thought - a grave for Arthur."

"The Song of the Graves", from
The Black Book of Caernarthen.



In his original preface to Malory's Morte D'Arthur Caxton gives first place among the nine most worthy kings that ever were to the "chief of the three best Christian and worthy", namely, King Arthur. And, after lamenting that so little

that is trustworthy has been written in England about Arthur ("... many noble volumes be made of him and his noble knights ... beyond the sea ..."), and that many even deny that he ever lived, he cites various circumstantial proofs that Arthur had lived and was indeed the great man tradition made him out to be. For example, his sepulture may be seen in the monastery of Glastonbury; the print of his seal "red wax closed in beryl" in the Abbey of Westminster; in the castle of Dover Gawain's skull; at Winchester the Round Table; so that "... all these things considered, there can no man reasonably gainsay but there was a king of this land named Arthur."⁽¹⁾

(1) Sir Thomas Malory: Le Morte D'Arthur; London, J.M. Dent & Sons. (Everyman Edition), 1928, Preface, p. 2.

Yet it is a fact that this most well-known and well-beloved of all the traditional and historical kings of Britain remains a vague and shadowy figure, concerning whose career there are few historical facts, and these few scraps are scanty and indeterminate. The three lines from the old Welsh poem quoted above sum up the uncertainty that surrounds the figure of Arthur.

"To-day, as of old, Arthur remains but a shadowy apparition, clothed in the mists of legend and stalking athwart the path of history to distract and mystify the sober chronicler".⁽¹⁾ He has "neither beginning of days nor end of life", and only romantic story-tellers such as Geoffrey of Monmouth venture to be positive in their details.

Of the three great 'matters', i.e. the "matter of Britain, the matter of France and the matter of Rome, the great"⁽²⁾ the first-named is the vaguest and most confused, and has produced the greatest mass of literature -- prose and verse romances, critical studies of origins, "scholarly quests along perilous paths of mythology and folk-lore ... ponderous enough to appal the most omnivorous reader".⁽³⁾

This legendary king of Britain has inspired the poets, painters and musicians of Europe to produce

(1) W. Lewis Jones: King Arthur in History and Legend. C.U.P., 1911, p. 2.

(2) Jean Bodel (twelfth century):- Chanson de Saisnes.
"Ne sont que iii matieres à nul home entendant.
De France et de Bretaigne et de Rome la grant"

(3) Jones, op. cit., p. 3.

works which count amongst the greatest cultural treasures of their respective nations. English, Dutch, German, French, Spanish and Italian cultures have been enriched by this romantic figure, whose existence - if ever he existed at all - is shadowy and uncertain to the extreme, and the pertinent facts concerning whom are as scanty as the influence which his legendary career has exerted is great.

What, then, are the grounds for a belief in the existence of one who has had such a profound influence on the culture of a whole continent?

No contemporary documents recording the life and deeds of Arthur exist; yet there is preserved a certain body of recorded facts which, meagre as they are, attest the existence of a great war-leader Arthur, between the first coming of the Saxons in 449 A.D., and the middle of the sixth century. These earliest notices are to be found in the Latin writings of scribes and chroniclers, tending to prove that there had once been a historical personage in England around whom a great body of tradition and legendary matter had grown up by the time accounts of him were first written down. Nothing in these records warrants the belief that he was ever 'king' of any part of Britain: his renown rested entirely or mainly on his warlike prowess.

The first chronicler who mentions Arthur is Nennius (Nynniaw, a Welsh clerk who lived in the early part of the ninth century). In the Historia Brittonum which he wrote (or possibly only revised),⁽¹⁾ he lists

(1) Sir Paul Harvey: The Oxford Companion to English Literature, O.U.P., 1944, p. 548, and other authorities.

the twelve battles of Arthur, the chieftain or general -- 'dux bellorum' -- who led the Britons against the Saxons, after Hengist's death, in the fifth or sixth century. The famous, often-quoted passage is worth reproducing here in part :-

"In illo tempore Saxones invalescebant in multitudine et crescebant in Britannia Tunc Arthur pugnabat contra illos in illis diebus cum regibus Brittonum, sed ipse dux erat bellorum Octavum fuit bellum in castello Guinnion, in quo Arthur portavit imaginem Sanctae Mariae perpetuae virginis super humeros suos, et pagani versi sunt in fugam in illo die, et caedes magna fuit super illos per virtutem Domini nostri Jesu Christi, et per virtutem Sanctae Mariae virginis genetricis ejus. Nonum bellum gestum est in Urbe Legionis Duodecimum fuit bellum in monte Badonis, in quo corruerunt in uno die nongenti sexaginta viri de uno impetu Arthur; et nemo prostravit eos nisi (1) ipse solus, et in omnibus bellis victor exstitit".

7 { This extract is of importance because in it we have for the first time (a) the reference (supported by other chroniclers and consistently noted as of extreme importance) that Arthur bore a sacred image on his shoulder (or probably on his shield), which was to make of him a Christian champion; (b) a reference to that Caerleon (City of the Legion) later to become famous as Caerleon-upon-Usk where Arthur held court; and (c) a reference to Arthur's superhuman prowess as a fighter.

The use of the title of 'dux bellorum' with reference to Arthur would seem to indicate that he held the post of commander-in-chief, corresponding to the office of 'Comes Britanniae' of the time of the Roman rule. Without himself necessarily being a king, he

(1) John Rhys: Preface to Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur, Everyman edition, London, 1928, Vol. I, p. xi.

would in his military capacity be superior to all kings, and in supreme command of all forces. In default of direct proof that this was so it is perhaps permissible to assume that after the withdrawal of the Roman forces from Britain the Britons would still retain the military organisation and offices to which they had been trained and accustomed during the occupation. (1)

References to Arthur are also found in the Mirabilia associated with the Historia Brittonum and dating from the same time. Two of these Marvels of Britain are :

(a) the wonderful stone in Buelth (Builth in South Wales), with the imprint of the foot of Cabal, the hound of the warrior Arthur ('Arthuri militis'); this track was made while Arthur was hunting the boar Troit, and the marvel was that this particular stone, when

-
- (1) The other two military commanders in Britain in Roman times were the Dux Britanniarum, who defended North Britain, especially the Wall, and the Comes Littoria Saxonici, who defended the south-eastern coast of the island. The Comes Britanniae was given general supervision over these two and supreme charge of the defences of the entire country. The successors of the first two officers were called in Welsh gwledigs or princes. Arthur was called 'emperor' and not gwledig. The Welsh borrowed the Latin title imperator 'emperor', and made it into amherawdyr "so that is is not impossible, that when the Roman emperor ceased to have anything more to say in this country, the title was given to the highest officer in the island, namely the Comes Britanniae, and that in the words Yr Amherawdyr Arthur 'The emperor Arthur', we have a remnant of our insular history".

John Rhŷs: Studies in the Arthurian Legend, O.U.P., 1891, p. 7.

- (2) or Troynt. This reference to Arthur's hound forms a connecting link between the earliest Latin documents in which Arthur's name is found, and one of the very oldest of the Welsh Arthurian tales. In the story of Kulhwch and Olwen from the Mabinogion the hound 'Cavall' also takes part in Arthur's hunting of Twrch Trwyth ('porcus Troit') ... see Chapter II.

removed from the cairn raised by Arthur below it, after the space of a day and a night was always to be found back in its place on the top of the pile the next day;

(b) the tomb in Ercing (Archenfield) of Anir (Amir, Amyr, Amhyr, Amhar) the son of Arthur,⁽¹⁾ slain and buried by Arthur himself. This marvellous grave, when men came to measure it at various times, was never found to measure the same length twice. "Et ego solus probavi"!, says the veracious chronicler.

The next important loci are two entries in the tenth century MS. Annales Cambriae. (a) Under the year 516 is noted the Battle of Badon (cf. Nennius supra): "..... In quo Arthur portavit crucem domini Ihesu Christi tribus diebus et tribus noctibus in humeros suos et Brittones victores fuerunt"; and (b) under the year 537: "Gueith Camlann (i.e. the battle of Camlan) in qua Arthur et Medraut (Medrod, Modred) corruerunt".

(1) There are a few references to a son of Arthur in early Welsh poems. Amhar is the name given to him in the story of Gereint filius Erbin from the Red Book of Hergest. He is called Llacheu in the Black Book of Caermarthen and Lohot in the French Perlesvaus (The High History of the Holy Grail). In the Welsh Saint Greal it is Kei who slays Llacheu. Gwydre is also named as a son of Arthur.

The Arthur of romance known to modern readers is childless, at least by Guenever (but Rys thinks Llacheu was her son by Arthur: Arthurian Studies p. 59). Tennyson (Idylls of the King) represents Arthur and Guenever as childless; the franker and less prudish Malory recounts how Arthur begot Borre on Lionors, daughter of Sanam, and a little later (after having met and fallen in love with Guenever, but not wed her yet) begetting Modred on his sister Margawse, wife of King Lot of Orkney, being in ignorance of her identity at the time of the illicit union. (Morte D'Arthur, Bk. I, Ch. 19).

Such are the meagre pre-Norman records.

These earliest Arthurian records in Latin indicate the gradual growth, through a period of about three centuries, of a legend around the personality of a real British warrior of the sixth century, and a tradition grew up which by the eleventh century had attained a form and proportion which was to impress Norman chroniclers and romancers deeply, and inspire them to amplify and extend the material of the legend; a legend so well established that they had no hesitation in accepting its truth.

Thus William of Malmesbury (floruit circa 1125) in his Gesta Regum Angliae expresses his regret at the extravagance of the tales gathered round such a historical person as Arthur, the ally of the last great Roman general, Ambrosius Aurelianus, in quelling the 'presumptuous barbarians':

"This is the Arthur of whom the idle tales of the Britons rave even unto this day; a man worthy to be celebrated not in the foolish dreams of deceitful fables, but in truthful histories. For he long sustained the declining fortunes of his native land, and roused the uncrushed spirit of the people to war".(1) "Finally, at the siege of Mount Badon, relying upon the image of the mother of the Lord which he had sewn upon his armour, he made head single-handed against nine hundred of the enemy and routed them with incredible slaughter".(2)

He also described the discovery, during the reign of William the Conqueror, of the tomb of Walwen (Gawain) "..... but the tomb of Arthur is nowhere beheld, whence ancient ditties fable that he is yet to come".(3)

(1) Jones, op. cit., p. 32.

(2) E.K. Chambers, Arthur of Britain: London, Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd., 1927, p. 17.

(3) Idem, p. 17.

This last statement is the first reference to the persistent Celtic belief in the second coming of Arthur, 'l'esperance de Bretaigne'. This most remarkable aspect of Arthur's career was to capture the imagination of all later romancers, just as, no doubt, it was already the firm belief of his countrymen: that he was 'Rex quondam Rexque futurus', as Malory was to write later.⁽¹⁾ This belief was by the eleventh century widespread throughout Wales, Cornwall and also Brittany, the adopted home of some of the Celtic stock. In this connection we have the important testimony of Alain de Lisle (Prophetia Anglicana, second half of the twelfth century):

13. { "That it was most true is proved to-day by the varying opinions of men on Arthur's death and life. If you do not believe me, go to the realm of Armorica, which is lesser Britain, and preach about the market-places and villages that Arthur the Briton is dead as other men are dead, and the facts themselves will show you how true is Merlin's prophecy, which says that the ending of Arthur will be doubtful. Hardly will you escape unscathed, without being whelmed by the curses or crushed by the stones of your hearers".⁽²⁾

Henry, archdeacon of Huntingdon (Historia Anglorum, c. 1139) is another chronicler, not so trustworthy as William of Malmesbury, who borrows substantially from the Nennian account. He is given a place in this review of the Arthurian records, not because of his Historia, however, but for two other reasons. For one thing, he utters the first note of doubt when he says that, even in his own time, all the places of the twelve famous battles are unknown. But, more

(1) Morte D'Arthur: Bk. XXI, Ch. 7.

(2) Chambers, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

important, in a letter to a friend, Warinus, he tells how he stopped at the abbey of Bec in Normandy, while on a journey to Rome in the year 1139, and was there shown a "great book written by Geoffrey Arthur". From this 'great book' Henry writes an abstract for the benefit of Warinus, of the passing of Arthur, which is a much more highly coloured and vivid account of the final battle between Arthur and Modred than is to be found in the original Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey himself.

This Geoffrey Arthur is the outstanding figure in the creation of the romantic figure of King Arthur, for his work is not so much a serious history, as it purports to be, but is rather of the nature of an imaginative romance, and the inspiration for all Anglo-Norman and later romances. His work will be treated at length, for its importance in the development of Arthurian Romance, in the relevant chapter (VI), but he is mentioned here for the sake of chronology, and because he is directly responsible for the discordant note of disbelief which he arouses in the next two writers to be noted.

William of Newburgh, composing his Historia Rerum Anglicarum about 1197, indulges in some choice invective against Geoffrey, whose severest critic he is. It is manifest, he says, that everything which this person wrote about Arthur and his successors, was made up partly by himself, and partly by others, "whether from an inordinate love of lying or for the sake of pleasing the Britons". Geoffrey, he says, clothes his lies in Latin speech to give them the

colour of an honest history, and --- "by his saucy and shameless lies he has made the little finger of his Arthur bigger than the back of Alexander the Great". More audacious still, he has translated and expanded the deceitful divinations of a certain Merlin and sent them abroad as authentic prophecies.⁽¹⁾

William's indignant criticisms find a humorous parallel in the references of the Welsh ecclesiastic, Gerald de Barri - better known as Giraldus Cambrensis. In his Itinerarium Kambriae of 1191 he tells of one Meiliarius of Caerleon who had dealings with evil spirits. When the devils oppressed him too much they could be exorcized by the Gospel of St. John's being placed upon his bosom, when, like birds, the spirits vanished. But when the gospel was removed and Geoffrey Arthur's History was substituted, the devils all came back quicker than before and remained longer on his body and on the book.

Yet this same Giraldus would also seem to have subscribed to those very untruths of Geoffrey, for in 1196 he gave, in his De Principis Instructione, an 'eye-witness account' of the final discovery, at Glastonbury, of the tomb of Arthur and Guenever, during the reign of Henry II. He had himself read the inscription on a leaden cross found in the hollowed oak coffin, which read: "Hic jacet sepultus inclitus rex Arthurus cum Wenneveria uxore sua secunda in insula Avallonia". At the exhumation a golden lock of woman's hair had been found but fell to dust. Giraldus was shown a

(1) Jones, pp. 5 and 69; Chambers, pp. 106 and 107.

thigh-bone and a skull by the abbot, and these relics were of gigantic size. Twenty-five years later he wrote a similar account, but was confused as to the date of discovery.

So much for the records - of which as full a count as possible has been given - that would seem to provide evidence of the existence of Arthur. We must also note here the contrary evidence.

What of the historians that must have been contemporary with Arthur? What evidence do they supply? And here it must be admitted, there is an ominous and very disappointing silence; yet the silence of the writers concerned can be satisfactorily explained.

For the twelve battles he enumerates Nennius is the sole authority, with one exception. That exception is the one battle, so important, too, to other chroniclers, of Mount Badon, the constant reference to which would go to prove that there had been at least this one historical fight, so that it has accordingly been accepted as one of the historic battles of Britain. It is possible to assign to it an approximately certain date. The record of its date in the Annales Cambriae is less dependable, however, than that given by Gildas, the celebrated sixth century scribe, who expressly refers to the battle as having been fought in the year of his birth. In his work De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae, c. 544, he gives a short sketch of the history of Britain down to his own time. Of the Saxon invasions he states that they were first checked under the leadership of Ambrosius Aurelianus (cf. William of Malmesbury, p. 20 supra) the last of

the Romans. He fixes the year of the battle of Mount Badon as about 504, and he does not mention Arthur at all.

The particular nature of his work must, however, be remembered. It is not so much a history as a homily directed against the Britons and their leaders, especially one Maglocunus (Maelgwn Gwynedd).⁽¹⁾ Gildas was a 'Romanist', and in his vehement denunciation of the wickedness of the Britons he did not have much sympathy with their independence and nationed striving, which were to him but savagery and selfish native pride. He would not, therefore, look upon it as his task to extol national heroes of the Britons, and so his total ignoring of Arthur or any other Celtic leader is not disturbing. It did not suit his purpose to celebrate the name and deeds of any British prince, and apart from Ambrosius - by birth, training and sympathies a thorough Roman - he does not mention any British chieftain except as a target for his invective.⁽²⁾

More significant, and not so easily explained away, is the silence of Bede, writing in the first half of the eighth century. Even Geoffrey of Monmouth, in the dedicatory epistle that prefaces his History, expresses surprise that Bede, in his Ecclesiastical History, has nothing to say about

(1) Among other things Gildas accuses Maelgwn of having slain his uncle (unnamed). Could this uncle have been none other than Arthur? Professor Rhys advances the opinion (Arthurian Legend, p. 47) - cf. Modred and Arthur.

(2) Jones, op. cit., pp. 22 and 23.

Arthur. If Arthur was indeed widely known as a Christian champion it is strange that an ecclesiastical writer such as Bede should pass him over in silence. Bede does mention Ambrosius as a successful leader against the Saxons, and knows of the "siege of Baddesdown-hill", but this knowledge he obtained from Gildas. In his record of the Saxon invasions he reproduces Gildas, often verbally, and it may be as Jones suggests,⁽¹⁾ that he drew his material solely from Saxon traditions and from Latin records, and that he was either ignorant of, or distrusted, the Celtic traditions concerning Arthur.

There is also no mention whatever of Arthur or the battle of Badon Hill in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. But from the nature of things the compilers of the Chronicle were not at all concerned with British leaders and British victories. The only two names of British kings that are to be found in the entries for the fifth and sixth centuries are those of Wurtgern (Vortigern) and a certain Natanleod, and throughout the references to the Britons can only be described as derogatory.

This, then, is the evidence for and against the tradition of Arthur to be found in the Latin chronicles of six centuries. What of the native British records? Apart from the oral tradition that must have supplied the sources for much of the chronicles, there is also a large body of Welsh poetry, and here again we meet Arthur. But most of the poems were

(1) Op. cit., p. 29.

committed to writing very late only, and have come down to us in eleventh and twelfth century MSS., so that, as trustworthy records they have even less value than such early writings and uncritical histories as those of Nennius and his followers. They add, however, to the cumulative effect of the positive evidence, but the nature of the Welsh poetic references and the spirit that permeates them are primitive and savage to an extreme degree, and they give a picture of a purely mythological Arthur, which will be examined in the following chapter.

On reviewing this accumulation of written records the question arises: what, if any, conclusive facts can be extracted from them?

I think there can be little doubt that the evidence seems to point to the existence, somewhere about the beginning of the sixth century, of a great Celtic chieftain of the name of Arthur, who, after the departure of the Romans and the coming of the Saxons, by virtue of his ability and warlike prowess became a great and successful leader. As the champion of Britain, and in conjunction with the other known and recorded leaders, he withstood the inroads of the Saxon invaders - those embarrassing allies who had first been invited by Vortigern to Britain to give their assistance against the savage bandit tribes from the North and the West, and had returned again and again to do some harrying and plundering on their own account, and finally stayed for good.

There are enough written records in Latin and in Welsh to prove the existence of such a leader

called Arthur, and there must have been - soon after his death - a sufficiently great body of oral tradition gathered round his memory to account for the persistence of the legend of his deeds and greatness, which would in time convince the Norman chroniclers and romancers of his historicity. This inspired them and fired their imaginations so that they took the material so ready to hand, and developed and shaped it to produce the great edifice of Romantic legend which represents the final result of their work, and which is such a rich literary heritage of the English nation.

This Arthur, however, could not ever have been a king or even a prince. He was exalted to royalty, with a great court of peerless warrior knights, only by the imagination of the later romancers. The many references in the early Welsh poetry must have had a basis of fact; and provide the main grounds for the theory that there was once such a person of great military importance. He is called in the Welsh poems 'ameraudur' or 'amherawdyr', from the Latin 'imperator', having probably the original meaning of 'commander' rather than 'emperor' and fulfilling, as has been stated before, the post of 'dux bellorum', or 'Comes Britanniae', a historical position.

It is noteworthy, as Rhys points out⁽¹⁾, that he is never referred to as 'gwledig' - ruler or prince - and least of all 'king'. In the story of Kulhwch and Olwen⁽²⁾ the hero salutes Arthur as

(1) The Arthurian Legend, p. 7, and Preface to Everyman Morte D'Arthur, p. xvii.

(2) Above, footnote (2), p. 18, and see below Chapter II.

'Penteyrned yr ynys honn' -- 'Head of the princes of this island'. Ambrosius, with whom Arthur is supposed to have fought, is termed 'gwledig'.

This greatness of Arthur, especially as a powerful and successful leader against the hated invaders, accounts for the 'hope of Britain'. Years after Arthur had fallen in battle and the people had come to realize the hard truth that the great hero was no more, the legend originated that he was not dead but would return again to free his country. Such a hope would be a natural longing, and a good example of wishful anticipation on the part of his people in a time of crisis, as they saw no end to the series of invasions to which their homeland was a prey. Thus they would earnestly hope for a day when the great hero of the dim past, who had now become legendary, would return in all his terrible power (-- had he not once personally slain 960 Saxons in one onslaught?) to drive out the latest of the invaders from across the sea.

So there was nothing strange in the belief that he lingered on in the 'magic isle of Avilion', till he should hear the summons for his return. In various localities of England, Scotland and Wales the legend survived that Arthur was sleeping with his followers beneath a hollow hill or in a cave. This legend of the sleepers is not confined to England: Frederick Barbarossa and Charlemagne, too, still sleep and await the day of awakening.⁽¹⁾ (See next page for footnote).

In time, no doubt, as with legendary heroes of all countries, folk tradition gathered around the one figure of the popular hero the exploits of a number of other and lesser heroes, although there is no indication why the traditions came to be gathered around the name of an otherwise obscure chieftain of the name of Arthur.

His apotheosis into the great king, the central figure of the great body of romantic tales of the Middle Ages, came only after, with the elaboration of the native British tradition by the French romancers, who seized upon the original material of the 'matter of Britain', and built that edifice of sophisticated and highly cultured Romance upon it, each tale-teller in turn taking the work of his predecessors as the nucleus for his own expanded composition. (2)

The original matter is Celtic -- of that there can be no doubt, as will be shown more fully in the next two chapters. At some time of which we cannot be certain, (from the fourth to the sixth century), some of the Welsh migrated to the mainland of Europe

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- (1) This sleeping of heroes (or period of suspension in some other world) is a feature of the 'survival myth' to be found in most mythological systems. When the tradition of Arthur's return came to be added to the rest of the legendary stock there was the Christianized precedent of the 'Seven Sleepers of Ephesus' to suggest it. Ogier the Dane, and Siegfried also still sleep thus. This belief represents the natural reluctance to admit that a great hero has passed once and for all to that "undiscovered country from whose bourn ..."
- (2) J.D. Bruce, Arthurian Romance, Vol I, Preface, p. iv, shows how the materials of Romance were common property in the Middle Ages, "... when the sense of literary property was virtually non-existent".

from their mountain fastnesses in South-western England,⁽¹⁾ whither they had been driven by the inroads of the Picts and Scots, and the invasions of the Danes, the Saxons and the Angles, and landed on the coast of France at a spot immediately south of Southern England. Here they established themselves in what was called after them 'lesser Britain' (later known as 'Armorica'), and they became the Breton people. The story of the settlement in Brittany under Conan Meriadoc (Kynan Meriadawr) is told in The Dream of Macsen Wledig in the Mabinogion. Macsen himself was the Roman ^gGeneral Maximus who commanded England in the fourth century, and who mutinied and in 383 A.D. crossed into Gaul with an army and went thence into Rome where he made pretensions to the emperorship of Rome itself.

In his train Kynan fought and was rewarded with the land where arose Brittany. With them the emigrants would have taken their traditions concerning Arthur, and many other folk-tales of a much more primitive nature, in which the central characters were still the half-gods, half-men of Celtic mythology, and whose exploits also partake of the superhuman tasks accomplished in a world that was not yet that of ordinary men.

In Brittany the primitive tales would have developed and changed naturally but the basic elements remained to supply, many centuries later, the source for the Breton 'lais' of Marie of France. And then, in good time, these old tales returned to their native soil via France, and would contribute elements that

(1) Under their leader Conan Meriadoc - Chambers, Arthur of Britain, p. 93.

were in turn taken up by the native Welsh stories, which so lost some of their purity and became contaminated by foreign spirit and sentiment. Examples of such stories that are Celtic in origin, but travelled back to Wales via Normandy, acquiring a polite veneer of Norman-French sentiment in the process, are The Lady of the Fountain, Peredur and Geraint of Lady Charlotte Guest's famous translation of Mabinogion. (See Ch. II infra).

To sum up: there was an Arthur, and he probably did fight successfully against the Saxons. What his mythological Celtic origins were, and what romance made of his memory will be examined and set out in the ensuing pages.

CHAPTER II : The Mythological Arthur.

"It might, I think, be shown that the Cymric nation has strong claims to be considered the cradle of European Romance".

Lady Charlotte Guest: Introduction to the Mabinogion.



EARLY Welsh literature also tells of Arthur, in verse and prose. The portrait that is there given of him is also that of the great war leader, and it conforms to the picture gained of him from the chronicles; but he is also more than that. He acquires a vaster stature in these early Welsh tales that seem to recount exploits of a remote antiquity, and in them we are transported to mythical regions, in which Arthur's followers are giants of the Celtic pantheon.

Indeed, the perfunctory and often obscure references in these early poems reveal the vista of a mythological cosmos that stretches back to the very beginning of Celtic religious thought, the prehistoric Celtic heathendom, and we learn to know Arthur as a primitive culture god, conferring on the men of Earth the blessings of divine gifts: a very different being, thus, from the polished and urbane ruler of a Norman court portrayed in the mediaeval romances.

The references to Arthur in these poems are also very suggestive but give the same vague and incomplete picture of him. They are tantalizingly brief, and provide the source for infinite speculation as to his real nature, rather than any solid evidence of his place in Celtic history.

He is referred to, more or less fully, in three separate kinds of compositions: these are a few poems, the prose tales, and the Triads.

The poems which are attributed to the oldest Welsh Bards have come to us in MSS. dating from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. They are contained in the "Four Ancient Books of Wales"⁽¹⁾ -- namely, The Black Book of Caermarthen, The Red Book of Hergest, The Book of Aneirin (or Anuerin) and The Book of Taliessin.

Although many of the poems contained in these books are probably not much older than the MSS. in which they are found, some of them would seem to refer to historical events and personages of the sixth and seventh centuries, and some contain mythological matter derived from a much remoter age.

In three of these poems we learn something more of Arthur. Two of them are in The Black Book of Caermarthen. The first is Gereint filius Erbin,⁽²⁾ which bears out what has been deduced above concerning Arthur's historical position. In a battle described as being fought at Llongborth, Gereint is the poet's hero, but Arthur is introduced as the latter's emperor and lord :-

En llogporth y gueleise y arthur
guir deur kymynint a dur
ameraudur llywiaudir llawur.

(1) Edited and translated by Dr. W.F. Skene, 1868.

(2) This is also the title of a prose tale, Gereint the son of Erbin, from The Red Book of Hergest; it is the Welsh parallel to the Erec et Enide of Chrétien de Troyes.

En llogporth y llas y gereint
guir deur o odir diwneint
a chin rillethid ve llatysseint.

"At Llongborth saw I of Arthur's
Brave men hewing with steel,
(Men of the) emperor, director of toil.

At Llongborth there fell of Gereint's
Brave men from the border of Devon, (1)
And ere they were slain they slew".

In these lines the position of Arthur seems to be quite clearly indicated: the men fighting on his side are Gereint's men from Devon; that is, Arthur is Gereint's superior - he fills, in fact, the rôle assigned to him in the Historia Brittonum: that of 'Dux Bellorum'.

In this association of Gereint (Geraint) with Arthur we meet for the first time with one of the famous knights of the (later) goodly company of the Round Table.

In the second poem to be noted we meet two other important members of the fellowship: Kei - "Kay the Seneschal", of the Idylls of the King, and Bedwyr, the Bedevere of Malory's Morte D'Arthur. This poem consists of a dialogue between Arthur and one Glewlwyd Gavaelvawr (Glewlwyd of the Mighty Grasp), who appears in the Welsh stories as one of Arthur's chief 'porters'. The latter here is in no hurry to open the gate of the castle to which Arthur seeks admission, until he has satisfied himself as to the number and credentials of Arthur's followers. As a result we get a wonderful catalogue of warriors, who bear strange names reaching back to the remotest region of primitive Welsh myth.

(1) This and other quotations are from the Introduction to the "Everyman" edition of Malory's Morte D'Arthur, by John Rhys. The translations are his.

This strange poem has many interesting references, but it is unfortunately too long to be quoted here in full. It mentions contests with monsters, hags and witches, and we meet many great heroes.

Among them are "Mabon, son of Modron, Uther Pendragon's man", and "Manawyddan, son of Llŷr, profound in counsel", who "brought home a pierced buckler from Tryvrwyd". (1)

The two doughtiest of the champions Arthur has around him are Bedwyr and Kei. When Bedwyr fought at Tryvrwyd the champions fell before him by the hundred; "nine hundred to watch, six hundred to attack was his onslaught worth".

Even a greater warrior was "the worthy Kei":-

Oet guaget bragad	It were vain to boast
vrth kei ig kad.	Against Kei in battle.
Oet cletyw ighad	His sword in battle was
oe lav diguistlad	Not to be pledged from his hand.
.....	
rac ricu emreis	Before the kings of Emrys
gueleise kei ar uris	Have I seen Kei in haste.
Preitev gorthowis	Leader of the Harryings,
oet gur hir in ewnis	Long would he be in his wrath;
Oet trum y dial.	Heavy was he in his vengeance;
Oet tost y cynial.	Terrible in his fighting.
Pan yuei o wual	When from a horn he drank
yuei urth pedual	He drank as much as four men;
ygkad pan delhei	When he came into battle
vrth cant id lathei	He slew as would a hundred.
Ny bei duv ae digonhei	Unless it should be God's act
Oet diheit aghev kei.	Kei's death would be unachieved.
.....	
kei a guant nav guiton	Kei slew nine witches.
kei win aaeth von	Worthy Kei went to Mona
y dilein lleuon	To destroy lions.
y iscuïd oet mynud	His shield was small (2)
erbin cath paluc.	Against Palug's Cat.

It is interesting in the light of the above

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- (1) Tryvrwyd in the form Tribruit is one of the "twelve battles of Arthur" recorded by Nennius.
- (2) An example of the transference of exploits. In one French Mort Artu it was Arthur who fought the monstrous cat, and so met his death. Chambers, op. cit., p. 214; Bruce, op. cit., pp. 41 and 42.

to note the diminution which the figure of Kay underwent in the course of time. From being the mighty warrior of the Welsh poems he suffers continual detracting at the hands of later writers to appear finally in the pages of Malory and Tennyson as the surly, ill-tempered butler, who was anything but a great fighter. He is already discourteous to Kulhwch in the early Welsh story of that name.

The third poem about Arthur, the most important and most remarkable of the three, is found in The Book of Taliessin, under the title of Preiddeu Annwn, "The Harryings (or Spoils) of Hades". It is a most obscure poem referring to various expeditions of Arthur to the realms of twilight beyond the seas. Definite names are given to the places visited, but they cannot be identified⁽¹⁾, and all six the castles are representations of the Celtic Hades. On each of the six ventures, as the bard sings, ".... Three freights of Pridwen⁽²⁾ went we with Arthur; seven alone returned",--

"Tri lloneit prytwen yd aethem nu gan arthur
Namyn seith ny dyrreith".

Is it only a curious coincidence that in the tale of Branwen Daughter of Llyr only seven Britons escape from Ireland after the invasion of that island by Brân? His head is cut off and in some mysterious way feeds his men for seven years (cf. the Magic Cauldron - see below).

(1) For example, Caer Sidi, 'The Revolving Castle' and Caer Wydyr, 'The Glass Castle'. These two ideas were, according to authorities, general among the Celts in connection with the Otherworld. In one version of the enchantment of Merlin he was imprisoned in a strong glass fortress. The Celtic Elysium was also visualised as "an isle of glass". (Ynyswytryn - Isle de Voirre).

(2) Arthur's ship.

One of the quests achieved was the seizing of the magic cauldron of the King of Hades. Two men referred to in the Preiddeu Annwn are Pwyll and his son Pryderi. Now Pwyll appears again in the tale of Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed, (from the Mabinogion to be noted below) as the Head of Annwn (the Celtic Hades), and the owner of a magic cauldron in that region. He has been identified with King Pellès of Malory, owner of the castle where so many sacred and mystical relics were preserved, such as the Holy Grail, the 'Spear of the Dolorous Stroke' (with which Balin wounded King Pellam), and even the body of Joseph of Arimathea.⁽¹⁾

The last two poems referred to here have several features in common with what is probably one of the oldest prose tales in Welsh, the story of Kulhwch and Olwen, also from The Red Book of Hergest. That story also tells, among other things, of the rape of a cauldron⁽²⁾, not that of the King of Hades, but one belonging to Diwrnach the Goidel, who lived in Ireland. Arthur went in quest of it with a small retinue in his ship Pridwen, and returned with it "full of Irish money".

Again, the Preiddeu Annwn refers to the speckled ox, 'Yr Ych Brych', and the acquisition of a 'speckled ox' also figures as one of the tasks Kulhwch

(1) Morte D'Arthur, Everyman edition, London, 1928, Vol. 1, p. 61, or any edition, Bk. II, Chs. 15 and 16.

(2) Rhys, Arthurian Legend, advances the view that this magic cauldron (of inspiration, plenty and fertility) that figures so largely in Celtic myth, was the origin of the Grail legend. He is supported by other scholars, see below.

has to accomplish in order to obtain Olwen's hand.⁽¹⁾ Moreover, nearly all the heroes mentioned in the Black Book dialogue between Arthur and the porter, besides many others, appear also in Kulhwch and Olwen.

This story is one of the prose tales from the Llyfr Coch o Hergest, 'The Red Book of Hergest', a fourteenth century MS., consisting of verse and prose tales, which was the source for the famous Mabinogion⁽²⁾ of Lady Charlotte E. Guest. This work she published originally in 1849 in three volumes, comprising text, translation and notes, so making accessible to the general reading public the rare old tales that would otherwise have remained the study of scholars only. Her famous rendering has only recently been superseded by the translation of Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones in 1948.⁽³⁾

It is a truer and more exact rendering. (Lady Guest had originally intended her translation as a book for children, and she edited and censored the more indelicate phrases and expressions).

The collection contains twelve tales. Six of them are obviously very ancient, but they are non-Arthurian. They are quasi-mythological, but the

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- (1) For both incidents see Lady Guest's Mabinogion, Everyman edition, London, 1913, pp. 115 and 113.
- (2) Some definitions are necessary here, for the sake of clarity. 1. Mabinog: an apprentice bard. 2. Mabinógi: the things which formed the mabinog's literary training and stock-in-trade, i.e. his course of study, and the tales he was allowed by custom to recite for pay. 3. Mabinógion: plural form of Mabinógi (meaning stories). Strictly speaking the only four mabinogion in Lady Guest's collection are the first four tales, 'the four branches of the mabinogi'. (Authority: Rhys: Arthurian Legend).
- (3) My copy is the Everyman edition, Dent, London, 1949.

action of time and change has softened down the primitive mythological elements. The gods have ceased to be gods, but they have not become ordinary men. The substance is so much older than the form that it seems as if the original story-teller who first wrote down the oral tale did not quite know how to handle and analyse his obscure material. As Matthew Arnold says⁽¹⁾:

"The very first thing that strikes one, in reading the Mabinogion, is how evidently the mediaeval story-teller is pillaging an antiquity of which he does not fully possess the secret; he is like a peasant building his hut on the site of Halicarnassus or Ephesus; he builds but what he builds is full of materials of which he knows not the history, or knows by glimmering tradition merely; -- stones 'not of this building' but of an older architecture, greater, cunninger, more majestic".

With two of the tales, The Dream of Macsen Wledig, and Llud and Llevellys⁽²⁾ we are not concerned here. The first is a vague farrago of legend and pseudo-history, while the latter is an old-world echo of a primitive myth whose significance has been lost.

Another group of four tales is the following: Pwyll, Prince of Dyved, Branwen, the daughter of Llŷr, Manawyddan, the son of Llŷr, and Math, the son of Mathonwy.

These are all names famous in the Celtic pantheon, and in ^{the} four tales we get the clearest, most complete and most consistent account of the genealogy

(1) The Study of Celtic Literature: London, John Murray, 1929, p. 51.

(2) Llud, the British sky-god, becomes in the pages of Geoffrey of Monmouth the eponymous founder of London. (See p. 66 below).

and history of the early British gods.⁽¹⁾

Although Arthur is never named in any of the four tales, many of the protagonists in these semi-divine dramas are, in one connection or another, named among the followers of Arthur in later tales. And, later still, in the Anglo-French romances based on the native British traditions, they have become Gallicized knights of Arthur's mediaeval court, under names that clearly show their relationship to the Celtic originals. Thus Pwyll becomes Pelles; Peredur, Perceval; Drystan, Tristan or Tristram; and Gwalchmei, Gawain.⁽²⁾

A third group of the tales from the Mabinogion contains stories about, or including, Arthur. They are of two kinds: (a) those entirely indigenous which are much earlier than, and therefore unaffected by, French romances, namely, Kulhwch and Olwen, and Rhonabwy's Dream, and (b) the Normanized tales - The Lady of the Fountain (or Owein and Lunette), Peredur, the son of Evrawc, and Gereint, the son of Erbin. Judging from the 'matière' and the 'san' (the matter and treatment) of these tales, they are early Welsh legends that passed into the hands of the French trouvères (either in England after the Conquest, or earlier in Normandy via the Bretons), were given a dressing of chivalry,

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- (1) Geoffrey of Monmouth, 'pillaging' Celtic sources for his apocryphal history of the British Kings, made of the sea-god Llŷr a human king, 'Leir', and credited him with a daughter (Creudylad or Kreiddylat, actually the daughter of the sky-god Llud), and made of her 'Cordeilla'. And so through Geoffrey Celtic mythology provided Shakespeare with two of his most poignantly tragic figures.
- (2) See John Rhŷs: Studies in the Arthurian Legend, and J.C. Squire: Celtic Myth and Legend, and compare the Morte D'Arthur (Malory) throughout.

and passed back into Welsh in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Peredur is the earliest Grail story in English literature, and Gereint is the original of Tennyson's Enid and Geraint and The Marriage of Geraint.

The last tale of the collection, that of Taliessin, is from a late sixteenth century MS. and therefore not of the same value as the others. It merely mentions that its events took place when Arthur was king. In how far it is a version of an actual antique tale by the famous semi-historical Celtic bard Taliessin mentioned in the very earliest Welsh poetic fragments, can perhaps never be determined. The translation of Gwyn and Thomas Jones omits this tale.

For its intensely interesting revelations of early British mythological matter, and the light that it throws upon Arthur and the divine origin of some members of his entourage, the story of Kulhwch and Olwen must be noted a little more fully here.

"Almost every page of this tale", says Matthew Arnold⁽¹⁾, "points to the traditions and personages of the most remote antiquity and is instinct with the very breath of the primitive world".

The story deals with the series of superhuman tasks laid upon Kulhwch by the giant Yspaddaden Penkawr, which he must perform in order to win the hand of the giant's daughter Olwen; the consummation of Kulhwch's desire will entail the death of the giant.

Kulhwch knows that the tasks will be easy for

(1) The Study of Celtic Literature, p. 46.

he will enlist the aid of his 'uncle', the mighty chief-tain Arthur. He goes to Arthur's court for the ceremony of 'hair-cutting' which appears to have been an initiation rite, the Celtic equivalent of being dubbed knight⁽¹⁾, and by performing which Arthur becomes the godparent of the young hero.

At the gate of Arthur's palace he meets with the porter Glewlwyd of the Mighty Grasp, whom we met in the Black Book dialogue poem. When Kulhwch comes to ask his boon Arthur in the usual grandiose manner grants it - even before he has heard what it is - whatever it may be, ".... save only my ship⁽²⁾; and my mantle⁽³⁾; and Caledvwlch, my sword⁽⁴⁾; and Rhongomyant, my lance; and Wynebgwrthucher, my shield, and Carwenhau, my dagger; and Gwenhwyvar, my wife".

Kulhwch then names his boon, namely the request for aid to gain Olwen's hand, and he also asks help personally from all Arthur's train assembled there. Now follows a truly amazing list of great ones: six-and-a-half pages of the book⁽⁵⁾ are necessary to catalogue them all.

The attainments of some of the heroes are marvellous enough. So for example,

"Drem the son of Dremidydd (when
the gnat rose in the morning with the sun,

(1) Chambers: Arthur of Britain: pp. 72 and 215.

(2) 'Pridwen', named in Preiddeu Annwn.

(3) 'Gwenn': The Dream of Rhonabwy.

(4) Romance made of it Caliburn - Excalibur.

(5) Mabinogion, 'Everyman' edition, pp. 100 to 106.

he could see it from Gelli Wic in Cornwall, as far off as Pen Blathaon in North Britain); Medyr the son of Methredydd (from Gelli Wic he could, in a twinkling, shoot the wren through the two legs upon Esgeir Oerval in Ireland); Gilla Coes Hydd (he would clear three hundred acres at one bound: the chief leaper of Ireland was he); Clust the son of Clustveinad (though he were buried seven cubits beneath the earth, he would hear the ant fifty miles off rise from her nest in the morning); Ol the son of Olwydd (seven years before he was born his father's swine were carried off, and when he grew up a man he tracked the swine, and brought them back in seven herds); and Osla Gyllellvawr, whose dagger served as a bridge over the torrents for Arthur's armies".(1)

But many of the train are simply grotesque. What must one make of such weird characters as the following:

"Sol, who could stand all day upon one foot; Sugyn the son of Sugnedydd (who could suck up the sea on which were three hundred ships so as to leave nothing but a dry strand. He was broad-chested); Gwevyl the son of Gwestad (on the day that he was sad, he would let one of his lips drop below his waist, while he turned up the other like a cap upon his head); Uchtryd Varyf Draws (who spread his red untrimmed beard over the eight-and-forty rafters which were in Arthur's court); and Huarwr, whose boon of Arthur was a request for a meal so prodigious that it was the third great plague of Cornwall when he received it; and Gwallgoyc who would allow no one to sleep if he wanted anything, even when he came to a town of three hundred houses".(2)

The element of parody in the tale makes one suspect a tale-teller with a twisted sense of humour. It is typical of the Celtic love of exaggeration. In my opinion the caricature-like figures are an accretion to the tale. Arthur being the popular hero, the story-teller sought to swell his train by dragging in

(1) and (2) Mabinogion, pp. 100 to 106.

all the vague legendary figures of which he knew, in order to preserve the faint memory of their epic feats, and to accentuate the importance of Arthur in having at his command such Gargantuan figures. Of most of these eccentrics there is no trace in other or later legends or folk-lore.

The central theme of the tale is the hunting of the boar Twrch Trwyth,⁽¹⁾ in order to gain the comb and scissors it wears between its ears. In fact two boars are hunted, the other for the sake of a tusk which must serve as a razor for the giant. But many other tasks have to be completed as preliminaries to the main one. So there is a mountain to be levelled, ploughed and sown over, and the crop to be reaped within a day; also many other related agricultural tasks are to be undertaken. These and the attainment of the comb and scissors (gifts of civilization) all point to Arthur's position as a culture god.

In all mythology the culture hero is a demi-god, a semi-divine human being who invades the Other-world to seize the divine gifts which he bestows on the children of men.⁽²⁾

The epic boar-hunt begins in Ireland, crosses the sea, is prosecuted right through Wales, proceeds to Cornwall, and ends in the sea with the drowning of the boar, but with the main object achieved. The passage through Wales is remarkable for its topographical

(1) See Ch. I, p. 18, footnote 2 above.

(2) The classic example is Prometheus, who stole the heavenly fire for the benefit of the human race.

exactitude, and the course of the wild chase can be exactly followed on a map - the story thus, en passant, serving an aetiological purpose. In this hunt Arthur's hound Cavall (noted in the Mirabilia⁽¹⁾) plays an important part.

The battle of Camlan is repeatedly mentioned in the Kulhwch, and among the motley crew in Arthur's court, (besides some "who came forth from the confines of hell"), and "Creiddylad, daughter of Llud Llaw Ereint"⁽²⁾) we also meet two Essylts (Iseults): Essylt Vinwen ("Essylt of the White Visage"), and Essylt Vingul ("Essylt of the Narrow Visage").⁽³⁾ Further, the introduction of a number of characters who have strayed from Irish legend serve to show the close relationship of the myths.

In The Dream of Rhonabwy some other of Arthur's retainers are named, who have an important place in later Romance: March (Mark) the son of Merchion, Tristan the son of Tallwch, and Peredur of the Long Lance.

The other three mabinogion, so called, in which Arthur figures - The Lady of the Fountain, Gereint, and Peredur, - will be noted under Chapter VI as they properly belong to the romances which have come down through the French.

(1) Chapter I, page 18, above.

(2) See p. 41, footnote (1).

(3) We need look no farther for the originals of the later and better-known Iseults: the Iseult of Cornwall - "La Beale Isoud", and Iseult of Brittany - "Isoud as Blanchés Mains", who were to become associated with Tristan in one of the few great love-stories of the world.

The last sources of Arthurian matter from the Red Book of Hergest to be noted here are those curious short poems which group various remarkable traditions of people, or things, or events in threes, the Triads. They come from the Llyfr Coch o Hergest "The Red Book of Hergest", and have been printed in the Myvyrian Archaeology. We see such an arrangement in the Kulhwch list of Arthur's men, as for example, the three who came away alive from the battle of Camlan:

"Morvran the son of Tegid (no one struck him in the battle of Camlan by reason of his ugliness; all thought he was an auxiliary devil. Hair had he upon him like the hair of a stag). And Sandde Bryd Angel (no one touched him with a spear in the battle of Camlan because of his beauty; all thought he was a ministering angel). And Kynwyl Sant (the third that escaped from the battle of Camlan, and he was the last who parted from Arthur on Hengroen his horse)".

But the majority of the Triads are short independent pieces. They became a characteristic feature of mediaeval Welsh literature. From them we get a few gleanings which serve to fill out the picture of Arthur.

So in one triad Arthur is made responsible for one of the "Three Wicked Uncoverings" of the Isle of Britain. The mabinogi of Branwen, daughter of Llŷr relates how the head of Bran the Blessed had been buried, by his own command, on the White Mount (Tower Hill) in London, with its face towards France. While it remained undisturbed Britain would be secure from invasion. But Arthur, scorning to hold England otherwise than by his own might, wickedly disinterred it.

Another of the triads speaks of Arthur as having three wives, each called Guenever (Gwenhwyvar, the daughter of Ogyrvan the Giant - Leodegrance in

Malory, Leodogran in Tennyson -- is usually considered to be the Queen Guenever). In another triad Arthur and Modred in turn made such a ruinous visitation upon each other that the legend of the 'Three Costly Pillagings' arose:

"Modred went to Arthur's court at Kelliwic in Cornwall: he left neither food nor drink in the court; he consumed everything; he drew Guenever from her royal chair and buffeted her. The second was when Arthur went to Modred's court; he left neither food nor drink in that court nor in the district".

Huarwr's boon that was the 'third great plague of Cornwall' has been noted above (p. 44). Another triad tells that Arthur had three mistresses, Indec⁽¹⁾, Garwen and Gwyl. Arthur himself was one of the Three Frivolous Bards. The Three Stout Swineherds of Britain were Pryderi, Drystan (Tristan) and Koll; but while Pryderi allowed himself to be robbed of some of his charges by Gwydion, Drystan was a much better watcher. He kept the pigs of March, son of Merchion, while the real swine-herd went on a message for him to Essylt (she, incidentally was one of the Three Unchaste Women of Britain); Arthur, March, Kei and Bedwyr came all four, but not one could get a single pigling out of Drystan by ruse, force or theft. Of one of Koll's sows again, it was prophesied that Britain would suffer from her litter. Arthur pursued her with an army to Cornwall. Again we get the nature or culture myth, for the pig dropped grains and a bee at spots which were afterwards productive of corn and honey. The

(1) Indech was one of the sons of the Fomorian matriarch Domnu (see Ch. III, p. 60, and App. IV): Is the triad here not a confused and faint echo of an old lost myth (with change of sex) that gave Arthur a place as the contemporary and consort of one of those dark goddesses?

important part played by pigs and boars throughout early Welsh literature indicates their importance as the chief domestic animal of the Celts.⁽¹⁾

Some of the triads have an epigrammatic terseness that is neat and pungent, for example: "There are three things which are not often heard: The song of the birds of Rhiannon, a song of wisdom from the mouth of a Saxon, and an invitation to a feast from a miser". (Rhiannon was Pryderi's mother).

It is clear how these triads⁽²⁾, each of which is the crystallization and concentration in popular form of three separate legends, indicate the great field of Arthurian matter which had been handed down orally before it was committed to writing (so that much may have been lost before, or after, having been written down). They refer to persons and events hidden in the mists of antiquity. They number about a hundred and fifty, but many of them are late inventions, and are based on statements from Geoffrey⁽³⁾ or the romancers; but "otherwise", says Rhys, "the Triads give us the oldest accounts of Arthur, and this now and then in a form which the story-tellers and Romance-writers found thoroughly untractable and best ignored".⁽⁴⁾ And Jones "In the Triads ... we come upon traditions handed down from a very remote age, which were all but incomprehensible to the mediaeval scribes who garnered them, and are therefore preserved in a bewilderingly confused and

(1) Chambers, op. cit., p. 215.

(2) All authorities quoted, passim.

(3) Or, conversely, may they not rather be part of the old oral traditions garnered by Geoffrey from native sources?

(4) Arthurian Legend, p. 6.

disconnected form. They are the disjecta membra of a lost mythology, the legacy of prehistoric Celtic heathendom ... impossible to restore into a coherent and intelligible whole". (1)

[All of the foregoing, especially the references to such characters as Gwydion, Pwyll, Pryderi, Rhiannon, Brân, Mabon, Llŷr and Gwyn -- who all clearly belong to the company of the original British gods -- and their relationship, in one way or another to Arthur, would seem to point to a far greater divinity of Arthur himself. For, although themselves originally great and powerful, they have become grouped around one who is represented as their superior. In his person and exploits Arthur is a far greater being than a mere earthly leader. He of whom it was so often told in legends that he invaded the netherworld, and successfully carried off its treasures, not once or twice, but many times; he who strove with such dark powers as the fateful Medraut; he who gathered around him such an illustrious host -- he could not be among the least of the mighty children of Dôn, the All-Mother. Yet we are faced by the inexplicable fact that nowhere in the Celtic pantheon is there any record of a god Arthur, or of any name approximating to his.]

Of the others there are myths, legends and traditions enough to give them an unassailable position, but Arthur has no locus standi either in space or the elements. Was he, then, merely the obscure 'dux bel-lorum' of whom little is recorded historically? How

(1) King Arthur in History and Legend, p. 55.

must one account for his supreme importance? Gods would not rally round a mere human being, and allow their fame and repute to be outshone by one who should be among their servants and worshippers.

The matter requires deeper examination, and the unravelling of the tangled skein of mythological threads, in order to assign to him his proper place. But in order to do that we must know something of the background of the British gods, and to understand the gods we must know something of the people who worshipped these gods, and of their religious notions. Facts there are very few, and we must trust to the interpretation of slight clues for the building of a more or less adequate theory.

This certain scholars, notably Professor Rhys and others have done, and we must examine their findings and draw our own conclusions.

Here is the place then, for a rapid survey of Celtic religion, after which we may be better able to understand Arthur's real nature and position. Only when we have pieced together the scattered shards of pottery will we be able to discern the design on the reconstructed vessel.

CHAPTER III : Excursus: The Gods of the
Goidels and the Brythons.

"That gray king, whose name, a ghost
Streams like a cloud, man-shaped from mountain peak
And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still".

Tennyson: Idylls of the King.



THE inhabitants of the British
Isles prior to the Roman inva-
sion are usually described as
Celts; yet it is generally
accepted that there were two
distinct human stocks in Britain
at the time of the Roman con-
quest. (1)

The earliest of the two were the Iberians. Physiologically they were short, swarthy, dark-haired, dark-eyed and long-skulled -- a Mediterranean type. They were the builders of those burial mounds called the 'long barrows', and even at the beginning of historic times, were probably still in the stone-age stage of development. The 'Ancient Britons', of whom we read in our old school history books, who painted their half-naked bodies with woad, and paddled their coracles about in the rivers and lakes, were probably these Iberians, for the Celts were a much more civilized people, whose elaborately coloured garments were the precursors of the Gaelic tartans of to-day.

Then from Gaul came the Celts who dispossessed, subjugated, and even amalgamated with the Iberians,

(1) Charles Squire: Celtic Myth and Legend, Gresham Publishing Co. Ltd., London, p. 19, (to which work I am indebted for the greater part of the facts in this chapter).

but did not entirely extirpate them. The Celts were tall, fair, light-haired, blue- or grey-eyed, and with broad heads. They built the 'round barrows' in which to bury their dead. They were in a higher stage of culture than the Iberians, and introduced the use of bronze and silver.

These Celts consisted of two main tribes which were already separated in Gaul before they invaded Britain. These two branches of the Celtic stock went over to Britain at different times⁽¹⁾: the earlier immigrants were the Goidels, or Gaels, the later ones were the Brythons or Britons.

The Romans, as we know, found Gaul divided into three parts, inhabited by (a) the Aquitani, with whom we are not concerned; (b) the Belgae, and (c) the people whom the Romans called the Galli, but who called themselves Celtae. The Belgae would be the Brythons, the Celtae the Goidels.

The Goidels first went over to the white island across the narrow sea channel, and their Goidelic dialects of Celtic survive to-day in the Gaelic languages of Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man.

Then came the second Celtic race, the Brythons, who drove the Goidels before them as the latter had done with the Iberians. The result was that during the Roman domination the British isles were probably roughly divided as in the map, (See Appendix II).

(1) The seventh and the third centuries B.C. have been tentatively advanced as approximate dates of a first, and an assumed second immigration. Magnus Maclean: The Literature of the Celts - Its History and Romance, Blackie, London, 1906, p. 3.

The Brythonic stock survives to-day in the Welsh, the people of Cornwall and the Bretons of Brittany in north-western France, of which the first and the last have retained their Celtic speech, but the Cornish dialect is extinct.

In the further discussion of these two races who peopled the British isles we will refer to them by their more generally known names of Gaels and Britons, remembering that by Gaels we mean the people of Ireland as well as of Scotland.

Our knowledge of the Gaels is derived only from native writers (in the old Irish and Scottish MS. tales), for the Romans did not come into contact with them outside Gaul; our chief information of the Britons we obtain from the Romans. We need not pause to consider their social life, but must glance at their religion.

Our authorities are Caesar (in his commentaries - chiefly certain chapters of the De Bello Gallico), and to a lesser extent, Tacitus, Pliny, the Greek traveller and writer Posidonius, the geographer Strabo, and the historian Diodorus. The chief contact of the Romans with the Celts was through the inhabitants of central and western Gaul, but what the Roman writers have to say about the religion of the Celts of Gaul applies equally to the Celts of Britain (both Gaels and Britons); for it would seem that Britain was the purest fount⁽¹⁾ if not the original source of the

(1) Caesar: Gallie War, Bk. VI, Ch. XIII: "Disciplina in Britannia reperta atque inde in Galliam translata esse existimatur, et nunc, qui diligentius eam rem cognoscere volunt, plerumque illo discendi causa proficiscuntur".

Druidism that was the central feature of Celtic religion.

The Celts had a religion and a mythology. We must distinguish between the two. Under religion we may understand the currently active form of worship of a people, with its attendant ritual and sacrifice. Mythology, on the other hand, consists of the stories of a much more ancient form of religion to explain the cosmos; it is the history of the birth and adventures of the gods, and the stories serve to account for the various natural phenomena which the people strove to understand and explain. Mythology is thus primitive natural science. (1)

The religion of the Celts in its broad outlines was like that of the other Indo-European races, notably the Greeks -- a belief, namely, in elemental gods and goddesses who ruled over the sky, the sun, the moon, the earth, the sea, the dark underworld. It is chiefly an account of the eternal struggle between Light and the powers of Darkness. Besides this, in their religion, every passion, and every art too, had its divine founder, teacher and exponent, and around these deities grew up the body of myth and legend. (2)

The priests who interpreted, taught and

(1) Lewis Spence: An Introduction to Mythology, Harrap, London, 1931, pp. 11 - 39.

(2) When we come to stories of more mundane heroes who still, however, partake of semi-divine powers, we may discard the term 'myth' and speak rather of 'legend', or legendary tradition. Closely allied to myths and legends, but applied more to tales dealing with topographical features, are folk-tales and folk-lore generally.

carried into visible practice the religious views of the Celtic tribes were the Druids; the word is derived from a root DR -- which signifies a tree, and especially the oak, and the centres of their worship were oak groves.⁽¹⁾ That parasite of the oak, the mistletoe, also played an important part in the sacred rites practised in connection with seasonal festivities.⁽²⁾

The Celtic worship was what is called 'solar', for its chief festivals were related to points in the sun's progress. Thus their most important feast was that of Midsummer or 'Beltaine' -- the first of May; sacrifices were made at Samhain -- 'Summer's End', when the sun's power waned, and the strength of the gods of darkness, winter and the underworld (who had to be appeased), grew great.

The Druids were the priests, prophets, magicians, doctors and educators of the people. They jealously guarded their secrets, handing down their mystic lore orally, and consistently refusing to commit anything to writing.

The two chief aspects of Celtic religion which struck the classic writers were

(a) the belief in the immortality (and transmigration) of souls, and

(1) It is therefore wrong to ascribe to Druidical worship, as is so often done, the various prehistoric arrangements of large stones which, under the names of circles, dolmens, cromlechs etc., exist in various parts of England -- the best-known being Stonehenge. These must belong to a far earlier age and more barbarous state of society -- probably even pre-Iberian.

(3) Julius Caesar: The Gallic War, Bk. VI. Edited by Professor John Brown, B.A., Blackie, London, 1896, App. I, pp. 70 to 72.

(b) the extremely barbarous mode of human sacrifice to placate the gods -- "Upon a scale which would seem to have been unsurpassed in horror even by the most savage tribes of West Africa or Polynesia".⁽¹⁾

Caesar gives an account of these human sacrifices, and describes how the victims were shut up in gigantic wickerwork cages of human shape, and, thus imprisoned, were burnt alive.⁽²⁾ Such sacrifices were still made by the Irish Gaels at the beginning of the Christian era to the stone idol Cromm Cruaich, at a spot 'Mag Slecht' -- the Plain of Adoration, in County Cavan. This god was of the Moloch type, for he appeared to be satisfied by no less than the sacrifice of one-third of the healthy issue of his worshippers every year. It is a memory of this sacrifice which is preserved in the story of Tristan and Iseult where a tribute of youths and maidens was claimed for the King of Ireland from the Cornish people in the time of King Mark. The Morholt came from Ireland and demanded one of every three children born in Cornwall during the last fifteen years: it was Tristan who fought against and slew the dread emissary of the King of Ireland and so brought deliverance -- compare the legend of Theseus and the Minotaur.⁽³⁾

But it is not of this savage religion that

(1) Squire: Op. cit., P. 37.

(2) De Bello Gallico: Bok VI, Ch. xvi: "Alii immani magnitudine simulacra habent, quorum viminibus membra vivis hominibus complent; quibus succensis circumventi flamma exanimantur homines".

Cf. Sir J.G. Frazer: The Golden Bough, Macmillan, New York, 1947, p. 651.

(3) Gertrude Schoepperle: Tristan and Isolt, Vol. II, pp. 327 to 330.

we read in the earliest Celtic writings. In them we get stories of a mythology as poetical as that of the Greeks.

When the Romans stamped out Druidism in Britain -- the last stand being made in the Isle of Anglesey about 61 A.D. -- the Druids were driven into Ireland. Here they were later to be vigorously opposed by Saint Patrick, and their influence waned till they later became subordinate even to the class of bages or filé, the writers of the earliest Irish legends -- thus the ancestors of the Bards. By the third century the Druids -- who were then chiefly a few women -- were no more than ineffectual soothsayers, while the bards had become a much more important class. About the fourth century A.D. they composed and shaped the stories of the gods and the heroes, which were then sung and recited for centuries, until, like the Welsh tales, they came to be written down from about the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries.

The stories of the Gaelic gods have come down to us in a great body of old Irish, and a lesser collection of Scottish MSS. The Irish documents are chiefly the following: the great collection of tales, The Book of the Dun Cow, The Book of Leinster, The Book of Ballymote, The Yellow Book of Lecan, The Books of Lecan and Lismore, and many other MSS, which were compiled and transcribed about the beginning of the twelfth century. Most of these are preserved in the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin. So there is also a Scottish collection of MSS. preserved in the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh.⁽¹⁾ While the latter collection

(1) Maclean: Op. cit., pp. 96 - 134.

is not so great or so important as the Irish, the relevant tales serve to corroborate and supplement the Irish stories.

These writings contain the great cycles of Gaelic legend: those, namely, of the Tuatha De Danann, the Heroes of Ulster and Finn and the Fenians (Fianna). Maclean classifies these as the Mythological, the Heroic, and the Ossianic Cycles. In this connection note again the footnote on page 55: the Mythological Cycle deals with the myths of the gods proper -- the Tuatha De Danann -- 'The Children of Danu', while the Heroic Cycle deals with the legends of the semi-divine heroes - such as Cuchulainn - of tradition. The Mythological Cycle (found in the Books of Leinster and Ballymote) deals with stories of events dating from the dim past to the beginning of the Christian era. In the stories of the Ossianic Cycle we come down to the immediately pre-Christian times (about 400 A.D. - the dawn of written history) and they deal with semi-historical kings of Ireland such as Eochaid Airem.

These Gaelic myths are of supreme importance as giving the oldest account of the Gaelic gods. The latter are the originals of the corresponding deities in the British cycles, and it is when we know something about the Gaelic gods that we can assess more clearly Arthur's divine position. For the Gaels and Britons were two branches of one race, and they had a common religious heritage. Though the names of their gods may differ we note the superficial and the essential resemblances.

In the Irish (or Gaelic) mythology we find

the division common to all the Aryan religions: the eternal warfare between two supreme hosts. On one side are ranged the gods of day, light, life, fertility, wisdom and good; on the other the demons of night, darkness, death, barrenness and evil. The first symbolized the beneficial aspects of Nature, and the arts of man; ~~the second were the hostile powers thought to be behind such baneful manifestations as storm and fog, drought and disease.~~ The first are ranged as a divine family round a goddess called Danu, from whom they took their collective name of Tuatha De Danann - 'People' or 'Children of Danu', and they inhabited the world of light. Opposed to them are the huge and deformed monsters springing from the depths of the sea and the abysses, the Fomors, the children of Domnu. The relationships of these two groups of gods to each other can be clearly seen from the attempted genealogies given in Appendices III and IV.

{ Danu was the Universal Mother, and her husband, the Celtic Dis Pater from whom sprang all gods and men, was Bilé, the god of Death (honoured at the festival of Beltaine).

The greatest of Danu's children was Nuada Argetlam, 'Nuada of the Silver Hand': he was the Celtic Zeus, and god of war. He had five consorts (the Badb), chief of whom was Morrighu, who presided over battle and slaughter.

Next greatest was the beneficent Dagda, the Celtic Herakles. His magic cauldron 'the Undry', could feed the whole world. He was married to Boann, from whom the river Boyne gets its name.

Diancecht was the divine healer. Goibniu, Luchtainé and Credné were respectively the smith, the carpenter and the brasier of the Tuatha De Danann,

Lêr was a god of the sea, who is less famous, however, than his son Manannan, the three-legged eponym of the Isle of Man.

The Dagda's children were first Brigit, who married the handsome Fomorian Bress (for a while king of the Tuatha De Danann), and who was much later canonized as a Christian saint. Then came Angus, a Celtic Eros, who at one time carried off Etain, the bride of his brother Mider. This Etain in a later incarnation became the wife of Eochaid, high king of Ireland, and the strife of Eochaid and Mider for her person, foreshadows the strife of Arthur and Modred for Guenever.⁽¹⁾

: Next comes Ogma, the professional strong man of the Gaelic gods, and the reputed inventor of the famous Ogmic (or Ogam) script. This indigenous Irish form of writing spread afterwards to Great Britain and inscriptions in Ogmic characters have been found all over the island.⁽²⁾

The last of the Dagda's children was his son Bodb the Red, who later became king of the gods.

Diancecht had several important children. His son Miach, and daughter Airmid, followed their

(1) John Rhys: Studies in the Arthurian Legend, pp. 25 to 70.

(2) See Appendix II for example of Ogam script.

father's profession. A second daughter, Etan, married Ogma. Their five sons were Tuirenn, Cairpré and Mac Cuill, Mac Cecht, and Mac Greine. The latter three were kings of the Tuatha De Danann when the Milesians, the first mortal settlers of Ireland, arrived. Dian-cecht's fourth child was Cian who married Ethniu, daughter of the Fomor, Balor. Their son was the invincible Lugh, the Celtic Apollo. When the three sons of Tuirenn, owing to a feud, murdered Cian, Lugh extracted from them the greatest eric or blood-fine in all history for the death of his father.

A grand-daughter of Angus, Dechtire, who was a half-sister of Conchobar Mac Nessa (king of the Red Branch of Ulster and contemporary with Eochaid Airem), had a son by Lugh, named Cuchulainn, who became one of the greatest of the semi-divine Irish heroes of the later Heroic cycles - the Siegfried of the Celts.

Of the Fomors, the monsters of the deep,⁽¹⁾ the most remarkable was Balor, who had such a venomous eye that it was always kept shut, but when the eye-lid was lifted by means of a hook in battle, ranks of the enemy fell dead before its malignant glare. The giant Hawthorn - Yspaddaden Penkawr⁽²⁾ -- father of Olwen, too, had such ponderous eyebrows that they had to be lifted up by means of hooks. The name of Balor and the characteristic of his terrible eye survive in such a

(1) Grendel and his dam from Beowulf are similar underwater monsters - gods of the abyss. It is quite possible that the Teutons and the Celts, with a common Aryan origin and therefore religious notions from a common heritage - should have corresponding deities.

(2) Kulhwch and Olwen, see p. 42 supra.

phrase as 'a baleful glare'.

Another Fomorian giant was More - the original of March, son of Merchion, the dark underworld king, who became King Mark of Cornwall, the husband of the Fair Iseult and uncle of Tristan (Malory's Sir Tristram).⁽¹⁾

Not all the Fomors, however, had monstrous features. One of them, Elathan, had dark, handsome, mephistophelian features, and his son Bress (who married the Dagda's daughter Brigit) was proverbially beautiful.

The Tuatha De Danann were not the first inhabitants of Ireland. The Leabhar Gabhala (Book of Invasions) gives the chronology. First there were the "Race of Partholon", followed by the "Race of Nemed". The Fomors, who had always been there from the beginning of things easily disposed of the Partholons and the Nemedians. Then came the "Fir Bolg" (probably the aboriginal Iberians), and after them the Tuatha De Danann, who defeated the Fir Bolg at the first Battle

(1) Mark, March, Mearh = a horse, referring to the animal features of the Fomors, and the fact that Mark - not unlike King Midas of Greek legend, with his ass's ears - had a horse's ears. Squire, *Op. cit.*, p. 328. Rhys Arthurian Legend, pp. 357, 358.

And just as Midas's unfortunate servant who shared the secret was so oppressed by the scandalous truth that he could not keep it to himself but must needs shout it out to the grass and the reeds (who further spread the tale) so, too, in Bérout's version of the Tristan story King Mark's dwarf tells the hawthorn tree of his master's unfortunate affliction and so the barons come to hear of it. (Was this perhaps the lai Sir Dinadan made, "than which a worse lai was never heard" which so enraged King Mark? - M.W.S.).

Schoepperle: Tristan and Isolt II, p. 269.

of Moytura (South) and so obtained living space in Ireland, with their capital at Tara. Then the Tuatha De Danann were also attacked by the Fomors, whom they vanquished at the second Battle of Moytura (North), and banished for ever to the depths of the flood.

But the twilight of the gods was drawing on apace. The Milesians under their eponymous leader Milé came from Spain and the East (they were the Scots and Gaels). They landed in Ireland and fought against the Tuatha De Danann, were victorious and now occupied the royal seat at Tara. At that time Mac Cuill, Mac Cecht and Mac Greine were kings of the gods. When the strangers arrived the three queens of these gods, Banba, Fotla and Eriu each in turn asked Amergin, the Druid of the Iberians, that in the event of the mortals' victory the island should be named after her. This was promised, hence the three ancient names of Ireland - Eriu giving the well-known Erin. (At this time England was still known as Alba - later Albion).

With the coming of the mortals the gods were driven into exile and their power decreased. Some sought an island far to the west, 'Hy-Breasail'. Later pioneers in the Spanish seas thought they had found it and named the land they found 'Brazil'. Manannán, son of Lér, went to the Isle of Man. The Dagda found sidhé - underground palaces - for the majority of the deposed gods, in barrows or hills to be seen in Ireland to-day. Once there, every god became a Fer-Sidhé (pronounced Farshee) -- 'Man of the Hill'; every goddess became a Bean-Sidhé, -- 'Woman of the Hill', and they live on as the fairies and banshees of Irish folklore.

At this time Mider and Eochaid played chess for the possession of Etain until Eochaid was finally successful. From this time, too, dates the sorrowful tale of the swan-children of Lêr.

The scope of this work does not allow discussion - however tempting the wish - of the further cycles of legend: the histories of the great heroes Conchobar Mac Nessa, Cuchulainn and Ferdiad; the great war of Táin Bó Chuailgne, 'The Driving of the Cattle of Cooley'; nor yet of Finn Mac Cumhail, the 'Fingal' of Macpherson's Ossian -- for they are irrelevant to our study of Arthur. We must turn, instead, to consider the British gods.

Many of the Gaelic gods have their counterparts in British mythology. The descriptions and stories of the British gods have come down to us in a much less complete form than those of the deities of the Gaels. Only in the Four Branches of the Mabinogion do they have the character of supernatural beings. For the rest they have been transformed into kings in Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia ^{Regum} Britonum ^{niac}, or have been adopted by the Norman-French romancers and turned into knights of Arthur's court. But, however disguised, their real nature can still be discerned. In many of the gods of the Britons we recognize, in the similar names and attributes, the familiar features of the Gaelic Tuatha De Danann.

The British gods are also divided into two families: the children of Dôn, and the children of Llŷr. These two families or tribes are usually regarded as in opposition, and their struggles seem to

symbolize the same conflict between the powers of heaven, light and life, and those of the sea, darkness and death, which are reflected in Gaelic myth in the battles between the Tuatha De Danann and the Fomors.

Dôn is, of course, the British counterpart of Danu. Her husband is Beli who conforms to the Gaelic Bilé. The British Llŷr is no other than the Gaelic sea-god Lôr. Nudd or Llud (they are both really the same god who is variously called by both names), as his cognomen 'Llaw Eirint' - 'of the hand of silver', shows, is the same personage as Nuada Argetlam, 'Nuada of the Silver Hand'. He had a shrine overlooking the Thames. Tradition declares that St. Paul's Cathedral occupies the site of an ancient pagan temple, while the spot on which it stands was called 'Parth-Llud' by the Britons and 'Ludes Geat' by the Saxons -- Ludgate (Hill).⁽¹⁾

Even more important than Nudd was his son Gwyn, god of Death and the Underworld. A curious confusion in the mythology makes Llud (who is also Nudd) the father of a fair daughter Creudylad⁽²⁾, of whom Gwyn was the lover. An episode in the Kulhwch and Olwen describes the courtship. Gwyn had a rival in Gwyrthur. These two waged perpetual warfare for Creudylad, each in turn stealing her from the other, until the matter was referred to Arthur, who decided that she should be sent back to her father, and that Gwyn and Gwyrthur should fight for her every first of May till the day of doom, and that whichever of them

(1) See p. 40, footnote (2).

(2) See page 41, footnote (1).

should then be the conqueror should have the maiden.

Dôn's brother Math, the son of Mathonwy, was also a benevolent ruler of the Underworld, who handed on his magical lore to his nephew and pupil Gwydion, the latter becoming the druid of the gods, and the friend and teacher of useful arts to man. Also beneficial to men were Amaethon, god of agriculture, and Govannan, the god of smithcraft who is identical with the Gaelic Goibniu.

Gwydion married his own sister Arianrod. They had twin sons Dylan and Lleu. Dylan, the god of darkness, took at once to the sea and became synonymous with the waves and the sound of the waves. Lleu was the British sun-god, the exact counterpart of the Gaelic Lugh Lamhfada.

Two sons of Beli and Dôn of whom little are known are Nynniaw and Peibaw who quarrelled and were turned into oxen for their sins.

Last of the children of Dôn was Penardun, who wedded Llŷr, their son being Manawyddan, the Gaelic Manannán. Llŷr also had another wife, Iweridd, and their children were a daughter Branwen, and a son Brân. (The history of Branwen is told in the second tale of Lady Charlotte Guest's Mabinogion). Brân is, even more than Manawyddan, a dark deity of Hades. He was of colossal size, and he delighted in battle and carnage like the hoodie-crow from which he took his name. The hoodie-crow was always supposed to accompany Morrighú to the battle-field too. Brân's son was Caradawc, who later became confounded with the historical Caratacus.

That Brân was associated with Gower in the

Swansea Peninsula may be proved from the Morte D'Arthur, "in which storehouse of forgotten and misunderstood mythology Brân of Gower survives as 'King Brandegore'⁽¹⁾".

Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed, once exchanged places with Arawn and ruled for a space in Annwn, the Hades of the Britons. His wife was Rhiannon⁽²⁾, and their son was Pryderi. In a poem of Taliessin's we find Manawyddan and Pryderi joint rulers of Hades (Annwn), and warders of the magic cauldron of inspiration, which the gods of light (including Arthur) attempted to steal or capture, and which became famous afterwards as the 'Holy Grail'. When Pwyll died, Pryderi gave his mother's hand in marriage to Manawyddan the son of Llŷr.

Besides many minor gods of foreign importation we find, too, in the British pantheon, some of Gaulish origin. Thus the warlike heaven-god Camulus appears in Gaelic myth as Cumhail, the father of Finn, and in British mythical history as Coll, (duke of Caer Colvin, known earlier as Camulodunum, and now as Colchester); it is believed that 'Old King Cole' of the nursery rhyme represents the last faint tradition of the Celtic god -- how are the mighty fallen!

The name of the sun-god Maponos is found upon altars in Gaul and Britain, and in Welsh literature (Kulhwch and Olwen) as Mabon, son of Modron - a follower of Arthur. Another Gaulish sun-god, Belinus, must have been connected with Brân, for we find in Geoffrey of Monmouth's History 'King Belinus' as brother of

(1) Squire: op. cit. p. 272.

(2) See p. 49 for mention of her in a triad.

'King Brennius',⁽¹⁾, and in the Morte D'Arthur 'Balin' as brother of 'Balan' (whom Rhŷs also identifies with Brân).

Another god worshipped in Gaul, Ogmios, god of eloquence, and equipped like Herakles, exactly corresponds to the conception of the Gaelic Ogma. Also the war-goddess Nemetona, worshipped at Bath, was probably the same as Nemon, one of the Badb -- Nuada's Valkyr-wives. Finally Lugh, or Lleu, was widely known on the continent as Lugus, and three towns, Laon, Leyden and Lyons, are named after him (Lugudunum, Lugus' town).



Now in the myths and legends dealing with these deities one remarkable fact emerges very clearly: by far the great majority of these divine personages have some sort of connection or relationship, directly or indirectly, with 'King' Arthur, and always in a minor capacity. They are either followers of Arthur, or serve him in one way or another, or come at his summons to carry out his behests. Arthur is, in fact, greater than any of the gods: they are nearly all his willing vassals.

Yet he is never mentioned as a god of the Britons, although in all but name he is the head of the gods. Let us enumerate some of the points of contact of Arthur with the British gods:

1. Manawyddan constructed the terrifying bone-fortress of Oeth and Anoeth to imprison all mortals who dared to invade Hades. A triad tells that Arthur was

(1) Geoffrey of Monmouth: History of the British Kings, Bk. III, Ch. i.

one of his prisoners.

2. In the courtship of Creudylad by Gwyn and Gwyrthur it was Arthur who had to pronounce judgment.

3. Another triad tells that Llud was one of Arthur's Three Chief War Knights; yet another that Arawn, King of Hades, was one of his Chief Counselling Knights.

4. In Kulhwch and Olwen we read how Nynniaw and Peibaw toiled at the yoke for Arthur; how Manawyddan, Gwyn and Pryderi helped Arthur in his search for the Treasures of Britain (e.g. the comb and scissors of Twrch Trwyth); and Amaethon and Govannan also helped him to perform the superhuman tasks for the benefit of Kulhwch.

How is it that Arthur, if he was a mere mortal king, could command the services of these mighty ones? The question is the central, and as yet not satisfactorily solved, problem concerning Arthur, which has exercised the minds of scholars and caused much discussion and theorising.

The greatest English scholar who has devoted his study and learning to the attempted solution of this question is Professor John Rhys. He has given his conclusion - adequate according to his reasoning - and no one else has attempted to give another evaluation of Arthur's position, although there are many who disagree with Rhys, without advancing an own theory in the place of the one they reject.

Professor Rhys's argument in short is the following: He assumes that there must have been two

Arthurs whose fames became confused, to the exceeding renown of a composite half-real, half-mythical personage into whom the two blended. One was the human Arthur, the Comes Britanniae, whose historical existence we have examined in Chapter I. The other he boldly states to have been a divine Arthur, a god more or less widely worshipped among the Britons.

"How then did Arthur become famous, and how came he to be the subject of so much story and romance? The answer, in short, which one has to give to this hard question must be to the effect, that besides a historic Arthur there was a Brythonic divinity named Arthur, after whom the man may have been called, or with whose name his, in case it was of different origin, may have become identical in sound owing to an accident of speech, for both explanations are possible. Leaving aside for a while the man Arthur, and assuming the existence of a god of that name, let us see what could be made of him. Mythologically speaking he would probably have to be regarded as a Culture Hero; for, a model king and the institutor of the Knighthood of the Round Table, he is represented as the leader of expeditions to the isles of Hades, and as one who stood in somewhat the same kind of relation to Gwalchmei as Gwydion did to Lleu". (1)

He then goes on to draw a parallel between Gwydion and Arthur. For while many of the gods of the older dynasties, such as Llud and Gwyn, Arawn, Pryderi, Manawyddan, Amaethon and Govannan are found side by side with Arthur, there is one notable omission in the persons of Gwydion and his family. Rhys accordingly assumes that Gwydion must later have dropped out of the British pantheon, and his place been taken by Arthur -- a comparison of the Gwydion-myth and the Arthur-myths shows an almost exact correspondence in everything but name :

(1) Studies in the Arthurian Legend, pp. 8 and 9.

1. Both Gwydion and Arthur are exponents of culture and the arts.
2. Both invaded the underworld, at first unsuccessfully (compare Arthur's imprisonment in the fortress of Oeth and Anoeth, p. 69).
3. Both partook in boar-hunting exploits (e.g. note the triad Chapter II, page 48), Arthur with less success than Gwydion.
4. Chief similarity of the two myths is the family relationship of the two gods. Gwydion, we noted (page 67), was married to his own sister Arianrod and they had two sons Dylan, a god of darkness, and Lleu, the sun-god.

Arthur's sister, called 'Margawse' by Malory, was the wife of Lot, king of Lothian and Orkney⁽¹⁾, and she had a son called Gwalchmei in Welsh, Walganus in Geoffrey's Latin, and Gawain in English. 'Gwalchmei' means the 'falcon of May', a suitable name for a Solar Hero who corresponds to Lleu. His dark brother Medrawt (Medrod -- Modred) is the son of Arthur and Margawse⁽²⁾, and Rhys supposes that both brothers were the sons of Arthur and his sister in some form of the original myth, but that later romancers ignored this incest motif in order to cleanse Arthur and Gawain of this blot. When Malory recounted the incestuous union the stain could still attach to the traitorous Modred

(1) Loth - another name of Llud (Nudd) the British sky-god. Loth (Llud-Nudd) and Margawse equate with Nuada and his consort Morrigú, of Gaelic myth; 'Margawse' means 'shed blood'. She is called 'Gwyar' in the Kulhwch and Olwen. Morrigú was the war-goddess.

(2) See Chapter I, p. 19, footnote.

(the representative of darkness corresponding to Dylan).

Another point: Geoffrey calls Lot's wife 'Anna', (Malory 'Margawse'). We know from Malory that Arthur had another sister, the enchantress Morgan le Fay⁽¹⁾. Possibly this is a typical confusion (in the confused mass of myth, legend and romance dealing with Arthur), and Morgan and Margawse may really have been one. The well-known ^{g^u}fued between Arthur and Morgan (never very intelligible in Malory, cf. Bk. IV, ch. 6 - 14), becomes clear when we equate it with the similar fued existing between Gwydion and Arianrod as a result of their peculiar, intimate relationship.

In the second chapter of the Arthurian Studies, Rhŷs follows the correspondence of the Arthurian legend to British myth still further in his comparison of Arthur with Eochaid Airem. The latter has his fued with Mider for the possession of Etain. (2) Arthur had his strife with Modred who abducted Guenever. The correspondence of Modred, Medrod, with Mider is apparent. And so Rhŷs finally comes to his conclusion, after a philological discussion of nearly four pages on the original root whence came Airem and Arthur (partially to show the origin of the name Arthur, and partially to expound Arthur's status as culture god.) He sums up :-

(1) Her various names, Morgen in the Vita Merlini; Morgain la Fee in French Romance; Argante of Layamon, Margawse of Malory, are all sufficiently similar to represent different forms of one and the same name, and are near enough to Muirgen and Morrigú.

(2) Etain means 'shining one'; Geunever, 'white apparition'. Both represent the dawn, claimed in turn by light and darkness.

"It may be granted that there was a historical Arthur, who may have held the office, which under the Roman administration was known as that of Comes Britanniae; that he may, like Aurelius Ambrosius(1), have been partly of Roman descent; that Maelgwn (2) was his nephew, whom Gildas accuses of slaying his uncle; that his name Arthur was either the Latin Artorius, or else a Celtic name belonging to a god Arthur; for the Latin Artorius and the god's name, which we have treated as early Brythonic Artor, genitive Artôros, would equally yield in Welsh the familiar form Arthur. In either case, the name would have to be regarded as an important factor in the identification or confusion of the man with the divinity. The latter, called Arthur by the Brythons, was called Airem by the Goidels, and he was probably the Artaeon Mercury of the Allobroges of ancient Gaul. His rôle was that of Culture Hero, and his name allows one to suppose that he was associated, in some special manner, with agriculture (3) over the entire Celtic world of antiquity. On the one hand we have the man Arthur, whose position we have tried to define, and on the other a greater Arthur, a more colossal figure, of which we have, so to speak, but a torso rescued from the wreck of the Celtic Pantheon". (4)

We have already indicated (page 70) that the scholars are found who criticize Rhys' hypothesis concerning Arthur's divinity.

Jones (5) speaks guardedly of the "ingenious hypothesis". Bruce (6) dismisses Rhys' mythological theory in a few sentences:

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- (1) See above Chapter I, pp. 20 and 24.
 - (2) See above Chapter I, page 25.
 - (3) See Chapter II, p. 45 supra.
 - (4) The rest of his Arthurian Studies - 14 chapters - is a further exposition - very erudite - of the main thesis of the godhead of Arthur, and the divine nature of nearly all his knights and other associates, for each of whom he finds a parallel in Celtic myth. The whole work is a storehouse of mythological information, and a monument of scholarship.
 - (5) King Arthur in History and Legend, p. 25.
 - (6) Evolution of Arthurian Romance, Vol. I, p. 4.

"It seems wiser to accept this statement",
(referring to Arthur's victory at Badon Hill),

"as authentic and to recognize in him a man of Roman descent or a Romanized Celt, who in these times of stress, attained the leadership of the British hosts. There is no need, therefore, of regarding him simply as a creature of the popular imagination or of vaporizing him into a hypothetical culture-divinity, as various scholars have done -- so John Rhys he acknowledges that the derivation of Arthur from Artor, Artorius, is phonetically unobjectionable; nevertheless with his customary weakness for the fanciful mythological interpretations of Max Müller and his school -- once so popular, but now generally discredited -- he endeavours to connect the name with the Aryan root ar -- (=to plough), and hence conjectures that Arthur was by origin a culture-divinity". (1)

E.K. Chambers⁽²⁾ delivers the most formidable criticism: he is an example of the sober objective writer who has no particular mythological axe to grind, and examines the subject in a thoroughly disinterested manner. While admitting that many mythological elements attach to Arthur's exploits he shows clearly that Rhys pushes his comparisons and analogies too far and he demolishes all Rhys's elaborate parallels that attempt to reconstruct or create a Celtic culture-hero, Artor. For he states the incontrovertible fact that in spite of the theorizing evidence is unfortunately lacking for the existence of an early Celtic Artor. It is true that no such god is mentioned by name among the Children of Dôn in British mythology, nor is there a Gaelic counterpart among the Tuatha De Danann, or even among the semi-divine heroes of the Ultonians or the Fenians.

(1) It is only fair to both Bruce and Rhys to say that Bruce objects only to the godhead theory; otherwise he makes full, and grateful, use of Rhys's excellent learning, and pays tribute to it.

(2) Arthur of Britain, pp. 205 to 232.

With regard to the mythological status of Arthur he says (page 206) :-

"I do not think that these theories are worth serious pursuit, since they rest upon the uncritical assumption that details, such as Arthur's relationship to Uther and Modred, which we find for the first time in Geoffrey of Monmouth, can safely be treated as derived from earlier Celtic legend A similar uncritical use (of sources) renders valueless much of the work of the late Professor Rhys. He is even capable of quoting the fifteenth century Malory as an authority for mythological data He is a philologist, and comparative mythology is never more dangerous than when it calls in the aid of philology".

When Rhys equates Guenever and Etain, from the original meanings of their names, and consequently sees in the Arthur - Airem versus Modred-Mider strife a nature myth -- the gods of light and darkness struggling for the dawn, Chambers says :

"This is only a flicker of the old 'solar' theory of mythological interpretation, to which Professor Rhys remains sentimentally attached".

Concerning such stories he says :

"There is nothing to suggest that they are telling anything but an ordinary tale of human violence. A mediaeval chieftain, and in particular a Celtic mediaeval chieftain, might reasonably expect to be allowed to take his neighbour's wife without incurring the suspicion of Otherworld tendencies". (1)

Chambers himself would seem to lean to the purely historical view: to accept the existence, once, of the man Arthur. In time he would become euhemerized - exalted to godhead - owing to the accumulation and accretion of legends as the memory of his actual deeds faded into the romantic mists of the dim past.

(1) Chambers: Op. cit., page 214.

J.C. Squire is entirely a disciple of Rhys, and echoes the theories of this scholar, piling on the evidence with proofs of a whole pantheon of gods in Arthur's following.⁽¹⁾

Yet, in spite of the monuments of research, the painstaking studies, the hypotheses and theories with their attendant critics, the controversy still rages and Arthur's true nature has not yet been decided upon.

What can be said to sum up?

I think the answer is the following: I lean to the 'mythological system' of Euhemerus (philosopher of the fourth century B.C.), namely, the view that myth is history in disguise. The gods were men, and the mists of time and later fantasy had so magnified and distorted their figures as to make them appear divine. In short, they were great men deified by later generations.

Primitive religion, thus, has its roots in ancestor-worship, and primitive nations build up a pantheon and a mythology from the traditions of the distant past. The ranks of the gods are later swelled by the addition of a host of semi-divine mortal heroes, and the reverse process of later great heroes becoming endowed with divine attributes to form new gods, also takes place.

The very first beginnings of the hagiography lie in the inherent love (a) either of listening to, or

(1) Celtic Myth and Legend, Chapter XXIII.

else recounting, interesting anecdotes of people, places and things, especially of wonderful exploits of popular characters or heroes, and (b) the natural tendency to exaggerate for the sake of effect -- two things that are common even to modern civilized men, and much more so to barbarians in a childlike state of mental development, who are more eager to accept as true the most startling exploits.

In a time of oral tradition, when nothing was yet crystallized into permanent form by being written down, different versions of the life of hero -- altered and supplemented, embellished and embroidered by generations of story-tellers, camp-fire raconteurs -- would at length become a mixture of the factual and fantastic, the historical and the imaginary, and the ordinary deeds of arms of a petty chief or war leader would assume gigantic proportions and become super-human feats achieved against monsters or underworld powers in the company of the divine inhabitants of the heavens. The most practical and matter-of-fact man loves a spice of the marvellous and easily accepts the incredible as at least possible.

Some of the great elemental and natural phenomena such as the sun, the moon, the stars, earth, sky, fire, water and storm would, of course, also - in a primitive society - be productive of certain myths, and the explanation of the occurrence of manifestations of these phenomena would also produce their crop of legends dealing with the divine beings or powers responsible for these mysteries. The primitive man, groping for the explanation of things he does not understand is, inevitably forced to explain them in terms

of the things that he knows. For example, the gods are much like he and his fellows; they must also fight, consequently they must have weapons: what more natural than that the smoking Etna must represent the chimney of the divine smithy of the divine smith Hephaestus, Vulcan?

But, on the whole, most gods would have been originally only the outstanding figures in the remote history of the tribe, transformed by the aura of wonder and awe and ignorance and superstition, and the enchantment that distance lends to the view, into colossal and all-powerful figures: imagine the prestige-value of such ancestors. Primitive fancy in conjunction with dawning and gradually developing intelligence would account for the confusions and the contradictions of the divergent versions.

In my opinion it is wholly unnecessary to formulate more recondite theories for what is a perfectly natural process in primitive story-telling; and I believe that the figure of Arthur is nothing more than an example of such a process.

He must have been a historical person, not necessarily a great war-leader of Saxon times (otherwise the old chronicles would have been more explicit and detailed), but possibly a minor though popular leader dating from the dawn of Celtic history; one who so early achieved fame that he could be considered as a contemporary and compeer of the divine families themselves. About the time the first chronicles were being compiled, when traditions ceased to be oral and were being committed to writing, all the legends con-

cerning the original Arthur (who may or may not have been known by that particular name, but probably was so known) were accredited also to a great British warrior (not a king) of the name of Arthur. And as the fame of this later Arthur grew he became the composite figure of the original Celtic Arthur, the later historical Arthur of the fifth or sixth century, and the magnified and expanded Arthur of romance. No doubt the exploits of many another ancestral hero whose name had become lost, but whose fame lived on, also in time became attached to the one figure who had caught the popular imagination; so that Arthur, as we have him to-day, is the personified accumulation of two millenia of fire-side tales of hero-worship.

Arthur probably lived in ancient Gaul or somewhere in central or south-eastern Europe at the very dawn of the human era, or at the latest when the Britons first made a home for themselves in Britain, but, at any rate, so long ago that he was already a tradition when the heathen British gods held sway and were still being worshipped; he became 'historical' about the fifth century, his deeds, legendary or real, being then for the first time enshrined on the written page; and thence he developed rapidly in the literature of the highly civilized mediaeval Norman society to the chivalrous Arthur of romance we have learned to know and to love in the pages of Malory and Tennyson.

The thoughts expressed in the foregoing few pages can hardly claim the title of hypothesis or theory; they may hardly be entirely new; neither is it claimed that they will form a substantial contribution to the knowledge of Arthurian problems when

compared with the brilliant work of the great Arthurian scholars. They are advanced for what they are worth, as an attempt to explain a problem that has taxed many great minds. It will perhaps not be taken as presumption on the part of the present writer to say that wide reading, and much pondering, on the problems of the origins of Arthur have served only to bear out the theories of John Rhys, the great champion of the 'Celtic school'. I cannot agree with that indefatigable researcher, J.D. Bruce, who holds the opposite view that we owe the Arthurian legend almost wholly to the inventions of the Norman-French romancers, and that the Celtic elements are so faint that they can be discarded as negligible.

E.K. Chambers has given finality to the question of the historicity of Arthur as a one-time Celtic chieftain. Rhys has laboriously analysed the body of Arthurian matter in old Welsh literature as well as in Malory, and linked it up with the matter of Celtic mythology. Bruce's criticism of Rhys' penetrating arguments and analyses and comparisons which are based on a profound knowledge of the mythology, folk-lore and linguistics of Celtic matter, must of necessity come from a preconceived unwillingness to admit the truth. Bruce, who is purely a litterateur, brings to bear his encyclopedic knowledge of French mediaeval romance in order to prove that all the themes, nomenclature and motifs which can be traced to Celtic sources can by another process of reasoning be shown to be of Central European or of Oriental origin. He over-emphasises the contribution of the Norman-French *trouvères* and *troubadours* as the original shapers of the

Arthurian legend, and obstinately refuses to accept the mass of internal evidence - even of such an essentially Celtic story as that of Tristan and Iseult - which is to be found in most Arthurian Romance. That the later development of Romance at the hands of the troubadours in the direction of a courtly love-romance is due to Norman-French ideals, practices and usages, with the addition of much matter in the episodes of the tales garnered from Classic and Eastern sources cannot be denied, but that all the original crude mythological matter which forms the basis of Romance is Celtic is no less obvious.

Arthur was not born and made mature in the twelfth century Anglo-French society romances based on Geoffrey of Monmouth. His origins are much more ancient, and can only be traced back to the wonderful mythology of the races who inhabited Ireland, Scotland and Wales long before the Roman invasion, and at least a millenium before the Frankish nation took shape.

That the Norman-French singers were the ones to seize the crude British materials to refine it and to build up on its shaky base a firm literary structure is only another of those strange phenomena in the history of the human race, which proves, once more, the essential spiritual kinship of nation with nation. More, it is proof of the greatness and promise of the original matter which was fit material to grow to great heights in the hands of a highly-civilized and refined society, who had the time and the leisure and the refinement necessary to produce a beautiful literature from it, rather than in the hands of wild, isolated, almost primitive folk who wrested a hard living

from the bleak and desolate mountains where they had been driven by fire and war, but who were blessed with a rich and genial native imagination of a highly poetic order.

Mediaeval Arthurian Romance, as it developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, is a combination of the wild, fay-ridden, native semi-history of the Celts, to which was wedded the sophisticated romance of a gay, highly-refined courtly French society. If the legend had continued to develop in its native Welsh fastnesses, it would have remained crude, primitive and with elements so ancient that it would in parts have been harsh and incomprehensible, although with a wild and imaginative beauty of its own. Had it been purely French in origin it would have missed the glow of fantasy and imagination, and would have had a sleek, luxurious and rather decadent beauty, calculated in spirit rather than spontaneous, effeminate rather than virile.

Instead of either it was thus both: the way in which the original Celtic parent stock was added to by the Norman-French poets will be set out in Chapter VI on "The Romantic Arthur".

This, then, was the origin of Arthur and of the "Arthurian Legend". On this blend of myth and quasi-history the romancers were to work for three centuries to produce the Arthur and the Arthurian legend of mediaeval romance and Courtly Love. In order to understand how and why they thus handled the original matter, and to understand the spirit and meaning of this new literature -- in other words, in order

to try and understand something of the mediaeval mind -- we must know something of the historical and sociological background of the times that produced the literature. This enquiry we shall make in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER IV : The Mediaeval Scene.

"He (i.e. William) came, on the first day of August to Salisbury, and there came to him his wise men, and all the land-owning men of property there were over all England, whosoever men they were, and all bowed down to him and became his men and swore oaths of fealty to him that they would be faithful to him against all other men".

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, year 1086.

"A Knyght ther was and that a worthy man,
That fro the tyme that he first bigan
To riden out, he loved chivalrie,
Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie.
And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.
He never yet no vileynye ne sayde,
In al his lyf, unto no maner wight.
He was a verray parfit, gentil knyght.

Chaucer: Prologue to The Canterbury Tales.



THE period of highest development of the literature of courtly and chivalrous romance stretches over the hundred-and-fifty years from about the middle of the twelfth to the end of the thirteenth centuries. Not that romance began to decline after this time - indeed, it was to flourish for at least a hundred years more - but within this first time-limit we see it in its greatest glory.

For those who would know what manner of people and what conditions of life produced this literature researchers have pieced together a clear, detailed, and probably fairly accurate picture of the Norman-French society of that time, or rather, of the Anglo-Norman-French nation which developed in England from the end of the eleventh century.

The successors of William of Normandy had

inherited the empire of the Conqueror but, with the exception of Henry II, they had not the ability to hold their wide domains, and after the death of the first Plantagenet king in 1189 their continental empire crumbled under the pressure exerted by their suzerain, Philip Augustus of France. As their power thus decreased in France, and the centre of gravity of the influence of the later Plantagenets shifted to England, so in that country there developed now a new Anglo-French race with a new language.

It was thus in the courts of English and not of French rulers that mediaeval romance flourished and developed, although in the beginning the language of romance was French, and the spirit and ideals permeating it too were wholly French.

The romance of which we want to treat had its origins about the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries in the highly refined and pleasure-loving court of the Countess Marie of Champagne, the daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Poitou who was the wife of Henry II. The latter ('Henry Beauclerc') had been in England no less a patron of the fine arts than the Countess Marie herself, in whose court the leading Provençal trouvères, such as Chrétien de Troyes, Renaud de Beaujeu, Raoul de Houdenc and others composed poems which were to serve as model and inspiration for the romance literature of the whole of Europe.

In so far as the social and cultural history of a nation is reflected in its literature, to that extent may we also conclude something of the pulsing life of the Middle Ages from its popular romance tales,

more clearly, perhaps than when it is revealed to us in the dry bones of ordinary history.

The period we have indicated above as the limits for the heyday of romance may be taken to represent typically that vague epoch which we call the (later) Middle Ages. It was the time when the 'Feudal system' still held sway; when crusading armies were marching to the East on a holy mission to free the Holy Land from its unholy occupiers, with the prospect of some rich plunder as an incidental reward for their Christian virtue; when young men were supposed to be trained in the usages of the chivalrous code; when noblesse oblige meant exactly what the words connote: the time, in short, of the incurable romanticists such as Sir Walter Scott, -- of which some less idealistic and more realistic aspects are reflected in our history books.

The crude feudalism which had sprung from the collection of customs of the composite Romano-Germanic society of the first centuries of the Christian era, and had developed during Charlemagne's time, had by the time of Henry II (i.e. round the sixth decade of the twelfth century) been welded into a regular system of land tenure and social order which was established by custom and verbal agreement as if enshrined in written law. It was now a complex thing which shaped the whole structure of society from the sovereign down to the humblest peasant in one great contract of service and loyalty. Reduced to its simplest terms it was a contract of exchange -- land tenure in return for loyalty and service, and may be expressed in the four words: lord, vassal, fealty and fief. It was,

as far as the ruler was concerned, a very loose system of control over his kingdom. All land belonged, in theory, to the sovereign. In reward for service he distributed certain landholdings to his highest nobles, the counts and dukes. These in turn sub-divided their land in return for the homage and service and payments in kind of their lesser tenants in the following ranks of nobility, and the system pyramided down to the simple knight whose bit of land, cultivated by peasants or serfs, might perhaps be barely sufficient to enable him to support himself and provide the horse, armour and weapons with which he rode out to perform his military service to his over-lord. **Feudum**, or fee, or fief, is therefore land (or office or revenue) held in dependence upon any person. All landholders depend upon the sovereign, either directly or indirectly through some lord. Every man owes homage and service to the man from whom he holds land. Thus the relationship is not only that of tenant to landlord, but also of vassal to lord.

The system, however, did not originate only from above downwards: it also started from below. Feudalism grew up through the loss of the ordinary man's independence. When the barbarian invasion came, and the complex Roman legal system that had protected the common man within its framework broke down, life very suddenly became a struggle for survival in which the smaller man had no chance without the protection of someone greater and more powerful than himself. In such a case he surrendered what land he had to the stronger, rendered him homage, and received back the tenancy of his land as a fee, or in fief. In return

for the lord's protection and the right to till his former possession, he owed his lord service, especially military service -- the military service and assistance that the overlord in his turn demanded from his vassals in order to provide the army requirements of the sovereign.

Such a vassal at the bottom of the scale owed to his immediate lord a fealty which was stronger than his loyalty even to his sovereign. And though the right of appeal to the sovereign in legal matters existed even for the lowliest peasant, yet, in practice, every tenant was subject to the immediate jurisdiction of the landlord's court -- the manorial court - for the royal law-courts were distant and probably weak, perhaps in some cases non-existent.

The peasant held his little plot on condition of three days' work for his lord and three for himself. As, in addition, he owed military service, and the nobility of mediaeval times were almost constantly involved in warfare, the peasant had often to neglect his fields and march under his lord's banner. Higher up in the social scale the richer or more powerful vassal could redeem his service or the obligations upon which his fief had been granted by paying a sum of money to his lord. In the later stages of feudalism it became the general rule for nearly all vassals to pay cash in lieu of rendering service, or of yielding up in kind the lord's share in the revenue of their holdings.

There were a few other obligations on the part of the vassal. Thus he had to be prepared to contribute handsomely when his lord had any extra expense,

as when the eldest son assumed knighthood, when a dowry had to be provided for the lord's daughter, or, as so often happened, the lord had to be ransomed when captured. And when the holder of the fief was a woman her lord had the right to approve her marriage or withhold his sanction, in order to ensure his getting good vassals.

The feudal system, which at first sight, would seem to have had great cohesion, and by its scale of dependence downwards to provide control over the loyalty of every man in the king's dominions, so that all fealty finally converged in the central authority of the king, held in itself the seeds of its own final disruption in the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries. In the first place the greater nobles, as soon as they acquired more wealth and power by private warfare or marriage, finally assumed a measure of independence towards the sovereign, and became petty rulers on their own account, strong enough even to defy the authority of their liege lord, as did William of Normandy. In the second place, owing to the terms whereon fiefs were granted, the vassal in time also came to have a measure of independence and legal power in connection with his tenancy. The tenancy, namely, was not for a certain number of years only, or simply for life, to revert again at the tenant's death to the original owner of the fief. It became hereditary tenancy: so long as the tenant (vassal) remained faithful to his lord and performed the stipulated services, and his successors did homage and continued to meet the conditions upon which the fief had originally been granted, neither the lord nor his heirs could rightfully regain possession of the land.

As the great vassals-in-chief who held land directly from the king soon became almost independent of him according as their own holdings and power increased, and they built up great armies from the ranks of their own vassals, and ensconced themselves in powerfully fortified strongholds; and as the sub-vassals owed their greatest loyalty to their immediate lords, and often had not done homage to the king personally, it is easy to see how loosely the central authority was vested in the person of the king. The break-up of the whole system, accordingly, although it did not come for some centuries, was only a matter of time in a changing world-order, especially after the social and economic changes which followed the Renaissance. (1)

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- (1) Feudalism was not confined to the Frankish empire or to the Middle Ages only. In Roman times already we have something of a similar kind in the client-patron relationship: the system whereby the small man formally placed himself under the protection of a great man was called patrocinium. There was also the system called precarium, which is a financial relation of dependence. Originally it signified a tenancy by friendship or favour, from precare: one man prays another, as a favour, to let him have the use of a plot of land which the other does not need. Later a poor man, in time of trouble, might beseech a great man to protect his farm. The great man could make the surrender of the land a condition of his protection. He would then give it back as a precarium. Bankrupts and all who were compelled to abandon responsibilities and ownership to some great landholder thus protected themselves personally by patrocinium, or financially by precarium, or by taking advantage of both customs. Thus we have a rudimentary feudo-vassalage system.

The Germans in the earliest years had something similar. Tacitus describes how distinguished warriors gathered round them a whole fellowship of satellites: this companionship he calls comitatus, and he describes this fellowship tie as being stronger than that which bound the man to his State. On the other hand the Germans had no financial arrangement resembling the precarium.

After the barbarian invasions the conquerors
(footnote continued on next page)...

The other great characteristic feature of the middle ages, Chivalry, was a 'system' or concept as undefinable as, and much more abstract than, feudalism itself. Opinion on the real nature of chivalry as a code is sharply divided, and one wonders how far it came to realizing its ideals. While some historians see in it a wonderfully ideal code of honour based on the highest Christian teachings, others are frankly sceptical.

On the one hand Professor J.J.C. Hearnshaw, in his Chivalry and its Place in History becomes almost lyrical in his eulogy :-

"Above all, it inculcated an ideal of social service; service without remuneration; service, however humble its nature, free from degradation or disparagement; service of the weak by the strong; service of the poor by the wealthy; service of the lowly by the high". (1)

Mediaeval chivalry, thus, according to Professor Hearnshaw, "in England set the tone which has been perpetuated in the great Public School tradition".

(footnote continued from previous page)

easily adopted the Roman system, and the precarius developed rapidly among the Franks, only changing its name to beneficium. Under the Merovingian kings even great men adopted the precarius tenure, and precarius and patrocinium were fused into one single system --- and this was the birth of the feudal system.

In England the Saxons first and the Danes later, too, had their own peculiar class system and system of holding and working the land, so that a feudal state of an early kind existed in England at the time of the Conquest.

- (1) G.G. Coulton: Mediaeval Panorama: The English Scene from Conquest to Reformation. Cambridge University Press, 1938, p. 234.

On the other hand J.R. Green calls chivalry "A picturesque mimicry of high sentiment". Bishop Stubbs wrote: "What is the meaning of Chivalry? Is it not the gloss put by fine manners on vice and selfishness and contempt for the rights of man?" (1)

Again, by way of contrast, we may refer to Chaucer's more than well-known description of the perfect knight. And Malory, too, defines the ideal to which all knights of the Round Table were sworn. Yet of the knights whose function it was "to protect the Church, to fight against treachery, to reverence the priesthood, to fend off injustice from the poor" a churchman could write scornfully, but probably with some measure of justice, that they outraged every rule of knighthood. Peter of Blois, Archdeacon of Bath, writes to a friend :

"I cannot bear the vaunting and vainglory of the knights your nephews The Order of Knighthood, in these days of ours, is mere disorder. For he whose mouth is defiled with the foulest words, whose oaths are most detestable, who least fears God, who vilifies God's ministers, who feareth not the Church -- that man nowadays is reputed bravest and most renowned of the knightly band ---- Even nowadays, aspirants receive their swords from the altar in order that they may profess themselves sons of the Church, acknowledging themselves to have received their weapons for the honour of the priesthood, the defence of the poor, the avenging of wrongs and the freedom of their country. Yet in practice they do the contrary ... If these knights of ours are sometimes constrained to take the field, then their sumpter-boasts are laden not with steel but with wine, not with spears but with cheeses, not with swords but with wine-skins, not with javelins but with spits. You would think they were on their way to feast and not to fight". (2)

(1) Coulton: Op. cit., P. 235.

(2) Idem, p. 243.

Caxton was to make a bitter complaint on the debasement of the ideals of knighthood and chivalry later⁽¹⁾, and we shall attempt to assess the real state of chivalry - by the end of the fifteenth century at least - in the proper place below⁽²⁾.

Chivalry was less an institution than an ideal. Schofield says:

"Chivalry was the golden dream of possibilities which hovered above the eyes of mediaeval men and women, ennobling their aspirations but finding its truest expression less in actual existence than in legend and literature".⁽³⁾

Just as feudalism was never systematized and put to writing, so, too, there probably never was any official written code of chivalry. It was also a matter of usage, custom and tradition. The Church itself had great influence in moulding it, as can be seen from the development of the ritual accompanying the assumption of the status of knighthood. There were different ways of conferring knighthood. In the simplest the king or great noble simply dubbed the worthy recipient on the field of battle or in his hall. In the second or more usual method there was a good deal of religious ceremony and ritual, although the actual investiture was still done by a lay person. The candidate kept vigil throughout the previous night, praying before the altar on which his arms were laid.

(1) See below, Chapter IX, p. 243.

(2) See below, Chapter IX, pp. 243 - 247.

(3) W.H. Schofield: Chivalry in English Literature: Chaucer, Malory, Spenser and Shakespeare. Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature II, Harv. Univ. Press, 1925, p. 3.

The next morning he took a ceremonial bath to symbolize his purification. (The Order of the Bath still bears testimony to this part of the ritual). Then he made confession and heard Mass, after which his spurs and sword were buckled on, usually by some high-born maid⁽¹⁾. Then he was dubbed with the sword by the sovereign, and exhorted in a formal sermon. A third and rarer ceremony was purely clerical, and was performed by a bishop.

The true-born knight was supposed to be as gentle as he was courageous. He had to be courteous to all, even -- and especially -- to the weak and poor. He had to be pure in his character, modest and chaste, and moderate in all things. He vowed to devote his life to service, not only of his lord, but of all people. He had to fight injustice and protect the weak. In its ideal form, therefore, chivalry represented the complete expression of the Biblical doctrine of serving first God and next to God one's fellow-men. Now in the pages of truthful history we see little of this ideal chivalry reflected, although some contemporary historians such as Froissart (who was no mere romancer) have given us the fairer pages from those times.

But, on the whole, the Middle Ages was a hard time when selfishness and cruelty were almost necessary conditions to prevail in the struggle for existence. Most dependable historical records of the times suggest little of the chivalry which is imparted in contemporary romance. That chivalry was the ideal

(1) Cf. Malory: Morte D'Arthur, Bk. XVII, Chs. 2 - 7, and Don Quixote, Bk. I, Ch. III, and even the arming of Christian in the Pilgrim's Progress.

which the trouvères held up to the court ladies of their times and such of the men as would heed it. But the real Middle Ages was not a period of chivalry in the sense of courtesy, generosity and strength dedicated to the cause of the weak. For the questing knights of romance (riding to succour helpless ladies, and generally righting the wrong) we have foraging freebooter barons burning and pillaging castles and hamlets -- a nobility who hanged, or at least cropped the ears of, the serfs whom they caught stealing an occasional deer or otherwise encroaching on the divine prerogatives of the aristocracy.

Instead of worshipping the ladies as the love-lorn, sighing and swooning knights of romance were represented as doing, the men of the times looked upon their womenfolk as chattels owned for their own gratification. In the place of the mystic religious fervour of the Grail seekers we have in the Middle Ages actually an insincere piety and lip-service to the authority of the Church in times of prosperity; and, conversely, a primitive, superstitious fear, and trust in the efficacy of naïve charms, relics and talismans, as well as judicious and expedient candle-burning or endowment of some monastery, and purchased prayers, in warding off divine anger and retribution. It was a time when the jungle law of 'might is right!' could be practised with an impunity in proportion to the individual's military strength or delegated authority. It was a time whose common events are more vividly portrayed by a single such sharply-drawn vignette as the neo-mediaevalist William Morris's Haystack in the Floods than by the broad canvas of the other earlier

mediaevalist and depicter of the twilight of chivalry, Jean Froissart.

Especially by the end of the fifteenth century, when the ideals of chivalry were still theoretically observed, the practice had sadly deteriorated.

"Never has England had an aristocracy more proud and privileged, nor, it would seem, more corrupt than in the fifteenth century. Unless all contemporary records deceive, some of the most conspicuous nobles then were reckless, dishonest, sensual, and brutal, to a degree that we nowadays find hard to believe. Unbridled selfishness and insolence had a natural issue in riot and disorder. Robbery and rape, sacrilege, murder - every sort of foul crime by so-called gentlemen - is openly chronicled. Suspicion and uncertainty afflicted the nation".⁽¹⁾

These remarks apply, not only to the end of the Middle Ages, but also, and as much, to the whole period in which the ideals of Chivalry and noblesse oblige are supposed to have reflected the lives and actions of men of noble birth.

The French romancers, however, reflect the chivalry we like to imagine was the general social rule throughout civilized Europe. After all, even the rude ideals of those brutal times, especially as reflected in the earlier heroic epics of the Carolingian cycles, are such as can be admired at any time, and in any society. They were: the worship of physical courage, and the manly qualities of strength and daring; the quick defence of honour -- tarnished though it may be by custom and training in selfish usages; faithfulness to the person of the king or other feudal overlord, as exemplified in Charlemagne and his peers of

(1) Schofield, op. cit., p. 95.

the early French heroic epics, the Chansons de Geste; and the eagerness to embark on adventurous and desperate quests. All these helped to create the age even as we know it in authentic history.

Of course, the later French romances with their exposition of the minds and souls of stricken lovers, of ridiculous ventures undertaken for the sake of impressing a loved one, represent a more emasculated chivalry than that of the earlier and ruder heroic epics. In them the chevaliers very often exchange the battlefield for the lady's bower and achieve their conquests with the lute rather than the lance.

But leaving for a moment the world of romance, and returning to the real life of the Middle Ages, we may suppose that the code of chivalry was not an entirely dead letter, and that some, if not all, of those who professed to nobility of birth and behaviour conformed to much of the usages of chivalry. It was a civilizing and refining influence in the barbarous times.

For one thing, it did much, in the long run, towards raising woman's status. Among the most important articles of the teachings of chivalry were those that inculcated respect for womanhood, and that had their origin, partly, in the worship of the Virgin Mary, which received definite impetus from the Church teachings of the eleventh century. Progress in this direction was slow, in truth, and did not prevent universal wife-beating in the Middle Ages⁽¹⁾, but in romance,

(1) Coulton, op. cit., P. 614: and cf. R.J. Mitchell and M.D.R. Leys: A History of the English People, London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1950, pp. 38 and 178 to 180.

again, which reflects the finer and more refined aspects of mediaeval life, we find womanhood elevated to a pedestal, and the service of women considered as the supreme duty of knighthood.

By Chaucer's time - that is, by the latter half of the fourteenth century - chivalry was in decay. Froissart cannot hide its decadence from the discerning reader. Much more had chivalry declined by the end of the fifteenth century when Malory wrote his great prose epic of chivalry, perhaps as a last desperate effort to preserve some of the finer things of the past. Yet this decadence was not due entirely to internal causes.

Other influences were operating to bring an epoch and its way of life to an end. Feudalism as such was disintegrating, the Renaissance teachings contributed to the break-up, and finally, as the towns grew, and, with them, the wealth of their merchants, a new class of society - that of the merchant and craftsman - was being born. Against these influences knighthood could not maintain its position, and chivalry declined accordingly.⁽¹⁾

Nevertheless, we may assume that in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries chivalry as a code was still an influence of power, that could not be entirely neglected by any powerful noble who would retain some measure of honour and claim to gentility and courtesy. Here we cannot stress sufficiently the influence of the troubadours and trouvères,

(1) See below Chapter IX, p..246.

who by their songs and romances did much to strengthen and spread, indirectly yet very subtly, the more refining and civilizing rules and lessons of chivalry. In this respect mediaeval romance was a textbook of courteous and gentle practice and convention, which through its wide currency exerted a powerful influence for good.

in fact
Some sort of refining or ennobling was necessary, in all conscience, in those rude times. Life in the average Norman-English castle, for example, was crude enough. The domestic economy of castle life was simple, hard and even austere. The hall was, as in Anglo-Saxon times, the centre of family life. There the lord and his lady ate, managing their food with fingers and dagger, even as their retainers did, because such simple tools as forks and spoons were not yet standard equipment at meals. Even plates were hardly in use, and meat was eaten on trenchers of bread that were laid on the bare boards of the trestle tables, and that were, after use, simply flung to the floor, to mingle there with the bones and other table refuse. Such of these morsels as were not eaten by the mastiffs and hounds remained lying, with the droppings of hawks and the mud from men's feet, under the rotting mat of rushes until the latter might be renewed some months later.⁽¹⁾

When the time came to retire the lord and his lady might possibly make their beds in the very hall, close to where their followers rolled themselves

(1) Mitchell and Leys, op. cit., pp. 34 to 37;
Coulton, op. cit., pp. 228, 305.

in their cloaks and made themselves comfortable on the benches or the floor. Such primitive sleeping arrangements would make it possible for Tristan to visit the queen's couch, as in the romance, while the presence of the many knights around provided a good alibi. At best the lord and lady might withdraw to their rooms in that part of the dark and cold castle which had been made habitable for the household, but the servants and fighting men made shift as best they could with the amenities of the hall. The torches and rushlights in brackets on the wall burnt dimly through the woodsmoke which, coming from the fire on the open hearth in the centre of the floor space, curled upwards and found its way out through louvres in the roof.

When there was peace and the castle not threatened by battle or siege, life went on in a calm and almost monotonous way. The lord and his men hunted the deer or the wild boar in the forests (even as had Kulhwch in the old Welsh tale); the lady supervised such little of the work as the seneschal, stewards or bailiffs did not oversee, and further raised her children, worked at her embroidery, or whiled away the hours, if she were musical, with lute or rote. It was a life in which the little variety that the wandering minstrel or poet brought with his tales of adventure and love, was truly welcome.

And when the lords were away at one of the almost incessant wars which engaged the nobility of the time, or possibly on a crusade, it was not to be wondered at that the ladies of the castle should not only turn to the stories of undying love, but even to

welcome such an amorous adventure on their own account in order to relieve the boredom of their drab and circumscribed lives.

Such an illicit love-affair and the consequent domestic triangles were more a matter of rule in the middle ages than is generally realized. In the ballads to which we will refer below (page 259), and in the romance tales of the gentle-folk no less than in the coarse fabliaux of lewd folk, there were enough cases of satirical and scornful references to the 'sacrament' of the marital state.

Besides, it is a historical fact that most marriages of the time among the higher levels of society were loveless arrangements of convenience. Here the marriages were arranged according to the dictates of policy, often to unite two powerful families, or to patch up an uncertain truce. Even down to the ranks of the peasants the mariage de convenance was the normal arrangement.⁽¹⁾

Although the human being is an adaptable creature and many such marriages worked out fairly well in the end, it is to be expected that the tie was not very strong in most cases, and marital litigation and divorce were common in the Middle Ages. In fact it was comparatively easy to dissolve an unwished marriage (for the man, that is); in spite of the strict

(1) Mitchell and Leys, op. cit., p. 180: "The case of a marriageable girl who was unmarried and without a sufficient dower to attract a husband, and who had no vocation as a nun, could be very wretched, and it is not surprising that she would be ready to accept any suitor her family could provide for her, whatever her personal feelings might be".

canonical rules of the mediaeval Catholic Church, or perhaps, as a result of them, a divorce could very easily be obtained on the common ground of consanguinity. The complicated system of reckoning this consanguinity made it more than likely that any particular marriage should fall within the forbidden degrees, and such a relationship could readily be discovered, if convenient, for the termination of marriage. So, for example, if the parties were related in the fourth degree the marriage was null and void unless a papal dispensation could be procured.

Where such relief was not possible or practicable there was estrangement at least, and the temptation to seek happiness outside the union. Even more must this have been the case as a result of the very common practice of child marriage, and especially wardships which was so common in mediaeval England. The guardianship of orphaned wards by the overlord was a matter of considerable profit since the guardian handled the endowment until the child's coming of age, and was able to dispose of him or her in marriage almost as he chose.

Parents also often arranged the marriage of their children to others of their choice at a very early age. Where the bride and groom were betrothed in extreme youth, or a maid of tender years espoused to some mature husband, so that one at least of the contracting parties had little to say in the matter of choice, it is not surprising that in the course of time there should be unfaithfulness on the part of the wife. The male partner to such a marriage could at any rate reconcile himself to the condition of his wedded life as

he, being lord or seigneur, could often exercise his 'feudal rights' promiscuously among the more comely wenches of the vill, or the womenfolk of his lesser vassals generally. Indeed, the jus primae noctis (or 'Droit du Seigneur'), in which the lord claimed the patriarchal right of first approving the young bride's fitness for the married state, was a much-honoured principle of mediaeval law. The wife on her part would not be slow to seize any opportunity that offered for similar freedom to seek love where she could find it. That the subject of the mal mariée should, therefore, be a stock theme of mediaeval stories is accordingly no matter for wonder.

The mediaeval husband would, of course, strive to ensure the sanctity of the marriage pact on the part of his wife with the utmost rigour and jealousy. Opportunity would, however, not be lacking for the determined and desperate lady to find means of evading his vigilance, and of arranging meetings with the favoured lover when she had succumbed to the power of Love's sweet constraint. For, after all, according to mediaeval reasoning, Love was all-powerful, and the unhappily-married bride could not always resist love's dictates, merely to preserve a fidelity which was not owed where no love was - that is, towards her husband.

And so, what at first was an expedient or occasional lapse became at length a convention, and this deception of the husband which, plainly and simply, was nothing less than polite adultery, became looked upon as a virtue. Owing to the suspiciousⁿ and precautions of the husband, and the consequent difficulties

laid in the way of the guilty pair (not to say the positive danger involved in their relationship), and their fidelity towards each other in the face of great obstacles, the lovers could always depend upon the sympathy of all who might know of the liaison, while the injured husband who sought to keep them apart was nothing but the villain of the piece. He was always considered to be well served when the true lovers through perseverance at length overcame all difficulties and were able to consummate their love in each other's arms.

Such intrigues must have been of sufficiently common occurrence to provide, at length, the source of inspiration for mediaeval poets. Love, and especially guilty love, is probably the world's oldest theme of popular story and song. Sex was then, as it is now, the one subject of universal curiosity and interest. Thus the very condition of the mediaeval conjugal relationship gave birth to the amour courtois which meets us on every page of romance.

CHAPTER V : Courtly Love.

"Diu mines herzen ein wunne und ein krôn ist
vor allen frouwen, diêch noch hân gesên,
Schône unde schône unde schône, aller schônist
ist si, mîn frouwe:"

Heinrich von Morungen: Liebeslied.



HE background for infidelity and deception having been established, it only remained for society to set the seal of approval of polite minds on it and for poets to sing its praises.

The Provencal poets were much concerned with love in all its aspects, and the service demanded by Love of its votaries. In their romances they built up a whole complex structure of custom and etiquette, laws and conventions governing the behaviour of true lovers. There were supposed to be Courts of Love that had to decide upon all matters of love between the knight and his 'amie'.

This queer literary convention, the amour courtois, 'courtly love' -- the code which ruled the conduct of the knight towards the lady he had vowed to love and serve -- is an interesting and curious phenomenon of the mediaeval mind. It is the one aspect of polite society life in the Middle Ages which strikes us most forcibly in reading mediaeval romance.

Every knight worthy the name had a lady as the object of his affection and loyalty whom he vowed to love and serve. To her he devoted his life and in her honour he performed great feats of arms. Even in

the smallest matter he had to obey her every wish and behest, no matter how insignificant, with an unquestioning obedience that in some instances in the most popular romances amounted almost to a grovelling servility. Lancelot, for example, unhesitatingly acts the craven when Guenever bids him play a cowardly part in order that she may test the strength and quality of his devotion for her.

In the conventional ruling of the 'Courts of Love' (that were supposed to have decided on all matters of love, courtesy and etiquette) the knight ought by preference to love and serve as his lady -- his 'amie' -- a married lady of higher station than himself.⁽¹⁾ The process by which the lovers met, and the many steps in which their love blossomed and progressed, and the way

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- (1) Writing later than the trouvères sang - in the fourteenth century, when knighthood was still in flower - Boccaccio, with riotous fancy, gave us numerous examples of amorous ladies of gentle birth being attracted to the persons of well-set-up pages and even lusty grooms and other such humble but satisfactory Don Juans. In the impudent pages of the Decameron this arch-satirist is not merely mocking the sanctity of marriage as an institution. We must conclude that his stories were also a picture of the decadent Italian society of his times.

And it is just here that the value of the Decameron is to be found. Boccaccio did not write to praise or recommend the licentiousness he portrays. The broadness of his humour represents the broad humanity with which he satirises the immorality of his times in polite society no less than among the common folk.

This is support, then, for our contention that the theory of courtly love is, to a certain extent, a reflection of the actual practice of mediaeval society in Europe. (See below Ch. VIII, pp. 231 - 234.)

Many centuries later de Balzac would lay claim to the title of spinner of such "droll stories" dealing with the more piquant aspects of illicit passion, although his master is Rabelais rather than Boccaccio, and he suffers by comparison with either of his more gifted predecessors in this genre.

in which, through a great series of trials and tests the lover was eventually found worthy of receiving, first, slight tokens of regard and, finally, the complete surrender of the loved one - all this formed the subject for the popular literature of the day.

The lovers in courtly romances did not merely meet and fall in love at sight. So rapid a courtship did not provide material for a tale that had to be spun out to provide many nights' entertainment. The course of true love was supposed to develop according to a regular system, or scheme, or series of steps; at every stage the behaviour of the lovers was closely governed and prescribed by the laws.

In theory the cavalier could always be made perfectly happy by slight tokens of favour such as his lady's expressed approval, or a scarf or glove to wear on his helm at the tournament.⁽¹⁾ In such robust times as the middle ages however, with its broader standards of morality, the matter did not quite work out like that in practice. Such relationships would and could not be confined to langorous looks and an occasional passionate kiss imprinted upon a slim white hand graciously extended through the window bars. The two famous liaisons of Lancelot and Guenever and Tristan and Iseult are the classic example of how

(1) Such festishistic charms must have symbolised more material and satisfactory favours to be conferred later. Much of the business of 'Courtly Love' seems to me to be a pathetic attempt at compensation, an attempt to sublimate or lift to a higher and more idealistic plane the real state of affairs to which the pale ladies of the castle had to resign themselves, and so sought to idealise in an artificial manner with the aid of their minstrels. The whole matter ought to yield a fruitful field of study to a literary student with a psycho-analytical bias.

Nature has a way of upsetting the rigid code even of a Court of Love when such a dangerous game is played.

"Naturam expellas furcā, tamen usque recurret". Departing Crusaders knew well that it was no needless precaution they took when they personally fitted 'chastity belts' to their wives and then hung the key around their own necks pending their return.⁽¹⁾

The literary aspect, however, of this 'amour courtois' was a more idealistic and ethereal manifestation of the genuine passion of reality, although romance made no effort to hide the obvious fact that the physical union of the lovers was the desired end of the long period of developing love. The ladies at court who were entertained by this artificial and conventional representation of exaggerated sentiment were pleased by the devotion and faithfulness displayed by the heroes of their favourite romances, heroes who adored at a distance and blanched and heaved deep sighs and trembled at sight of the loved one, did everything, in fact, but declare their love. Pleasant indeed must have been to them the long monologues by the afflicted lovers, the minute analyses of their feelings by the lovers, their endless amorous casuistry (cf. Cliges, vv. 575 - 1046 - see below).

This 'amour courtois', with its 'courts of love', codes of etiquette and behaviour and other appendages, and its reflection in the popular romances of the time, seems to have been a game invented partly by Marie of Champagne, and under her inspiration given

(1) But - love laughs at locksmiths?

literary form and further impetus by the trouvères who invented elaborations of the story themes. Chief portrayer of the literary side of the 'amour courtois' was Chrétien de Troyes. From the conditions governing the marital relation in the middle ages, as indicated on pages 101-105 above, there grew at length the conclusion that the marriage must always and of necessity be merely a social practice - if not an evil - to be borne for the sake of custom and considerations of expediency, and to continue the race, but of love within the relationship there could be no question. True love could only exist extra-maritally, where the man was not the spouse of the woman, although she might be married to another. Nor even do the romances, except by way of exception, celebrate the innocent and legitimate love of two young people both unwedded, where love ran its course to be blessed at the final and happy conclusion with the sanction of a legal union and lasting conjugal bliss thereafter, as in an ordinary modern sentimental novel.

The very idea of marriage precluded all thought of true love, as in the curiously twisted ethics of mediaeval romance, which expounds the nature of the amour courtois, wedded love was a contradictio in terminis -- no such thing could be. Legalized love in which there were no barriers to be overcome, no pursuit, no flight, no conquest, no trials and tribulations, no furtiveness, no intrigue -- that was not love worthy of being recounted and extolled in a romance. In a true romance there must be difficulties in the way of the lovers, for opposition to the attainment of the desired end would make the desire greater, would nourish it and

strengthen it, make the lovers more constant and faithful to each other, enable them to endure greater trials, and stimulate them to overcome greater obstacles. A married woman of necessity owed her husband love and obedience: there was in wedlock, therefore, no question of choice for her to confer her favour.

The whole question hinges, to a certain extent, on the attitude of the mediaeval Church towards marriage, and carnal love in particular, of which more below.

In trying to trace the immediate fons et origo of the concept of courtly love, besides the conditions of mediaeval society which, as we have seen above, gave rise to such a perverse valuation of the sanctity of the marriage tie as to make it something to be contemptuously and even cynically transgressed, the student has very few pointers besides such knowledge as may be concluded from the romances themselves, and for the rest, two or three modern studies on the subject. There is still a fruitful field of research for the serious student in the whole question of this literary curiosity. The following three writers cast some light on the matter - the last-named is the most important: William A. Neilson, Sarah F. Barrow and C.S. Lewis.⁽¹⁾

Neilson's work is a critical textual study of

(1) W.A. Neilson: The Origins and Sources of the "Court of Love". Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature, No. VII, Boston, Ginn & Co., 1899.

Sarah F. Barrow: The Mediaeval Society Romances, New York, Columbia University Press, 1924.

C.S. Lewis: The Allegory of Love, A Study in Medieval Tradition, O.U.P., 1948

the mediaeval English poem The Court of Love and other similar allegorical poems. In this work he shows that though the literature of courtly love found its impetus through the work produced under the patronage of Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Countess Marie of Champagne, 'Courts of Love' never existed as a serious, organized institution in the court of either of these patrons of letters.

There was a well-established tradition and convention which expounded and taught the theory and laws of the deportment of courtly lovers, but no regular 'Courts' were ever held to decide on matters of love.

The origin of the 'laws and customs' of courtly love is to be found, in the first place, in the lyrical verse of the Provençal troubadours who produced a new philosophical and reflective type of love poetry in which there were great digressions in order to analyse the motives and doubts of the lovers. So, in his romances, Chrétien, for example, halts the narrative in order to show by introspective soliloquies how the hero and heroine are torn between their emotions. An elaborate debate follows with much hair-splitting; often the debate takes an allegorical form: Reason may debate with Love as to the best course to be followed -- needless to say, Love always wins.

The debates as a literary form in mediaeval literature were a favourite exercise: they were written in Latin, and were chiefly didactic in content. They are represented in England by such poems as The Debate of the Body and the Soul and The Owl and the Nightingale. The introduction of love into the

debates was only a matter of time -- we find débats d'amour among the very earliest specimens of mediaeval amatory poetry.⁽¹⁾

Another factor that contributed to the birth of amour courtois was the existence in France of a large body of writers of amorous verse of an allegorical nature -- chief being the Roman de la Rose -- in which Love is represented as holding court where questions of love and disputes between lovers are brought for trial and decisions. In some of these poems the cult and worship of Love is represented as being almost a kind of mock religion, which burlesques divine worship. Neilson examines a great number of these poems and discusses them in all their aspects as a genre in support of his main discussion of the English Court of Love. His conclusion, however, is that this body of poetry does not justify the conclusion that there ever in the Middle Ages, existed a serious institution called the Court of Love in which actual cases of disagreement between lovers were submitted to formal tribunals, tried by formal laws, and settled by decisions which derived their force from the sanction of public opinion. For such a belief, besides the body of poetry he quotes and discusses, three other documents have been adduced: The Lives of the Provencal Poets by Johannes Nostradamus, the famous book of Andreas Cappalanus, (De Arte Honeste Amandi (circa 1200) and a fragmentary record of a Cour Amoureuse held about 1400. These have, however, been discredited because the idea of such a Court of Love was formed upon a misunderstanding of the passages in

(1) Neilson, op. cit., p. 241.

the writings of the troubadours which referred to the poetical amusements described.

Andreas, for example, in his book quoted certain decisions stated by him to have been made by the Countess Marie of Champagne herself. M. Gaston Paris (quoted by Neilson) objects that the conception is inconsistent with the very conditions in which it is represented. The one essential requirement in the conduct of all affairs of chivalrous love in the middle ages was the necessity for secrecy. Yet the only way of enforcing the decisions of the supposed tribunals that has been suggested by the upholders of the belief in the institution, is public opinion. How to bring public opinion to bear upon unknown persons is a problem not explained. Lovers' quarrels were probably sometimes settled by the intervention of others, and such decisions found their way into literature but there was no evidence of a formal institution.⁽¹⁾

It is clear, therefore, that there existed, as a widespread fashionable amusement, the custom of disputing on subtle points of love in connection with the poetical contests where there might be judges with decisions and prizes or not. There is no proof of the name 'Court of Love' having been used of this amusement in the time of the troubadours. The phrase belongs only to the type of allegory whose history forms the matter of Neilson's treatise, and was applied to the supposed institution only after 1400.

(1) Neilson, op. cit., p. 250.

Neilson says :-

"I do not mean to say, however, that these love discussions -- whether conducted in tensos by troubadours, in jeux partis by trouvères, as dubbii, questioni, or giochi by Italian courtiers, or as mock pleadings in the courts of those ladies of whose decisions Andreas has handed down so misleading a tradition -- were without their influence upon the conduct and ideals of courtly life in the middle ages the question of the existence of Courts of Love comes down to a question of jest and earnest, and the line between these is not easy to draw". (1)

He shows how in modern life many a game, played in deadly earnest, many a business, is carried on as a 'game', and goes on :-

"There is no reason to believe that business and play were any more clearly divided in the middle ages, and we may grant the love discussions of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter an immense influence upon knightly conduct without in any way invalidating the contention that these ladies and their courtiers were only playing a game". (2)

..... a game, therefore, but one that had some refining and ennobling effect upon chivalrous conduct in a rude age.

Miss Barrow's study is a critical examination of some twenty-seven romances (only about six of them Arthurian) in order to demonstrate how a certain type of mediaeval romance in spirit and literary technique "is the prototype of the modern psychological novel of manners". From these romances she demonstrates how the very element of courtly love portrayed therein transformed the episodic romances, whose main ingredients were action, into well-constructed novels that

(1) Neilson, op. cit., p. 248.

(2) Idem, p. 250.

have psychological truth, with motivated action, so that they gain in artistic value. She feels that these courtly romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, although they seem at first reading so remote from modern fiction, yet foreshadow the modern novels, both in human interest and narrative art, owing to the presence and influence in them of the ingredient of courtly love. She says :-

"... They too reflect contemporary life in stories shaped and made real by the psychological and social themes. the romances of Chrétien de Troyes and his school of courtly poets, with their subordination of action to motive, their analysis of thought and feeling, and their attention to social background, clearly point the way to the work of such novelists as Bourget and Galsworthy". (1)

She discusses fully those romances which, instead of action, portray thought and sentiment, and so she differentiates between the two kinds of romances and classifies them as "the society romance" and the "romance of adventure".

Emphasis of the one or the other of the two great themes of romance, love and adventure, has a very significant effect. In the rambling romance of adventure there is no unity of plot: the knight errant moves and acts without the inner stimulus of thought and feeling which the love theme ensures. Love is incidental and not the goal of the knight's ambition.

In the romances of sentiment, on the other hand, where adventure is subordinated to love, there is seen a unity of plot but, even more important, in view of the subsequent development of fiction, is the

(1) Barrow, op. cit., p. 1.

shift of interest from deed to motive and consequent elaboration of the psychological element.

In these romances the trouvères purpose, ostensibly at least, to teach the doctrines of the fine amor. They want to show how refined people of high birth and gentle manners think and act when in love, or rather, how they ought to think and act. The society romance is a "problem" story, trying to answer psychological and ethical questions raised by sentimental theories and social conditions. The problem was limited by convention and some phase of courtly love, and two ends were to be attained: the correct demonstration of the psychology of love, and the safe-conduct of love beset by hostile forces.

The course of true love, in the system of the amour courtois, according to Miss Barrow, had five stages :- (1) Incipieny; (2) Development; (3) Betrothal; (4) Ordeal; and (5) Union. In varying measure the majority of the "society" romances reflect these five stages, and is the story built on this plan, with change of names, places, situation and episodic details.

In his manual for lovers, the De Amore (as it may be termed under its short title), André the Chaplain has set out scientifically the rules for, or stages of, the process and growth of love. He based his textbook on the Ars Amatoria of Ovid, in which the Latin author wrote on love with the humorous and satirical tongue-in-cheek style usual to him, and which the students of love in the Middle Ages with their earnestness and lack of humour chose to accept in all earnest

as serious precepts.

Miss Barrow analyses nearly thirty such society romances that are constructed in conformity with the Andean principles, in order to trace therein various stages of the growth and development of love and how it motivates and actuates the further series of events. The lovers behave entirely according to accepted convention, and in the measure in which they reflect the rules of cortoisie in their behaviour, to that extent are they to be praised as exponents and upholders of the ideals of courtly love.

The hero and heroine do not lack constancy -- especially on the part of the hero is the willing submission of the will to love faithfully portrayed.

"... The poets tried to do artistically what Andreas tried to do scientifically. They aimed to show the true nature and the natural phenomena of fine amor, that irresistible, compelling, inexorable affection of the heart, which enslaves the mind and body, subdues the will, refines the manners, inflicts agonies of doubt, fear, and despair, works havoc with physical health, but repairs its ravages with its joys, and rewards devoted loyalty with lasting happiness. For their purpose the trouvères of the twelfth century fashioned the machinery of fine-spun analysis, reflection, complaints, pleas, symptoms, and stereotyped subtleties of thought and imagery, which marks the medieval romance." (1)

In the romances we see thus all the well-known and well-worn instances which go to show what is expected of the ideal lover -- the exaggerated sentiment, the grotesque demands and services, the furtiveness, intrigue and deceit, the superhuman achievements

(1) Barrow, op. cit., p. 9.

under the spur of love, the whole procession of endless debates and ratiocination and amorous conceits which are repeated with little originality or change of presentation in the different romances.

In the further chapters of her exposition of the amour courtois or the fine amor (as she calls it) Miss Barrow makes an able job of her task to show the fairer aspects of this exaggerated sentiment, its ennobling effect upon knightly endeavour, and its contribution to plot and structure in romance. The details of this superrefined and almost pathological love need not, however, concern us much further here. The curious phenomenon of this artificial sentiment with all its swooning and frenzies and other puerilities may be fully examined in the romances woven around its theme. We must rather pause a moment to consider some aspects of the matter which Miss Barrow cannot avoid mentioning but does not pursue to a satisfactory conclusion. And this is the great and almost irreconcilable aspect of the clash of moral and ethical considerations brought about by the demands of the fine amor.⁽¹⁾

In Chapter III of her book she sets out to depict the effect of the impact of courtly love on

(1) Under normal circumstances, I suppose, literary criticism is not concerned with the moral aspect of literature, except in so far as an obviously prurient piece of work, or children's reading matter, comes under review. In my personal 'theory of poetry' (or the discussion of the lasting value of literature as a whole), however, I cannot see how the discussion of a literature's moral or ethical tone can be ignored. The theme of a story can, of course, be wholly immoral, like that of Tristan and Iseult, but still be redeemed by its beauty or the moral lesson to be drawn from it. But, on the whole, literature must teach - even if only by horrible examples. "The function of poetry is to make man better".

society. She says (pages 32 - 33) :-

"He (the poet) not only sets forth the science of love, but as a rule, endeavours also to define its relation to social ideals. His eye is on society as well as on his lovers. Nor is this altogether the result of his aim to make his tale convincing through realistic setting and motivation. In most cases he is distinctly interested in the social significance of his sentimental theme".

As members of society the lovers are subject to conventions that are often inimical to love. The career of the model lover, then, must be studied in connection with general standards of conduct. Courtly romances may be grouped in two kinds according to the reaction of the lovers to the circumstances of their amour.

The romances of the first group very often deal with situations having no distinctly moral barrier to love but offering social obstacles such as discrepancy in rank and fortune, parental opposition or other prejudices. The goal of these romances is a happy marriage, in a union sanctioned by church and society. Yet even in such decorous affairs the tone of the story may be unmoral, and the lovers unite before the Church sanctions the union, as in the Partonopeus. In the preliminary stages of the developing passion there is much to-do about the heroine preserving her chastity from her lover, yet circumstances of the tale soon demand and condone a precipitate consummation, which is then entirely in order (so long as scandal has been avoided) as the ideal end of romance, and because it is not illicit and so violates none of the more conservative conventions of society. The wedding is but the public evidence of love's victory over hostile fortune,

a victory without moral aid.

In other romances, again, such as Cliges, the love-affair is illicit, where the heroine is already tied by the bonds of marriage, generally a loveless one. Now the reasoning of the fine amor generally runs thus: in most cases the love of the hero and the heroine is justified by the lovers concerned in that their passion antedated the hateful marriage, which is therefore unhallowed and cannot be considered morally binding. Such a situation immediately, in the ethical code of courtly love, justifies unfaithfulness and intrigue; the unhappy marriage is the obstacle to be overcome without any moral scruples: the union of the lovers is -- as always -- the proper end approved by all.

Bound by law to husbands not of their own choosing the heroines of such romances find themselves in a situation demanding a compromise more or less moral between the social and the sentimental conscience. Fidelity is owed only to the lover, and the casuistry, quibbling and confused logic of the clash between two faiths -- the moral or legal and the sentimental -- is most entertaining and a revelation of mediaeval dialectics. Intrigue and deception of the husband and the maintenance of chastity for the sake of the lover are all considered perfectly justified and natural and these ends are sought and attained by any means including drugs, spells and witchcraft generally. The lovers eagerly seek the desired end, yet shrink from the frank adultery of the Tristan and Iseult relationship on the lines set forth by the de Amore.

Now this is all very well and interesting as

far as it goes. After a promising beginning, however, Miss Barrow's examination of the subject does not get anywhere, and tails off disappointingly. She confines her enquiry to the shadowy society portrayed in the romance tales. It would have been of more interest and value, surely, to pursue the enquiry further to a study of the reconciliation between the ideals and ethics of courtly love -- in so far as they may be presumed to be a reflection of mediaeval thought and the actual practice of the times -- and the real people who actually lived in the Middle Ages.

Of course, one realizes that Miss Barrow is engaged on a purely literary study of a genre and not a historico-sociological treatise. Nevertheless, the whole question raises intriguing moral issues from the apparently irreconcilable clash that arises between two sets of moral values that are diametrically opposed, namely, the interest of the lovers and that of the rest of society, or rather, the ethics of courtly love and the moral basis on which society must necessarily be established.

In the romances of courtly love the only moral law is that which serves true love. Faith towards the loved one claims prior place to all other faiths. The ordinary values and moral standards on which an ordered society based on mutual faith and trust depends simply do not apply. What is moral according to modern standards and the ordinary rules of logical thinking is, in the ethical code of courtly romance, immoral in proportion as it militates against the interests of the lovers.

Now one must assume that even in the Middle Ages all other relationships must have depended for their continued existence on the ordinary standards of faith and integrity held by all reasonable men who respect a contract. Yet judging from the curiously warped logic of courtly romance, where that is held as moral and right which benefits one individual at the cost of another or the group as a whole, and all the concepts of honour and faith mean exactly the opposite, we see the first contradiction in the working of the mediaeval mind, namely, that two contrasting moralities can exist side by side. The second contrast I want to note is between the refinement of courtly love, on the one hand, and its accent on sexuality on the other. That these two facets of a single emotion, which, superficially seem to be mutually destructive, can exist side by side is something which the less tortuous and more realistic modern thinking fails to comprehend and to reconcile with what is just and fitting.

Miss Barrow analyses in detail a number of typical romances in order to show the triumph of the fine amor -- refined or courtly love -- in which there is in nearly every case not only complete justification of illicit love, but also the positive accentuation of the erotic element in love. She avoids discussion of this matter, however, which -- to my mind -- is the most obvious and cardinal aspect of courtly love, and whose examination cannot be ignored. Her silence on this point, in an otherwise penetrating and exhaustive study, is difficult to understand in a serious and objective student, for we must have clarity on the

ethical value of romance of this kind. (1)

After skirting delicately around the subject and avoiding a clear statement on the issues raised, she sums up, committing herself only thus far :

"In truth, courtly love is, in the final analysis, always of the world worldly. For all his exaltation of his theme, for all his emphasis upon the delicacy, the sweetness, the mysterious strength of the passion that he celebrates as the noblest that can animate a hero, the mediaeval romancer does not spiritualize love. With him it is throughout erotic and social. However disciplined and refined, however ennobled by Christian ideals it may be at its best, its ultimate level is material, not spiritual. The poet raises it through *cortoisie*, dignifying it through psychological science, and giving it the grace either of moral or sentimental virtue".

Now all this seems to mean something, yet it is by no means clear. I fail to see how Miss Barrow can arrive at the conclusion that courtly love has any grace, either moral or sentimental. To me its chief characteristic -- in spite of all cortoisie -- is the unmistakable and insistent crudity of the mediaeval concept of love.

All the sighing and sobbing, all the outpourings of impassioned longing, all the worship of the memory of the absent loved one, or of the visible symbols of the loved one such as a few stray strands of hair from a comb - all this is not the be-all and end-all of the romances. The separations, trials and tribulations are not undergone in order to ennoble and purify and sublimate the love of the lovers. It is as

(1) Or does one necessarily become "subjective", and one's judgment therefore invalid, when one carries an enquiry to the logical end of praise or condemnation?

if everyone knows what all this is the prelude to. Sooner or later the consummation comes as a reward for all that has gone before, and the actual, long-deferred carnal union which follows inevitably, takes place -- we may assume -- with a freedom and abandon in direct proportion to the period of hesitation and denial that went before. It is recounted by the poet/trouvère as the logical end of the adventure, and was seemingly accepted by mediaeval audiences as the obvious happy conclusion. Where the whole theme of incipient love and its gradual growth is handled with so much subtlety and delicacy, it is sometimes a little disturbing and shocking to see how crudely and with what lack of finesse the liaison comes to its point. Very often there is little preliminary wooing or what we would consider courtly love.

The union of the lovers has none of the purity of elemental passion: there is no freshness, no ideal mating as of two young lovers in the dawn of the world, innocent of all knowledge but their need for each other. The atmosphere of courtly love is oppressive with a constant and obtrusive urgency, a kind of furtive incontinence which belies the veneer of courtliness that brightens the actions of the lovers. Such a purely fleshly urge, stripped of its trappings of "fine manners and gay courts, of tourneys and fêtes, of wealth and rank, of deeds conspicuous for their daring skill, of fair loyalty and gracious rewards -- the world of chivalry",⁽¹⁾ is only an ugly residue, a sorry presentment of the love which is man's greatest divine gift.

(1) S.F. Barrow: The Mediaeval Society Romances, p. 67.

Let us recognize the fact at once honestly and sincerely: nearly all courtly romances are a glorification of illicit and adulterous love -- they are in truth, as Roger Ascham was to say upon a time⁽¹⁾ all compact of manslaughter and harlotry.

Granted that the standards of mediaeval thought on certain social matters are greatly different from those of to-day, it is nevertheless striking how the amour courtois is, if not always and positively immoral, at least often amoral.

The very nature of the amour courtois in its most praiseworthy manifestations is irreconcilable with, and inimical to, those very qualities which contribute to the structure and preservation of society. The stability of the married state founded upon mutual faith and trust is not merely an ideal of Christian-utopianism, but one of the corner-stones of civilized society.

Now the mediaeval attitude towards the sanctities of marriage is quite callous, and cynical and destructive to the greatest degree. But more, the crudity as opposed to the supposed refinement and idealism of the passion portrayed in courtly love romances is something that immediately occurs to the modern reader. It is difficult to see how the mediaeval romancer or his audience could have failed to see this incongruous element in the tales they told or enjoyed. Yet it may be that the consummation of the passion was the very thing the audience was waiting for to hear,

(1) See below Ch. IX, p. 242.

and so they enjoyed being baulked of the most piquant part of the story, with a sort of inverted bawdry, allowing themselves to be charmed for the time being with a sop of courtly innocuous amorousness in the tale of the preliminary and interminable stages of wooing and the development of love; hence, then, the deliberate crudity of the climax. As for the condonation of the 'unfaithful faithfulness' of the lovers towards husband and/or feudal lord, that we must attribute to a natural sympathy with and interest in the weal and woe of the lovers: anybody who stood in the way of the lovers' realizing their love would naturally be considered merely an unpopular hindrance, even though normally a breach of faith towards the cavalier's feudal lord would arouse only revulsion, as at treachery of the grossest kind.

Yet the amour courtois necessitated the breaking of moral laws that were valid even in the Middle Ages, if not among the wilder and less scrupulously-minded privileged and leisured classes, then at least among the clergy who held narrower views of virtue and probity. The mediaeval Church did have great spiritual influence, with its unlimited and very real powers of punishment, based - as it may have been - on superstitious fear rather than the deep religious zeal of those who stood under its rule. Thus it is difficult to understand how such lax concepts of the holiness of the married state could have originated in the age when the Church, with its stern moral and ethical teachings and an uncompromising attitude towards the infrangibility of the Ten Commandments, so completely controlled and affected men's thinking. (The golden age of

romance was before the advent of humanism and liberalism).

This attitude of indifference towards the views and teachings of the spiritual rulers, and general antagonism to all that is right, argues a state of laxity in moral and ethical standards which is usually associated with a very decadent civilization and society, comparable to that of ancient Babylon or of Rome, in its last stages, for instance, rather than of one in the vigour of its youth and growth, such as that of Europe in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries; or else of a barbarous and primitive society. A certain amount of freedom in sexual matters in Celtic or Teutonic myth does not seem at all out of place, but, then, one does not expect any 'courtliness' about the full-blooded wooing of old-world warriors who fought and fornicated with honest zest.

Nor is the love-making of romance lovers the legitimate love of young unmarried lovers. It is a prime essential of the fine amor that it nearly always entails a furtive amour of an adulterous nature. Nothing in romance can disguise the patent fact that the love of the knight and his amie can come to fruition only at the cost of committing sin -- it is, in short, the glorification of adultery, and the injured husband is the hated rival, or villain, who never has the sympathy of the teller or the hearer of the tales, and whose deception or discomfiture is the high-light of the history.

Courtly love succeeds - in a way possible only to the convolutions of mediaeval thought - in

reconciling flagrant immorality with the highest gentility and courtesy. This is a feat of mediaeval mental agility which we cannot accomplish to-day. They saw nothing incongruous in such a recognition of opposites: to them it was not only possible but normal, and we must recognize this duality.

We are driven to the conclusion that mediaeval romance was to some extent a reaction against the stern probity, the feudal homage, faith and truth of the earlier chansons de geste of the Carolingian epic cycle. How otherwise can we account for the unspoken condonation of Lancelot's relation towards the king? In courtly romance the faith of the cavalier towards his amie is of greater importance than his faith to his feudal lord. Where the two faiths come into direct collision the trouvère simply ignores the issue raised, and we have the startling phenomenon of a dual Arthur who is at once the flower of knighthood and an ineffectual and derisory homme complaisant.

A more penetrating and explicit handling of the question of determining the nature of the amour courtois is found in Lewis's luminous exposition in the first chapter of his The Allegory of Love.

The aspect of Love in the troubadour poetry of the eleventh and twelfth centuries Lewis characterizes thus :-

"The sentiment, of course, is love, but love of a highly specialized sort, whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery and the Religion of Love". (1)

(1) Lewis: op. cit., p. 2.

And a little further on he expands :-

"There is a service of love closely modelled on the service which a feudal vassal owes to his lord. The lover is the lady's 'man'. He addresses her as midons, which etymologically represents not 'my lady' but 'my lord'. The whole attitude has been rightly described as 'a feudalisation of love'. This solemn amatory ritual is felt to be part and parcel of courtly life". (1)

The mediaeval writers, Lewis says, based their theory of love on Ovid's Ars Amatoria, but of this work he says :-

"Ovid sat down to compose for the amusement of a society which well understood him an ironically didactic poem on the art of seduction. The very design of his Art of Love presupposes an audience to whom love is one of the minor peccadilloes of life, and the joke consists in treating it seriously -- in writing a treatise, with rules and examples en regle for the nice conduct of illicit loves. It is funny as the ritual solemnity of old gentlemen over their wine, is funny. Food, drink and sex are the oldest jokes in the world, and one familiar form of the joke is to be very serious about them. From this attribute the whole tone of the Ars Amatoria flows". (2)

But, it will be noted, he says, that the very same conduct which Ovid ironically recommends could be recommended seriously by the courtly tradition. He makes the same point, therefore, which we noted above, namely, that the ideal and practice of courtly love stems from a root of misconception of Ovid's purpose on the part of the mediaeval students of love. Further, any idealization of sexual love, in a society such as that of the twelfth century Norman-French England, where marriage is purely utilitarian, must

(1) Lewis: op. cit., p. 2.

(2) Idem: p. 6.

begin by being an idealization of adultery. Also, the origin of courtly love must be sought in the curiously warped conception of sexual love in the middle ages, and the arguments of clerical writers and other scholasts, (who surely could have been only theorists on the subject), on the question of whether sexual love and the sexual act are sinful or otherwise.

The churchmen and scholasts of the Middle Ages had much philosophising to do. A great deal of it was barren and futile but much of it was an earnest searching after truth. So, too, human relationships - including that of man towards woman - came under their review. At that time there was as yet no conception of romantic love as we know it. In classical times men had known certain forms of affection, but they were mostly between man and man. There had been: filial duty of son to father; the amicitia of two friends for each other; dependence of the client upon his patron, and later loyalty of the vassal to his lord -- intense loyalty which could turn to hatred as intense, and deepest treachery. But of a deep-seated emotional basis for the relationship between a man and a woman there was no notion, nor even of love between husband and wife: duty, yes, and a comfortable domesticity, but not romantic passion built upon mutual physical and emotional attraction and regard.

For this reason the new love of mediaeval romance is at first a pale shadow of the loyalty of a vassal for his lord -- the feudalisation of love thus. In Provence first, (from which the idea of courtly love originated) but elsewhere, too, later, we find

"landless knighthood" -- knighthood without a place in the territorial hierarchy of feudalism. The unattached knight as we find him in romances, owing loyalty to no lord, respectable only by his own valour, amicable only by his own chivalry, predestined lover of other men's wives, was therefore a reality. The castle is a little oasis of luxury and therefore at least possible refinement, in a barbarous countryside. There are many men in it, knights, men-at-arms, squires, pages, troubadours and other retainers, but there are few women. A normal outlet for the affection or passion of these men is rare. The lady of the castle is the object of the service and the worship, however artificial, of all this great body of men. She it is who determines the courtesy and refinement of atmosphere, affords the element of female charm. To the lady then the great train of menfolk in the castle, for whom there is no question of marriage, pay court and do homage. They are her 'men', ready and eager to serve, and adore at a distance. It is clear how these conditions will give rise to the first two marks of courtly love noted above, namely, Humility and Courtesy; how do the other two marks, Adultery and the Religion of Love connect up with this picture of the mediaeval castle? The association of love with adultery has been partly explained above and from what we saw in the previous chapter. But besides the actual practice of feudal society which we noted there, there is another point to be noted that would prevent the men of that time from connecting their ideal of romantic and passionate love with marriage. We saw that love could normally not exist between husband and wife from the circumstances of the majority of marriages

of the time, so ideal love 'as it might be' was sought in the relationship which a married woman could only find in an idealized form as an intrigue with a young lover who was not her legal lord and master, and so could not demand from her the obedience and grudging acquiescence which a husband could demand.

We have noted, in the previous chapter, the state of subservience in which the mediaeval wife stood to her husband. Yet the high-spirited woman of those times longed as much for freedom to bestow her affections where and how she wished as do women of our own time. Especially did she long for a romantic passion (as a contrast to the "apathetic acquiescence" that was her normal lot) in which she was the mistress of the situation for as long as she wished to prolong the suspense and defer the final bestowal of her favours. She could not always be the coy and elusive unattainable. Even if her love were an entirely legitimate one, the woman, knowing the inevitable ending to the affair once she was wedded, could at least call the tune to which it would be danced while her power lasted. \ And if retribution were to follow for an illicit love then at least it was worth making hay while the sun shone. In either case there could be no "wedded bliss".

The other factor affecting the views and attitude of men towards marriage was the mediaeval theory of love, which, as we have mentioned above, was determined by the mediaeval church view of marriage and love.

The men who wrote on this matter and sought to lay down the standards were much concerned with the

act of sexual union per se, and the desire or passion accompanying it. This was their natural reaction towards scriptural dicta and the doctrine of Original Sin and the Fall of Man. Here the tortuous reasoning of these early divines reveals some interesting conclusions. Some writers considered the act as innocent, but the desire sinful, while others held the opposite view. The passionate love even of a man for his own wife was also considered as adulterous. Lewis quotes theories of Pope Gregory (sixth century) and various other lesser known divines. Thomas Aquinas must have the last word: the evil in the sexual act is neither the desire nor the pleasure but the submergence of the rational faculty which accompanies them.

Lewis says then :-

"The general impression left on the mediaeval mind by its official teachers was that all love -- at least such passionate and exalted devotion as a courtly poet thought worthy of the name -- was more or less wicked. And this impression combining with the nature of feudal marriage ..., produced in the poets a certain wilfulness, a readiness to emphasize rather than to conceal the antagonism between their amatory and their religious ideals. Thus if the Church tells them that the ardent lover even of his own wife is in mortal sin, they presently reply with the rule that true love is impossible in marriage. If the Church says that the sexual act can be 'excused' only by the desire for offspring, then it becomes the mark of a true lover, like Chaunticleer, that he served Venus -

"More for delyt than world to multiplie". This cleavage between Church and court, or, in Professor Vinaver's fine phrase, between Carbonek and Camelot is the most striking feature of mediaeval sentiment". (1)

He goes on to treat of the fourth mark of courtly love - its love religion of the god Amor. This is partly an inheritance from Ovid, and partly due to

(1) Lewis: op. cit., pp. 17 and 18.

the transference of the emotion stored in the vassal's relation to his seigneur to the new kind of love. But mainly this erotic religion arises as a rival or a parody of the real religion, and does it emphasize the antagonism of the two ideals. As an example of such quasi-religious poetry he cites the twelfth century Concilium in Monte Romarici, with its humorous blasphemy in its impudent parodying of the practices of the Church. The God of Love is equipped with a gospel, erotic heterodoxy and orthodoxy are distinguished, Love has his cardinals and exercises the power of excommunication against those who disobey his dictates; in the treatise of Andreas even the divine power of reward and punishment after death is attributed to Love. "If you go on to add to the lover's 'heaven' its natural accessories, a god and saints and a list of commandments, and if you picture the lover praying, sinning, repenting, and finally admitted to bliss, you will find yourself in the precarious dream-world of mediaeval love-poetry. An extension of religion, an escape from religion, a rival religion -- Frauendienst may be any of these, or any combination of them".⁽¹⁾ Lewis denies the theory that courtly love to a certain extent derives from mediaeval Christianity and mariolatry - the cult of the Blessed Virgin - for, as we have seen, the love religion is often a parody of real religion, but in this respect I disagree with him.

In its doctrine of the worship of the Virgin as the epitome of exalted womanhood the mediaeval Roman Catholic Church can certainly be credited with some con-

(1) Lewis: op. cit., pp. 21 and 22.

tribution to the cult of Frauendienst of the troubadours and Minnesinger that in its turn taught men that women should be appreciated for their own feminine qualities and so set the stage for the "emancipation" of women.

Frauendienst, courtly love, amour courtois, fine amor -- this manifestation of a new kind of love that has its origin in the twelfth century courtly romance, and that was to become attached to Arthurian romance as the vehicle par excellence for the dissemination of its lore, is thus a complex thing. It is derived in part from many sources: from 'Ovid misunderstood'; the instruction of André the Chaplain; a revolt against the social practice of mediaeval marriage customs; the circumstances of the menfolk in the mediaeval castles with their limited opportunities for normal relationship with women, and the consequent intrigues and amatory exchanges that sometimes inevitably arose therefrom. It is coloured by a new and more chivalrous attitude towards women that we note in the comparatively polite and refined Anglo-French society of the middle ages. It was shaped by men's thought and attitude towards sex questions as determined for them by the moral teaching of Holy Church, and in the last instance it was affected by that perverse looseness and licence that characterized the mediaeval attitude towards serious things - a subconscious rebellion, perhaps, against the strictness and authority of the Church with its stern, uncompromising standards of morality.. But most of all is it due to the vigour and zest for life, and the pleasures of life, of a time when men were impatient of restrictions, moral or ethical, religious or political; when they lived expansive-

ly, fought bravely, took what they wanted freely and royally in a brave new world which we see being born about the eleventh to the fourteenth century, the period of transition from classical to modern times. The Middle Ages was a period of growth important in the development of western European civilization. We may describe it as the period of adolescence, and compare it with the corresponding period in the growth and development, physical and spiritual, of man.

Just as the history of the individual reflects and repeats in miniature the history of the race, so too, Society represents the composite pattern of the lives of its members, the sum of the thoughts, aspirations, wishes and actions of all who make up society. As a man struggles through the period of doubts and problems, hesitation, vague fears, idealism, heroism - the Sturm und Drang - of his puberty to adolescence, and his spiritual life is the mirror of all these conflicts, so it was, too, with the youthful adolescent mediaeval society (of all nations). The Middle Ages, too, and the life of the times, reflected similar contradictions, clash of ideals, searching, ignorance. Superstition existed side by side with the faith which took men on the Crusades; harshness and cruelty were co-existent with nobility and chivalry. Men felt a vague yearning, a pathetic longing for things to be better than they saw them to be. Chivalric ideals contended with the barbarism and selfishness of an earlier age; the claims of the common rights of men as opposed to the might and right of the strong individual were beginning to clamour in men's consciousness.

The ladies of the castle played their little game of pretence, trying to make one of man's noblest emotional experiences, that of romantic love, a reality. It was the beginning of woman's fight for her right to be considered as an individual with an own dignity and worth, to be considered a finely-wrought being with a right and claim to be cherished and worshipped, loved and protected, rather than to be counted of little importance, a mere instrument for the gratification of man's appetites and without a soul and a personality of her own.

In spite of all its faults, incongruities and childishness, Courtly Love is thus the reflection in literature of the beginnings of the spiritual enfranchisement of women.

CHAPTER VI : The Romantic Arthur.

"No work of imagination, save the Aeneid, has done more to shape the legend of a people than the *Historia Regum Britanniae*".

Sir E.K. Chambers: Arthur of Britain.



REQUENT references have been made in the foregoing pages to Geoffrey of Monmouth. The reason is not far to seek: he is undoubtedly the most important figure in the development of the Arthurian Legend. He has rightly been called 'the father of Arthurian Romance', and at this stage a short examination must be made of his person and his contribution to the subject, as well as of his influence and the work of his successors.

Geoffrey could not well be treated earlier, for his work on Arthur does not fall under the catalogue of historical references given in Chapter I, nor does he describe the mythical Arthur of Chapters II and III. Geoffrey wrote of Arthur in what professes to be a History of the Kings of Britain, but his work contains so little sober history, and so much imaginative creation, that he falls, properly, under the head of those who have written Arthurian romance.

Biographical details of Geoffrey are very scanty. The year and the place of his birth are unknown. The cognomen that he assumed may denote that he was born (probably about 1100 A.D.) at the Norman

settlement of Monmouth in what was then the Welsh district of Gwent, or merely that he had his education at the Benedictine priory of Monmouth: nothing else is clear from the fact that he signs himself Gaufridus Monumetensis. Nor even do we know his origin and parentage: while he is also known as Gaufridus Arthur, or Gryffud ab Arthur, nothing is known of a supposed father Arthur. Geoffrey may even have been of Breton rather than Welsh descent. He was probably Canon of St. George's in Oxford, and later Archdeacon of Llandaff. All that does seem certain is that he must have been attached to the household of Robert, Earl of Gloucester; that he cherished ambitions of preferment in the Church, but was only rewarded rather late with the unimportant Bishopric of St. Asaph in 1152; and that he died at Llandaff in 1155.

Even the date of his great work, that would seem to deserve -- if ever book deserved it -- to be called by the much-abused name of 'epoch-making', is uncertain, the nearest computation being about 1138.

Geoffrey tells us at the very outset of the History that, having often wondered why no one had ever written about the Kings of Britain who ruled before the 'Incarnation of Christ', and even about Arthur and others that had come after that event ("beyond such mention as Gildas and Bede have made of them in their luminous tractate"), he had thought of writing such a history himself. At that stage, happily, Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford offered him "a certain most ancient book in the British language that did set forth the doings of them all in due succession.."

The 'ancient book', according to the general opinion of students and critics, is a mere literary ruse.⁽¹⁾ Yet, apart from it, Geoffrey did have other sources. He acknowledges the oral information received from Walter, as well as from the 'liber'. He has mentioned Gildas and Bede (who was probably, however, Nennius), and he also had the native Welsh traditions as preserved in the old Welsh literature noted in Chapter II, to draw upon. He freely availed himself of the most reliable sources at his disposal, as any other chronicler of early British literature would have done.

Yet in the greater part of the book he gives his imagination free play and expands and embellishes the matter of his sources where he does not actually supply his own fanciful inventions. The result is a fanciful pseudo-history that his readers readily - even eagerly - accepted as fact, and it was an immediate success. It was something quite new to Anglo-Norman readers and it was eagerly read, enjoyed and accepted by the story-loving readers of the time. Geoffrey was the prince of romancers, and he gave his readers

(1) The arguments of those who reject Geoffrey's liber do not convince me. How many old MSS have not fallen prey to battle, fire and flood: the wonder is that so many have been preserved. May not Geoffrey's written source have existed once but all trace of it lost (just like Sir Thomas Malory's Morte D'Arthur manuscript), especially if there was only one MS. of it? According to the researches of Arthurian scholars the work of nearly every mediaeval romancer can be traced to some source in other earlier books, very often "lost". Why, then, should only Geoffrey have been so original that he had no written source? If he had no extensive, factual source (either in an earlier "book" or a great body of oral tradition) for his Arthurian story, he would have to be classified among the greatest inventive creators in literary history. Why is there no other imaginative work like his preserved from mediaeval times?

a work that, coming at that particular time, and having that particular nature, could not fail to be a success. Its ingenious mixture of pseudo-history and romantic imagination was just the thing to appeal to a reading public that must have grown rather tired of the sober monkish chronicles that had formed the standard and staple literary fare up to that time.

Whenever his fabrications are most palpable (that is, cannot be traced to known chronicles) Geoffrey refers to his source, the 'liber' of Walter of Oxford. In his epilogue, while handing over his task to others to complete, he warns the two eminent and reputable chroniclers, William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, to stay out of the romantic enclosure that is his own particular preserve, namely, the pre-Christian England. They may write of the Saxons, but he bids them be silent "as to the kings of the Britons, seeing that they have not that book in the British speech which Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, did convey hither out of Brittany" (1)

The work was dedicated to his patron, Robert of Gloucester. (2) The beginning of Book VII, dealing with the Prophecies of Merlin, contains another to Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, at whose request, Geoffrey says, he compiled the Prophecies.

The pseudo-history begins with Brutus, the

(1) Historia Regum Britanniae: Bk. XII, Ch. xx.

(2) One MS. preserved at Berne contains a double dedication addressed to both Robert and King Stephen. It is this dedication which enables an approximate date of completion to be determined.

grandson of Ascanius, and the eponymous founder of Britain. In its pages are to be found the stories of Cymbeline, King Lear, and Sabrina, 'daughter of Lochrine', together with many other tales made familiar to modern readers in the works of later English poets who have used Geoffrey as their source. Holinshed, the genial Elizabethan chronicler, also dipped deeply into the Gaufridian dish.

Geoffrey writes with all the gravity of a pious monkish chronicler. In the early books he makes brief references to various pre-Christian personages and events of sacred and secular history, in order to date his account of events in British history. So for example, when Gwendolen handed over the throne to her son Madden, "at that time Samuel the prophet reigned in Judea ... and Homer was held to be a famous teller of histories and poet".⁽¹⁾ When Madden's son Memprius died Saul was reigning in Judea. When Hudibras founded Kaerguen ("which is Winchester"), and the fortress of Mount Paladur ("which is now called Shaftesbury"), Haggai, Amos and Joel "did prophesy".⁽²⁾ Some time after the reign of Cordelia "Isaiah and Hosea prophesied and Rome was founded the eleventh of the Kalends of May, by the twin-brethern, Romulus and Remus".⁽³⁾

(1) Historia, Bk. II, Ch. vi.

(2) Idem: Bk. II, Ch. ix; (Histories of the Kings of Britain by Geoffrey of

(3) Idem: Bk. II, Ch. xv; (Monmouth, Translated by Sebastian Evans, Everyman Edition, London, J.M. Dent.

The Historia covers a period of about 1500 years. With his account of Arthur, which occupies about one-fifth of the book, Geoffrey launches forth into pure romance. He gives the first account of the union of Uther Pendragon and Igerne, the wife of Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall, which was brought about by Merlin and from which Arthur was born. (1)

He tells, then of Arthur's career as a great king, renowned for his valour and his bounty, who in his series of conquests ranges over, and subdues, nearly the whole continent of Europe, and finally all but knocks at the gates of Rome itself. But before that consummation of his imperialistic career he is recalled to Britain to avenge the treachery of his nephew Modred who has usurped the throne and taken into an unhallowed union Queen Guanhumara (Guenever) herself. And Modred retreating into Cornwall, there now follows the great battle of Camlan on the river Camel. Modred is slain and Arthur

"wounded deadly, was borne thence into the island of Avalon for the healing of his wounds, where he gave up the crown unto his kinsman, Constantine, in the year of the Incarnation of our Lord five hundred and forty-two". (2)

And here in Geoffrey's indeterminate account of Arthur's exit lies the germ of the whole magical end of Arthur, which was to become such a marvellous feature of the legend in later romances.

The Arthur Geoffrey portrays, with his court

(1) Historia: Bk. VIII, Ch. xix and xx.

(2) Idem: Bok XI, Ch. ii.

of knights, is no Celtic chieftain who fights only against Saxon invaders. He is a later Arthur, a splendid mediaeval figure, whose court is full of the colour and pomp of a Norman court in the Age of Chivalry. There is, for example, a wealth of splendour and pageantry in Geoffrey's account of the ceremony of Arthur's coronation and its attendant banquets.⁽¹⁾

No other writer was ever so great an opportunist as the suave and unctuous Canon of Oxford. He knew how to make use of his opportunity and take the tide in his affairs at the flood. The literary appetite of the Norman-French society which had grown up in England after the Conquest, and had been nurtured on, and become rather jaded by, first, a limited diet of French heroic tales of early times, and later of the artificial remantic tales of the trouvères, with their stock ingredients of courtly life, rather effeminate cavaliers and the 'amour courtois', was now tired of the Gallic treatment of these old themes. New matter and new treatment of the old matter and themes of heroic deeds, as reflected in Celtic folk-lore, were the elements which were to bring new life and new interest into the literary entertainment of the Anglo-Norman court. Geoffrey's work with its pseudo-historical verisimilitude joined to all its new elements of magic and wonder was such a success as any complete novelty always succeeds in becoming. So adroitly did he handle the matter of Celtic mythology, superimposed on the more sophisticated matter of knight errantry and adventurous quests, that he composed a fare that was

221

(1) Historia: Bk. IX, Ch. xii and xiii.

most grateful to contemporary palates, and the Historia had a tremendous vogue as is proved by the great number of M.S. copies that were made and circulated within the next few years. (1)

Geoffrey's book appeared at just the right time.

"He lived at a period when England was responding to the intellectual stimulus that had come to her with the Norman Conquest, and when her literary life, which had been lying dormant, had begun to blossom afresh under the influence of the scholars, the chroniclers, and the minstrels brought by the Normans across the Channel. Henry I..... did not fail to show his appreciation of letters, and surrounded himself with a gay and song-loving court, where story-tellers and poets were welcome guests. The Normans after their half-century's occupation of England were beginning to take a keen interest in the past history of their newly acquired domain, and to turn with zest to the traditions of early Britain. But the taste of the Norman noble demanded something less mysterious, less fantastic, and less remote from his own world than Celtic myth afforded him and also something more polished and entertaining than the bare chronicles at his disposal Geoffrey had a peculiarly facile nature, an eager intelligence, and a distinctly inventive turn of mind: he was a student, an accomplished Latin scholar, and a master of a finished Latin style. Quickly he perceived the trend of men's thoughts, and saw an opportunity of winning distinction for himself while catering to the taste of the time" (2)

Following his predecessors Gildas, Bede and Nennius closely, he compiled his romantic history, drawing freely upon all such resources as an unusually well-informed man of his time would have at his command.

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- (1) There are 200 extant copies in libraries and museums to-day. The British Museum has 37, Oxford 26 and Cambridge 32.
- (2) Lucy Allen Paton: Introduction to Dr. Sabastian Evans' translation of the Histories of the Kings of Britain, Everyman edition.

His public was far too uncritical to question his sources closely. His work so far adhered to literary convention and had such a resemblance to an authentic chronicle, carried such an air of convincing truth, and was above all so interesting, that none of Geoffrey's readers questioned his facts but only devoured his book, and it (and its author) became famous almost overnight.

Geoffrey was therefore the right man at the right time, who had the imagination and the ability to create a romantic history that was practically bound to be in the popular taste.

"He had a public and a theme that offered him a chance to do a brilliant piece of work that could not fail to be successful. He aimed to flatter the Norman conquerors by displaying the greatness of the race they had subdued, to satisfy their curiosity by transmitting to them ostensibly authentic historic records of that race, to weave his facts together in a narrative embellished by interesting material in reality drawn from many sources, and to present the whole as sober history in grave and sonorous Latin. The acuteness with which he judged the taste of his contemporaries may be gauged by the success which the Historia at once achieved. It..... immediately won extraordinary popularity in England and on the Continent. An acquaintance with its contents soon became a necessary part of an equipment for polite society, and speedily chroniclers began to treat it as one of the important authorities to be repeated in any serious account of British history". (1)

Dr. Sebastian Evans⁽²⁾ gives what Lewis Jones calls "a plausible and by no means improbably explanation" of the nature of Geoffrey's work and his purpose in writing it.

"It is the parent stock of Arthurian Romance. It is not a history although it

(1) L.A. Paton: loc. cit.

(2) In the Epilogue to his translation of the Historia.

is in the form of a history. No history, nor even, save accidentally and very partially, a historical romance, but a romance of a distinct and peculiar stamp, a romance in the sense in which the Iliad, the Odyssey and the Aeneid are romances, a romance in the sense of a national epos A true national epos, I say, but of what nation? It is not English, not Norman, nor even Breton, nor Welsh".

He goes on to state the opinion that it was the national epos of the composite nation that consisted of all the above nations, the empire of the time of Henry I, Stephen and Henry II, and he draws a parallel between Geoffrey as national singer, and Virgil, Virgil had by the publication of his Aeneid consolidated and strengthened the empire of Augustus by claiming for the founders of the Roman Empire the blood of the heroes of Troy. Geoffrey claimed for the British a descent no less exalted, through Brute, the great-grandson of Aeneas. As Augustus 'inspired' Virgil, so Henry Bauclore 'inspired' Geoffrey. (Although Henry, indeed, was no Augustus, and Geoffrey was far enough from being a Virgil).

"The true significance and bearing of Geoffrey's book", says Evans, (was that)

"it was an epic that failed, for it was to have been the national epic of an empire that failed (1) King Arthur, Geoffrey's creation as Aeneas was the creation of Virgil, the king who was to have been the traditional hero of the Anglo-Welsh-Norman-Breton nucleus of empire was left without any empire to hail him as the founder of its glories. He became a national hero unattached, a literary wonder and enigma to ages which had forgotten the existence of the composite short-lived empire which was the justification of his own existence".

(1) When John lost Normandy early in the thirteenth century that empire came to an end for ever, or rather until an empire of new range and extent came with the conquests and colonial expansion of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Geoffrey of Monmouth having now been examined at some length, an indication must be given of what seems to me to be the facts in which the importance of his work lies.

1. The Historia is the first work that gives a connected, coherent account of an Arthur of comparatively modern times who corresponds to the mediaeval (and modern) conception of a chivalrous, bounteous sovereign (modelled on Charlemagne) who is surrounded by a great court of peerless knights who follow the ideals of chivalry.

2. It is the immediate source of all later Arthurian romance. It inspired at least two great 'Arthuriads' -- those of Wace and Layamon -- that have contributed to the creation of the Arthurian figure that modern readers know.

3. Geoffrey is the creator of the figure (as yet vague) of the magician Merlin.-- although he obtained the conception of his sage from Nennius' account, in the Historia Britonum of the marvellous boy Ambrosius.

Nennius tells how the British king Vortigern rules in Britain. Harrassed by the inroads of the Picts and Scots, by Roman pressure, and by fear of the next moves of his treacherous Saxon allies Hengist and Horsa, Vortigern is advised by his magicians to build a fortress on Mount Hereri (Snowdon). He cannot do so because the masonry collapses as it is raised. A scapegoat is found for sacrifice in the person of the boy, Ambrosius, who is supposed to be fatherless. Ambrosius by his miraculous gift of prophecy is able to

solve the mystery of the unsuccessful building operations by revealing the pool, with its two contending dragons, red and white, below the fortress⁽¹⁾, and so confounds the magicians.

This same tale Geoffrey tells but boldly⁽²⁾ makes the youth "Merlin, that is also called Ambrosius". He devotes Book VII of the Historia to the many obscure 'Prophecies of Merlin'. Further he tells how Merlin brought the 'Giants' Dance' (that is, the great stones of Stonehenge) from Ireland to Britain.⁽³⁾ After having brought about the union of Uther and Igerne that was to lead to the birth of Arthur (and later a daughter, Anna), Merlin drops out of Geoffrey's pages.

4. Geoffrey it is, too, who has given us the full portraits of Arthur's two faithful servitors - Kay the Seneschal, and Bedevere the Butler.

A concluding remark on Geoffrey's portrait of Arthur: Taking Nennius' bare account of the Saxon victories of the British hero Arthur, Geoffrey creates a new Arthur for his Norman readers: an imperial conqueror - himself the hero of many valiant encounters, the performer of daring exploits, and splendid king of a Norman court - evolves out of the capable war-leader of Nennius. Geoffrey's Arthur has a duel with the giant Ritho, a fight with the giant of Mont St. Michel for the succour of a captive maiden, and another hard

(1) This is the motif, too, of the tale of Llud and Llevellys, from the Mabinogion.

(2) Historia, Bk. VI, Ch. xix.

(3) Idem: Bk. VIII, Ch. xi.

encounter in single combat as champion of Britain with Flollo, champion of Gaul. Arthur is, therefore, no less a knight errant than any of his great knights. In later romance he was to cease to be such a heroic figure, and is rather the gracious sovereign who attracts to his person and court the brilliant array of Chivalry of the Round Table knights, inspiring others but no longer himself taking such an active part in quests: the "roi fainéant" of romance.

The Historia Regum Britanniae gained such instant and widespread popularity that it became accepted as an authority by British and French historians. The first man known to have made use of Geoffrey's Historia was the Anglo-Norman Geoffrey of Gaimar who lived in the North of England, and about 1150 wrote the first French metrical romance, part of which is a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's work. But the History of the Britons which formed the prelude to his L'Estoire des Engles has been lost while the latter work has been preserved. (1)

The first important work, however, to follow under Geoffrey of Monmouth's inspiration was the French metrical chronicle, the Roman de Brut (1155), of the Norman poet Wace. This work is of importance and interest in the development of the Arthurian legend not only because of the author's poetic qualities and his original treatment of the Arthurian story, but also because of the type of composition that he produced. It was the precursor of all the long line of 'Bruts'

(1) Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. I, p. 264.

that followed, and it also introduced the new genre, the metrical chronicle, which is an intermediate form between the prose chronicle (the standard form of mediaeval monastic production) and the metrical romance - the form of narrative poem that blossomed most richly in France during the last half of the twelfth century, receiving its greatest impetus from Chrétien de Troyes, the most distinguished of the trouvères.

The metrical romances were written for court circles, and they recounted adventures of love and chivalry, and also served as manuals in the code of behaviour which governed courtly life in France at that period. Wace's poem (although based upon a chronicle history) is also addressed to a public whose taste turned toward chivalric narrative, and it foreshadows those qualities that characterized the verse romances which found such fitting themes in the stories of the heroes of Arthur's train. Such a poem in lively metre in the vernacular was likely to appeal more to readers (especially female) than the artificial Latin prose of the Middle Ages.

Wace lived from about 1100 to 1175. Born in the island of Jersey, he went to Caen as a lad, and was put to the study of letters there, and later at Paris. He became a *clerc lisant* (reading clerk) and his writings won preferment for him from Henry II, who gave him the position of Canon of Bayeux. He wrote a great deal, but his most important work is the Geste des Bretons (History of the Britons'), better known as the Roman de Brut. It is a reproduction in verse of Geoffrey's Historia, but it is more than a mere translation. Besides making some additions to Geoffrey's

Arthurian story, his chief contribution is the new spirit he puts into it. By his use of the swift-moving French octo-syllabic couplets, he gave a tone and movement to the narrative quite different from that of Geoffrey's Latin prose.

Although through his caution and regard for the probable he will not accept all the wildly fabulous tales, and omits the prophecies of Merlin because he cannot understand them, he has a vivid power of visualization and he adorns the narrative with many imaginative details.

Besides this Wace weaves into the narrative more pronouncedly chivalric material, and he gives a place to descriptions of love which are absent from Geoffrey's staid pages. Wace was evidently also familiar with stories of Arthur that Geoffrey did not know. So he gives the first literary record of the Round Table:

"Por les nobles barons qu'il ot
Dont cascuns mieldre estre quidot...
Fist Artus la Roonde Table,
Dont Breton dient mainte fable.
Illoc secient li vassal
Tuit chievalment et tot ingal...
Nus d'als ne se pooient vanter
Qu'il seist plus halt de son per".

"Because of these noble lords about his hall, of whom each knight pained himself to be the hardest champion ... Arthur made the Round Table, so reputed of the Britons ... that when his fair fellowship sat to meat their chairs should be high alike, their service equal ... thus no man could boast that he was exalted above his fellows". (1)

(1) Wace's Romance from Arthurian Chronicles represented by Wace and Layamon; translated by Eugene Mason, London, Dent (Everyman), 1928, p. 55.

He also gives the first indication of the "Hope of Britain" concluding with:

"He is yet in Avalon, awaited of the Britons; for they say and deem he will return from whence he went and live again ... Men have ever doubted, and --- as I am persuaded -- will ever doubt whether he liveth or is dead...."

Wace departs from his authority Geoffrey, to place Arthur's exitus dubius "in the year 642 of the Incarnation".

Wace's romantic version of the Arthurian story was the direct source for the Brut of the English priest Layamon (circa 1205), in the first half of the thirteenth century. He followed Wace's version in outline, but succeeded in extending its 15,300 verses to well over 32,000. His language is that of the transition from Anglo-Saxon to Middle English.

Layamon was spiritually and imaginatively more closely allied with the early Saxon life than the refined society of a Norman court. His verse (written partly in the alliterative lines of Anglo-Saxon poetry, and partly in rhymed couplets of unequal length) has the rude vigour of the earlier native poetry, rather than the gay lilt of the Norman-French. But Layamon was not a courtly trouvère who sang for lords and ladies. He was a Worcestershire poet who wrote in his own Saxon tongue for his own countrymen.

W. Lewis Jones says:

"Layamon ... was fired by an ambition 'to tell the noble deeds of England', and to tell them in the English tongue. His poem is the first articulate utterance of the native English genius reasserting itself in its own language after the long silence

which succeeded the Conquest. Although he borrows most of his matter from Wace, Layamon in matter and spirit, is much nearer akin to the robust singers of the Old English period than to the courtly French poet. The simple force and vividness of the primitive English epic appear in descriptions of battle scenes and of heroic deeds. Even the poet's diction is scrupulously pure English". (1)

Legouis and Cazamian⁽²⁾, commenting upon the fact that Layamon, although an Anglo-Saxon, sings of British heroes, say:

"Layamon's patriotism is as ardent as it is mistaken. His error draws attention to the fact that the two races who had been enemies were already inextricably fused. They constituted a new unity which was already the English nation, and had England for its place and symbol (His poem shows) the transitional character of Layamon's curious version of the Arthurian story. He was at once the last of the scopps and the first of the English trouvères".

His poem is a great contribution to the formation of the Arthurian legend. His particular contribution is the imagination which he brought to his task, and the way in which he seemed to move and live with the characters of the legend, interpreting their emotion and passion with the dramatic dialogue he puts into their mouths. It is in this way that he expands the bare narrative of his authority Geoffrey, and predecessor Wace, into a drama of life and thought and action. He lets his imagination play in the occasional composition of incidents for which there is no source in Wace. He also conceives the story in a different spirit from Wace. Layamon's Arthur is no

(1) The Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. I, p. 265.

(2) A History of English Literature, London, Dent, 1937, p. 85.

mediaeval knight, but a grim, stern, ferocious Saxon warrior. He is seldom seen through the softer light of Romance. Yet Layamon is our only source for the charming story that elves bestowed good gifts on the infant Arthur in his cradle -- a tale that is Teutonic in origin.⁽¹⁾ So, too, Layamon gives a truly Celtic account of the 'Passing of Arthur': two fairy maidens bear the wounded king over the sea to be healed by Argante, Queen of Avalon. Added to these details, Layamon gives an important account of the establishment of the Round Table, completer than that of Wace. He tells, namely, how Arthur had to suppress very sternly the unseemly and fatal brawls that arose among his knights owing to questions of precedence at the board. Later a craftsman from Cornwall fashioned for him in four weeks' time a table whereat sixteen hundred and more men could sit down to meat.⁽²⁾

This short extract (quoted by Vinaver, Malory, p. 86) which is part of the description of the squabbles over precedence at the board, may serve to show the nature and quality of Layamon's vernacular verse:

þa he ʒe iborne
þone mete beoren
æfne forð rihten,
þa to þan cnihten,
þa touward þan pæinen,
þa touward þan sweinen,
þa touward þan bermonnen
forð at þan borden.

(1) Layamon's Brut from Arthurian Chronicles,
(Everyman), p. 177.

(2) Idem: pp. 209 to 211.

þa duȝeðe waerð iwraððed;
duntes þer weoren riue.
Aerest þa laues heo weorpen
þa while þa heo ilaeste,
and þa bollen seoluerne
mid wine iuuled;
and seodden þa uustes
uusden to sweoren.

Layamon's work shows his indebtedness -- living as he did, close to the Welsh Border -- to current native Welsh traditions of Arthur. Because of its Saxon nature the Brut never attained wide popularity, and it had little effect upon the growth of the cycle; nevertheless it remains a great literary achievement in the field of Arthurian Romance.

"Geoffrey, a clever combiner, a highly-gifted narrator and scholar, born at a happy hour, gave the Arthurian legend a definite literary form, brought permanently together independent elements of tradition, and contributed enormously to the popularity of the cycle. Wace, the professional author, the scrupulous antiquarian and naïve poet, carefully refined the material of Geoffrey, and dressed it in the French costume of courtly love. Layamon, the intense and imaginative English priest, transformed it by the Saxon spirit, and divesting it of courtly elegance, filled it with greater simplicity and force". (1)

This, with the early Latin chronicles of English clerks and historians, was the contribution of England to the evolution of the Arthurian legend up to this stage -- the beginning of the thirteenth century. From now on it was to be the Normans who would expand the tale and swell the list of characters, and transfigure them in the light of romance and the Norman courtly traditions, into the great chivalrous company of Knights-errant of the Round Table brotherhood. Later, towards the end of the fourteenth century,

(1) Introduction to the above edition Arthurian Chronicles, pp. xv and xvi.

Englishmen would learn to write in their own vernacular, and produce the Middle English romances.

We have glanced at the British migration to Armorica as a result of the pressure of Danish invasions and the consequent founding of 'Lesser Britain' on the soil of France. The Breton nation, in their development, later came into contact, and had traffic, with their Norman neighbours who thus quite naturally became acquainted with the original Arthurian legend through the Breton oral and written traditions.⁽¹⁾ This matter the Normans adopted and used and transformed in their own way, and the result was the growth of an independent Arthurian tradition on the Continent.

When the Provençal trouvères (of whom Chrétien de Troyes was one of the first) began to compose the romance tales which were to be the vehicle for the cult of the amour courtois, they seem to have decided that the matière de Bretagne was the fittest foundation on which to build their literature.

Arthur of whom they had first learned from the old Armorican Breton traditions, and whose history had been now fully and romantically supplemented by Geoffrey of Monmouth, was more fitted to be the centre of a cycle of romances suitable for reflecting the tenets of courtly love than Alexander, Charlemagne or any other great king of earlier times. The chevaliers banded around Arthur, and vowed to the performance of the teachings of chivalry, were most suited to serve as heroes for new romances in which the courtly ideals of

(1) Very little of it has survived to present times in Brittany.

the times could be best portrayed.

With motifs supplied from old half-understood mythic matter of the newly conquered Celtic and Saxon tribes of England, and of the Franks themselves, as well as the legends of Rome, Greece and Byzantium, allied to their own invention, they composed many new tales to glorify their favourite knightly heroes. These heroes were such as the Anglo-Norman society of the early twelfth century could appreciate and admire: men similar to themselves, who delighted in a fight, who were epitomes of gentility and courtliness, who had superhuman courage, an eager curiosity to follow quests and marvels, and who, withal, were gallant lovers of ladies. What Geoffrey lacked the *trouvères* supplied, and so they created an independent body of tales, all, in the last instance, centring upon Arthur's court. Many other old Breton *lais*, of non-Arthurian origin, ceased to have an independent existence, and were transferred bodily to the Arthurian cycle in expanded form as romances.

The renewed acquaintance with the native British traditions in Britain after the Conquest, and the popularizing of the matter by Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the refining of it by Wace, led to a natural interest in, and further use of, this matter by the Norman poets of the courts of Henry II and his successors. So the Normans used the original matter with which they had now twice come into contact, as a basis for their own greatly expanded, and more literary versions and they became the exponents of the French literary exploitation of this British matter. They made it a court literature, and distilling from the original

matter all the coarser primitive elements and the more unintelligible Celtic mythological matter, they became in their turn the true shapers of the 'matière de Bretagne.'

One more name of a story-teller in the development of French Romance who contributed something, if not very much, to the Arthurian legend, is that of Marie of France, famous for her Lais, of which a couple deal with Arthurian personages, and so deserve notice here for the sake of completeness.⁽¹⁾

Marie of France was born near Rouen and lived about the second half of the twelfth century or first part of the thirteenth, the unnamed "king" of her dedication being possibly Henry II of England (1154 - 1189). Her Lais (dating from 1165 - 7), that all deal with the subject of Love entirely in the spirit of the amour courtois, were greatly admired. Her sources were ancient Breton lays that, according to her own statement, she reshaped and polished. She also expounds and lauds the "courtly love" of mediaeval romance in these poems, written in octo-syllabic couplets -- the favourite form for all the romantic tales of the period.

In a collection of sixteen Lais⁽²⁾ only two have an Arthurian background. These are The Lay of Sir Launfal and Chievrefueil (The Lay of the Honey-suckle). The theme of the first is that of the knight

(1) Bruce, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 175 to 182.

(2) French Mediaeval Romances from the Lays of Marie de France: Translated by Eugene Mason, Everyman Edition, Dent, London, 1911.

who is loved by a fairy queen, and who successfully withstands the advances of Queen Guenever herself, pleading his attachment to his supernatural mistress. Guenever appears in rather a poor light as a spiteful echo of Potiphar's wife, who complains however, not of physical shaming, but of the insult that Launfal claimed his lady as being more beautiful even than herself. The lady finally appears at Arthur's court in person and Launfal's claims are allowed by all to be correct. Noteworthy facts in this lay are that Arthur is represented as holding court at Caerleon-on-Usk; Gawain appears again as one of the chief knights; and finally, Launfal's fairy lover carried him off with her to "an island, very dim, and very fair, known as Avalon". The theme of this lai is important as it is that of the "fairy mistress" motif found in so many Celtic tales, for example that of Cuchulainn, and also Chrétien's Yvain.

The Lay of the Honeysuckle is a short, slight lai dealing of the love of Tristan and Iseult, and it tells how Tristan communicated with her by carving his name on a piece of hazel bark and placing it in her way. This is one incident of the long French Prose Tristan. Marie's lais which have been preserved are examples of a genre important in literary history as the forerunners of the longer verse romances. Many incidents in later Arthurian Romance had their original source in these and other lost (Breton) lais dealing with old oral traditions of Arthur. And more than six hundred years after Marie lived her work inspired another minor poet whose small production is so precious of its kind that Francis T. Palgrave of the impeccable taste

included several of his songs in the Golden Treasury. He was A.W.E. O'Shaughnessy (1844 - 1881), and he recast five of the tales of Marie in his Lays of France: they are, however, non-Arthurian.

The names of the writers examined in this chapter do not complete the tale of those who wrote Arthurian romance in prose or verse. Indeed with them the legend only became fairly launched as a subject for romance; they were the true and original shapers of the 'matière de Bretagne'. It is from the beginning of the thirteenth century and for the next two hundred years that the broad stream of Arthurian romance became a mighty flood that swept over Europe, breaking the banks of national frontiers. But these writers who have been treated above, and that wrote in the latter half of the twelfth century, were the originators of the romantic version of the early legend. Each contributed his share to give shape and body to the bare bones of the original legend, and developed it, so that by the end of the twelfth century it embodied most of the themes which later romancers could only expand and elaborate. From Geoffrey to Chrétien (with a modicum of the original Celtic myth -- the ultimate source --) we have every essential for the vast edifice of romance created in the next two centuries. We have Arthur himself, firmly established as the exalted mediaeval monarch, whose brilliant court is the unsurpassed rallying point for the flower of Chivalry. Around his figure are collected the heroes of all the famous cycles of legends, each of independent origin but finally welded to the central legend. Merlin is there; the Grail legend has become identified with the Arthurian legend;

Tristan and Lancelot are among Arthur's peerless companions of the Round Table.

Not much more remained to be added, yet here was matter enough to engage for two hundred years the attention and the narrative and poetic gifts of the story-tellers of all nations, who now combined all the ageless motifs of all story-telling of all the Indo-European races since story-telling began. The story of Tristan and Iseult exemplifies all of them. This great love-story, as well as the other 'branches' of the composite Arthur legend, will be examined in subsequent sections, when the later developments of all these themes that came to be collected around the central theme will be more closely noted, with a view to assessing the work of Sir Thomas Malory, who gave unity to the vast, almost chaotic, body of mediaeval romance.

With Geoffrey of Monmouth, however, and Wace and Layamon and Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes, we have all the original makers, the sources of all their successors.

CHAPTER VII : Chrétien de Troyes and his successors.

"Et so ben la lancia
et lo gradale.
De Merlin sapiria tractare
quando fece bene et male,
comunque Artuso al temporale;
la mia materia e cutale
che de senno abunda.
So de la Taula Rotonda
et Tristan et d'Isota la blonda".

Ruggieri Apuliese. (1)



OME, at least, of the mediaeval poets who turned their hand to the composition of love poetry, can lay claim to greatness in their particular field. Of these the greatest - and the most important for his contribution to the evolution of the Arthurian cycle - is indubitably Chrétien de Troyes.

Little is known of him. Possibly a herald-at-arms, he lived and wrote in Champagne about the third quarter of the twelfth century under the patronage of the Countess Marie de Champagne, the daughter of Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine (wife of Henry II). Like her famous mother, Marie of Champagne would have had a share in the introduction to courtly life of the Provencal ideals of courtesy and the service of women which were soon to become a cult of European society. It was at her court at Troyes that Chrétien wrote the four romances which together form the most complete expression we possess from a single author, of the ideals of French Chivalry, namely, Erec et Enide,

(1) "And I know well the Lance and the Grail. Of Merlin I could treat, when he wrought good and evil, as soon as Arthur stood in need; my matter is such that it abounds in wisdom. I know about the Round Table and Tristan and Iseult the Fair". Quoted in E.G. Gardner: The Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature.

Cliges, Lancelot (or Le Chevalier de la Charette) and Yvain (or Le Chevalier au Lion).⁽¹⁾

Chrétien belonged to a generation of French poets who took over the mass of Celtic folk-lore which they imperfectly understood, and made of it what it had never been before -- the medium to carry the chivalric customs and ideals of the upper classes (for the code of Chivalry never touched the lower orders).

"He appears early to have chosen as his special field the stories of Celtic origin dealing with Arthur, the Round Table, and other features of Celtic folk-lore. Not only was he alive to the literary interest of this material when rationalised to suit the taste of French readers; his is further the credit of having given to somewhat crude folk-lore that polish and eloquence which is peculiarly French, and which is inseparably associated with the Arthurian legends in all modern literature ... To Chrétien, so far as we can see, is due the considerable honour of having constituted Arthur's court as a literary centre and rallying point for an innumerable company of knights and ladies engaged in a never-ending series of amorous adventures and dangerous quests (While) we should bear in mind that all his poems imply familiarity on the part of his readers with the heroes of the court of which he speaks, (and) one would suppose that other stories, told before his versions, were current (yet), if so, we do not possess these earlier versions, and for lack of rivals Chrétien may be hailed as an innovator in the current schools of poetry".⁽²⁾

And so, as we do not know what his sources were, we must give Chrétien due credit for his originality in creating much of the romance that surrounded the great figures around Arthur. He first gave us the Lancelot figure, and the account of the love of Lancelot and Quenever for each other, which later

(1) Collected in Everyman volume, Eric and Enid, by Chrétien de Troyes, Translated by W.W. Comfort, Dent, London, 1913.

(2) W.W. Comfort: Introduction to Eric and Enid, pp. x and xi.

became one of the great central themes of the cycle - the cardinal feature of the legend which Tennyson, among others, was later to elaborate and to represent as the cause for the decay and disruption of the Round Table fellowship.

Chrétien had a great influence on his successors. Poets in his own land referred to him with reverence, and foreign poets complimented him by direct translation, and by embroidering upon the themes which he had made popular. The knights made famous by Chrétien -- Lancelot, Tristan, Perceval -- soon crossed the frontiers, and obtained rights of citizenship in Germany, Holland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, England and even Scandinavia.

"Chrétien's originality, then, consists in his portrayal of the social ideal of the French aristocracy in the twelfth century. So far as we know he was the first to create in the vulgar tongues a vast court, where men and women lived in conformity with the rules of courtesy, where the truth was told, where generosity was open-handed, where the weak and the innocent were protected by men who dedicated themselves to the cult of honour and to the quest of a spotless reputation. Honour and love combined to engage the attention of this society; these were its religion in a far more real sense than was that of the Church". (1)

Chrétien, as we see from his romances, does not concern himself much with Arthur. For him Arthur is the far-famed Christian sovereign who attracts to his illustrious court all those knights who aspire to fame and honour and the prestige and renown that attach to those who serve him. Chrétien's use of Arthur's court as a centre of chivalry, with its attraction as

(1) Comfort: loc cit.

a rallying point for courteous knights of whatever extraction - a mere background, thus, for his romances -- is well illustrated in the romance of Cliges. This is merely the story of the mutual passion of a married woman (Fenice) and her knightly lover Cliges, and their faithfulness through severe trials, to an eventual happy union. But the hero of the first part of the story, a Byzantine prince named Alexander, must needs attach himself to Arthur's court to win his spurs there, and so, inevitably does his son Cliges later. The chief interest of the story, however, lies in the second part dealing with the love of Cliges and Fenice, and in this tale the Arthurian connection is of the slightest, and seems to be very arbitrarily dragged in to connect Constantinople and England, and to illustrate the wide renown and drawing power of Arthur's court.

In the romance of Erec et Enide Chrétien gives a list of the famous knights of the Round Table and it is here that we hear again, or for the first time, of knights like Gawain, Lancelot of the lake, Yvain, Tristan, Kay, Lohet the son of Arthur, Bedevere and others, many of whom are themselves the heroes of other romances.

Besides Arthur himself, and his queen, Guenever, the one figure from the Arthurian legend most familiar to modern readers is Lancelot. Unknown to Celtic Saga, he appears for the first time, like a star shot from nowhere, in the pages of Chrétien. He is first mentioned in Erec et Enide, he is overcome by Cliges in a tournament in the romance of that name, and he is the central figure of an adventure of his own in

Le Chevalier de la Charette.

The main theme of this tale is a variant of the 'abduction motif' in which Guenever figures in so many tales. For, "she was a lady", said the school-girl, "who was very much subject to the misfortune of being run away with". A certain Caradoc of Llancarven gave in his Vita Gildae (circa middle twelfth century) the first version of this abduction story, the abductor, according to him, being one Melwas. In Chrétien de Troyes the abductor is Melyagant, who in Malory's pages becomes Sir Meliagrance, and the story is told in Bk. XIX, Chapters I - IX. This abduction story is, of course, the old Celtic Mider-Etain-Angus, and Mider-Etain-Eochaid myth, with its later echoes in the Arthur-Modred strife for Quenever in Geoffrey of Monmouth, Malory and Tennyson. In the tales of Chrétien Lancelot is already represented as enjoying Guenever's amatory favours. His tale takes its name from the incident when Lancelot, owing to the slaying of his horse in a combat, is forced to accept such an undignified means of conveyance as a cart in his quest to champion Guenever.

Erec et Enide is the story, of which Gereint the son of Erbin from the Mabinogion is the Welsh parallel, which tells of Gereint's sloth and neglect of knightly duties, his misunderstanding of his gentle wife's reproach of herself, her patience under almost unbearable trials, and Gereint's rehabilitation. Tennyson has told the same story in Enid and Geraint and The Marriage of Geraint. The theme of this story - that of the "patient Grizelda" - was a well-known and

favourite one in mediaeval times. As Erec is the first of Chrétien's works it is the oldest Arthurian romance to have survived in any language.

Yvain is an episodic story of the hero's many adventures and also has its parallel in the Welsh story of The Lady of the Fountain, or Owain and Lunette. Chrétien has also been credited with a lost work on Tristan,⁽¹⁾ and he also wrote, as noted above, the first Grail romance in Perceval le Gallois, or Le Conte del Graal. In all the earliest Grail romances Perceval is the hero, who sets out on the quest that leads to the first sight of this mystic vessel. It is only later, in the French prose romances, that Galahad, the son of Lancelot, becomes the hero of the Grail quest. Chrétien's romance which is one of the earliest sources of this tale is, according to Bruce's analysis⁽²⁾, a long rambling tale of many loosely connected episodes, and the wonderful adventures of two heroes, Perceval and Gawain. The tale is incomplete as Chrétien left it; at the most interesting part, namely, Perceval's visit to the Grail Castle, the romancer's history stops (ended, probably, by his death), so that we do not know how he

(1) Chrétien says, in the first few lines of Cliges, that "he who wrote of Erec and Enide" and many other books, also wrote "about King Mark and the fair Iseut".

In the concluding lines of his Parzival Wolfram von Eschenbach, who drew, according to his own statement, from sources by an unknown writer Kyot, says that if Chrétien's version of the Tristan story did not do justice to the tale that might anger Kyot, who had told it truly.

"Ob von Troys meister Cristjân
disem maere hât unreht getân,
daz mac wul zûrnen Kyôt,
der uns diu rehten maere enbôt".

(2) Bruce, op. cit., pp. 223 to 230.

intended to develop the theme. In the tale are introduced the wounded king (the 'Fisher King'), who is the guardian of all the paraphernalia of the later Grail romances: the bleeding lance, the Grail itself, and the silver plate (paten). We shall return to the Grail Quest and the origin of the Holy Grail in the next chapter.

Although Chrétien is generally considered the greatest and most representative poet of the Amour Courtois, C.S. Lewis thinks he was not so originally or by intention. He says :-

"..... this poet is not wholly the product of the new conceptions. When he began to write he seems hardly to have accepted them. We must conceive him as a poet of the same type with Dryden: one of those rare men of genius who can trim their sails to every breeze of novelty without forfeiting their poetic rank".⁽¹⁾

He was among the first to welcome Arthurian stories and to choose love as the central theme of a serious poem. He stamps upon men's minds indelibly the conception of Arthur's court as the home par excellence of true and noble love. But in Erec he violated all the rules of love and courtesy. It was only in his Lancelot (Le Chevalier de la Charette) - of which he says that Marie requested him to write it, giving him both the "matière" and the "san" (the subject-matter and the manner of treatment) - that he began to portray courtly love.

"It is his fate to appear constantly in literary history as the specimen of a tendency. He has deserved better. And the tragedy of the thing is that he himself was

• (1) The Allegory of Love - pp. 23 and 24.

never really subdued to that tendency. It is very doubtful whether he was ever dazzled by the tradition of romantic adultery. There are protests in Cligés which seem to come from the heart I am probably not the first reader who has seen in the fantastic labours which Lancelot undergoes at the bidding of the Queen, a symbol of the poet's own genius bent to tasks unworthy of it by the whim of a fashionable woman". (1)

Summing up Chrétien de Troyes' work Bruce says:-

"After all, however, his most memorable services to the great cause of poetry, perhaps, were in stimulating immeasurably the imagination of his contemporaries - for the vast forest of mediaeval Arthurian romance sprang mainly from the seeds of his sowing -- and in enriching the whole poetic tradition of Europe with new and beautiful themes on which greater men than himself have exercised their genius, from the age immediately succeeding his own down to that of Tennyson and Wagner". (2)

It is certain that, beside Geoffrey of Monmouth, Chrétien de Troyes was the greatest single writer to help create the Arthurian romance. Apart from his own contribution he exercised a very great influence, and many known and unknown writers were inspired by his poems to expand the Arthurian legend with a multiplicity of tales both in verse and in prose, ringing all the possible changes on the subjects and themes provided by the chivalric careers of all the great company of knights of Arthur's court, and especially the paladins Lancelot, Gawain and Perceval.

Especially after the two great cycles of French prose romances were compiled in the first half

(1) The Allegory of Love, pp. 23 and 24.

(2) Evolution of Arthurian Romance, Vol. I, p. 122.

of the thirteenth century the Arthurian story-material had grown into a vast mass of literature in at least seven European languages. So for example, the Vulgate Cycle of Prose Romances in French alone, as represented in Professor Oskar Sommer's monumental edition in seven volumes⁽¹⁾, is a compilation that would almost tax a man's years of leisure, let alone his patience, to plod through. Yet this vast mass of literary matter, as well as all the other prose and verse romances, that appeared from the beginning of the thirteenth century onward, contains hardly one essential feature of the story that Chrétien himself had not already supplied.

The main branches of the consolidated legend as we have it to-day are (a) the history of Arthur himself; (b) the story of the Grail Quest; (c) the Lancelot and Guenever story. All the rest, with the exception of the minor branches of the Merlin and Tristan histories, is mere repetition or expansion of the old themes. Quests and adventures of single knights are multiplied and duplicated but the elaborations - while adding bulk to the whole, and providing a measure of variety (?) - contribute little that is essentially new to the legend per se. And all the writers, and all the tales they wrote, found their immediate inspiration and sources in broad outline in Chrétien.

In tracing the influence of the genial French romancer we see that he first gave shape to the legend of the Grail Quest in his Perceval le Gallois, while he also wrote a Tristan poem that has not survived. Contemporaneously with his poems appeared a

(1) See Ch. X, p. 255, and Bibliography.

poem on Tristan written by the Anglo-Norman poet Thomas, about 1155 - 1170. There also exist fragments of a French poem on the same subject by a poet of Normandy named Béroul.

In Germany Gottfried von Strassburg, too, wrote a Tristan (thirteenth century), and later a Middle-English Sir Tristrem appeared. All these Tristan poems, including Chrétien's, were, according to the conclusions of scholars, based on a lost original (whose theme - like that of the Merlin history - is purely British in origin), and all, excepting Chrétien's own poem, were inspired by the French romancer's version.

The wide influence of Chrétien outside France is further exemplified by the great number of romances that appeared in other languages. His poems directly inspired, before the end of the twelfth century - besides the Tristan poems just mentioned - the Lanzelot of Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, and about the same time, the Erec and Iwein of Hartmann von Aue, both of which were paraphrased from Chrétien's romances of the same names. Then in the thirteenth century came Gottfried von Strassburg's adaptation of Thomas' Tristan, referred to above, Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival, which used the versions Wagner was to use seven hundred years later for his operas on these two themes, and Heinrich von dem Türlain's Diu Crône, the latter both being Grail romances.⁽¹⁾ There was in this century also a Dutch

(1) W.H. Schofield: English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer, London, Macmillan, 1931, App. 1, p. 462, gives the following chronological list of German romance writers (not all Chrétien imitators) :-

(Footnote continued on next page).

Lanseloet, while Spain and Portugal also provided their own versions of the histories of these 'international' heroes; which all prove the fascination that the Arthurian subjects of these tales held for the writers who knew and loved Chivalry and Knighthood, even though they had little national or cultural affinity with the "Matière de Bretagne" or with Britain's legendary king.

On the whole Chrétien's supremacy during his lifetime deterred others who came soon after him from trying their hand in a genre that he had made his own. But from the closing years of the twelfth century and the first part of the thirteenth many more romances appeared which continued the genre. So we find at this period the Li Biaus Descouneus (Le Bel Inconnu) by Renaud de Beaujeu on the same theme as the later Middle-English Libeaus Desconus (a partial source of the tale of Gareth and Lynnette). This motif of a handsome and gallant unknown who later proves his worth and puts to shame those who despised him, was a favourite one in mediaeval times, and of entirely independent origin; in time, however, this motif, like so many other independent ones, became attached to the Arthurian background, and the hero of the adventure must necessarily

(footnote continued from previous page)

- | | | |
|----------------|---|---|
| 1170 - 80 | : | Eilhart von Oberge: <u>Tristan</u> |
| 1192 - 1202 | : | Hartmann von Aue: <u>Erec and Iwaine</u> . |
| C. 1195 | : | Ulrich von Zatzikhoven: <u>Lanzelot</u> . |
| C. 1203 - 15 | : | Wolfram von Eschenbach: <u>Parzival</u> . |
| C. 1215 | : | Gottfried von Strassburg: <u>Tristan</u> . |
| C. 1170 - 1230 | : | Walther von der Vogelweide and
the Minnesinger |
| 1190 - 1200 | : | <u>Nibelungenlied</u> . |
| 1242 - 50 | : | Ulrich von Türheim: <u>Tristan</u> . |
| C. 1300 | : | Heinrich von Freiberg: <u>Tristan</u> . |

He omits: 1220 - Heinrich von dem Türlain:
Diu Krône (Crône).

become a knight in Arthur's train, as did Cliges.

Similar in subject and treatment are works from the beginning of the thirteenth century of Raoul de Houdenc. Thirty-seven such romances followed, some of which are listed on page 180 below.

It would be strange if England itself did not yield its own crop of versions of the romances. In time, indeed, English poets, too, began to contribute their share to the development and expansion of Arthurian romance, but Bruce points out clearly that the English romances came only in the period of decay of the European romances, so that they are, on the whole, of a higher standard than the continental poems of the same period, and yet reveal weaknesses too.

For as long as French remained the official language of the ruling classes of England there was little incentive to produce English versions of the French originals, and,

"when at last there was such an incentive in the decline of French in familiar use among the upper classes, these poems belonged to a past age and no longer represented, at least with such perfection, the spirit of contemporary society". (1)

This may account, in part, for the fact that the Middle-English romances on the whole are inferior to the German production in the same genre which was coincident with the peak period of French Romance, namely, at the end of the thirteenth century. →

The last English Arthurian romances belong

(1) J.D. Bruce, op. cit., Vol. I., p. 125.

to the conservative and backward North, where the feudal ideas and corresponding literary tastes were least changed. To this region belong the best of the English romances, namely the alliterative M.E. poem, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (middle fourteenth century), which belongs to a period when the metrical romances on the continent were utterly decadent. There were also two Morte Arthures -- the alliterative and the stanzaic, -- that have rather more than average merit. We shall return to these late English romances below.

In English appeared also the alliterative Joseph of Arimathea (Midland dialect, about 1300) and Lovelich's Holy Grail (South Midland, about 1480), both based on the French prose romances of the Vulgate Cycle. The Arthur and Merlin (end thirteenth century) and Merlin (fifteenth century) are drawn from the old French prose Merlin. Besides these English Arthurian romances in verse based on French romances in prose, there are also a number of others based on French romances in verse and they are of a somewhat higher order: they are :- Sir Perceval of Galles, Libeaus Desconus, Yvain and Gawain, Aunters of Arthur, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and Golygrus and Gawain.

It is while evolving thus, in the course of two hundred years during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that Arthurian romance came to acquire its complete form as a whole compendium of legends dealing, not only with Arthur himself, but also with other personages such as Merlin, Lancelot and Tristan, each the central figure of other independent cycles of legends, and with other extraneous themes such as the Quest of

the Holy Grail, also of independent origin from the Arthur legend.

Before we can discuss the question of how the branches came to be welded together we must complete the examination of the romances and their development to the stage where they ceased to be a factor of importance in literature.

The work of Chrétien (in the Perceval or Grail Quest) was continued by some other writers who are successively (1) an anonymous writer known as Pseudo-Wauchier, (2) Wauchier de Denain, (3) Manessier, and (4) Gerbert de Montreuil. They all wrote at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries. None of them contributed much to the construction and development of the Grail theme; indeed, temperamentally and artistically they stood worlds apart from the mysticism and spirituality of their subject, the quest of the sacred vessel. They expanded the volume of the work by many tens of thousands of lines, but the episodes are, on the whole, not very novel. They add, however, some motifs which were to recur in later romances, for example

(1) that of a mysterious stranger with a head-cutting challenge as in the English Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and

(2) that of the various "chastity tests", - a very common theme. The ethical tone of many of the romances, and of these Perceval continuations, is not high, the heroes often interrupting their venture to dally awhile with the damsel, lady or dame (mortal or fay) of the various castles where they sought shelter

overnight. The gallant Gawain was the greatest 'play-boy' of the romances in this respect. We are inevitably led to the conclusion (strengthened by what we learn from the descriptions of the usages and customs of the "courtly love") that the standard of marital fidelity was not very high in mediaeval times, on the part of the ladies no more than of the knights. So this preoccupation with the chastity of their womenfolk was a very real concern with most of the knights of romance.

Apart from the marvels and fantastic elements with which the romances abound (giants, dwarfs, enchanted castles, magic armour and weapons, spells and bewitchments) we can only conclude that literature then, as now, to a certain extent at least reflected the real social life of the times. The romance writers were, on the whole, very cynical in their attitude to the sanctity of marriage, and some of the amatory exploits of the chivalric heroes of romance are indeed licentious to a degree, even when they are engaged on the Grail quest. (One of the prices, alas, to be paid for an intensive study of chivalry and knighthood in the literature of the Middle Ages is this discovery of the feet of clay possessed by the idols of romance.)

The "chastity test" is, then, one of the most frequently met motifs in these romances. In one case it is a mantle that tears asunder when placed on the shoulders of a faithless wife; in another a drinking horn that cannot be emptied without spilling by the husband of the erring lady;⁽¹⁾ in yet another it is a

(1) Cf. Malory: Morte D'Arthur: Bok VIII, Ch. 34.

harp that sounds discords at the approach of an unchaste girl. The only knight of Arthur's court who successfully undergoes all tests (either on his own account or that of his wife) is Caradoc. Arthur himself on occasion unwisely insisted on undergoing the tests, when Guenever was always greatly taxed to find ways of avoiding an undignified exposure.⁽¹⁾

After these Chrétien continuations and the other romances that were directly inspired by the work of Chrétien, we may for the sake of completeness briefly mention some of the other verse romances with an Arthurian setting that appeared during the closing years of the twelfth and throughout those of the thirteenth centuries, in order to indicate the great volume of the literature of this genre that was composed during this time. It serves to prove the attraction which this type of story had for the story-tellers and readers of the time. Moreover these verse tales provided the materials from which were compiled the great cycles of prose romances that mark the next important stage in the development of the Arthurian Legend. In themselves they add few new features to our knowledge of the Arthur legend; they are for the greater part a duplication of marvellous quests by knights of Arthur's court and they introduce some new heroes and a wide range of motifs and themes that give a measure of variety to tales that are essentially very much the same in their main characteristics: the presentation of

(1) On one occasion when the queen had signally failed to pass such a test Lancelot was so incensed that he became enraged at the sight of any mantle, and without warning attacked a knight who was accompanying a damsel wearing a mantle.

all the aspects of the "armour courtois" and the exploitation of well-worn adventures and stock episodes.

They are the following :-

1. Meraugis de Portlesguez.
2. La Vengeance de Raguidel;
3. La Mule sanz Frain;⁽¹⁾
4. Le Chevalier a L'Espee;⁽²⁾
5. Yder;
6. Duromart;
7. Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees;⁽³⁾
8. Fergus;
9. Hunbaut;
10. Les Mervelles de Rigomer;
11. Floriant et Floriete;
12. Li Atres Perillox;⁽⁴⁾
13. Claris et Laris;
14. Sone de Nausay;
15. Escamor;
16. Meliador;
17. Durmant le Galois.

Some other romances that are non-Arthurian but are representative of the "Society" romances based on the theme of courtly love are :-

1. Ille et Galeron (twelfth century);
2. Ipomedon (twelfth century);
3. Amadas et Ydoine (end twelfth century);

(1) The Mule without a Bridle;

(2) The Knight of the Sword;

(3) The Knight of the two swords; a source of the tale of Balin - Malory, Bk. II.

(4) The Perilous Churchyard.

4. Flamenca (early thirteenth century);
5. Guillaume de Palerne (early thirteenth century)
6. Galerant (thirteenth century);
7. Jehan et Blonde (thirteenth century);
8. Châtelain de Coucy (late thirteenth century);

and others - see S.F. Barrow,

The Mediaeval Society Romances.

Thirty-seven such romances (that have been preserved) followed Chrétien, "and so", says Bruce, "the Arthurian Mediaeval Romance drags on into the fourteenth century until it expires with the Meliador of Froissart in the second half of the century". Yet these by no means exhaust the list of mediaeval romances of chivalry, for they are only the French romances. Most of them had their Dutch, German, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian versions. The majority are commonplace and tedious enough, but some are really interesting and have merit.

For discussions and analyses of their contents one must go to the indefatigable Bruce who has catalogued and summed them up, and written all there is to tell that is known of them hereto as regards sources, date of composition, mutual interaction and influence -- thus doing students of Arthurian matter a service of inestimable value.⁽¹⁾

Their chief importance lies in their representation of the important parts played in the various episodes of the tales by the three great paladins,

(1) And Miss Barrow (op. cit.) gives short summaries of twenty-one more (mostly non-Arthurian) "society" romances.

Perceval, Lancelot and Gawain, especially the latter. In many of them Kay is portrayed as a foil to the really worthy knights. He is a buffoonlike figure - the first to set out on every venture and quest, only to return discomfited or shamed, before having proceeded very far. In fact he is the butt of every romancer, a greater parody of a knight errant than the witless old Manchegan windmill-stormer was ever intended to be. (1)

One important name of a writer that emerges from this jungle of Arthurian romances is that of Robert de Boron. A knight of Picardy, he lived in the greater part of the thirteenth century, and is famous for his two greatest works, his Joseph d'Arimathea, and Merlin. The Joseph is famous as a source for the Holy Grail Legend, while Merlin provides the source of the 'facts' about the youth of Arthur. We shall return to Robert de Boron in discussing the different parts of the composite Arthur legend below.

And so the Arthurian legend grew and developed and gathered its accretions of other independent romances till the complete, full and lengthy prose Arthuriad took shape from its component 'branches'. In other words, the separate romances were joined together

(1) It is notable that in Malory, too, Kay is at first a worthy knight who also "slays his hundreds". As the romance proceeds he takes on his surly character and begins to be worsted in battle and tourney. Note in this connection Malory, Bk. I, Ch. xiv and xv, and Bk. III, Ch. iii and iv. In the seventh book dealing with the adventures of Beaumains (Gareth) we see the traditional Kay - the ill-natured clown.

In Malory's version of the Tristan story King Mark, too, is at first portrayed as a gentle, courtly and courageous king, but as in the corrupt late form of his original, Malory later consistently blackens his character, and makes him a vindictive craven.

to form a cyclic sequence, a sort of continuous and connected narrative.

The magnetic figure and reputation of the 'most Christian of Kings' had such an attractive power for all heroes of independent legends and tales of romance that all the chivalrous tales eventually became grafted to the central stock, to form a vast growth with many ramifications covering the whole field of chivalry and romance..

So, for example, just as the Holy Grail (itself the centre of an extensive body of tales and legends) was considered the most sacred object in the world, so its quest had eventually to become the supreme task of the most noble, most virtuous, most courageous court in Christendom. The alliterative fifteenth century Scots Golygrus and Gawayne even tells of a pilgrimage of Arthur to the Holy Land.

By the middle of the thirteenth century the long metrical romances had gradually declined in favour, and popular taste demanded rather prose romances. It was now, with the addition and welding together of so many collections of legends and their fusion in the prose cycles that the Arthurian legend acquired its five main 'branches'. These in their completest form (chief source of Sir Thomas Malory's recension) are to be found in the French prose Vulgate or Walter Map Cycle. It is called the Vulgate because it soon became the most popular redaction of the romances in the Middle Ages, almost completely displacing other versions. Its completion must have taken place during the years of the first quarter of the thirteenth century. It is

the original source for the greater part of Malory's Morte D'Arthur and a manuscript copy of it must have been the "Frennshe boke" among the various sources which provided the matter of his book.

It is made up of the five great tales :-
L'Estbire del Saint Graal, L'Estoire de Merlin, Li Livres de Lancelot, La Queste del Saint Graal, and La Mort Artu.

The name of Map is also given to the collection because the MSS. regularly ascribe to him the last three branches of the cycle, although this view is rejected by most modern scholars and Map himself never claimed authorship. He lived about 1140 to 1210, was a Welsh clerk and one of the chief men of his age. He was Archdeacon of Oxford under Henry II, and the author of the satirical De Nugis Curialium (The Courtier's Triflings). He would therefore not be the same Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford who gave Geoffrey of Monmouth his 'Britannici sermonis vetustissimus liber'.

The Vulgate Prose Cycle was not composed on a preconceived plan by one writer or even a group of writers working together. It grew rather spontaneously in the way that other mediaeval cycles grew -- by writers attaching their own inventions to those of their predecessors: simply annexing what was already there and expanding it according to their own fancy, the expanded version of one writer in time being adapted and expanded by other writers, so that there was a natural growth of the literary snowball dependent only on the number of tale-tellers and the extent and virtuosity of their inventive powers.

So, for example, such a popular story as that of Lancelot grew in this way into an incredibly vast compilation which retained a perennial interest, the longer it grew, for mediaeval story-tellers and their audiences. The plan of construction of these long romances is simple and lends itself to interminable extending. A couple of knights start on a quest from Arthur's court. At some time or other they become separated, or one wanders off on another quest. His companion turns off from the main quest in order to seek the strayed one, and meets many other marvellous adventures, each of which leads to further quests. Their paths recross, perhaps without their recognizing each other, and fresh episodes follow, either companion being very easily lured away on another adventure. And so these quests link and interweave until after a long passage of time and by devious ways they are brought together to complete the original quest -- provided that the romance writer has not in the mean time forgotten what it was the companions set out to do, or simply grown tired of the story and allowed it to take an entirely different course. The usual ingredients are fights between knights who challenge each other on sight, damsels in distress who have to be succoured or freed from oppression or 'evil customs', enchanted castles, spells which are cast on the hero of the tale, monsters to be destroyed, the valorous deeds generally accomplished in honour of the amie and so on, over and over again, as long as the romancer cares to continue.

An example of such a marathon tale is that of Chrétien's Grail story the Perceval le Gallois with its continuations. Chrétien himself wrote upward of

40,000 lines and brought the story to its most interesting point, where it stopped, owing to his death. (The author's demise was about the only thing that could put a fairly conclusive stop to a typical mediaeval romance. The work of the first continuator, Pseudo-Wauchier, extends through 21,916 lines, that of his successor Wauchier de Denain through 34,934, while Manessier added 10,445 and Gerbert a further 15,000 - a total of 122,000 lines. Yet the Lancelot is even longer. Compared to these romances a four-volume eighteenth century novel is a mere pamphlet.

The European Arthurian Romance period may be said to have come to a close about the end of the fourteenth century, when the great stream of tales gradually began to dry up as interest and inspiration began to show signs of exhaustion.

With the decay and passing of feudalism and the kind of chivalric life which the mediaeval romances had to a certain extent reflected, the taste for these stories, which now represented a past era, also declined and other kinds of literary productions were being read.

The Renaissance provided so many other literary genres and such a wide selection of subjects and themes and wider fields of study that taste swung away from the old stories which now seemed very remote, childish and naïve. The invention of printing had also made possible the unlimited duplication of books, which made possible a wider circulation among a circle of readers who did not have any interest in the matters which had interested the select courtly circles amongst

whom the manuscript romances had circulated.

The Renaissance, too, brought with it a healthy breeze of rationalism which blew away the clouds of ignorance, superstition, fantasy and romantic wonder of the middle ages. Such new and effective weapons as were provided by even the primitive bombards of the early Gunpowder Age dispelled the myth of the invincibility of the cumbersome steel-encased champions of Arthurian vintage and of their massive castles and keeps. Writing in the second half of the fourteenth century Jean Froissart chronicles for us the events of the *Götterdämmerung* of chivalry. With the end of the Hundred Years' War in the middle of the fifteenth century one epoch died and another was born.

Nevertheless for a long while yet the old romances retained an old-world flavour and charm for readers who were only a generation or two removed from times whose literature still partly reflected the spirit of their own time.

The peak period of European, and especially French, mediaeval romance stretched from the middle to the end of the thirteenth century, and romance culminated in the composition of the great prose cycles, which fell in this period. By the middle of the fourteenth century, at the time Froissart wrote his *Chronicles*, romance was beginning to decay. But contemporary with - beginning, in fact, soon after, and under the influence of, Chrétien - and continuing for a century or so more after, the French romance period, we find a steady stream of romances appearing in the other European languages, mostly translations and adaptations of

the French metrical and prose romances. Together they provide a mass of Arthurian stories equal in bulk, at least, to the French production. We cannot pause to linger over these however: they have been more than adequately listed and discussed by Bruce, and our chief interest and main concern is with the development of the legend in England.

The English production was naturally (as we have noted on pp. 175 and 176 above) somewhat later than the French, and dates from about the end of the thirteenth century beginning with the Midland English Sir Tristrem, to the last of the English metrical romances, the Scots Lancelot of the Laik, that must have appeared about the time Caxton was printing Malory's Morte D'Arthur.

These English metrical romances had been preceded, in the first decades of the thirteenth century, by the English metrical chronicles on the pattern of Geoffrey (in Latin) and his successor Wace (in French), the chief of these being Layamon's Brut, which we have noted fully above (pp. 154 -157). Of the later English metrical romances by far the best, not only in English but in all the territory of mediaeval romance in all the European countries, is the Gawain and the Green Knight (Lancashire dialect, c. 1400).

Both of the themes treated in this tale, namely, the temptation of Gawain by the lady of the Green Knight, and especially the motif of the Beheading Game, are Celtic in origin.⁽¹⁾ This story of a

(1) J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1936. Introduction, p. xii and J.D. Bruce, op. cit., Vol. I p. 88.

beheading challenge is found in the Livres de Caradoc, which is an interpolation in the first continuation of Chrétien's Perceval, and tells the attractive legend connected with Caradoc's winning of his peerlessly faithful wife Guinor, the only lady in Arthur's court that could stand the chastity test of the Mantle (see page 179 above).

Apart from Gawain and the Green Knight the two most important and best of the later English productions are the alliterative Morte Arthure and the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur. Of the two the first (middle fourteenth century), which is often assigned to the Scottish knight Huchown (although the colophon attributes it to Robert of Thornton⁽¹⁾), is really a chronicle in verse of the Brut type. Its principal interest is pseudo-historical; it is almost wholly taken up with the continental wars of Arthur and his final conflict with Modred. Its spirit is nearer that of the chansons de geste or poems of the Charlemagne cycle. As the poet wishes to give an air of historical truth to his narrative he discards the fantastic elements of the Arthur story, and so, for example, in his account of the last great battle, describes how Arthur dies of his wounds and is buried at Glastonbury (again confused or associated with Avallon), ignoring Layamon's poetic account of the 'exitus dubius'.

The tale is vigorously told, with a rugged strength. As in Layamon, Arthur appears again as the

(1) Morte Arthur. Two Early English Romances London, Dent, 1936, p. 93.
Erik Björkman: Morte Arthure - Alt-und-Mittelenglische Texte - L. Morsbach und F. Holthausen, Heidelberg & New York, 1915.

fierce British warrior, rather than the polished knight and king of French romance. Note how his anger is described at the opening of the story when he has heard the ambassadors from the emperor Lucius of Rome demanding Arthur's homage :-

"The kyng blyschit on the beryn with his brode eghen
 pat full brymly for breth brynte as the gledys;
 Keste colours as kyng with crouell lates,
 Luked as a lyon and on his lyppe bytes.

The king looked upon the man with his keen eye that fiercely burned with wrath like a blazing coal and cast flashes as he with angry gestures glared like a lion and bit his lips". (1)

Yet immediately after, when an appeal has been made to his knightly honour and hospitality, we see the generous Arthur we like to see :-

"Take kepe to thoos lordez,
 To styghtyll þa steryn men, as theire statte askys,
 That they bee herberde in haste in thoos heghe chambres,
 Sythin sittandly in sale seruyde theraftyr,
 That they fynd na fawte of fude to thiare horsez,
 Nowthire (of) weyn, ne waxe, ne welthe in þis erthe;
 Spare for no spycerye, bot spende what þe lykys,
 That there be largesce on lofte, and no lake founden!
 If þou my wurschipe wayte, wy, be my trouthe,
 þou sall haue gersoms full grett, þat gayne sall þe
 euere!

He commanded Sir Cayous (Kay) "take charge of these lords -- dispose of those valiant men as their estate required, so that they might speedily be lodged in those high chambers and afterwards served in the dining hall as was meet: see that there was no lack of fodder for their horses -- nor wine, nor honey, nor any luxury on this earth: spare nothing for any delicacy, but spend what thou likest, that there may be largesse aloft and nothing wanting. If thou lookest to my honour why then, by my troth, thou shalt have reward full great that shall avail thee for ever". (2)

(1) Morte Arthure, Everyman edition, cited footnote previous page, p. 3. Text, ll. 116 - 119.

(2) Idem, p. 4. Text, ll. 155 - 165.

There are descriptions of banquets that are truly on a royal scale⁽¹⁾; details of gory fighting are described with the gusto and delight of a connoisseur: there is hacking and hewing so that limbs are shorn off and blood flows in rivers while weapons are shivered by the fierce blows dealt.⁽²⁾ This is virile fighting, told of in a compressed manner that holds the interest much more than the gossipy French romances which linger lovingly over tedious and minute details.

There is great dramatic effect in the originality of the unknown poet in making Modred mourn over the death of Gawain of which he himself is the cause :-

"This was sir Gawain the gude, þe gladdeste of othire
And the gracioseste gome, that vndire God lyffede,
Mane hardyeste of hande, happyeste in armes
And þe hendeste in hawle vndire heuen riche;
þe lordlyeste of ledyng, qwylls he lyffe myghte,
Fore he was lyone allossede in londes inewe;
Had thow knawen hym, sir Kynge, in kythe thare he lengede
His konyng, his knyghthode, his kyndly werkes,
His doying, his doughtynesse, his dedis of armes,
Thou wolde hafe dole for his dede þe dayes of thy lyfe!"
Ȝit þat traytour alls tite teris lete he falle,
Turnes hym furthe tite, and talkes no more,
Went wepand awaye, and weries the stowndys
þat euer his werdes ware wroghte, sich wandrethe to
wyrke: (3)

(1) "Flesch fluriste of fermyson with frumentee noble,
Therto wylde to wale and wynlyche bryddes,
Pacokes and plouers in platers of golde,
Pygges of porke-despyne, þat pastured neuer;
(Porcupines that had not been weaned)
Sythen herons in hedoyne, hyled full faire;
Grett swannes full swythe and ...
Turkey tarts, delicious gumbalds delightful to eat;
Wildboars' shoulders and sliced flesh; geese and
bitterns in dishes filled with pastry; young hawks
dressed in bread, cranes, curlews, rabbits beauti-
fully browned in saucc; pheasants - and then the
wines: Claret, Cretan, Osay, Algarde, Rhenish and
Rochell (ll. 180 - 205).

(2) Morte Arthure: Everyman edition, pp. 89, 91.

(3) Morte Arthure: ll. 3876 - 3889.

But however much we should like to linger over the good things in the alliterative Morte we must hasten the tale and glance at the stanzaic poem.

The stanzaic Le Morte Arthur is a metrical romance based on the French prose romance La Mort Artu. (We have noted above, page 183, how by about 1350 the metrical romances were superseded by the great prose compilations. For this reason that the unknown English poet based his poem on one of the currently popular prose tales.)

It is a poem of much naïve charm, and recounts the mournful and moving tale of the Maid of Ascalot who dies for love of Lancelot; it tells further of the course of Lancelot's love for the queen, the history of Modred's treason, and Arthur's final battle. It is written in Midland dialect and dates from the latter part of the fourteenth century. It contains 482 stanzas, each of eight lines, rhyming alternately. It is most probable that Malory used it as a source for Books XVIII, XX and XXI of the Morte D'Arthur.

The language of the poem is such that any modern reader who can read and enjoy his Chaucer will have little difficulty in reading the romance with ease and appreciation: compare the extract from the passage describing Lancelot's leave-taking of Elaine, Tennyson's "Lily Maid of Astolat" :-

"By that was launcelot hole and fere,
Buskis hym, and makis alle yare,
his leue hathe he taken there,
The mayden wepte for sorrow and care;
'Sir, yif that youre willis were,
Sithe I of the ne may haue mare,
Som thinge ye would be-leue me here
To loke on, whan me longith sare'.

"launcelot spake wyth herte fre
For to comferte that ladye hende,
'Myne armure shalle I leue wyth the
.....
For here I may no lenger lende" (1)

In spite of some weaknesses, as in the matter of rhyme, and the over-use of clichés and "poetic" expressions, the poet tells his story with an ease and directness that is almost ballad-like.

"Although he lacks the vigour of imagination, the intensity of feeling and the originality in description that the poet of the Morte Arthure possessed, he manifests real power as an easy and agreeable story-teller, who by the quiet, even beauty of his poem, which comes like the gentle peal of a bell after the rush and force of the vigorous lines of the Morte Arthure, cannot fail to please. The charm of his simple narration of a story singularly appealing to the human nature of all periods, is altogether unlike the courtly tone of the diffuse French prose romances among which he found his sources, and is due without question to his own ability as a raconteur". (2)

Although in the French prose Mort Artu of the Vulgate Cycle it was a knight Gifflet who was sent by Arthur to return Excalibur to the bosom of the lake, in this poem the well-known scene is enacted by Bedevere, as in Malory and later versions.

"What saw thou there?" than sayd the kynge,
"Telle me now, yiff thou can;"
"Sertes syr," he sayd, "nothyng
But watres depe, and wawes wanne."
"A, now thou haste broke my byddyng
Why has thou do so, thou false man?
A-nother bode thou muste be brynging."
'Inanne careffully the knyght forthe ranne'. (3)

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- (1) Le Morte Arthur: stanza 27. Cf. Tennyson: Lancelot and Elaine.
(2) Morte Arthure: Introduction by Lucy Allen Paton, pp. xv and xvi.
(3) Le Morte Arthur : stanza 419.

Note where Malory got his: "Sir", he said, "I saw nothing but the waters wappe and the waves wanne", (1) which Tennyson turned into :-

"And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds". (2)

The poet tells how, after Bedevere had finally consigned the sword to the lake as Arthur had bidden, the king was borne away in the boat full of ladies. But the poet rationalizes the story and tells how the corpse was brought that night to be interred in the chapel, a version that Malory follows exactly⁽³⁾, although he digresses to explain that there is no certainty that Arthur was really dead.

"Thus of Arthur I find never more written in books that be authorised, nor more of the very certainty of his death heard I never, but thus was he led away in a ship wherein were three queens ... Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say it shall be so, but rather I will say, here in this world he changed his life ...". (4)

The good Sir Thomas Malleore, moralist and realist though he was, and impatient of the fantastic wonders of some of his French sources, had enough of the spice of romance in him to cherish the regretful wish that such might really be the poetic end of his hero Arthur, and not the finality of prosaic death in battle as of any ordinary mortal; and we, too,

(1) Morte D'Arthur, Bk. XXI, Ch. v.

(2) Tennyson: The Passing of Arthur.

(3) Morte D'Arthur, Bk. XXI, Ch. vi.

(4) Idem, loc. cit.

would wish our logic and ^{rationalism} ~~realism~~ to remain a little in abeyance, with that "willing suspension of disbelief" and pay tribute to the same belief in the immortality of Arthur.

It says much for the intrinsic worth of this stanzaic Morte Arthur that Malory with all the wealth of mediaeval romance before him should have chosen to follow its version for the later passages of his Morte D'Arthur.

Rather more alien in language is the late fifteenth century Scots Lancelot of the Laik, which paraphrases one episode from the early twelfth century prose Lancelot del Lac. It is interesting as being the last in date of all the metrical romances composed in Great Britain. The bard, in making choice of a subject, decided to write about Lancelot :-

"Thane in my thocht rolling to and fro
Quhare that I myhet sum wnkouth mater fynde,
Quhill at ye last it fell in to my mynd
Of o story, that I befor had sene,
That boith of loue and armys can conten,
Was of o knyght clepit Lancelot of ye laik,
The sone of Bane was, king of albanak;
Of quhois fame and worschipful dedis
Clerkis in to diuerss bukis redis". (1)

As the production and circulation of the romances declined in time the various Arthurian stories

(1) In **this** poem Guenever is known, as commonly in Scottish traditions, as Wanore (Gaynor).

From ll. 209 - 294 he mentions fifteen adventures of Lancelot which he will not tell, and goes on to recount one of the less interesting Arthurian stories "of the wars between Arthur and Galiot wherein Lancelot won renown by his defence of Arthur and at last made peace between the two princes. I shall also tell how Venus rewarded him".

It is a loose paraphrase of part of the French Prose romance of Lancelot del Lac.

lived on in chap-books and the ballads which were slowly gaining a circle of readers and ever-growing popularity among the humbler ranks of society whose interest could only be held by simpler tales more simply told. That there was a great number of such ballads which remained current for centuries is proved by the snatches and stray references in the lighter songs of Shakespeare's plays. And in a later age, when the dawn of the later Romantic Movement was to bring about a renewed interest in these old things, another man, who in his own way had inherited the passion and nostalgia of all true Romantics, resuscitated the ballads and regilded the frayed and faded golden thread of Arthurian tradition which still ran unbroken through the warp and woof of the rich cloth of English literature -- but we shall discuss Bishop Percy in his place below.

And while these last remnants of Arthurian mediaeval romance were still being composed and read and enjoyed in England the first great English poet was writing and helping to create the modern English language.

In these closing years of the fourteenth century Chaucer, "The Father of English Poetry", as Dryden called him, brought to bear all his unparalleled gifts in the art of telling a story in verse. And a Romanticist who gave us some of the most romantic of classic tales, yet he found no inspiration in the romantic matter of his own native land.

"It might have been expected that the adapter of knightly stories like Palamon and Arcite or Troilus and Cressida would above all be attracted to the prerogative romances of chivalry. Nor, certainly, would the poet

of the Canterbury Tales have wanted the required capacity for compilation, combination, and arrangement. But England was never the chosen home of chivalry, and always showed a certain callousness to many of the ruling principles of the Middle Ages; and Chaucer, the first great poet of the England that we know, was a humorist, a man of affairs, a citizen of the world, a foe of falsetto extravagance. Nor was his time, a time of parliaments and Lollardry and of the Renaissance dawn, specially apt to stimulate the stagnant mediaevalism of his country-men or himself". (1)

Professor George Saintsbury surmises⁽²⁾ that Chaucer may have considered handling Arthurian matter, to judge from the Knights' Tale, but after some hesitation wisely decided against treating this matter in the manner of his Troilus and Cressida.

He wrote only one essay in Arthurian matter, namely in the Wife of Bath's Tale, which handles the same theme as the ballad of Sir Gawain's marriage. But beyond putting the events of the tale in King Arthur's days Chaucer does not connect it with the matière de Bretagne, and, in conformity with his character he tells the tale in a cynical and puckish way. The chivalrous romance proper he treats with ridicule, and cleverly parodies its style in his burlesque fragment of Sir Thopas. By the time he comes, in the 'Second Fit', and after some thirty-two stanzas to this :-

"Hym self drank water of the well,
As did the knyght sire Percyvell,
So worthy under wede;
Til on a day

no wonder the good host had to protest :-

(1) MacCallum, op. cit., p. 87.

(2) Cambridge History of English Literature I, P. 174.

"Na moore of this, for Goddes dignitee
.....
Min eres aken of thy drasty speche
.....
This may well be rym dogerel". (1)

Although he can in passing pay a slight compliment to an Arthurian knight in the reference to "Gawayn with his olde curteisy"⁽²⁾, Chaucer speaks contemptuously of

"The book of Launcelot de Lake
That wommen holde in ful greet reverence",⁽³⁾

for, so he implies, men will have none of it.

And yet Chaucer may well be counted one of England's first poets of Chivalry, the chivalry, that is, of his own time - the latter part of the fourteenth century, as in the Knights' Tale of Palamon and Arcite, the squire's uncompleted tale, and the Breton Lay of the Franklin.⁽⁴⁾

The task of unifying, systematizing and re-telling the romances and lifting romance in England out of the doldrums into which it had drifted, was to wait for nearly a century after Chaucer, and then the medium was not verse, but the infant English prose which in this single volume was to find its feet and make its

(1) Tale of Sir Thopas, l. 195 f.f.

(2) Squire's Tale, l. 95.

(3) Nun's Priest's Tale, l. 392.
The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Globe Edition,
Macmillan & Co., London, 1932.

(4) Cf. W.H. Schofield: Chivalry in English Literature: Chaucer, Malory, Spenser and Shakespeare. Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature II, Harvard University Press, 1925, which despite bright parts, is to my mind rather a dull and laboured book - the part which, naturally, yielded the most pleasing matter being that dealing with Malory.

début in a work as near the standard of epic, as the matière de Bretagne was ever to attain in the land of its origin - Malory's Morte D'Arthur.

CHAPTER VIII : Excursus: The Branches of
the Legend.

"Esclargiz est li vespres et li jurs;
Contre l'soleil reluisent cil adub;
Osbert e helme i getent grand flambur,
E cil escut ki bien sunt peint a flurs,
E cil espiet, cil cret gonfanun."

Chanson de Roland. (1)

þis kyng lay at Camylot vpon Krystmasse
With mony luflych lorde, lede3 of þe best,
þer tournayed tulkes by tyme3 ful mony,
Justed ful jolilie wise gentyle kni3tes,
Syþen kayred to þe court caroles to make.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.



E must pause here to examine
some features of the five branches that became fused into the
complete prose Arthur legend,
namely:

- (a) The career of Arthur,
- (b) The history of Merlin,
- (c) The quest of the Holy Grail,
- (d) Lancelot, and (e) Tristan.

The titles of these romances do not exactly reflect their contents, for the various stories interweave, and some details of one may provide the origin of certain features in another. Thus, for instance, it is in the Robert de Boron version of the Merlin story that we get certain 'details' of the enfances of Arthur, and the circumstances that surround his accession to the throne of Britain, that are not to be found in the original legends dealing entirely with his own history, nor even in

(1) "The day has cleared up / The arms shine in the sun / Hauberk and helm throw forth bright flames / And the shields finely painted with flowers / And the spears and the golden banners."

The 'history' of Geoffrey of Monmouth. So, too, it is difficult to decide in which order to discuss the various branches in order to get the chronological sequence of events. Actually the story should begin with the origins of the Holy Grail, (L'Estoire del Saint Graal) which date from long before the time that Arthur ruled; the Quest itself deals with events during Arthur's rule; the Mort Artu tells of the closing years of his reign, while the story of his birth and early years is to be found in the history of Merlin.

To take first Arthur himself:

A. THE LIFE AND DEATH OF ARTHUR (MORT ARTU).

We have noted incidentally - in tracing the evolution of the Arthurian legend in the preceding pages - how the tale of Arthur originated in the legends from a misty past of the prowess of a great Welsh or, at any rate, Celtic war leader, and developed almost inevitably in the hands of chroniclers and romancers into the romantic story of the Arthur who became the personification of all courage and chivalry. By the fourteenth century Arthur had become the centre and rallying point of a great and chivalrous court. In the pages of Geoffrey of Monmouth he had had his fair share of quests and knightly exploits and had now come to rest on his laurels as the doyen of knights. He no longer needs to do deeds of knight-errantry and only holds court to inspire his knights and to see marvels performed by them or others. More and more he is overshadowed by his illustrious followers who, each in turn, impersonate one or the other of the knightly virtues and attainments. The Mort Artu tells of the later years of his reign

when the plotting of Modred, leading up to his open rebellion, and the tragic break-up of the Round Table - due partly to the departure and disappearance of the knights on the will-o'-the-wisp Grail Quest, and partly to the decay of virtue and faithfulness as portrayed in the guilty love of Lancelot and the Queen - all work together to bring the long and glorious reign to a dismal end. Through the naïve story-telling of those early romancers who were concerned chiefly with the outward and visible action of their tale, and who could have had very little glimmerings of psychological conflicts we yet see an intimation of awareness of the tragic necessity of Arthur's sunset in the Arthur-Modred strife, due to the sin of Arthur (committed in ignorance though it was) in begetting his own nephew-son Modred. There is an almost classic excellence in the inevitable and unescapable punishment towards which the great and noble man who has erred moves, ending in his destruction. Arthur answers almost perfectly to the Aristotelean definition of a tragic hero, and his career, his life and death are in the best traditions of Greek Tragedy.

It was, of course, only in the modern work of Tennyson that Arthur would be the central character in the tragic domestic drama of his own court life and the triangle created by Lancelot's passion for Guenever. In fact were it not for the dignity with which the Victorian poet clothes the figure of the king especially in the later Idylls, Arthur would have descended in the latest versions of his illustrious history, as in truth he does in the later French prose romances, to the position of the deceived husband - the serio-comic

cuckold who through the ages ~~has been the~~ butt of humour and the object of pity and contempt.

We see, therefore, that even thus early the first handlers of the Arthurian story were struck by the dramatic material in the legend of the king, although its possibilities were only to be recognized and worthily treated by a poet of greater ability more than six hundred years later. For the mediæval Norman romancers were more concerned with the action and episode in their material, and the reputation of the great British king as the centre and rallying point of the great galaxy of chevaliers whose courtly adventures formed the main source of their tales.

Nevertheless they created for us the well-known figure of the King Arthur we know: the great and inspiring ruler of knights in many respects greater even than he. They took the raw materials of the story of the warrior Arthur of native Celtic legend as they heard it in William's time, and as they had had it from the Breton singers in their own home-land⁽¹⁾, and after purging it of all uncouth mythological matter and the more unintelligible original features, and dressing

(1) That there must have been around the beginning of the Middle Ages a considerable body of Armorican literature, written or oral, from which the earliest Norman singers gained their first knowledge of Arthur, is a fact on which the present writer feels no doubt whatever.

Some of the authorities consulted also hint at something of the kind, but hesitate to make a bold pronouncement in the face of the fact that nothing remains extant of such a literature. Other scholars simply ignore the question of the existence of such Celtic matter transplanted to Breton soil, and so beg the question of where the Norman trouvères obtained their Arthurian traditions before contact could be made with the native oral and written traditions of Britain itself.

Vide supra, pp. 31 and 158.

it up in the courtly garb of romance, they produced their figure of Arthur in all the glittering panoply of Mediaeval Chivalry.

Indeed did they build of stone not of their own quarrying a new edifice on the old ruins whose significance they knew not, even as Arnold's Halicarnassan or Ephesian peasant. And so Britain was given back her native Arthur via the literature of France.

B. MERLIN.

The prose Vulgate Cycle is the completest collection of romances dealing with Arthur and his men. Two of the branches, L'Estoire del Saint Graal and La Queste del Saint Graal, deal with the origin and the quest of the Holy Grail. Then there is Li Livres de Lancelot, with which we will deal below. That leaves La Mort Artu, which recounts the events of the latter part of Arthur's reign up to his death. The Histoire de Merlin is actually the part of the cycle that, beginning with the origins of Merlin - the circumstances of his conception and birth, his youth and youthful achievements, including his prophetic gifts which he used as indicated in Nennius and Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the part that he played in the birth of Arthur - recounts all the early history of Arthur, his wars, the founding of the Order of the Round Table, and, in fact the whole legend of Arthur except that part which forms the matter of the Mort Artu.

Modern readers of the Arthurian legend naturally associate Arthur with Merlin, and Merlin with Arthur, and this is because the prose Merlin of the Vulgate Cycle, which was Malory's chief source, first

brought them into their close relationship. Apart from this, however, we must try to trace the primitive origin of Merlin in the independent traditions before those of Arthur.

Only in Welsh writings do we find mention of Merlin before the Arthurian romances: from mediaeval Brittany nothing. In early Welsh poetry there are eight poems by a bard Myrddhin, but he is not so famous as Taliessin. And the only Welsh poem that suggests some concrete fragment that seems genuine and earlier than Geoffrey of Monmouth's account of Merlin, is the Dialogue of Merlin in which Merlin converses with Taliessin, and in this the obscure words :-

"Since I, Myrddhin, am next after Taliessin
let my prediction become common".

are the only suggestion that he possessed prophetic powers.

A Triad mentions him as one of the three chief Bards of Britain, but it is late and so the reference is unreliable. In extant Welsh literature, therefore, Merlin is of relatively little importance. He would seem to owe all his fame to Geoffrey of Monmouth, who virtually created him.

We have already indicated, in Chapter VI, (see above, pp. 149, 150) what Geoffrey had to say about Merlin in his Historia where he retells the history of Ambrosius as given by Nennius. In Geoffrey Merlin is the prophetic boy of Vortigern's time, and he is also mentioned once or twice later in the Historia, and then appears as the deus ex machina who

brings about the union that results in the conception of Arthur. After this Geoffrey makes no further mention of him. He is nowhere described as Arthur's councillor and magician.

The 'Prophecies of Merlin' to which Geoffrey devotes Book VII of the Historia, refer to political events of Geoffrey's own time, and are his own inventions. Looking back on the Merlin material in Geoffrey's Historia it does not seem likely that much of it was derived from oral tradition. Nennius, classical legend and Geoffrey's own fancy seem to account for the whole.

Not so simple, however, is it to judge the next important Merlin document, the poem in Latin hexameters called the Vita Merlini (1148), which is commonly also ascribed to Geoffrey of Monmouth.

It is a curious production, the action of which is supposed to fall after the translation of Arthur to Avallon. It is the most original of all the works concerning Merlin, and in parts is genuinely poetical. Especially famous is the passage describing the 'Isle of Apples'

".... Insula Pomorum quae Fortunata vocatur",
the Celtic Elysium,⁽¹⁾ whither Arthur was taken 'vulnere laesum' -- to be healed of his wounds, and at length to return recovered -- 'tandemque redire salutem'.

The poem tells how Merlin is plunged into

(1) See footnotes, pp. 7 supra and infra - 218-219.

grief and madness, and forsaking his wife Gwendoloea, he flies to the desert and becomes a wild man ('silver homo'). He later breaks the silence of his melancholy to make certain prophecies which all come true. Later still he has a house built for himself with seventy doors and seventy windows,⁽¹⁾ so that he can sit within and predict the future by observation of the heavens.

From many similarities in the motifs described, the Vita Merlini would seem in a large measure to have been borrowed from the earlier Lailoken legend (fragmentary MS. in the British Museum), the origins of which are as yet unknown, (See Bruce Evolution, I, pp. 141-143.

The next development of the Merlin story comes with the Merlin of Robert de Boron, who tells how Arthur at birth was claimed by Merlin and then for his upbringing entrusted to the care of the good man Antor (Auctor - Ector). After the death of Uther Pendragon, Arthur at the age of fifteen alone succeeds in the test of drawing the sword from the marvellous anvil and, so proving his right to the succession,⁽²⁾ is crowned at the feast of Pentecost. Robert it is, too, who first tells of the vacant seat at Arthur's table, of which Merlin prophesies that it will be filled only by the perfect knight who will alone achieve the Grail Quest. (In all the Grail legends there is this close association between the sacred vessel and the 'Siege Perilous',

(1) Does this not recall Caer Wydyr "The Glass Castle" (See footnote, p. 7 supra) - one of the Celtic notions for the otherworld?

(2) For parallels of the motif of a talismanic sword compare the legends of Theseus and Sigmund.

both of which are destined for Galahad, but spell disaster to any other unworthy man who attempts to approach them). Robert's Merlin was the source of the later prose Merlin (last half of the thirteenth century), namely, the Vulgate continuation, in which is introduced the Merlin and Vivien (Viviane, Niniane, Nimue) story. This tells of Merlin's deception and succumbing to the charm of the 'woven paces and of waving hands'⁽¹⁾, and his imprisonment in the forest of Broceliande.

And so bit by bit the Merlin we know developed in the work of successive writers. It was Malory who gave the composite portrait of Merlin the enchanter, prophet, sage and bard, who had been Uther's adviser and was also Arthur's councillor. Bruce, in his work cited, by many analogies shows that the Merlin history has very little of Celtic origin, and consists rather of a collection of oriental motifs; but with all deference to the brilliant erudition of this authority, I cannot help having a feeling, vague and intuitive at present owing to lack of opportunity, time and sources to make such a specialized study at the moment, that Merlin is of Celtic origin, just as much as Arthur himself. Those very vague and cryptic references - in which his existence and powers are just hinted at - are, as in the case of Arthur himself, sufficient proof of a very ancient tradition. If Arthur can be traced back, theoretically, to the ranks of the Brythonic gods, then Merlin, no less, had his earliest incarnation in an arch-druid of pre-Christian times.

(1) Tennyson: Merlin and Vivien.

Merlin in the romances, and even in Malory, is a vague and shadowy figure. He comes and goes without warning, sometimes in disguise, and plays a brief part - always that of a beneficent guardian to Arthur or others whom he takes under his protection. He leads Arthur to his sword Excalibur (Bk. I, Ch. xxv), he makes an end to the bloody battles in the early part of Arthur's reign (I - xvii).

He is a tragic figure for with all his pre-science and prophetic powers he is not a magician and has no power to avert the impending disasters he can foresee.

He aids the brothers Balin and Balan to capture the arrogant King Rience, and he warns Balin that he will strike the Dolorous Stroke, but he does not, or cannot, warn the brothers that they will slay each other owing to so simple a mishap as an exchange of shields and their consequent failure to recognize each other. (II - viii, ix).

All compact as he is of wisdom he nevertheless is weak enough in his dotage to succumb to human passion, and although he knows and foretells his own discomfiture and doom (I - xx) he is unable to resist the seduction of the damsel of the lake. After his enchantment by Nimue he drops out of the story, having predicted and contrived many things that were to happen after his disappearance, including the preparations for the coming of Galahad (namely his sword and the Siege Perilous).

The figure of Merlin is a fascinating one

that will repay an exhaustive study. No full and authoritative study has yet, to my knowledge, been made of the legends and traditions pertaining to him.

C. THE LEGEND OF THE HOLY GRAIL:

The main facts of the career of the great chivalric king having been established and fully exploited, and his position as head of the brilliant Court and Order of Knighthood securely established, the thirteenth and fourteenth century Norman romancers found more promising material in the mystical adventures of Perceval as Grail seeker, Lancelot as knight-errant par excellence, and Tristan as the type of all lovers -- for them the chief interest. Later still the influence of the Roman Church of the Middle Ages and mediaeval piety and mysticism generally were not slow to make their influence felt on the territory of literature in the attempt to exalt and sublimate the secular romances of the day, and utilizing their themes as vehicles to convey the dogma of the Church. For the clergy realized the propaganda value of Arthur's name and they soon coupled it to their share of the tales, that were to reflect Christian teaching.

By no means all the romance writers, especially in the later stages of the growth of the prose romances, were court haunTERS and professional poets who spent their time in the ease and luxury of the ladies' bowers in the castles of the nobility. Many a rose of literary ability was born to blush unseen within the austere walls of the monasteries. Mediaeval monks were all men with literary training; in truth they spent the greater part of their lives in

reading whatever there was committed to writing and so available for reading, and as for their writing they were not always confined to transcribing chronicles or portions of the scriptures, saintly lives and other such improving literature. The stern moral tone, and the insistence on human weakness and sin as the basic cause for the degeneration of knighthood in general and Arthur's court in particular, as portrayed in the prose romances of the Historia del Saint Graal and the Queste del Saint Graal, especially the latter, point unmistakably to the clerical hands that penned the story. For when romance, instead of only exploiting the old courtly, amatory and adventurous themes, turned to the exciting possibilities of the Grail story as a source of new inspiration, the Church found therein a popular and infallible medium for propagating Christian doctrine, and Romance not only became elevated in tone but was considerably enriched by this theological theme.⁽¹⁾

From being mere titillating light reading to

(1) Schofield, English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer, p. 244, says that the shapers of the Grail legend (e.g. Robert de Boron) were not clerical writers, but all laymen. Yet in the previous pages he had pointed out how the early history of the Holy Grail is at bottom a legendary account of the conversion of Britain by Joseph of Arimathea.

I cannot agree to this view of the authorship of the legend. We must undoubtedly credit some unknown monkish writers of literary ability with the composition of part of the Grail legend, especially in the prose romance, where the ideal of asceticism as pictured in Galahad is wholly at variance with the worldly tone of the earlier courtly romances. In both the Queste del Saint Graal, and the Morte Artu the tone is much deeper, and more serious and moral than in the other parts of the Vulgate Prose Romances, which at once argues that different hands penned the last part of the cycle from those that wrote the other branches.

relieve the ennui of courtly ladies exhausted by the enervating monotony of their strictly circumscribed and sequestered lives, the romances were later raised to the level of religious treatises which with their naïve and confused symbolism were to do service as providing the origins for, and explanation of, the ritual of the Church services. So the Grail story, with its roots deep down in the pre-historic legends about heathen vessels of plenty and fertility (compare the Dagda's Undry and the various Cauldrons of Hades) in Celtic myth became the first exposition and source of teaching about the origins of the Eucharist.

In romance there are two⁽¹⁾ sources for the Grail Legend:

1. The Conte del Graal or Perceval le Gallois of Chrétien de Troyes (about 1170 - 1180) and
2. The Joseph d'Arimathea of Robert de Boron (about 1190).

The Perceval has been briefly noted above (page 169).

Chrétien himself is not a Grail romancer. His Perceval li Gallois breaks off just before the Grail Quest proper, and is really an ordinary episodic romance without any religious significance. How he would have gone on to treat the subject further we

(1) Miss M.J.C. Reid: The Arthurian Legend, Comparison of the Treatment in Modern and Mediaeval Literature, London, Oliver and Boyd, 1938, notes a third source, namely, the anonymous twelfth-century Queste (MS. lost) which was Malory's source for Books XIII to XVII of the Morte D'Arthur.

cannot know. The Grail part of his Perceval was added by his continuators, who probably expanded other versions of the legend known to them.

The Joseph of de Boron is a long poem dealing with the adventures of a Christianized soldier of Pilate, Joseph of Arimathea, and his sister and brother-in-law Bron, who emigrate from Jerusalem with certain sacred vessels given into Joseph's charge by Christ himself before His ascension. The whole long, rambling tale is a symbolical account of the ritual of the Eucharist just as the Perceval, too, is saturated with similar but more confused mystical elements whose significance Chrétien did not trouble to expound.

In the Joseph the Grail is the vessel in which Christ made His sacrament at the Last Supper, and in which Joseph also caught the sacred blood from Christ's wounded side. This vessel filled all worthy souls who viewed it with intense spiritual joy and delight. Joseph, eventually resigns the charge of the Grail to his brother-in-law Bron, 'The Rich Fisher' (compare the 'Fisher King' in Chrétien's Perceval). Here Robert leaves his characters of the Grail story, and proceeds to tell of Merlin the object, of course, being to connect the Grail story with the popular Arthur cycle.

Bruce shows⁽¹⁾ by drawing parallel comparisons and by indicating the correspondence between the history of the Holy Grail as given in Robert's poem, and the close of Christ's life itself as told in

(1) Evolution of Arthurian Romance: Vol. I, pp. 239 - 241.

scripture, that the whole poem is symbolical of the Grail which is to become the chalice at the celebration of the Eucharist, in other words the cup of the Holy Communion, and it represents Christ himself.

Robert de Boron's sources, filled out in his poem by his own invention, were certain uncanonical writings of early Christianity such as the Vindicata Salvatoris and the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus.

In some respects Robert's poem is a sort of lay tractate on, or popular version of, the doctrine of the Transubstantiation, which was the immediate centre of theological interest and discussion in the latter part of the twelfth century and early decades of the thirteenth, and was adapted and incorporated as part of the Christian faith by Pope Innocent III.

It is notable in the different versions of the Grail story that there was great confusion in the minds of the romancers as to whether the Grail was the cup containing the wine at the Last Supper, and in which Joseph had caught the precious blood spilt from Christ's side at the Crucifixion, or the paten (plate or salver containing the bread - Christ's body). There is also confusion as to the effect of the Grail (generally represented as a cup). In some instances it fills all who view it with intense spiritual joy; in others it spreads the most delightful odours⁽¹⁾, while in yet others it actually feeds and satisfies all who behold it with the kind of food everyone likes best⁽²⁾.

(1) "Then there entered into the hall the Holy Greal and) covered with white samite, but there was none might see it, nor who bare it. And there was all
(2) (footnotes continued on next page).....

This shows how the purely secular romances of the middle ages were influenced (especially in the later versions of the Grail Legend e.g. in the Vulgate L'Estoire and Queste, which were most certainly the work of clerical writers) by the theological doctrines of the Church, and so became the background for the introduction of the mystical element of the quest for a holy relic as the highest ideal and virtue of knight-errantry. Henceforth the knights of the Round Table were to become not only paladins of chivalric courage in the service of ladies, but also Christian champions in the struggle of faith against the powers of darkness -- all St. Georges slaying the dragons of evil. In fact the worldly element and tone of the romances gradually change and assume a much more pious and spiritual nature.

In the later versions of the Grail legend the tone of the history becomes increasingly elevated in morality and spirituality necessitating a change in the

(Footnotes continued from previous page)

the hall fulfilled with good odours, and every knight had such meats and drinks as he best loved in the world".

Malory: Le Morte D'Arthur, Bk. XIII, Ch. vii.

The whole question of the sources of the Grail Legend has been thoroughly treated by Alfred Nutt and Jessie L. Weston in their various works on the matter, e.g. -

Alfred Nutt: Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail, with Special reference to the hypothesis of its Celtic Origin.
(London, 1888).

J.L. Weston: The Legend of Sir Perceval. (2 Vols.-
London, 1906 - 9).
The Quest of the Holy Grail,
(London - 1913).
From Ritual to Romance. (Cambridge
1920).

person of the central hero, namely from Perceval (who in the anything but ascetic pages of Chrétien was a very worldly type and had his full share of amours) to another and purer achiever of the holy vessel.

Before the prose romances took shape the legend of Lancelot had already become fully established as a branch of the Arthurian cycle, and with his engendering of the stainless knight Galahad upon Elaine, the daughter of Pellès, the latest Grail Keeper, a new hero was provided.

In the Welsh Peredur⁽¹⁾ and the French Perlesvaus (The High History of the Holy Grail)⁽²⁾ Perceval is still the Grail hero. In another of the romances, the Welsh Seint Greal, Gawain is the Grail seeker (and achieves it in the German Diu Krône) but in the later romances Galahad becomes inseparably associated with the attainment of the Grail, as in Malory and Tennyson and the version of the story modern readers know.

Where the earliest romances are mainly concerned with the unconnected adventures and quests of individual knights (and the only binding element is their common membership of the Order of the Round Table) the whole Arthurian cycle gains greater unity and cohesion (and indeed becomes a cycle) when the Grail Quest in the prose romances becomes the central theme of the whole legend. Very clearly does the writer of

(1) Peredur from the Mabinogion: Lady Charlotte Guest and G. & T. Jones, London, 1913, Dent Everyman 1949.

(2) The High History of the Holy Grail: Translated by Dr. Sebastian Evans, London, Dent, Everyman, 1929.

the Queste bring out the fact that the search of nearly all the knights after this vague and tenuous ideal is a cause for the break-up of the fellowship. Tennyson took this same thought and gave expression to it in the modern 'Quest' of the Idylls.

With prophetic vision he makes Arthur foresee what the rashly made vows to follow the Grail will mean to his Order :-

"Lo now", said Arthur, "have ye seen a cloud?
What go ye into the wilderness to see?
.....
The Vision
A sign to maim the Order which I made.
..... while ye follow wandering fires
Lost in the quagmire". (1)

But the final and complete disruption of the Round Table and the order that Arthur made came as a result of sin and treason, in the guilty love of Lancelot and Guenever. This aspect of the legend of Arthur that would later so attract Tennyson was already brought out very clearly in the prose romance (while Chrétien had merely portrayed their passion as a type -- the type -- of courtly love, without realising, or utilizing and developing its tragic possibilities). But long before the Victorian poet wrote, the fine dramatic sense of the unknown clerical scribe whose hands penned the lines of the prose Mort Artu gave a fire and life to this old theme of an adulterous and fatal love that was to destroy so much that was fine and noble, and the artless romance of earlier times took on a greater stature of almost Attic tragedy.

(1) Tennyson: The Holy Grail.

To return to the legend of the Holy Grail. The romance had a long history of development. It is difficult to discover when this theme of the holy and mystical vessel was first handled and who provided the original source for the verse and prose romances on the subject. Robert de Boron wrote at approximately the same time as Chrétien, and they must have obtained the idea from a common source. We have seen how the romance originated in certain old legends and uncanonical writings and was expanded and developed by clerical writers of the late twelfth century. Chrétien the courtly trouvère, heir of the Provencal traditions of love poetry, was not concerned with the mystic qualities, symbolism and meaning of the Grail, and its search as an ideal of knighthood. He was concerned more with the external episodes of the adventures of his Grail hero Perceval.

Robert, on the other hand, was at pains to show whence the Grail came and what its sacred function was. He was vague as to where exactly the 'countries in the West' were situated to which Joseph and his band emigrated with the intention of converting the heathens and bestowing on them the blessings of the Holy Grail. The possibility is that England was intended⁽¹⁾ as,

(1) Attempts have been made to associate the origin of the Grail legend with Glastonbury. In Robert de Boron Joseph never comes to Britain but about the time his poem appeared fraudulent claims were being made in Britain by the monks of Glastonbury to connect the abbey with the Isle of Avallon (where the bodies of Arthur and Guenever were supposed to have been interred (see Ch. I, p. 23), and later even with Joseph himself. William of Malmesbury in his De Antiquitate Glastoniensis Ecclesiae tells how the Apostle Philip: "duodecim ex suis discipulis misit in Britanniam, ut

(footnote continued on next page).

indeed, it is given as his destination in the L'Estoire del Saint Grail.

In the earliest versions of the Grail legend -- those of Chrétien and his immediate successors -- the original Grail hero is Perceval (Peredur in Welsh), and so too in the French prose Perlesvaus. In these early Grail essays with their mysticism and confused symbolism the Fisher King (Keeper of the Grail Castle -- always represented as being wounded in the thigh(s)) seems to emerge as a representation of the Christ figure himself, just as later the conception of Galahad parodies that of Christ. For mediaeval piety there was nothing incongruous in these presentations.

Chrétien's tale could not, however, have been the original. It was an attempt (still confused and unsuccessful) to rationalize the vague and incoherent theological views and naïve piety of current religious thought, and to superimpose something the Normans could understand on the vague basis of old Celtic myth that they could not understand. We have noted that the ethical tone of Chrétien's version and that of his continuators was not as high as the subject demanded.

(Footnote continued from previous page)

ferunt, clarissimum amicum suum Joseph ab Arimathea, qui et Dominum sepulivit, prefecit". But this may be a late interpolation.

That the site of Glastonbury originally was a marsh provided sufficient grounds for associating it with the 'Isle' of Avallon. The genealogy of the word Avallon (or Avalon, Avilion) is obscure. It may come from 'Avallach' -- the Isle of Apples, 'Insula Pomorum', the Happy Isle (Elysium), from the British word avall for an apple.

Compare E.K. Chambers, in his work cited, pp. 115 - 118 and 265 - 267, and J.D. Bruce: Evolution I, p. 262.

Indeed the romances could not have a high moral tone for Chrétien cum suis were courtly writers who extolled the amour courtois and they were strangers to the religious aspect of the legend. They were far too secular and even materialistic in their approach to the subject to render it with appropriate piety. That is why they could portray Gawain and Perceval, who are both not free of the taint of sensuality, as the Grail seekers.

It was in the later versions of the romance, in the prose L'Estoire del Saint Graal and Queste del Saint Graal when clerical hands continued the tale with a deeper sense of religious feeling that the honour of becoming the successful Grail seeker descended on the peerless and immaculate Galahad, who alone had the qualities of purity and spirituality that fitted him for the exalted task. It is chiefly through Malory and so on to the modern poets that Galahad has become inseparably associated with the Grail Quest.

What is the ultimate source for the whole conception of the Holy Grail? This is a complex and difficult question, the adequate discussion of which would lead us too far afield. It has been painstakingly studied by many scholars and there are two main theories :

1. The theory of Christian origin: This theory holds that the Holy Grail had its origin in Christian legend, which, as said above, represents a combination of uncanonical writings (such as Robert de Boron drew upon) with certain passages in the Bible which describe the Last Supper, and which mediaeval piety and ingenuity exploited (with intense faith and

genuine belief) in order to explain and expound certain doctrines and rituals. The Holy Grail is, then, a wonder-working relic much as so many other relics of the middle ages.

2. Origin in Celtic Mythology: Opposed to this view is the opinion so widely held which sees the origins of the Grail in a Christianized version of the more primitive Cauldron of fruitfulness and plenty of early Celtic legend. The chief exponents and champions of this view are the folklorists Alfred Nutt⁽¹⁾ and John Rhys.

The latter discusses and analyses the subject fully in Chapter XIII of his Studies in the Arthurian Legend, and gives many plausible arguments by his usual means of ingenious philological and etymological reasoning. We cannot, unfortunately, enter here into his analysis (which seems to me without doubt the most logical and correct exposition of the matter). The curious reader must himself go to the original Rhysian fount. We must be content with one quotation which would seem to go far to clinching the matter :-

(1) I was unable to secure his large work Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail.

A third theory, discussed by Bruce (I pp. 27 - 289), that the origins of the Holy Grail legend are to be found in the ritual connected with a heathen cult of the Vegetation spirit, as advanced by W.A. Nitze and Dr. J.L. Weston, is in my opinion altogether too esoteric and far-fetched, and may be ignored. One may just as well contend that from external correspondence in shape the (bleeding) lance and the grail are symbols of the male and female organs of generation, and see in the whole matter the survival of some repulsive pagan sexual rites and then build up an imposing structure of arguments and proofs to support the theory, or any other equally wild. (See below Ch. XII), and cf. Jessie L. Weston: The Quest of the Holy Grail, London, Bell & Sons, 1913.

"With regard to that vessel (the cauldron of the Head of Hades) Taliessin, in poem xxx ... mentions the following things respecting it. (It) had a rim set with pearls adorning it; the fire beneath it was kindled by the breath of nine maidens; utterances might be heard issuing from it; and it would not boil food for a coward. The other poem ... says that he who has his seat there has nought to fear from plague or old age.

Compare with this what is said of the Grail in the romances, where Pelles and his brother figure. The Grail, when it comes, feeds those at the table with whatever kind of food each one desires. But those who are not worthy are not allowed by it to remain or to approach too near with impunity. Similarly those who worship at the Grail Chapel at King Peleur's remain young nor mark the lapse of time. Add to this that the Grail heals the sick and wounded. By means of accounts other than those in which the Grail belongs to Pelles or Peleur, the correspondence between it and the Cauldron of Pwyll Head of Hades might perhaps be more strikingly shown; but the foregoing is sufficiently near for our purpose. Now as the original identity of Pelles and Peleur with Pwyll and Pryderi has been shown to be probable, as has also the identity of Carbonek, where the Holy Grail was kept, with Caer Pedryvan, where Pwyll's Cauldron was found by Arthur and his men, the conclusion is all but inevitable that the famous Cauldron served as a prototype of the more famous Grail". (1)

I think there can be little doubt that the original source for the holiest relic of mediaeval Christianity is none other than the Cauldron or Undry that figures so largely in the heathen Celtic mythology. With vague memories of this magic food-providing vessel transmitted through oral British traditions from the earliest times, the later romance writers with a more religious bent created the mystic vessel of which they read in scriptural writings and whose history they invented and embellished as the romances were being transformed from a worldly and secular nature to a more

(1) Studies in the Arthurian Legend; pp. 305 - 306.

pious and morally higher plane.

Just as the heathen nations sought to explain and rationalize their experiences which they did not fully understand, so too the later Christian peoples were at pains to explain and rationalize their religious practices and usages, and the belief in the Holy Grail does not differ in the least respect from the belief in a Cauldron of Hades; nay the two beliefs correspond in every respect each as a representative aspect of the religious feeling of the particular time when each gained shape.

D. LANCELOT:

The most striking figure in all Arthurian literature, without exception, is that of Lancelot. Once he was introduced into the legend he soon became the greatest of the knights of Arthur, the shining type of courage, chivalry, and courtly love, and his romance with Guenever is one of the most remarkable in literature. It is truly a dramatic story this of a passion so overwhelming and all-ouerruling that it caused the peerless example of all nobility and chivalry to break the laws of faith and betray the very one whom, next to Guenever, he loved and honoured most loyally.

Of course, in studying the legends dealing with Lancelot the student must attempt to understand, and associate himself with, mediaeval literature and the strange phenomenon of the amour courtois in all its manifestations: a very difficult matter when the student is separated in time by nearly a millenium from the matter of his study. The mediaeval mind is in many respects almost an unintelligible phenomenon.

especially the French mediæval mind - for the modern student of, say, Germanic descent, and it is difficult, nay, almost impossible to project oneself into the psychology of those creatures of romantic imagination. Behind the few strictures in lighter vein that are scattered throughout the pages of this essay, especially on the subject of the morality or ethics of the conventions of courtly love, are the very real objections of a reasonably enlightened modern mind to accept - or else to sympathize with and understand - the logic of the lovers' behaviour, and Lancelot's insistence on the innocence of himself and the queen.

Where one may admire the large-hearted dignity of Lancelot's words (and Malory's swelling prose) in the famous scene before the walls of Joyous Gard (Morte D'Arthur, Book XX, Chapter x), when Arthur and Gawain parley with Lancelot, one can also only wonder at the speciousness and hypocrisy of Lancelot's words:-

"And as for my lady, Queen Guenever, except your person of your highness, and my lord Sir Gawaine, there is no knight under heaven that dare make it good upon me, that ever I was traitor unto your person. And where it please you to say that I have holden my lady your queen years and winters, unto that I shall ever make a large answer, and prove it upon any knight that beareth the life, except your person and Sir Gawaine, that my lady, Queen Guenever, is a true lady unto your person as any in living unto her lord, and that will I make good with my hands. Howbeit it hath liked her good grace to have me in charity, and to cherish me more than any other knight".

The love of Lancelot and Guenever for each other was no tragic love of enchantment and fatal bonds caused by the accidental drinking of a powerful love-philtre such as that of Tristan and Iseult;

theirs' was wholly voluntary and premeditated, yet no less inevitable and inescapable. They cannot be blamed for falling in love with each other: that was Fate and circumstances. One could even condone their enjoying each others' love, but the inexplicable aspect of the matter is that they should have tried to maintain the sorry pretence that they were guiltless, and more, that the romancers should have made a virtue of their deception of the king.

Even Malory who is broad-minded enough in all conscience cannot altogether approve of the things he has to tell. Of the occasion when Lancelot and Guenever were surprised in the Queen's chamber by Agravaine and Modred who were seeking proof of their adultery, Malory writes :-

"And then, as the French book saith, the queen and Launcelot were together. And whether they were abed or at other manner of disports, me list not hereof to make no mention, for love that time was not as it is nowadays". (1)

Tennyson, who was righteous but not quite obsessed with the well-known mid-Victorian puritanism -- otherwise he would not have been able to handle the subject so sympathetically -- softened down the tawdriness of the affair, and made it clear how their love was the result, so common, of a mismatch. Guenever should never have married Arthur. Her tragedy was that she met Lancelot after she was betrothed to the king. Arthur was too good, too perfect, for her; he was old, she young and passionate; he moved in a sphere and world of ideals

(1) Malory: Morte D'Arthur. Bk. XX, Ch. iii.

too high for her, she was of the earth -- she could never live up to the perfection of her husband.

Listen to her complaint to Lancelot in Tennyson's Lancelot and Elaine :-

"Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,
And swearing men to vows impossible,
To make them like himself: but, friend, to me
He is all fault who hath no fault at all:
For who loves me must have a touch of earth;
The low sun makes the colour: I am yours,
Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond".

In this respect, and with this interpretation, one can have sympathy with their love, and its tragic course and consequences; but not with the conventional representation of their passion as a type - the type - of the much-extolled amour courtois, with its swooning and frenzies and other puerilities coupled with frequent cohabitations of the most robust type :-

"And then Dame Brisen brough Sir Launcelot a cupful of wine; and anon as he had drunken that wine he was so asotted and mad that he might make no delay, but withouten any let he went to bed; and he weened that maiden Elaine had been Queen Guenever. Wit you well that Sir Launcelot was glad, and so was that lady Elaine that she had gotten Sir Launcelot in her arms". (1)

and on a later occasion :-

"... and then she departed and left them in bed together. Wit you well the lady was glad, and so was Sir Launcelot, for he weened that he had another in his arms. Now leave we them kissing and clipping as was kindly thing". (2)

And in a room nearby Guenever, who knew that another

(1) Morte D'Arthur, Bk. XI, Ch. ii.

(2) Idem, Bk. XI, Ch. viii.

was enjoying what she should have had, raged and stormed like a common trull "nigh out of her wit .. she writhed and weltered as a mad woman, and might not sleep a four or five hours"⁽¹⁾: courtly love forsooth!

The hypocritical Lancelot of Malory who could face his king and protest his own and the Queen's innocence in high-sounding phrases is, however, a legacy of the early French romance writers. The later Victorian poet, with greater insight into character, even if he did try to lighten the dark picture, portrayed a Lancelot who had grown old under the burden of a conscience torn two ways :-

"The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,
In battle with the love he bare his lord,
Had marr'd his face and mark'd it ere his time.
Another sinning on such heights with one,
The flower of all the west and all the world,
Had been the sleeker for it: but in him
His mood was often like a fiend, and rose
And drove him into wastes and solitudes
For agony, who was yet a living soul". (2)

Tennyson's Lancelot was a sinner who was always conscious of his sin, yet powerless to cast it off. We imagine that he could have wished to love the maiden Elaine, but his love and his will were no longer his own.

"The shackles of an old love straiten'd him;
His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true". (3)

We much prefer the truer picture of a Lancelot driven into the wilds in a madness of wrung conscience, rather than one who goes "wood" because the queen

(1) Morte D'Arthur, Bk. XI, Ch. viii.

(2) Tennyson: Lancelot and Elaine.

(3) Idem.

drives him from her presence. Thus the nineteenth century poets, although they try, on the whole, to minimize the guilt of Lancelot and Guenever, yet rationalize their behaviour with some premonition of psychological conflicts. So too with the Lancelot of John Davidson's poem The Last Ballad (1899): his Lancelot leaves the court from a stern sense of duty and in the wasteland fulfils the king's commands. As he wanders evil things mock him and the innocent flee from him :-

"The viper loitered in his way:
The minx looked up with bloodshot leer;
Ill-meaning fauns and lamiae
With icy laughter flitted near".

But wherever he goes the memory and the vision of the Queen haunt him :-

"..... for evermore on high
When midnight set the spaces free,
And brimming stars hung from the sky
Low down, and spilt their jewellery,

Behind the nightly squandered fire,
Through a dark lattice only seen
By love, a look of rapt desire
Fell from a vision of the Queen.

From heaven she bent when twilight knit
The dusky air and earth in one;
He saw her like a goddess sit
Enthroned upon the noonday sun.

In passage of gulfs and sounds,
When the wild winds dug the sailor's grave,
When clouds and billows merged their bounds,
And the keel climbed the slippery wave,

A sweet sigh laced the tempest; nay
Low at his ear he heard her speak;
Among the hurtling sheaves of spray
Her loosened tresses swept his cheek". (1)

Not great poetry, surely, but a sympathetic picture of Lancelot for which we are grateful.

(1) John Davidson: The Last Ballad, 1899.

The Lancelot figure soon became the centre of the greatest number of tales and the greatest volume of romance of all the Arthurian knights. Where in earlier romances Gawain had served as the ultimate type of honour and courage and courtliness, he soon became eclipsed by Lancelot who thereafter alone occupied the position of knight sans pareil.

Whence did he come, this mysterious Knight of the Lake? Chrétien first told of him in Le Chevalier de la Charette, but Chrétien, plunging, as he usually does, in medias res, portrayed him as already belonging to Arthur's court, when he had this adventure: already established as one of the greatest of knights, and the recognized cavalier of Guenever; already intimately enough established in Arthur's ménage to enjoy Guenever's intimate favours. But Chrétien does not bother to tell of his hero's 'enfances' - what his birth was, whence he came, and how he came to Arthur's court and captured the queen's love.

Neither is Lancelot mentioned in early Welsh literature or in Geoffrey of Monmouth or his immediate successors. It is the later romances, as the Lanzelot of Ulrich von Zatzikhoven (end twelfth century), that give the full history of Lancelot from his birth. This romance tells how Lancelot as an infant, and after his father, King Ban of Benoic (Benwick) had died, was stolen from his mother by a waterfairy who brought him up and acted as his fairy-godmother and protectress throughout his career. Of this Chrétien is silent, but he does name the hero of his romance 'Lancelot del Lac', which indicates that tradition (oral or written)

had attached this feature to Lancelot's history. The Lancelot of the Vulgate Cycle is the full, detailed history of his career and achievements.⁽¹⁾

Although Lancelot was the most perfect and most famous knight, the clerical writers of the L'Estoire and the Queste could not take him who was so stained with sin and earthly love as the hero for the Grail Quest. Another hero had to be sought, and so romance-writers hit upon the device that Lancelot should beget a son on a maiden, Elaine the daughter of King Pellles, the Grail Keeper. This engendering of a son of Lancelot had to be attained by a trick, for Lancelot, the celibate, could not betray his faith to the Queen, even though in the service of love he could betray his sovereign.

In all the history and literature of the 'amour courtois' Lancelot and Guenever are the two supreme examples of faithfulness among courtly lovers - or rather, as we have the romances, Lancelot is the faithful adorer and worshipper, the fierce war-charger who bends his proud neck at the lightest touch of the hand of his goddess, while Guenever is the capricious mistress who demands and exacts unquestioning obedience and instant execution of her slightest wish, granting slight (or sometimes rather more adequate and satisfactory) favours as the mood takes her.

In the scheme of things of the mediaeval romances there was no such thing as, and no place for,

(1) See Lucy Allen Paton: Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance, Ginn & Co., Boston, U.S.A., 1903, for a full discussion of Lancelot, and of the fairy mistress motif generally.

conjugal love and fidelity.⁽¹⁾ The only real love that could be extolled in story and song was that existing between a courageous and chivalrous knight and some married lady of high birth, which amounted, in the case of the cavalier, to a kind of adoration and holy passion, and inspired him to do the feats which are associated with a gallant knight. The comfortable domesticity of marital fidelity was no theme for troubadours and trouvères, as being far too commonplace and unromantic: it had to be something more interesting, more piquant than that -- an illicit amour that had a certain measure of social recognition and even approval. That the relationship was also by way of being an adulterous and therefore sinful one did not merit the disapproval or censure of the times.

Yet the development of the story of the Lancelot - Guenever relationship does, in its later stages, show a sterner and more censorious treatment. In the French prose romances and more especially in the Vulgate Cycle, the writer brings out very clearly that there is moral reprobation of the relationship of the two lovers, and that it is the underlying cause of the failure of all the knights but Galahad to achieve the

(1) M.W. Maccallum: Tennyson's Idylls of the King and Arthurian Story; Maclehose, Glasgow, 1894, p. 44.

In the chapter 'Chivalry and its requirements' :-
"And in the third place, while only some of the knightly orders were pledged to celibacy, they were all bound to uphold the honour of women; and gradually, without oath, they submitted themselves to that strange kind of gallantry known as the Service of Love, which at this distance of time strikes one almost as the most obvious feature of the chivalrous character. This fantastic fashion, in which the relation par amour usurped the place of marriage, at once gave scope for the devotion of the knight, and suited a society in which the highest minds regarded marriage as at best a necessary evil". (My italics).

Grail Quest, and of the tragic break-up of the Round Table companionship. But not only do these later romances - the Lancelot and the Mort Artu of the Vulgate cycle - so clearly connect the adulterous relations of Lancelot and the queen with the destruction of Arthur and the Round Table; the story becomes invested with a greater tragic intensity through the author's original conception (not inherited from any predecessor) of the traitor who was the cause of that ruin being Arthur's own son -- the child of an unwitting act of incest which he had committed with his sister. "Thus, as in the legend of Oedipus, the sin of the father, though unconsciously perpetrated, brings with it the blind and terrible retribution of the Fates".⁽¹⁾

In this respect the Mort Artu possesses an excellence of constructive skill and insight into character, a dramatic strength, that is far in advance of the other branches of the cycle, and, indeed, of any of the other mediaeval romances. That this aspect of the royal tragedy was so well brought out in Malory, and even more in Tennyson, is the legacy these two authors owe to the unknown artist whose perspicacity and dramatic sense and narrative skill first combined the ideas in the Mort Artu.

But the early metrical romances, whose chief end is still to reflect the amour courtois, extol the love of these two lovers as a thing to be admired and copied. They are held up as the shining example of true lovers, and Lancelot's behaviour is the convention-

(1) J.D. Bruce: Evolution of Arthurian Romance, Vol. I, p. 441.

al behaviour of an exponent of the amour courtois. His reactions on beholding his mistress are to modern thinking absurd to the point of farce. He swoons on seeing some of Guenever's hair in a comb. He is driven to a frenzy at the thought that she disapproves of some action of his. So wrapt in thought of her is he that he absentmindedly rides into a rushing stream and is nearly swept away. In a tournament he willingly acts the part of a coward to satisfy her whim. And in acting thus he was carrying out the very highest principles of the rules of Courtly Love.

Apart from his love of Guenever, however, the one other aspect of Lancelot's character that the romance writers extolled, was his faithfulness to his liege lord, and the great friendship existing between Arthur and this most trusted and well-beloved of his knights.

How the romances and the romancers reconciled these two contradictory aspects of Lancelot's nature, is, of course, something that only a mediaeval romance-writer can understand. Their love and their deception of the king was patent to all (it was the subject of laughter and scandal in the court), and Arthur himself could not have been unaware of it. Yet time and again his loyalty towards Lancelot makes him forgive the injury done to him, and he accepts a cast-off mistress back in his home as a wife. In fact Arthur appears in rather a poor light in some of the tales, as, for example in Chrétien's Knight of the Cart.

The rigid rules that in the tiniest detail governed the practices and customs of courtly love and

the behaviour of lovers, could thus extol, let alone condone, the most dishonourable relationship, and the violation of the supreme rules of chivalry (the feudal loyalty to the person of the king), thus justifying the censure we have been at some pains to make, as in the remarks in an earlier passage (see pages 124 - 128 and also 224 - 227 above.)

But for the mediaeval story-teller the 'amour courtois' still had very conveniently elastic principles when it seems that the supreme example of courtliness is to commit the most flagrant adultery and treasonable action. No wonder that the gentle court ladies gained such a vicariously pleasurable thrill from the perusal of works that extolled, and inspired to emulation, such actions in the romances -- the polite pornography of the times. It would seem that it was perfectly legitimate for mediaeval lovers to indulge as much in illicit relations as they wished, as long as they "observed the rules", and did it in the prescribed manner and correctly according to the etiquette that ruled such matters. One can only murmur: "O tempora, o mores!" and add a regretful: "Eheu fugaces!"

Where other authorities are silent on the moral and ethical aspect of the amour courtois, even Bruce has some strictures on the subject :-

"From the modern point of view, to be sure, in one domain of morals there are serious limitations to the ideals of conduct which are expressed by the romance(s) -- namely, in that of sexual relations; for, in the Lancelot, as in the metrical romances, love is practically always illicit and often adulterous. The hero's passion for the queen, which furnishes the *raison D'être* of the work is, of course, adulterous, and the divine champion of religion and chastity (Galahad) is himself the fruit of

an irregular and transient union. Needless to say that Arthur is no better than his spouse (1) These instances are the most conspicuous, but many others occur in the course of the narrative. The immorality of the underlying conceptions concerning the relations of the sexes is hidden, to some degree, in the case of the love-story of Lancelot and Guinevere by the veneer of the contemporary code of courtly love which this affair illustrates, but it appears in its full grossness in (other episodes)" (2)

A MINOR BRANCH of the Arthurian legend, and one that from its very nature, has exercised more attraction even than that of Lancelot for modern poets and readers in general, is that of the Tristan story. Towards the end of the twelfth century it was exploited in a series of metrical romances by French, and other, romancers⁽³⁾. One version of the story was also later incorporated in a great French prose romance almost as long, and just as popular, as the Lancelot. In its prose form it was incorporated into the collected Vulgate cycle and served as a basis for Malory. Through exigencies of space he unfortunately ended it very abruptly half-way through, and at a later stage in his book disposed of Tristan very summarily, describing his end through murder by his uncle Mark in a sentence or two⁽⁴⁾.

(1) We have noted some of his 'affairs', footnote , p. 19 supra, and there were others, in other romances.

(2) Bruce: op. cit: I, pp. 412 - 413.

(3) Cf. pp.173 -174 supra for German versions of the Tristan.

(4) Malory: Morte D'Arthur, Bk. XIX, Ch. xi, and Tennyson: The Last Tournament:

"Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek -
'Mark's way', said Mark, and clove him
thro' the brain".

in the French romance he stabbed Tristan with a "trenchant glaive". ..

This is the original ending which is less poetic than that of the later versions where the two lovers die together in Brittany. It is also the version which - unfortunately - Tennyson used and it may be because he hardly did justice to the great story¹ that Swinburne chose it as the subject for his poem: all the other themes Tennyson had treated adequately in the Idylls.

The story of Tristan is the one mediaeval romance (part Arthurian in its connections) that probably has most interest for modern readers, owing to the fact that it is less a mirror of courtly love and extravagant episodic adventures than a powerful story of emotion and conflict. It deserves a rather larger measure of attention and treatment and we shall examine it more closely in Appendix I below for its own merit and its value as an indication of the Celtic sources of Arthurian romance.

The great prose romances in a final redaction were welded together into one vast Cycle by the second half of the thirteenth century. No new development took place or writer arose for the following century. Rather did romance slowly begin to run to seed, as the Middle Ages slowly and imperceptibly slid into the Modern Age, and Chivalry - as it was then understood - decayed.

Arthurian Romance degenerated into a few debased and ribald ballads. The printed book, containing reading matter on other themes, spread and became the literary fare of commonality as well as nobility. Something had to come to save Arthur and his fame from oblivion. And it came before the next

century was to close.

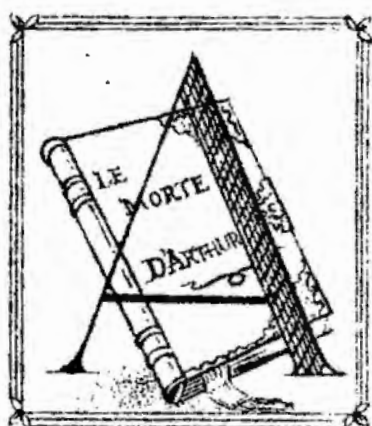
For the next great milestone in the development of the Arthurian legend is the Morte D'Arthur of Sir Thomas Malory. Of the books which may be termed milestones on the highroad of English literature this book is one of the most important - and not a milestone only but a landmark surely.

For its great importance in the literary history of the Arthurian legend, it deserves a section for fair notice and discussion to itself. The next chapter will be devoted to this notice.

CHAPTER IX : Malory and the Twilight of Chivalry.

"Thys noble and joyous book entytled
le morte Darthur / notwythstondyng it
treateth of the myrth / lyf / and actes
of ... Kyng Arthur / of his noble knyghtes
of the rounde table / theyr meruayllous
enquestes and adventures / thachyeuynge
of the sangreal / & in thende tho
dolorous deth & departyng out of thys
world of them al".

Colophon to Le Morte D'Arthur.



ARTHURIAN ROMANCE, in the voluminous French prose compilations (and the many later derivative English verse romances), had grown into a vast mass of literature almost too unwieldy to sustain itself and continue existing. It was rambling and incoherent, a vast sprawling structure of narrative, much of it inconsequential and dull. Besides, it had become something alien to the land of its origin. Somebody was surely needed who could "reduce" it out of French into English, and in the process select and combine the best in it into a new, more compact and vigorous form, and in a garb acceptable to men who now read English prose rather than French verse.

The one man who by temper and ability was best fitted to do so was Sir Thomas Malory. By one of those lucky chances that provide the right man at the right time he happened to come along to undertake his task just when the Arthurian legend was threatening to collapse and die from very degeneracy. The result of his labour was a book which became, and has for nigh five hundred years remained, a classic and a storehouse of information and inspiration for many generations of

poets and story-tellers of greater craft even than himself.

Malory completed his translation and redaction of the French prose romance cycle about 1470. It was printed fifteen years later, and after Malory's death, by William Caxton. It is fairly certain that the work was for the greater part, if not wholly, written in prison where Malory was detained for some years for taking part in a Lancastrian uprising against Edward IV. He died, probably still unpardoned, very soon after the completion of his work.

Malory's Morte D'Arthur is by common consent one of the great books of English literature, yet very little is known about the author. He came of noble stock⁽¹⁾, and at one time served at Calais in the retinue of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, whom all his contemporaries regarded as the embodiment of the chivalric ideal of the age.

In his service Malory no doubt would also have absorbed those ideals of romantic chivalry, that actually belonged to an age then past, which he himself lauded and sought to perpetuate in his book.

In 1445 Malory became Member of Parliament for his shire. Some years later he became involved

(1) Eugène Vinaver: Malory. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1929, p. 1: "The fundamental ideas underlying the Morte D'Arthur suggest that the author was of noble blood. Its tone is aristocratic throughout".

Professor G.L. Kittredge's researches published in Who was Sir Thomas Malory?, Boston, 1897, finally determined the question of Malory's identity.

in a dispute with a priory about some property and was imprisoned. Somewhat later he was also accused of a long list of other crimes of violence. Although released soon after, he was again twice imprisoned, the third time in 1468, on a charge of sedition, and there is no record that he was ever released under the general pardon granted to the Lancastrians. From now till just before his death about 1471, he was occupied in writing his book of Arthurian romance.

Caxton came into possession of Malory's MS., and had he not given it to the world in the early days of printing it might have been lost. The genial pioneer of the printing trade in England was not only a printer but also a man of letters. He himself translated into English various old histories, and works, both classic and romantic, which he then printed, so doing the cause of the infant English prose a great service. Of Caxton's share in the Morte D'Arthur Saintsbury says :-

"Caxton, the printer -- who instead of, like most early printers, giving us early editions, and mostly bad ones, of the classics, which were quite safe, gave us, to the infinite advantage of England, early models of composition in English, and preserved to us, in this instance at least, an English text which but for him might have perished". (1)

Caxton (or some unknown clerk) further provided the work with a title, and divided it (very arbitrarily) into books and chapters. He prefixed to it a Preface which supplies his and the author's purpose in writing and publishing the book, for he fully

(1) George Saintsbury: A Short History of English Literature, Macmillan & Co., London, 1916, p. 196.

sympathized with, and appreciated, the matter and manner of the 'noble and joyous book'. His Preface is a spirited tribute to the moral and sentimental teaching of the Morte D'Arthur.

When he is approached by 'many noble and divers gentlemen of this realm', despite his initial doubts concerning the authenticity of Arthur, Caxton allows himself to be convinced by the many irrefutable proofs adduced that Arthur had once lived and been a great king - one of the nine most worthy - and he enthusiastically "emprised to imprint a book of the noble histories of the said king Arthur, and of certain of his knights, after a copy unto me delivered, which copy Sir Thomas Malory did take out of certain books of French, and reduced to English". (1)

Caxton's purpose, and that of the author whose printer and publisher he was, is clearly stated in the Preface :-

"To the intent that noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knights used in those days, by which they came to honour; and how they that were vicious were punished and oft put to shame and rebuke; humbly beseeching all noble lords and ladies that shall see and read in this said book and work, that they take the good and honest acts in their remembrance, and to follow the same, wherein they shall find many joyous and pleasant histories, and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness and chivalry ... all is written for our doctrine, and for to beware that we fall not to vice nor sin; but to exercise and follow virtue; by which we may come and attain to good fame and renown in this life, and unto everlasting bliss in heaven". (2)

(1) Sir Thomas Malory: Le Morte D'Arthur, Everyman Edition, London, J.M. Dent, Caxton's Preface, p. 3.

(2) Preface, p. 3.

Yet the Morte D'Arthur contained much matter that was not so elevating, and Roger Ascham, with his own pedantic morality felt constrained to fulminate in the well-known passage in the Scholemaster⁽¹⁾, --- a criticism which Caxton himself, however, had anticipated with a sounder one :

WR { "Herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardi-ness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue, and sin. Do after the good and leave the evil and it shall bring you to good fame and renown". (2)

Purpose of the Work: Malory had, as we have noted above, been initiated into the art of war and the ideals and usages of chivalry, and like Perceval in the Morte D'Arthur, learned to 'haunt arms and noble deeds. In his time, generally, chivalry had fallen into decay. He wanted to hold up the ideals of the past age to his own countrymen in his own times. He himself was an ardent mediaevalist and upholder of chivalry. His moral teaching in the Morte D'Arthur is pertinent and

(1) Scholemaster: End of Pt. I: "In our fore-father tyme ... few books were read in our tongue, savying certayne books of chevalrie, as they said, for pastime and pleasure; which, as some say, were made in the monasteries, by idle monks or wanton chanons. As one, for example, Le Morte D'Arthur the whole pleasure of which book standeth in two special poynts; in which book they be counted the noblest knyghtes that do kill most men without any quarrell, and commit fowlest adoulteries by subtilest shiftes: as Sir Launcelot, with the wife of King Arthur, his master; Sir Tristram, with the wife of King Marke, his uncle; Sir Lamerocke, with the wife of King Lote, that was his own aunt. This is good stuffe for wise men to laugh at; or honest men to take pleasure at: yet I know when God's Bible was banished the Court and Le Morte D'Arthur received into the Prince's chamber".

(Not, indeed, that Ascham was so very far wrong about the morality of the book -- but that was the fault, not of Malory, but of French mediaeval romance.)

(2) Preface, p. 3.

timely and not the mere falsetto preaching of a tempor-
is laudator acti. Even more, towards the end of the
fifteenth century, in Caxton's time, Chivalry had de-
generated into mere show and bluff, ceremony and rule,
13 instead of the practices of valour, piety, nobility
and virtue. Caxton's lament over the decay of chival-
ry clearly expresses Malory's object in compiling the
Morte D'Arthur. He (Caxton) had witnessed and de-
plored the degeneration of chivalric customs in the so-
ciety of his day. He concluded his translation of the
French Book of the Order of Chivalry with the following
appeal to the knights of England :-

"O ye knyghtes of Englonde, where is the
custom and usage of noble Chyvalry that was
used in those dayes? What do ye now but to
go to the baynes and playe at dyse? And
some not well advysed use not honest and good
rule, ageyne all ordre of Knyghthoode. Leve
this, leve it, and rede the noble volumes of
Saynt Graal, of Lancelot, of Galaad, of Trys-
tram, of Perceforest, of Percyval, of Gawayn
and many mo. Ther shalle ye see manhode,
curtesye and gentylnesse". (1)

Verily chivalry had fallen on parlous days.
Many attempts had been made before and during Malory's
own time to restore to the world the moral teaching
and ideals of mediaeval chivalry. Thus Edward III
had as his object in establishing the Order of the Gar-
ter about 1344 to exalt the dignity of knighthood and,
by encouraging knightly service, to create a bond or
tie of fellowship. But what chiefly attracted these
late admirers of chivalry was not its doctrine but its

(1) Vinaver: op.cit.., p. 59.

The Book of the Order of Chivalry, a four-
teenth century work, was first translated by Sir
Gilbert de la Haye about 1456.
See Schofield: Chivalry in English Literature,
p. 285 note.

outward splendour.⁽¹⁾

Chivalry had had its origin in a sort of reconciliation between two opposing ideals or ways of life: the ascetic theology of the mediaeval Church and the unsanctified life of the world which the Church rejected as wholly bad -- the martial traditions of the upper feudal ranks that dated from heathen times.

The main business of the upper classes in early mediaeval times was the plying of the trade of warfare. This almost incessant fighting was sometime regular and justified - war waged in the service of justice or in the ordinary campaigns at the behest of the king, but more often selfish and predatory, in the service of own interest. As the orders of nobility arose in layers and ranks out of the level equality of primitive society, there were added to their way of living certain external features and practices - the trappings and pageantry of wealth and power accruing from self-assumed rights and prerogatives⁽²⁾: a parading of gentle and aristocratic customs that were formulated and ordered by an etiquette that gradually assumed shape and became cast in rigid form. Training and custom, accompanied by a complicated system of

(1) Vinaver: op. cit., pp. 56, 57. Another Knightly Order, that of the Golden Fleece, was founded in France in 1430.

(2) In Maid Marian Peacock says that in the days of Robin Hood what was called social order was "the preservation of the privileges of the few who happened to have any, at the expense of the swinish multitude who had none, except that of working and being shot at for the benefit of their better which is obviously not the meaning of social order in our more enlightened times". Quoted from: Hugh Walker, English Satire and Satirists, p. 290 (See T.L. Peacock, Maid Marian, Macmillan & Co., London, 1927, p. 68.)

initiation, turned the noble-born youth, through the intermediate stages of page and squire, into a knight with all the rights and privileges that name connoted

To all outward appearance the nobility professed to admire and follow a strictly ethical code of behaviour built on the virtues which the Church taught men to observe, for in theory they were servants not only of their temporal ruler but also of the Divine King. From this followed that when the Crusades were first started by the call issued by Pope Urban II at Clermont in 1095, the whole Chivalry of Europe had to obey.

These ideals were supposed to be far above the understanding, or participation therein, of the common herd, grubbing in the mire of their ignorance and degraded existence (to which, in truth, they had been relegated by the power of the aristocracy who determined the structure of society).

The earliest noblesse oblige probably demanded not so much that those who were born to title and wealth should conform to a code of behaviour commensurate with their position, but rather that those of gentle birth should at least make a pretence of observing the customs that fitted their exalted position. Unbridled passions of greed and lust could be given free reign in the incessant internecine warfare which was practised in proportion to the lack of power, or the lack of ability of the ruling sovereign to keep his unruly nobility in order - provided that a certain measure of civilized rules were observed by the barons toward each other in these campaigns of rapine or vengeance.

Those who belonged to the class of nobility, that is, the chivalry in the sense of those who practised the institution so named, must always be courtly to each other, for only by showing each other the respect their rank merited could their self-established position be upheld.

Their wealth and position gave them the leisure and means to practice the gentle arts of storytelling and music, which gave birth to the profession of the troubadours, who in turn invented the courtly tales of the cavaliers of romance: knights of super-human ability, epitomes of gentility and models of gallantry in the art of love.

In the comparatively rare intervals of peace they occupied themselves with the mock warfare and martial play provided by the jousts and tilting matches.

But time moves on. With the Renaissance came a revolution that was to make the knight moving about sluggishly in his ponderous armour an anachronism. When the diabolical and unchivalrous invention of gunpowder provided a weapon against which the most massively fortified castle was not proof, warfare took on a grimmer aspect than the picturesque though fairly safe game played before by the champions protected in cumbersome mail. The lighter armed and equipped, and therefore more mobile, troops from the ranks of the archers and footsoldiers became of equal importance to the knights in whose train they had followed into battle beforehand. And the new and pernicious ideologies that came with the doctrines of Humanist enlightenment - rights of man, and equality, and the dignity of

labour and the rise of crafts; the collapse of feudalism and so of its attendant physical and mental enslavement of the class of serfs -- these things all contained a dangerous new teaching of a new philosophy of 'democracy' that spelt the doom of the old order of chivalry. The old chevaliers and paladins of chivalry forsook their old warlike ways and paid less tribute to those virtues they had once held so high, and they now spent their energies in polite and emasculated pastimes for which Caxton upbraided them, as going to the bat and playing dice. Tournaments became spectacular pageants, and in every way chivalry declined. It was that brave old world that was passing and much that was good and noble was passing with it.

For this reason Malory wanted to sound a clear call to his countrymen, and to try and recapture the excellence of the past :-

"Loyalty to God, bravery in a righteous quarrel, kindness to enemies, and courtesy to all: these are the foremost virtues of a real chevalier. Such is Malory's simple creed. His book is an earnest endeavour to revive the moral grandeur of what he thought was the custom and usage of the land". (1)

Schofield, too, notes the nostalgia with which Malory wrote :-

"When one considers the circumstances of Malory's life - his aristocratic lineage and profession of arms, his training as a gentleman and a soldier, his experience of foreign and civil war, the vicissitudes of his own fortunes and finally, the fact that he wrote late in life, probably suffering in prison, approaching death - one understands better why the Morte D'Arthur is what it is, a

(1) Vinaver: Op. cit., p. 64.

work of retrospect, tinged with sadness for the passing of the good old days; a work of idealism, troubled with knowledge of miserable facts daily divulged; a work of patriotism, written when the land was being wasted by civil strife; a work of encouragement to the right-minded, and of warning to the evil-minded, among men of that class in which the author lived and moved". (1)

Likewise it was not easy to preserve the chivalrous temper in Romance when the institution of Knighthood had lost all or most of its significance, and the later romances of the early fifteenth century had also degenerated and fallen off sadly in quality. They were dull and tedious and full of absurdities: they had become burlesques of the virile romances that had enchanted earlier listeners.

It was this kind of romance against which another man of similar temper and character to Malory, but a greater genius, was later to turn his gifts, in that peninsula, and stronghold of romance, where chivalry flourished latest, but we shall return to Cervantes in his proper place below.

How did Malory set about the task of restoring the old chivalric ideals to honour?

Plan of the work: He wanted to make available to his own countrymen the old tales which reflected that chivalry he lauded. The greatest body of these was in French MSS., so he set about making his translation. But it could not be a mere translation: that was too gigantic a task, and besides they were too loosely knit and unwieldly in their form as they were.

(1) Chivalry in English Literature, p. 87.

He was acquainted with the prose Vulgate cycle and another (the 'Pseudo-Robert de Boron' cycle). Besides he would also have been acquainted with the other extant Arthurian romances both English and French in verse and in prose. All this vast and amorphous mass of matter he took and adapted, pruned and abridged and formed it into his Le Morte D'Arthur. With insight, taste and judgment, that was sound, if not impeccable, he selected the most interesting episodes, discarded the more tedious and commonplace adventures, often telescoped two episodes or an unnecessary doubling of characters and events into one. He gave to the loosely-knit branches of the old prose cycle a continuity and chronology and cohesion that concentrated into a reasonable compass all the vast body of his originals, and so he wrought it into some semblance of that coherent whole which must have, as the first great literary critic so cogently stated, "a beginning, a middle, and an end".

Malory brought to bear on his task a character and temperament eminently suited to the nature and scope of the task he wanted to undertake.

He was an ardent mediaevalist. In his work he handled material that he loved, and with this labour of love he lightened his weary years of captivity. With the piety of a devotee he refrained from doing violence to the spirit and atmosphere of his originals. For he combined in himself the qualities of the romantic antiquarian Walter Scott and the studious researcher William Morris. He gave an objective rendering of his matter, without (much) comment or moralizing on the

episodes as such, knowing well that romance, if handled in the way he handled it, would speak for itself. Although his attitude is that of a moralist he is no awkward and obvious didactic.

He was far enough away from the Middle Ages he portrayed to be able to see the period in correct perspective, and yet near enough it to experience and savour its own original spirit and temper. To him, as indeed to Cervantes, Chivalry was still a reality, for both of them had in their own times - separated as they were by nearly a century - professed and practised the ideals of knighthood and chivalry; both of them wrote of things they knew and loved even as had the last historian of the vanishing Middle Ages, Jean Froissart.

It is unnecessary to say that the Morte D'Arthur is not the greatest book, nor Thomas Malory the greatest artist, in English literature. The work has its weaknesses and faults. Yet its faults are balanced by its merits. From the nature of the work Malory's first task was to select and reject. Here his critical faculty is not always sound. Lack of discrimination accounts for the omission of some of the essential threads of the story, so that he makes it at times more obscure than the original. This is due to the very bulkiness of his originals. In his abridging of the matter to hand he apparently at first miscalculated the size of his project, for the earlier part of the book, which shows no signs of haste, he condensed very little. This part contains the Merlin, Tristan and Lancelot sections (Books I - V, VIII - XII and VI and XIX respectively). At this stage, and already in

the Lancelot section, he found that his own book was becoming unwieldy, and he had still the main parts of the Arthuriad to cover: the Lancelot, the Queste and the Mort Artu. He now had to hurry on to the end of his work and he condensed the latter portions very much. This drastic condensation was bound to influence the continuity of the story, and resulted in obscurities.⁽¹⁾ Yet the very process of editing and excising, thus bringing the story into a suitable proportion, is the way in which the book acquires part of its merit. When working on a small scale and reforming a few short scenes Malory generally attains simplicity. He reduces the number of minor characters. He discards less interesting adventures and disconnected episodes and avoids the romantic love for lingering over details of a scene. The result is that the narrative is sometimes bare and colourless, but on the other hand he keeps to the point of the narrative.

His real originality lies, not in elaboration of narrative, but in the treatment of the old stock stories, which, though he often cut them short, he interpreted in his own fashion and at least attempted to give them a new direction, a new meaning.

Of Malory's narrative technique Vinaver says

"Malory has a small stock of episodic details and he resorts to it perhaps too

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- (1) The best study of Malory and his work is that of Eugene Vinaver, who has given a full and penetrating examination, especially of Malory's treatment of his originals. I find some of his judgments somewhat harsh, however.

E.K. Chambers: Sir Thomas Malory: The English Association Pamphlet No. 51, 1922, is a delightful little commentary on Malory's book, with criticism as good and just as any.

often. The great story-teller was seemingly incapable of creating a story

His 'psychological treatment' of the romances differs very greatly from that of his originals. He was inimical to the ideals of the courtly love of the romance. He was a soberer narrator and a greater realist than the early romance writers he was fundamentally prosaic and practical. This makes him indifferent to such obvious and universal aspects of romance as magic and the use of the supernatural His discarding of some of the important details of a story and its reduction to a mere skeleton shows an utter inability to grasp the profoundly poetic meaning of the scene, and a complete lack of sympathy with the grace and mystery which are the very essence of romantic magic". (1)

?
no!
Perhaps Malory's greatest fault is his treatment of the Grail Quest. He failed to give it its real significance. In its deepest significance the Grail Quest is the antithesis of the Order of the Round Table, and all that it stands for. In its spirituality and its searching standards for the knights who would all be Grail seekers, it shows up their weakness and sinfulness, the transience of their mundane glory. To Malory who wants to exalt knighthood and the glory of his heroes this is repugnant, and he therefore failed to stress this aspect of the story. The Quest then assumes the guise of a pageant full of strange adventures, and Galahad, from being its mystical leader and inspirer becomes merely a good and valiant knight.

"Malory's Quest ... is deprived of its spiritual foundation, of its doctrine. The quest is no longer an antithesis to the Round Table, but an ornament of Arthur's kingdom: the fortunes of Arthur and his followers do not decline with the coming of the Grail knight Faced with two main themes, and forced to subordinate one, Malory made Corbenic a province of Camelot". (2)

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- (1) Vinaver: Malory: pp. 34, 41, 42, 51 and 94.
(2) Vinaver: Malory, p. 84.

On the credit side, what Malory did do, however, was to write an *Arthuriad*, a tale in which Arthur occupies the supreme position as a great and noble knight - himself a knight and example to his followers in performing deeds of knight-errantry, and more, the one who was the central figure, the inspiration, for his knights to perform the great deeds they did do. He is the unifying element in the great circle of champions, the one figure that makes of all romance the reflection of chivalry and nobility.

Malory did recognize this binding element provided by the figure of Arthur and the adventures of all the other cycles that, in one respect or another, were connected with him and his fortunes. And so by clearing away the underbrush and lopping off the unnecessary twigs and cluttering foliage, so that the beauty of the main trunk became visible, he displayed the full beauty of the central theme of the legend: Arthur and his tragedy.

✓ "The Prose Cycle, although it generally centred upon Arthur, was devoid of epic unity the six branches contained no consistent plot ... Their meaning and structure could only be discovered when they were cleared of subsidiary matter. Then ... was it possible to find ... the germ of an epic plot, capable of being dramatically developed. Malory's solution of his structural problem could not have been more simple He knew that the Epic of Arthur was there but that it had to be freed from its adventurous trappings, and by sheer 'reduction' he caused it to acquire a straightforwardness and an internal balance which it had never before attained". (1)

And so he did produce what E.G. Gardner calls "Our national prose epic". (2)

(1) Vinaver, op. cit., pp. 93 and 94.

(2) The Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature.

But there is something more. / As Chaucer first wrote poetry in a language that is as English as roast beef and beer, so too Malory may be said to have written the first great vernacular prose work. And it is not homely vernacular; it is standard English prose adorned by that indefinable and intangible quality which we call style.

The hardest criticism that has been levelled against Malory is that he is a 'mere compiler'. But he is more than that: he is an artist who knew how to handle his material, and make of it a new thing, and he knew in what language to clothe his creation.

"We may question Malory's merit as a storyteller, disagree with his interpretation of Romance, and even whittle down his claims to originality; but his Morte D'Arthur, whatever its failings, possesses one important and unchallengeable quality --- its style". (1)

He is a master of simple exposition, fluent, facile and direct. It is as finished prose in its way as any of the sixteenth or later centuries, but with a freshness belonging to the dawn of English prose. Its flavour is just old enough and quaint enough to charm and mark its age. He chose just the right measure of archaicism suited to the matter: a combination of the mode of expression of his own time with something a little older, a little more mediaeval. The matter was old and to a certain extent artificial. If told with artificiality and bombast it would have been absurd; if told too straightforwardly and colloquially it would have parodied the original. Lesser writers would have

(1) Vinaver, p. 100.

stumbled between attempting to reproduce the spirit of an old story without being artificial, and adapting it to their own times and becoming awkward. Malory steered safely along the middle course without seeming to make an awkward compromise.

Of his style Miss A.D. Greenwood writes :-

"There is a kind of cadence, at times almost musical, which bears the narrative on with a gradual swell and fall proportioned to the importance of the episodes, while brevity, especially at the close of a long incident, sometimes approaches to epigram Too straightforward to be archaic, idiomatic with a suavity denied to Caxton, Malory, who reaches one hand to Chaucer and one to Spenser, escaped the stamp of a particular epoch and bequeathed a prose epic to literature". (1)

His style, then, is simple and elevated, and its harmonious and musical rhythms are evident to everyone who reads with an attentive ear. Its simple grandeur has that quality which makes it, in parts, approach near, if it does not actually attain, that sublimity on whose qualities Longinus instructs us in his treatise.

M.W. Maccallum says of his work :-

"Even in his subject matter, Malory, however closely he follows his sources, is entitled to the credit of independence, and, it might be said, originality; for a compiler must select and connect; in selecting he must use his judgment, and in connecting he must appeal to his own imaginative presentiment. Moreover, the mere conception of a unity in the straggling wilderness of Arthurian romance was genial and large-hearted ... Of course Malory's work is by no means beyond criticism. He is capricious in his insertions and in his omissions.... He often leaves a history half-

(1) Cambridge History of English Literature, Ed., Sir A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller, C.U.P., 1949, Vol. II, p. 337.

told, notably in the case of Sir Tristram... his dexterity in mosaic is so small that he frequently contradicts himself in detail, and his arrangement is very confused. But ... he has succeeded in the grand lines of the history. He has told the tale of Arthur so that none of the pathos and terror is lost". (1)

Saintsbury must have the final word:

"What he did do consists mainly in two things, or perhaps three. He selected the most interesting things with an almost invariable sureness, though there are one or two omissions; and he omitted the less interesting parts with a sureness to which there are hardly any exceptions at all. He grasped, and this is his great and saving merit as an author, the one central fact of the story -- that in the combination of the Quest of the Graal with the loves of Lancelot and Guinevere lay the kernel at once and the conclusion of the whole matter. And last (his great and saving merit as a writer) he told his tale in a manner that is nearly impeccable ... Merely in English prose he is a great figure, for although his medium would not be suitable for every purpose, it is nearly perfect for his own. Merely as the one great central storehouse of a famous and fertile story his place is sure. But apart from all these extrinsic considerations, it is surer still in the fact that he has added to literature an imperishable book". (2)

And on this note we might have ended this study. For surely Malory has given the sum and substance of the Arthurian legend, to which nothing more could be added. But by ringing out the old Malory also rang in the new. (His book is not only the grand finale of mediaeval romance: it was also to be, and is still, the fountainhead of inspiration for all writers of later ages who are ever inspired anew by the imperishable figure of Arthur and his imperishable story.

(1) Op. cit., pp. 93 and 94.

(2) Op. cit., p. 97.

The next chapter of this study will, in its examination of the work of the 'moderns' be, in effect, a monument to Malory's work, for he, and he alone, has made Arthur accessible to all - other than the few incurably curious and studious editors of faded original manuscripts - who love Arthur; and the 'all' are many, many more than those few.

CHAPTER X : The Arthur of the
English Poets, 1500-1950.

"Man yernes rīmes for tō hēre,
And rōmans rēd on manōres sēre:
O Kyng Arthour ~~y~~at was so rike
Quom nōn in hys tīm was like;
O feriys ~~y~~at hys knyhtes fell
~~y~~at aunter sūre I hēre of tell,
Als Wawan, Cai, and oyer stābell
For tō wōre ~~y~~ō rōnde tābell:
Of Tristrem and hys leif Ysote
How hē for here becōm a sote".



Prologue to the Cursor Mundi.

ALORY'S Le Morte D'Arthur

bridges the transition from the old to the new. It belongs alike to the past epoch of the mediaeval romances which it finally closes, and to the new era in literature which it ushers in.

On the one hand it is the last of the great mediaeval Arthurian romances (in English at any rate) and on the other it is the source for all later - and more modern - treatments of the old matter.

From now on poets and dramatists who were to use Arthurian material would not need to go farther back for their sources than Malory's book. He had made accessible the whole story from beginning to end with all its branches and subsidiary legends within the covers of a single volume.

His book immediately became popular and influential and it has remained so to this day, as being the completest, most consistent, and most interesting account of the story for all modern readers. Editions have regularly followed each other through the four-and-a-half centuries since it was first published.

The matter of which it treats, namely, chivalry and gallant deeds, and the human story of conflict in the Arthur - Guenever - Lancelot triangle, retains a perennial interest.

"The fictions which were fostered under its shadow (i.e. that of chivalry) possess a certain capability of meaning that not only makes them immortal, but endows them with a living inspiration and challenges the world to treat them anew. And Malory's compilation which supplies as it were the last word and classic form to the mediaeval conception has justly enjoyed most popularity and exercised most influence in after times ----- generally and essentially it is to Malory ---- that the greatest English poets have recourse". (1)

Despite the gradual decline of mediaeval Arthurian romance during the latter part of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth, it did not, however, entirely disappear from the territory of literature. Poetically barren as the fifteenth century was in English literature, it is yet to its latter half that we owe most of the poetic literature which we call ballad poetry. Most of this poetry was never written down or printed, but transmitted orally for generations, being recited or sung to the harp by itinerant minstrels.

Some of these folk poems are so old that their origins cannot be traced, yet they are so immortal that they still grace school anthologies at least. Some of these are :- Sir Patrick Spens, Chevy Chase, The Battle of Otterburn, The Nut-Brown Maid, and some ballads of the Robin Hood cycle. The events described in most of them date at least from chivalric times.

(1) Maccallum: Op. cit., p. 96.

In fact they continue the tradition of those earlier romantic compositions, the metrical romances of the early fourteenth century such as Richard Coeur de Lion, Bevis of Hampton, Guy of Warwick, and The Squire of Low Degree. Quite a number of these fifteenth century ballads deal with tales of knighthood and, indeed, the Arthurian themes provide the matter for many such old ballads, which were kept green for generations in snatches that were sung even when the ballads themselves had gone the way of romance. In fact the ballads represent a broken up, modernised, and, for the most part, vulgarized residue of the matter of old romance - they reflect the form in which romance lived on as the popular literary fare of a class who had no knowledge of the traditions and ideals of the nobility who had enjoyed romance.

Some of these ballads are, inter alia, King Arthur and the King of Cornwall, Sir Lancelot of Dulake, The Marriage of Sir Gawain, Merlin, Arthur's Death, and The Green Knight. Some of these Arthurian ballads will be again noted a little lower down when we glance at Percy's Reliques as a contribution towards the Romantic Revival.

While mediaeval romance was giving its last gasps in all of Northern, Central and Southern Europe, it was still flourishing vigorously, too vigorously, in the South-Western corner of the Continent. In Spain and Portugal the later, more decadent romances of the Amadis de Gaul type were still weeds of rank growth when the purer stock had run to seed elsewhere.

Chivalric romance still exercised a great

influence over the minds of the people of Spain in the sixteenth century. Chivalry as an institution lingered on in the Peninsula at least a hundred years after it had died out in Europe. A century after Chaucer wrote his Sir Thopas making mock of the forms of knighthood, the knightly calling was in full glory in Spain.

And with chivalry and knighthood still at their height, chivalric romance, too, still flourished. But they were long, tedious romances of the most extravagant and insipid type, fit matter only for satire. This neo-romanticism was so popular and widely acclaimed in the peninsula, dragging on its existence to the end of the sixteenth century, that it is not surprising that a man of a broad and humane sympathy, equalled only by the sanity and clarity of his critical outlook, produced a book that was intended to end this flood of dull romance by ridiculing it out of existence.

In other words Arthurian romance had now become, and had to become, a subject fit only for satire and burlesque. Yet the Don Quixote, which set out to be one thing, imperceptibly and spontaneously and inevitably turned under Cervantes' hands into something totally different, and the half-witted figure of ridicule of the shabby old nobleman became that of the most immortal and best-beloved knight-~~errant~~ of all Romance, the most loved fool of all times.

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra was born in 1547, about seventy-six years after Malory had died. His Don Quixote was published in 1605, one-hundred-and-twenty years after Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur, when

Arthurian romance in England had degenerated into a few stray fragments of doggerel in Shakespeare's plays.

Don Quixote, although a burlesque of chivalry (as it existed at this late date in Spain), does not mock chivalry as an institution, nor chivalric romance as such. It satirizes the extravagant, insipid and decadent later Spanish romances of knighthood, as well as the affectations of those quasi-learned people who professed to know a great deal about, and to care for, these later romances.

The author's intention, therefore, was to cure the false taste for the romances of chivalry by parodying their styles and ridiculing their absurdities. It was only against bad romance that Cervantes wanted to tilt. And so he gave the world the immortal figure of Don Quixote in the greatest work of pure humour - in which the laugh is akin to tears - in the world. Instead of an uproarious farce he gave us a delicate and consummate work of art. Instead of battering chivalry out of existence with the bludgeon of his satire, he immortalized it and proved that the true Chivalry is a thing of eternal nobility, and that its observance and practice provide one of the saving graces of the race of man. In the work the satire deepened and became a criticism of life, permanent and universal.

For Cervantes was no mocker. Mockery is incompatible with the broad and humane sympathy, with the melancholy sweetness with which he limned the figure of the frenzied old knight. In the second volume which appeared ten years after the first, and was partly a counterblast to the contemptible plagiarism of Alonso

Fernandez de Avellaneda, but more of an amende honorable to the old Don himself, the narrative attains great dignity and even sublimity of feeling towards the end, and especially in the description of the death of the old Don Quixote.

Cervantes, therefore, did not approach his subject with the vengeful and misanthropic glee of a Pope or a Swift, nor even the kindly-malicious slyness of a Chaucer. It could have been in no joyous mood that Cervantes, the old, maimed and needy soldier, set himself, in the sunset of his life, the close of his hopes and aspirations, to write this burlesque on the chivalric books which is the dirge and also the anthem of Chivalry. He had himself drunk deeply of the draught which had intoxicated his hero. He had been infected with the same disease as the good Alonso Quixano. He had shared in the fond illusion that the function and duty of chivalry was the redressing of the world's wrongs. He had been a knight-errant himself, and his own life the very matter of a romance. In his youth he had been dazzled with the lustre of a great enterprise, which seemed to revive the glories of the heroic age. He had himself assisted at pageants and deeds of arms which recalled the fabled splendours and feats of Amadis.

Can we conceive him, with his illusions spent, disappointed with fortune, a man broken in health and in hope entering upon Don Quixote with a joyful heart? As truly may we speak of Don Quixote as being the most mournful rather than one of the most joyful of books.

May not this be the secret of its extraordinary popularity and ever enduring delight that, written to give vent to a passing humour, which was as much born of a quenched aspiration and a frustrate longing for the chivalric age as of contempt and disgust for the vicious and foolish books of chivalry, Don Quixote owes its immortality to its capacity for reflecting the moods and fancies of all its readers as well as to its wealth and truth of human nature?

At all events Cervantes did succeed in achieving a complete revolution in taste. After 1605 there were no new Spanish chivalric romances.

This note at some length on de Cervantes and the Don Quixote cannot be out of place here, for where the satire of Don Quixote is levelled against all romance, it also derides Arthurian romance which at its worst is no whit better than the Spanish romances of the poorest sort.

And Arthur is synonymous with romance and chivalry, and the Don Quixote is symptomatic of the evil days on which Arthurian romance, too, had fallen in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Even before de Cervantes gave mediaeval romance its quietus romance was all but dead in England. We say all but dead, for Arthur and some last vestiges of his one time fame lingered on, and Arthurian material and themes were to continue being used, in an unbroken line, in English literature, from Malory's great book onward until the present time.

The next essay on the Arthurian themes in

England appeared in the sixteenth century more than a hundred years after Malory's book with The Misfortunes of Arthur (1587) of Thomas Hughes, which was performed before Queen Elizabeth I. This was a tragedy in blank verse on the Senecan model, and one of the lesser forerunners of the great pageant of later Elizabethan drama. Hughes wrote before Marlowe had written much, and before Shakespeare had written anything. He thus had only the classical drama, of the Gorboduc type, as his model

His play, therefore, has the weakness of this type of drama -- it employs the classical apparatus of dumb shows and a chorus. The tragedy revolves around the Arthur - Modred relationship. Otherwise it follows Geoffrey's account and has no romantic episode or colour, and omits the Lancelot character altogether. It is a sombre and powerful rendering of the incest motif with its tragic dénouement, but Hughes ignores the poetical and romantic version of Arthur's departure.⁽¹⁾

We have noted how Shakespeare's only references to the Arthurian traditions are found in the stray snatches from ballads, as when Falstaff comes into the Boar's Head Inn singing:

"When Arthur first in Court
-- and was a worthy king". (2)

(1) The Albion's England, a sort of metrical history of William Warner a year earlier, had disposed of the whole history of Arthur (taken from Geoffrey's "Chronicle") in little more than a score of verses. He takes little interest in the more romantic incidents in the Arthurian stories: only those parts of the legend which may be historical - i.e. Arthur's European wars - are worthy of note.

(2) King Henry IV, Second Part: Act II, Sc. iv.

Justice Shallow recalls: "When I lay at Clement's Inn - I was then Sir Dagonet in Arthur's Show". (1)

The Fool in King Lear utters some few lines of gibberish concluding:-

"This prephecy Merlin shall make: for I live before his time". (2)

And yet Shakespeare had obtained the stories of Lear and Cymbeline from the very volume of Geoffrey of Monmouth wherein the Arthurian legend had its birth as a subject of romance -- or rather, from Geoffrey via Holin Holinshed.

In expressing some regrets at the scant note Chaucer had paid - and so uncomplimentary at that - to the old romances, including those on Arthurian matter, Saintsbury utters some just remarks applicable also to Shakespeare, and all the other great figures in English literature who have ignored the Arthurian legend as fit subject for their poetic gifts. He says:-

"It is as natural for some men of genius to prefer to take new ways, to strike into the path worn by none, as it is for others to produce masterpieces in kinds already tried by their contemporaries and predecessors. However all that can be said positively, is that if Chaucer did despise the romances, he merely exhibited that not infrequent infirmity even of noble minds which makes men unjust to their immediate forerunners...." (3)

The first great work after Malory's Morte D'Arthur which was to obtain its inspiration, in part, from the Arthurian tradition, was that unfinished

(1) King Henry IV, Act III, Sc. i.

(2) King Lear: Act III, Sc. iii.

(3) Short History of English Literature: p. 83.

masterpiece The Faerie Queene. Between 1590 and 1596 Spenser completed six of his projected twelve books. The Faerie Queene is, of course, no continuation of the Matière de Bretagne which the Arthurian romancers sang.

Spenser's poem was first and foremost an allegory with an avowed moral purpose, and no mere episodic narrative intended to charm and entertain. All the sensuous beauty of which the resources of the English language are capable in the hands of 'the poets' poet' are there, certainly: "his poem was one of the world's most magnificent picture-books (created) by this admirable painter and enchanting musician".⁽¹⁾ Essentially however, the Faerie Queene belongs to that genre which was the most representative product of the Middle Ages, and which we know in, among others, Pearl, Piers Plowman, the Roman de la Rose and the Vita Nuova.

In this beautiful but complicated double allegory (moral and political), Prince Arthur, the ultimate type of all Chivalry, and not the historical or traditional King Arthur, is drawn. He represents Highmindedness or Magnanimity, and is the shining example of all the virtues reflected in the separate knights of the Fairy Queen, such as the Knight of the Red Cross, Sir Guyon, Sir Artegall, Sir Calidore; he vanquishes the Vices and wins Gloriana. She, the Fairy Queen, would -- in Spenser's general intention -- represent Glory in the highest sense; in his particular intent "the excellent and glorious person of our souveraine the Queen, and her kingdom in Fairy Land" were meant.

(1) E. Leguouis and L. Cazamian: A History of English Literature, p. 279.

Spenser wanted to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline. "I labour to pourtraict in Arthure before he was King, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall vertues".

There are references in the poem to Merlin and Tristan, but apart from using the apparatus of Arthurian romance, namely quests, monsters, dwarfs, enchanted castles and so on, Spenser does not attempt to revive the old Arthurian traditions. It is a great pity, for with the gifts so lavishly displayed in this poem, surely he could have made a great romance or even an epic of Arthur's story.

Yet his poetic temper was not suited to this end. Legouis and Coomans say of the poem:-

"The romantic element ... charms intermittently, and attains to the exquisite only here and there When he wished to create characters even in a romance, he was impeded by his allegory, which asked not for living beings, but for embodied abstractions Britomart is the only character who changes the allegory into romance". (1)

MacCallum is more explicit :-

"Spenser was a man of the Reformation as well as a man of the Renaissance, and had the moral earnestness of the Puritans and their preoccupation with the unseen The solution for this contradiction between his joy in appearances and his contempt for them he found in an idealistic symbolism ... as far as his art was concerned, he chose Allegory - he made his romantic pageant the veil for ethical truth. As a result the ethical treatment of Arthurian story which this brought with it was such that it led him to discard the external action in which

(1) Op. cit., p. 281.

it abounds and he borrowed from the chronicles only the idea of Arthur as the flower of princes". (1)

Spenser was not insensible to the charm of Geoffrey's legend and gives a poetic summary of British history from the days of the giants to the reign of Uther, which Prince Arthur reads in the Castle of Alma and the reference to Merlin is also in keeping. (2) (3)

On the whole Spenser's connection with Arthurian legend is confined to some reminiscences of the Round Table and references only to some Arthurian knights and stray incidents. Thus Tristan is brought in for no apparent reason other than to add to the interest of his poem by mentioning in it one of the best-known heroes of old romance. (4)

Between Malory and Spenser we see the gulf between the middle ages and modern times. Malory is still of the age of romance, while Spenser belongs to our own age, and that accounts for his treatment of Arthurian legend.

"It (Spenser's spirit in the Faerie Queene) is a spirit as far removed from Malory's as if Spenser were one of ourselves; The temper of his time we feel not essentially unlike that of our own, and our own is not a time in which a great romantic legend could develop. No more was Spenser's. The Elizabethan age could keep the old romances alive, but it could not give them the nourishment requisite for

(1) M.W. Maccallum: Tennyson's Idylls and Arthurian Story, p. 129.

(2) The Faerie Queene: Bk. II, Canto x, Stanzas 1 - lxviii.

(3) Idem: Bk. III, iii, 10 - 13.

(4) Idem: Bk. VI, ii, 10 - 13.

further growth. This fact means that we have passed beyond the constructive period of the Arthurian legends. From now on they are interesting, not for the addition of new incidents, but for the different ways in which new generations have regarded the old incidents". (1)

From all the foregoing one may wonder whether Spenser was worth having such a fairly full notice, since his poem seems to be so little Arthurian in nature. It is clear, however, that he based the idea of the whole work on the foundation of the old romance of Chivalry⁽²⁾ - the Arthurian legend is, as it were the hidden steel skeleton of his structure. It shows too that the Arthurian legend was by no means unknown during the latter part of the sixteenth century, and Spenser must have realized that the Arthurian references in it would make his Allegory more acceptable reading.

The next work with Arthurian references is the Polyolbion (1613 - 1622) of Michael Drayton, generally regarded as his greatest work. This is a poetised description, in alexandrines, of England and Wales. In connection with certain place names Drayton recounts the legends attached to them. He mentions all the places to which he comes that have Arthurian associations and thus works in a fair amount of Arthurian material. He regrets that no competent writer has given the Arthurian matter worthy treatment.

Another writer who seems to have regarded

(1) H. Maynadier: The Arthur of the English Poets, p. 272.

(2) W.H. Schofield: Chivalry in English Literature - Spenser: pp. 127 - 179.

the Arthurian legend as semi-historical was Thomas Heywood, whose Life of Merlin appeared in 1641. It is a "history" of England (in verse) down to the times of Charles I, and the writer and his readers treated the prophecies of the sage as genuine and worthy of belief. This was due to the fact that early British history was beginning to be enlisted for political purposes in controversies on the right of succession of the Stuart kings.

In the period between 1640 and 1680 there is a great exuberance of various Prophetic Almanacs. The events of the Revolution, the panic aroused by the Plague, and the uncertainty and hardships arising from the great Fire of London, had made ignorant people unusually anxious about the future, and astrologers and fortune-tellers flourished. With most of their prognostications the name of Merlin was associated, and the venerable old sage became altogether debased into a vulgar fortune-teller's assistant. The image of his head became the fortune-tellers' trade sign.

Continuing with the seventeenth century we note that Milton had early in his career felt the attraction of the native and national matter and had proposed essaying an epic on Arthur. Filled with patriotic fervour, he had projected a Brut, as we note from the Epistle to Manso⁽¹⁾ and

(1) Mansus: ll. 80 - 84:-

"Si quando indigenas revocabo in carmina reges
Arturumque etiam sub terris bella moventem,
Aut dicam invictae sciali foedere mensae
Magnaminos heroes, et (O modo spiritus adsit)
Frangam Saxonicas Britonum sub Marte phalanges!"

and Epitaph of Damon⁽¹⁾. But his stern puritan temper afterwards led him away from such fictitious romantic subjects and he employed his genius on epics dealing with religion and religious subjects. The Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained were written rather than a new Arthurian, and who can say what the gain or loss has been?

Dryden, too, toyed with the thought of writing an epic on Arthur, - and he would probably also have treated the matter historically rather than romantically, leaning on Geoffrey rather than on Malory. But, alas, the Restoration period - the age of Reason - was no era to inspire poetic strains extolling the fantastic, the fabulous, the old romantic matter. Sir Walter Scott was later to express keen regret that these two poets had abandoned the Arthurian theme. His remarks on Dryden are worth quoting :-

"Dryden in immortal strain
Had raised the Table Round again,
But that a ribald King and Court
Bade him toil on to make them sport;
Demanded for their niggard pay,
Fit for their souls a looser lay,
Licentious satire, song and play;
The world defrauded of the high design,
Profaned the God-given strength and marr'd
the lofty line". (2)

While Dryden did not consummate his plan of

(1) Epitaphium Damonis: ll. 162 - 168 :-
"Ipse ego Dardaniæ Rutupina per aequora puppes
Dicam
.....
Et tandem Armoricos Britonum sub lege colonos;
Tum gravidam Arturo fatali fraude Iŷgernem;
Mendaces vultus, assumptaque Gorlois arma,
Merlini dolus"

(2) Marmion:- Introduction to Canto I.

writing an Arthurian Epic, he did write a play King Arthur, or the British Worthy (1691). It is also very far removed from the genuine Arthurian tradition: it is really a kind of opera, and owed some of its attractions to the music composed by Purcell, and the ballet dances. In it the Arthurian traditions are very freely handled and it is, at most, a very artificial fairy tale, originally intended to glorify King Charles II. (1)

But although Milton and Dryden did not proceed beyond the intention with their plans for Arthurian epics, a lesser poet attacked the subject on an ambitious scale. Richard Blackmore, physician and knight, very active politically in the revolution that placed William III on the throne, and with less learning than he professed, and none of the poetic fire which he convinced himself he possessed, set himself the task of singing the exploits of Uther's son.

His Prince Arthur of 1695 in ten books was followed ten years later by King Arthur in twelve books. His own statement, concerning the latter, that it was written in odd moments of leisure, and therefore for the greater part in coffee-houses and while he was passing up and down the street, prompted Dryden's sneer :-

"At leisure hours in Epic song he deals,
Writes to the rumbling of his coach's wheels".

- And in the same poem (Prologue to the Pilgrim)

(1) Before the play could be performed, however, Charles II died, the revolution of 1688 drove James II into exile, and only three years after William and Mary had become sovereigns of England was it performed.

"All the former fustian stuff he wrote
was dead-born doggrel or is quite forgot".

The two poems are long, dull and prosy, and full of bathos, although not altogether devoid of merits in parts. Blackmore was even praised by Addison in The Spectator. The poems are not really intended to extol Arthur so much as to serve as a literary allegory in support of the Revolution and King William, for Blackmore was a pillar of the Whigs. He treated the subject quite historically, which treatment is fatal to its romantic qualities. It represents Arthur (William) as fighting against Oeta (James II). Ranged on William's side are the Christians (Protestants), while Oeta's followers, the heathens, represent the Catholics. Blackmore models his work on the Aeneid, using similar supernatural machinery as is found in the classic work. The Deity and the angels are the patrons of Arthur, while Lucifer and his hosts are the allies of the heathens. Treating the matter thus historically he selects Arthur's two most uninteresting campaigns, that have least to do with romance, supplemented with the furniture of contemporary politics and misapplied religion. "The result", says MacCallum, "is ephemeral fiction that is none the less fictitious for its formal and pompous gait".⁽¹⁾ No one reads Blackmore's Arthurian epics to-day.

There was, therefore, in the seventeenth century a fair volume of literary production inspired - or ostensibly inspired - by the figure of Arthur. In these works, however, the Arthurian tradition is mostly

(1) Op. cit., p. 158.

used for the purpose of political allegory, or call it poetic political pamphleteering.

The reason for this revival of interest in Arthur during the century, as reflected in its various literary fruits just noted, was the fact that around the question of the historicity of Arthur revolved the struggle of king against parliament or people, and the right of accession to the throne of England.

The Tudor monarchs exploited the Arthurian legends and Merlin's vague prophecies as proof of their right of accession, and of the divine right of kings as expounded by James I. Throughout the troubled history of England in this century - the struggle of parliament against king, the Puritan revolution, the short-lived Republic, and the Restoration - the question of the supposed descent of the Tudor kings from the British Arthur was a very burning political question, and the matière de Bretagne became political propaganda matter, to be exploited or detracted to the full by the rival parties, the claim being made by the Loyalists and refuted by the Parliamentarians. The former favoured Geoffrey and his British traditions of the Trojan origin of Arthur: the latter denied this origin. A more scientific approach to the study of history, and philological research into the nature of the Saxon tongue and the Saxon laws and charters prosecuted by the democratic parties, led to a rejection of Geoffrey's authority, as well as the discarding of the validity of a British origin for the English races. It was realized that the English peoples were more Saxon than British, and that Saxon law had to be defended against the autocracy of the Tudor kings of

"Arthurian lineage".⁽¹⁾

That the noble Arthurian matter should be so abused for political gain would seem to be the lowest condition of degradation of the legend, which could hardly be surpassed, and yet it was to sink still lower in the next literary work that utilizes Arthurian matter.

The first decades of the eighteenth century saw the development of the English novel. It was an age of prose, an age that exalted common sense as the idol of culture, and it paid little heed to the spiritual or the picturesque. Everything that smacked of the Middle Ages was alien to the spirit of the time.

Anything mediaeval or romantic was called "Gothic", which was partially a term of reproach, meaning barbarous. The best work of the period is to be found in the novel and the subjects for novels were limited to the careers of ordinary human beings. The typical hero of imaginative fiction is not now King Arthur, but Tom Jones. To this age the personages of Arthurian tradition could not appear other than ludicrous, and so, when the Arthurian subject is again handled, it is handled very roughly by Fielding in a satirical play The Tragedy of Tragedies, or the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great (1730). It is a neat parody of former and contemporary tragedies of the ranting bombastic type, and contained cunning political

(1) Roberta F. Brinkley: Arthurian Legend in the Seventeenth Century. Johns Hopkins Monographs in Literary History III, Baltimore; London and Oxford, 1932, gives a full and painstaking account of Arthurian controversies and literature in the seventeenth century.

allusions and many malicious thrusts at English statesmen of the time.

In his play Fielding represents Tom Thumb as begotten by Merlin's art to be the glory of Arthur's court and the defender of the realm. Arthur's spouse in this play is not called Guenever but has the absurd name of Dollalolla, and she has fixed her passion not on Lancelot but on Tom. After his mighty achievements in quelling the rebellion of Arthur's subjects Tom meets with an unheroic death - as Merlin had prophesied - by being devoured by a cow, no doubt taken accidentally with a mouthful of juicy grass. Such burlesque of the noble Arthurian memory is surely the last word in the degradation of the legend. Fielding thus makes use of Arthur in connection with the children's story of Tom Thumb. Other nursery-tale heroes, too, such as Jack the Giant Killer about this time were promoted to the ranks of Arthur's Knights and the Arthurian Legend is at its lowest ebb in this first quarter of the eighteenth century when "King Arthur was laid up in the humble Avallon of juvenile fiction, the best he could find, till he should be healed of the grievous wound that the rationalism of the period had dealt him, and return once more to gladden the hearts of his Britons".⁽¹⁾

But after the ebb the tide turns to its flow, and the fortunes of Arthur, too, began to revive. In the latter half of the eighteenth century that movement had its birth which is known as the Revival of Romance. It was initiated by what may be called "The Revival of

(1) MacCallum: Op. cit., p. 167.

Interest in the Mediaeval".

The archaic fabrications of Macpherson (1760) and Chatterton (1764) excited great attention, and taste began to turn eagerly to that kind of literature that only a decade or two before would have been dismissed as "barbarous". Arthur, too, in the general interest now taken in the romantic, mediaeval or "Gothic" past, was given a new lease of life and provided new interest for Englishmen in the old ballads that were exhumed and resuscitated by Bishop Percy in his Reliques of Ancient Poetry. His volume, compiled from the old MS. he discovered and edited and had published (1768), contains, besides a critical essay on the origins of the mediaeval metrical romances of chivalry, the following ballads dealing with Arthurian matter, that had their origin in the fifteenth century which, besides Malory's book, had offered so little fresh and new on the subject :-

Sir Lancelot du Lake; The Boy and the Mantle
(theme - chastity test); The Marriage of Sir
Gawaine (theme - the "Fier Baiser" - The
Dangerous Kiss); King Ryence's Challenge;
King Arthur's Death; The Legend of King
Arthur.

It was not always the old unsophisticated ballads that Bishop Percy offered his public. Many of them were, according to his notes, in a mutilated state in his old MS., and these he did not hesitate to amend and complete. Yet others he chose to prune and polish according to his own judgment, and using his editorial prerogatives to smooth down the roughnesses of

what seemed to him in many cases to be the rude form of these old poems. He could, alas, not altogether disassociate himself from the perverted taste of the Augustan age which would not be able to stomach such primitive and uncouth stuff, and he had to make it palatable to the enlightened taste of his own times.

"He adulterated his ballads", says Saintsbury, "but he knew no better". One could hardly thus early expect the true piety and genuine antiquarian interest of modern editing, which is unwilling to tamper with old original matter, and, on the contrary, tries to preserve all the freshness and charm and even faults and rudeness of the originals.

Yet, unwarranted and uncritical as his tamperings, and 'improvements' may have been, his volume bears abundant proof that he was really in sympathy with, and fond of, these rude specimens of old romantic narrative, and he is the first true lover of Arthurian matter after Malory and before Scott.

The romantic tide was flowing apace now and the way was being prepared for a triumphal return of the old champion Arthur to the lists of literature. Gray's The Bard (1757), and Evan Evans' Some Specimens of the Ancient Welsh Bards (1764) were signposts of the faint Arthurian track. All the romantic works from the Ossian onwards were the forerunners of Scott's truer mediaeval romantic essays in Marmion and The Lay of the Last Minstrel, while Walpole's extravaganza The Castle of Otranto was merely an awkward adumbration of the more genuine mediaevalism of The Talisman and Ivanhoe. To this same time of the seventeen-sixties

belongs the critical work of Richard (later Bishop) Hurd in Letters on Chivalry and Romance.

Thus in the novel, in poetry, and in criticism we see the later "classical" age groping back uncertainly to the inspiration of the chivalrous age: the age of naturalism stretching forth a hand of kinship to the age of fantasy and romance.

Thomas Wharton wrote a literary criticism which is not devoid of interest and value. In his Observations on the Faerie Queene (1754) he had discussed Spenser's indebtedness to the Arthurian story, and in his meritorious History of English Poetry (1774) he was the first Arthurian critic and student of origins. His poem, the Grave of King Arthur (1777), too, is no mean piece of work. He also wrote two sonnets, one on the Round Table at Winchester and the other on Stonehenge, that indicate his genuine interest in the old matter.

The publication of various collections of ballads and romances also made people more familiar with the old romantic themes. Among these are two made by that stormy petrel, the antiquarian, crank, and spelling reformer Joseph Ritson, so famous for his amusing polemical battle with Bishop Percy. His compilations are: Collection of English Songs (1783), and Ancient English Metrical Romances (1802). There also appeared Lewis's Tales of Wonder (1801), and Ellis's Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances (1805). All these collections are at once proof of the revival of interest in romantic things - an interest which belonged to the general romantic movement of

the time - and books that served to arouse still further the interest in mediaeval matters.

John Leyden felt the fascination of the Arthurian theme (Scenes of Infancy, 1803) but left the enterprise to a mightier inspiration than his own, namely that of his friend Walter Scott. For all these tentative essays in handling the Arthurian legend, as a subject for both poetry and criticism, were to be given much greater impetus by the work, both poetical and critical, of Sir Walter Scott. His mediaevalism was a master passion in his nature, and as a mature writer he wrote with all the enthusiasm and zest of a boyish adventurer daring forth on the magic seas of romance. We know to-day that Scott's reconstructions of the past were often faulty and full of glaring anachronisms but we must allow him the indulgence we give to all pioneers in a particular field of study. He more than any other man helped to create the interest that led to further more scholarly researches and sounder results.

"He not only had a large vision of the field of inquiry that has since been parcelled out to a crowd of day labourers, but with relatively scanty materials and defective apparatus he obtained results on which later specialists have built". (1)

It was inevitable that he should feel the attraction and power of the Arthurian romances and that he should attempt something in the same tradition.

I have said that his Marmion and Lay of the Last Minstrel were his first attempts in the direction of mediaeval romance. The former incidentally shows

(1) MacCallum: Op. cit., p. 181.

true appreciation of the worth of the Arthurian legend and a prophetic vision of its inspiration of later poets :-

"The mightiest Chiefs of British song
scorn'd not such legends to prolong". (1)

His Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border (1802-1803) is no less a valuable anthology than the Reliques in the development of the Romantic revival. But he made a more direct contribution to romance: In 1805 he edited the old metrical romance of Sir Tristrem, and since it was defective, he supplied the final episode to the MS. narrative with a love and delicate tact entirely unlike the blundering tinkering of Bishop Percy.

His own original essay on matter with an Arthurian background is the Bridal of Triermain or The Vale of St. John (1813) in which the part of the tale that serves as prologue to the main narrative tells of events in Arthur's time.

Scott's work inspired his friend Reginald Heber to two attempts in this direction. His Morte Arthur (1812) shows the influence of Spenser. He leaves the allegory out and keeps far closer to the mediaeval framework than Spenser, but like Spenser he is attracted to the marvels and errantry of the Arthurian story and not the quintessence of its spirit: the darker aspects of the tradition are omitted or toned down. The story of Modred's origin and Guenever's guilt are completely altered. Morgan le Fay is the evil genius who causes all the trouble and the

(1) Marmion: Introduction to Canto I.

whole becomes little more than an elfin tale of glamour and enchantment.

He also wrote another piece, The Masque of Guendolen - a drama rather than a masque, which combines the ballad of Sir Gawain's Marriage with the history of Merlin, and is a picturesque and agreeable play.

Yet with all the mediaevalism and romanticism of Scott and his school, there was in all these works more interest in the facts and externals than in the ideal and spirit of Romance in general, and the Arthurian legend in particular: it is pageantry rather than real representation.

Southey was the next poet, and great poetic tale-spinner, who might have made something of romance. Indeed he executed an excellent translation and abridgement of the Spanish Amadis de Gaul, while an edition of Malory was also published under his name (1817), for which he had written a preface but had not otherwise edited. But, on the whole, the crude and chaotic Celtic materials of the Arthurian story did not attract him as much as did other more exotic subjects.

Disappointing, too, is the fact that the great spirits of the Romantic revival - Byron, Shelley and Keats - with their passionate and revolutionary romanticism, did not attempt the Arthurian story. Rather were they attracted to the less remote romance of the Orient in their own poems of passion and romance. A tentative explanation for this neglect of the matter of Arthurian romance by these high priests of the romantic narrative will be advanced in the final Chapter of Conclusions.

The "Celtic Revival" or Celtic cult as forerunner and part of the Romantic Revival, which had begun with Gray's The Bard and Evans's Specimens of the Ancient Welsh Bards, continued throughout the years. Some old Welsh poems were collected and printed, with the Triads noted above that preserve so many important Arthurian traditions, in the Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales (1801 - 1807). In 1838 appeared Lady Charlotte Guest's Mabinogion which is a very creditable piece of pioneering in the study of old Celtic materials, for her copious notes testify to untiring research in unearthing, especially, the old Arthurian traditions and legends, and following up folk-lore, mythological and topographical references in this collection of ancient Welsh stories.

In 1839 Sir Frederick Madden published his great collection of romances relating to Gawain for the Bannatyne Club. Matthew Arnold's enthusiastic Lectures on the Study of Celtic Literature (1867), although shaky in its premises and facts, did much to stimulate the interest and increase knowledge on the matter. It still remains an invigorating piece of writing for which Celtic scholars are yet grateful.

The critical study of Celtic materials in the Arthurian legend was to culminate in the work of Alfred Nutt and John Rhys, and the European Celtic scholars, such as M. D'Arbois de Jubainville.

General interest in the Arthurian legend is seen in the many editions of Malory that were issued throughout the century, mostly with critical notes and other informative matter: it appeared twice in 1816

(the first editions since 1634), and also in 1817, 1856, 1866, 1868, 1889 - 91, 1893 - 4, 1897, 1900, 1921. The greatest edition was the one of Dr. H. Oskar Sommer, 1889, in three volumes: Vol. I Text; Vol. II Glossary, Index, etc.; Vol. III Study of the Sources.⁽¹⁾

An interesting and unusual way of treating early Welsh traditions of the time of the birth of the Arthurian legend is to be found in some of the series of brilliant and ironical tales dealing with the antiquities and legends of Wales, by Thomas Love Peacock (1785 - 1866). There is, however, little occasion and less space here to pause awhile and examine these interesting short novels of his. We must merely mention that he was a scholar, and what is more, a clever man, who combined his store of British and classical knowledge with tales of a witty and satirical nature, in which he treated the age in which he lived, with its theories, its great men and its social problems, with polite ridicule, as in Headlong Hall, Crotchet Castle and Gryll Grange. He also had a vein of delicate imagination which he displayed in the fanciful Maid Marian.

But the one work which best and most completely combines his powers of sarcasm with his grace of fancy and his scholarship, and withal handles Arthurian matter, is his Misfortunes of Elphin (1829).

The plot he combines from the story of the mythical bard Taliessin and the abduction of Guenever by Melwas. It is a genuine antiquarian study, and was

(1) Vinaver: Malory, does not think highly of Sommer's researches and conclusions: his own - naturally - are more penetrating and correct!

written as a vehicle for the translation of many old Welsh poems and triads, containing, among other good things, the famous War Song of Dynas Vawr.

In this work Peacock did one important thing. Although he made no attempt to produce an illusion of the imagination, to retell a genuine and convincing old tale - for the tone of outrageous banter is too obvious - he did show that it was possible to treat the old matter in a modern spirit and yet retain for it the ancient stage. This brings us back to the remarks made earlier in this study concerning Malory's treatment of the Arthurian legend. It will be remembered that we noted (p. 254) that a lesser writer, when treating old and serious matter, can easily fall into the fault of parodying it or becoming artificial. In Peacock the irony never becomes burlesque and he is too respectful of and in love with his sources to handle them rudely. In this respect there is a great difference between the Misfortunes of Elphin and Mark Twain's A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur which is not so entirely alien in spirit and intention to the former work as might superficially be judged.

The later work of the American author also sets out at first to ridicule the institutions of chivalry much as Don Quixote would lash the foolishness of the decadent mediaeval romances; it is also, in the beginning, full of a gentle raillery at the social order of feudal times as Maid Marian is. But as his tale proceeds Mark Twain's abhorrence of class distinctions, with its attendant exploitation of the suppressed classes, rises to an indignation which almost

destroys the fun and good-natured burlesque of the earlier parts. In the later parts he seems to be embarrassed with the characters and the situation he has created and the end is scrambled and weak. The Yankee is, nevertheless, a readable novel with a serious moral purpose if carefully read, and not the mere extravagant burlesque it is usually adjudged to be.⁽¹⁾

But whereas Peacock retains a calmness and equanimity like that of the trained fighter who keeps his good-humour lest he be betrayed into the carelessness engendered by loss of temper, Mark Twain's noble rage, as of a bull-headed pugilist, causes him to slip in the plan of his story, and in order to avoid becoming too serious and moral he piles on the parody and farce so that the tale remains a crude caricature and comes dangerously near to being unconvincing. It is therefore neither pure and unadulterated fun, nor an effective social sermon, and misses the truth and effectiveness of the picture as drawn by the more subtle artist Peacock.

Another American Arthurian burlesque that pokes gentle fun at Chivalry is Eugene Field's Proper Trewe Idyll of Camelot. An earlier satiric treatment of Arthurian legend had been the poem The Monks and the Giants (1817) of John Hookham Frere (of Anti-Jacobin fame) which was a skit on the external characteristics of romance, much in the spirit of Don Quixote. Like the latter work, however, the satire did not strike at

(1) I cannot agree with Mr. (Dr.?) Maynadier who thinks, and calls, the Yankee "unintelligent and disagreeable". Arthur of the English Poets, p. 401. MacCallum, too, is less than just.: *Op. cit.*, p. 288.

the root of Arthurian romance, for Frere was himself a man not of unromantic cast of mind.

To return to the poetry of the Romantic Revival. Many stray references scattered through his poems show that Wordsworth too, and almost in spite of himself, was attracted by old romantic themes, although his wisdom kept him to the paths he was best fitted to tread, and to the carrying out of his particular task in the kind of poetry wherein his chief strength lay. This was with the romance that lurks in common life, and that mirrors itself in the sights and sounds of Nature -- scenes and thoughts of a philosophical and meditative nature reflected in tranquillity. Not for him the marvel of fantasy, the excitement of sword-play and the wonder of enchantment, but rather the commonplace, the joys and sorrows of the little things of reality. It is almost ridiculous to think of the serious and intense author who found inspiration in such subjects as Goody Blake, The Idiot Boy, and even of the larger things such as Resolution and Independence, singing of knights and ladies, and serpents and charms and all the fantastic to-do of mediaeval romantic adventure.

Yet even the Wordsworth who in Peter Bell disclaimed for himself all share in the marvels of romance betrays himself into honest enthusiasm for the adventurous and romantic in the lines :-

"Sometimes the ambitious power of choice, mistaking
Proud Spring-tide swellings for a regular sea,
Will settle on some British theme, some old
Romantic tale by Milton left unsung;
More often turning to some gentle place
Within the groves of Chivalry, I pipe
To shepherd swains, or, seated harp in hand,

Amid reposing knights by a river side
Or fountain, listen to the grave reports
Of dire enchantments faced and overcome
By the strong mind, and tales of warlike feats,
Where spear encountered spear, and sword with sword
Fought, as if conscious of the blazonry (1)
That the shield bore, so glorious was the strife".

And so even he whose fancy turned, outside the narrow circle of the English village and countryside, rather to the classical themes as in Laodomia, succumbed at last (when he was over sixty years old), to the glamour of a romantic theme in writing his poem The Egyptian Maid (1835), in which the names and persons are derived from Arthurian story.

The story of this semi-lyrical poem is that of a maid who is wrecked on the shores of Britain through Merlin's magic, and who can be called out of her death-like trance only by her destined husband. Various knights among Arthur's greatest make the trial but only Galahad succeeds, and in the "happy ending" this celibate marries the Egyptian maid!

Wordsworth had the right feeling for the subject, as is shown by the quotation above, and other references in his poems. But this poem is clumsily moral. The Egyptian Maid personifies purity, and is the destined bride of the purest knight of the Round Table, namely the ascetic Galahad. This is such a fundamental and unwarranted change in an Arthurian character as one would expect only from the age of prose and reason, for Wordsworth's temper, says Dr. Margaret Reid⁽²⁾ "was not romantic in the sense of idealizing

(1) The Prelude, Bk. I.

(2) M.J.C. Reid: The Arthurian Legend, p. 44.

the historic past". Philosophic as he was he did not penetrate deeply enough into the legend to find its symbolic and cosmic meaning. "Legend, as legend, had no power to arouse the mysticism of his nature. So the poem remains as a rather clumsy attempt to tell an unconvincing story in an artificial manner". (1)

Another poem which sadly misses striking the genuine romantic note, because the story is so freely handled that only the names of the characters and places remain, is Edward Bulwer Lytton's King Arthur, An Epic in Twelve Books (1848). Appearing after the Mabinogion Sir Frederick Madden's Gawain and other fruits of Arthurian scholarship and research, Lytton's Arthur is strangely foreign in spirit, and is Arthurian only in name.

Omitting for the time being the work of Arnold, Morris, Swinburne and Tennyson for fuller treatment in the next chapter, the chronological note of Arthurian poets includes now some minor poets who were influenced by the ideals of the Pre-Raphaelites. The first of these was Robert Stephen Hawker (Quest of the Sangraal, 1863).

Various "movements", deliberate or unpremeditated were inspired directly by the Romantic revival. Of these the "Mediaeval revival", though never a conscious and organised activity by a school or group, was most far-reaching, and worked like a leaven through the literary and cultural consciousness of the nation. One need hardly cite the deepening attraction felt by many

(1) M.J.C. Reid: Op. cit., p. 78.

towards the mysticism, stability and unity of mediaeval religion, with its visible manifestation in the Oxford movement that so deeply affected Anglican Church leaders like Keble, Manning and Newman, to name only three.

It is a far cry from the Apologia pro Vita Sua to the Blessed Damozel, but the same thought inspired both works, the same nostalgia for the mystic glamour of the Middle Ages, as something more stable and enduring than could be found in the modern time.

This mediaevalism in art, literature, and religion, is best represented in the ideals and work of the Pre-Raphaelite group, and one part of the group's work was that devoted to reflecting the romance and enchantment of Chivalry and the Arthurian legend. In this respect we have the purely mediaeval work, small in quantity but of a singularly precious quality, of William Morris: we will examine it fully in the next chapter. Swinburne, too, although never an active member of the Brotherhood was influenced by its faith and its leader Rossetti. Also his Arthurian poems will be discussed below. The artists John Everett Millais and, to a greater extent, Edward Burne-Jones have left many paintings in which the subjects are drawn from the Arthurian legend, though they, and Tennyson, have inspired a host of other later nineteenth-century painters of Arthurian pictures.

Hawker inherited something of the true mediaeval spirit of the Pre-Raphaelites. Unlike them, however, he was inspired by the ascetic religious zeal of the Middle Ages, rather than by the delight in its picturesque beauty which William Morris took. As the

vicar of a remote Cornish parish he shows in his work how his natural instinct was stimulated by Cornish traditions and legends. His Quest of the Sangraal,⁽¹⁾ of which he, unfortunately, completed only the first Chant, has a certain Hebraic flavour and is redolent of the mystical fervour which gradually came to pervade his life and thought.⁽²⁾ He describes how four champions, Lancelot, Perceval, Tristan and Galahad set out on the quest to the north, south, west and east respectively. His lines have a manly and vigorous ring, with much movement and dignity; as in the opening lines :-

"Ho for the Sangraal, vanished vase of Heaven,
That held like Christ's own heart an hin of blood:
Ho for the Sangraal!" How the merry shout
Of reckless riders on the rushing steeds
Smote the loose echo from the drowsy rock
Of grim Dundegal, thron'd along the sea!"⁽³⁾

His knights are of rather sterner stuff than the knights of mediaeval romance :-

Now feast and festival in Arthur's hall:
Hark, stern Dundegal softens into song:
They meet for solemn severance, Knig'.. King,
Where gate and bulwork darken o'er the sea.
Strong men for meat and warriors at the wine,
They wreak the wrath of hunger on the beeves,
They rend rich morsels from the savoury deer,
And quench the flagon like Brunguillie dew.
Hear! how the minstrels prophesy in sound,⁽⁴⁾
Shout the King's waashael, and drinkhael the Queen!

This is splendid stuff: this is Celtic. It cannot be regretted too much that Hawker did not complete the

(1) R.S. Hawker: Cornish Ballads and other Poems, 1869: Quest of the Sangraal.

(2) He greatly mourned the death of his wife. A few hours before his own death he was admitted into the Roman Catholic faith.

(3) Quest of the Sangraal.

(4) Idem.

fragment.

Only a few years later another man almost as mediaeval in temper as Hawker and Morris, William Westwood (the friend of Charles Lamb and a later disciple of Izaak Walton) wrote two Arthurian poems that are also true to the old spirit of the legend: The Sword of Kingship (1866) and The Quest of the Sancgreall, (1868). His poems are more charming than many of the other minor nineteenth-century poems because he keeps to the original versions of the stories, as told in Malory. The influence of Tennyson (who influenced to a greater or lesser measure most of the minor poets, especially those who essayed Arthurian subjects -- five of the Idylls had appeared by 1868 and eleven by 1872) is clearly seen in these lines from Westwood's Quest :-

So evermore the months drew to a close;
The apple ripened to its ruddy prime;
The pear dropped, golden, in the orchard grass;
Athwart the gusty sky long flights of storks,
With whirl of wing and noisy clap of beak,
Passed southward ... still no tidings, and the
queen,
At midnight kneeling in her oratory,
A "mea culpa!" quivering on her lips
A "mea maxima culpa!" heard the bells
Roll forth their brazen clangour o'er the world,
Ring out the old year, welcome in the New. (1)

There are quite a fair number of minor poems by writers who wrote so little that they are now scarcely remembered, poems that were inspired directly or indirectly by the example of the Tennyson, and also show the greater poet's influence. We can make the barest mention of them. Of the best of these are G.A. Simcox's Farewell to Ganore and Gawain and the Lady of

(1) Quest of the Sancgreall, quoted by Maynadier, Op. cit., p. 369.

Avalon (both 1869), and F. Millard's Tristram and Iseult (1870). At the end of the century and much more modern in treatment is the remarkable Last Ballad (1899) of John Davidson, which we have already noted (p. 228 supra). At this time, too, the Arthurian matter was once more dramatically handled in the plays of J. Comyns Carr, namely King Arthur⁽¹⁾ and Tristram and Iseult.

Beyond the borders of Great Britain, too, poets were writing poetry based on Arthurian romance. Early in the century the American James Russell Lowell first attempted to treat the old matter in the modern spirit with an original theme in his Vision of Sir Launfal (1845). It teaches anew the old moral story that true charity consists of love and not alms given from a sense of duty. Sir Launfal before setting out from Arthur's court on the quest of the Holy Grail has a vision. When he departs he flings a few coins to a leper outside the castle, from a mere sense of duty. When he returns much later, disillusioned because he has failed to achieve his quest, he has learnt true humility. He again finds the beggar there. This time he shares his single crust of bread with the unfortunate, and gives him water to drink from a wooden bowl.

'Twas a mouldy crust of coarse brown bread,
'Twas water out of a wooden bowl, --
yet with fine wheaten bread was the leper fed,
And 'twas red wine he drank with his thirsty
soul'. (2)

The leper is transfigured into the image of Christ who tells Launfal that the Holy Grail is there

(1) See also p. 298 infra.

(2) Quoted by Maynadier: Op. cit., p. 381.

in the wooden bowl. So he learns that the Grail does not need to be sought but is right there for him at any time that he bestows real charity. The verse is pedestrian in parts (as in the lines quoted), and the scenery is that of New England, yet the poem is not devoid of merit.

Ambitious in intention, if not so successful in the performance, was the plan of another American, Richard Hovey, to write an Arthurian "poem in dramas". He had planned to tell the whole Arthurian story but completed only four works: two masques, The Quest of Merlin and Taliesin, and two five-act dramas The Marriage of Guenevere and The Birth of Galahad. These have none of them more than the average merit of minor works.

In Australia, too, A.L. Gordon in The Rhyme of Joyous Garde (1868) depicted Lancelot's remorse.

At the end of the century and the beginning of the present one mediaeval romance and more particularly the legends of Arthurian romance, under the influence of Tennyson's poetry and also Wagner's operas - which had by this time all been presented in England, as well as on the continent -- were still interesting the minds of the public and the scholars, English and European. In the transactions of Folk-lore Societies Mr. Alfred Nutt, Miss Jessie L. Weston and others were delving deeply into the Celtic and Scandinavian mythologies. European scholars were brilliantly editing the mediaeval manuscripts that had long lain dust-covered in various libraries, and a host of writers of greater or lesser importance were hotly attacking or

defending the various theories on the origins of Arthurian romance in the literary journals or independently published monographs. It is truly remarkable what a great spate of critical works flowed from the printing presses from about 1880 to about 1910.

After the first decade of the new century, however, Tennyson's reputation suffered a temporary eclipse when it became fashionable to detract his Victorian correctness, and the Idylls of the King were allowed to lapse into disfavour. This was due partly to the natural reaction that set in after the period of intense popularity of his work, and partly to the new spirit of a new age - the Edwardian. The intense activity in Arthurian research had also reached its peak and begun to decline, and since then studies devoted to origins and sources and other critical questions have been few. I have been able to trace, in English, a meagre dozen critical works, including two text editions, from 1920 to date.⁽¹⁾

Yet throughout the golden thread of Arthurian poetry has continued unbroken in English Literature. There has been a steady production of Arthurian poetry to the present day. But since the beginning of this century two aspects of the matter have come to the fore. Firstly, there is the attraction that the immortal story of the love of Tristan and Iseult seems to have for modern poets to the exclusion almost of other Arthurian themes. Secondly, there is what seems to be the

(1) See Bibliography. The two text editions to which I refer are J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, O.U.P., 1925, and Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones: The Mabonigion, Dent Everyman, 1949.

conclusion of the poets that the dramatic form is the fittest method of treatment of the legend.

The important dissertation of Miss M.J.C. Reid, The Arthurian Legend, Comparison of treatment in Modern and Mediaeval Literature, (1938) is the only recent critical work I have been able to find that gives a commentary and criticism of twentieth century Arthurian poetry (up to the year of publication of her book). Where her subject-matter is so wide and treatment so ample it is difficult to indicate the quality of her work in such short space as we have.

She traces the treatment of all the legends belonging to the various branches of the composite legend in modern English poetry from the appearance of Malory's Morte D'Arthur (1485) to the present day (1938, as above). She also examines all the modern poetry on separate characters, apart from Arthur and the Arthurian legend as a whole, such as Gawain, Merlin, Lancelot, Balin, Tristan, and related subjects such as the Holy Grail and the Wagner operas.

So she contributes a "study on the literary value of myth and legend". She shows how the revival of folk-tales in Ireland, for example, is part of an Irish national movement felt in the domain of literature and politics. The Arthurian legend, however, does not play a similar part for the English. She comes to the rather disillusioned conclusion that Arthurian legend is "likely to hold in some measure its place in English literature as embodying romantic ideals and aspirations. But so far Arthurian legend, except perhaps the Grail Legend and that of Tristan,

has appeared unsuitable to modern conditions, and so has not fulfilled its high promise or been adequately represented in English literature".⁽¹⁾

Her analysis of twentieth century Arthurian poetry is useful, and the only criticism of the kind so far. She has unearthed and discussed the following particular works :-

POEMS:

Laurence Binyon: Tristram's End (1913)

the American

E.A. Robinson : Merlin (1917) and Tristram (1928)

A "Poetic drama" by Gordon Bottomley:
Merlin's Grave (1925)

PLAYS (all in verse) :-

J. Comyns Carr : Tristram and Iseult (1906)

Michael Field (Katherine H. Bradley and Edith E. Cooper) : The Tragedy of Pardon (1911)

and: Tristan de Leonnois (1911).

Arthur Symons : Tristan and Iseult (1917)

Thomas Hardy : The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall at Tintagel in Lyonesse (1923)

Laurence Binyon : Arthur (1923)

John Masefield : Tristan and Isolt (1927).

NOVEL:

J.C. Powys : The Glastonbury Legend (1933).

(Comyns Carr had also written another drama, King Arthur in 1895). It will be noted that of the twelve works listed here no less than seven deal with the

(1) Reid: Op. cit., p. 263.

Tristan legend; the Tragedy of Pardon also treats the Tristan story).

It is clear how the Tristan story has captured the imagination of modern poets. Because it is a story of passion but not of courtly romance (except in so far as some of the later trouvères worked elements of the amour courtois into it) it has more attraction for modern taste than the Lancelot story on which mediaeval writers lavished their inventive powers.

This is at once a pointer to the reason why the Arthurian legend has not been found fit matter for inspiration by the more modern writers. Modern thought and taste call for modern treatment of the matter, and of the old romances with their load of artificial sentiment and fantastic adventure only the Tristan - which is a purer theme that is sufficient in itself without the support of adventitious ornamentation - lends itself to modern treatment: it is a story essentially of spiritual conflict, such as the writers of our time love to analyse and portray.

And yet, in my opinion, the Tristan story is not the best part of the Arthurian legend. It is and remains, after all, only a story of lawless passion. Despite its undoubted beauties and merits -- the portrayal of deathless love, faith that is proof against all obstacles and trials, the conflict in Tristan's mind between honour and faithfulness -- in spite of all these it is ethically of very little value. It is my conviction - one may even call it my critical creed - that poetry (literature) if it is to be of any permanent value, must contain in itself the eternal moral

truths: it must teach some lesson, and this, (see above Chapter V, p.119 footnote) I believe, even the most subjective lyric can do. From this point of view I feel that the Lancelot story, and more especially the Arthur story -- even with its repulsive incest motif -- with its tremendous tragic significance, lends itself much better to worthy literary treatment. I shall develop these thoughts further in the Conclusion to this essay.

CHAPTER XI: The Arthur of the
great Victorians.

"There, too, we read of Spenser's fairy themes,
And those that Milton loved in youthful years;
The sage enchanter Merlin's subtle schemes;
The feats of Arthur and his knightly peers."

William Wordsworth: Artegall and Elidure.

"Isôt ma drûe, Isôt m'amie,
En vûs ma mort, en vûs ma vie!"

Gottfried von Strassburg: Tristan.



Gleam in 1389.

HE one great poet of modern times who has written most and best on Arthurian themes is Tennyson, whose Arthurian poems were produced over a period of half-a-century, between the publication of The Lady of Shalott in 1833 and that of Merlin and the

During this time however two other great poets, Matthew Arnold and William Morris, wrote poems on Arthurian subjects, while towards the end of the century Swinburne, too, appeared in the Arthurian lists. But before and after them Tennyson wrote, so that he is anterior to them in point of time and yet later too, owing to the long period and the extent of his production in this field. So, while their work is inferior both in volume and quality to his, it is perhaps best, first, rapidly to note their work before pausing rather longer to examine Tennyson's greater achievement in the matter of the Arthurian legend.

MATTHEW ARNOLD (1822 - 1888) is the first poet whom we note. Perhaps a greater critic than poet, he wrote early and wrote little. His poetical work was received with indifference and met with neglect. His work, or some of it, especially the elegiac part, is exquisite, but the whole is of limited range. In his poetical method he is essentially classical as he was by nature an ardent Hellenist, and by inclination anti-romantic. In quality and style his poetry is calm, stately, subdued and cold - almost statuesque.

He wrote one poem only on an Arthurian theme - Tristram and Iseult, which appeared in the Volume Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems in 1852.

In it he chooses to describe, not the great passion itself in its highest moments, but the close of the passionate life, and he ends with a warning of the fate which overtakes the man who fails to govern his passions. The poem though noble in spirit fails in essential emotion. It is of a piece with the subdued colour and melancholy reflective nature of the rest of his work. It was perhaps an unfortunate choice of subject this for him, with its tale of a stormy love so unsuited to his nature. Shelley, yes, might have done justice to it - perhaps as much as Swinburne was to do to it later, but Arnold could not infuse into it the intense feeling and sensuousness which the subject demanded.

He wrote it in three parts which have respectively as their central figure Tristan, Iseult of Ireland and Iseult of Brittany. It is dramatic in form and quality.

The dying Tristan lies in Brittany waiting for the ship that is to bring to him the first Iseult - La Beale Isoud - that she might perhaps nurse him back to health. The main narrative and commentary, in seven- and eight-syllabled lines of great movement, is interspersed with shorter passages in heroic couplets representing Tristan's fevered dreams and the memories that well up and crowd upon his mind.

It is a chastened and domestic Tristan, with two children by his lawful mate, Iseult of the White Hands, that now lies on his death-bed, a spent force.

Though this picture of him is incongruous to the old romance, the description here and in the third part, of the two children, is beautifully drawn :-

" - - - They sleep in shelter'd rest,
like helpless birds in their warm nest
on the Castle's southern side".

The poem does not follow the tradition that Tristan dies at the false report of Iseult's non-arrival. She does arrive, and in Part II they discuss their fatal love at length, the movement and rhythm of the poem now changing to four-lined stanzas. Contrary to the old tradition of an Iseult that, like Helen of Troy, can never grow old, Iseult is here represented as aged and faded, worn with passion and weary of life. And each offering the other belated comfort, the two lovers expire.

In Part III of the poem, a year later the sorrowing and fading lonely Iseult of Brittany is portrayed with her children - and how she tells them the tale of Merlin's enchantment by Vivien, from which, and

the poet's own comment, follows the moral of the man who is foolish enough to fall slave to his own passion.

The best part of the poem is the famous passage that gives a portrait of Iseult of Brittany after Tristan's death :-

"And now she will go home, and softly lay
Her laughing children in their beds, and play
Awhile with them before they sleep; and then
She'll light her silver lamp, which fishermen
Dragging their nets through the rough waves, afar
Along this iron coast, know as a star,
And take her broidery frame, and there she'll sit
Hour after hour, her gold curls sweeping it,
Lifting her soft-bent head only to mind
Her children, or to listen to the wind.
And when the clock peals midnight, she will move
Her work away, and, let her fingers rove
Across the shaggy brows of Tristram's hound
Who lies, guarding her feet, along the ground:
Or else she will fall to musing, her blue eyes
Fix'd, her slight hands clasp'd on her lap; then
rise;
And at her prie-dieu kneel until she have told
Her rosary beads of ebony, tipp'd with gold,
Then to her soft sleep: and to-morrow'll be
To-day's exact repeated effigy". (1)

Arnold's treatment of the matter of the old story, therefore, is very free and quite alien to the original, for he has modernised it. It is pleasant enough to read, and has beauty and pathos but it fails to move one very much, the most attractive parts being the description of the two children, in which respect it has very little affinity with the Arthurian legend, and might as well have been any other poem of a Victorian nature and setting. One cannot help feeling that the matter was not really congenial to Arnold's nature nor his powers.

Yet, Arnold, who was no admirer of romance

(1) Tristram and Iseult: 11. 76 - 95.

as such, was a keen student and admirer of Celtic literature - that is, the British matter of which he has written the sympathetic study noted in Chapter II above, and so, as a poet, he felt the attraction of the tale of these two Celtic lovers.

WILLIAM MORRIS (1834 - 1896) was totally opposed to Matthew Arnold in spirit and outlook. His mediaevalism which he expressed in his philosophy and the nature of his employments and literary productions is well-known, and his Arthurian essays are more satisfactory than Arnold's, and in certain respects they bear comparison with Tennyson's greater achievement. His mediaevalism was a much greater passion with him than is the case with any other poet of like temper, including - perhaps - Walter Scott, and throughout his long life he lived this romantic predilection of his. He himself said that he was "a dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time".

Even in his extreme youth the foundation was laid for those varied interests of his in the past which were later to be expressed in all his literary work. As a child he roamed the woods and fields, an errant knight in imagination. He accompanied his father on visits to old churches, monuments, cathedrals. The poems of his first volume breathe the atmosphere of mediaeval religious mysticism, of the dim vastness of arches and aisles, the mellow beauty of old paneling and stained glass windows. He was, throughout his life, a worshipper of beauty. His one great friend was the artist Burne-Jones. He became one of the main supporters and most active member of the

Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and came under the influence of men like Carlyle and Ruskin and especially Rossetti; in his youth his favourite reading had been Chaucer, Malory and the Scandinavian myths, while he was later also much impressed by Tennyson's poems, especially Maud and The Lady of Shalott. And even Browning's love for intricate situations and for swift ellipses of thought and language are traceable in The Defence of Guenevere. He himself became a poet and romancer, designer, decorator and craftsman. Being wealthy he was free to apply himself to his many and varied interests. For him the Middle Ages, when craftsmen took a pride and delight in creating beautiful things, was the ideal time, the only real and worth-while age. (1)

So steeped was he in mediaevalism that his poetry is much more real and convincing than that of any other poet, for he lived in those times in his imagination. He describes the middle ages with details as of things remembered from his own childhood. The detail of such poems as The Defence of Guenevere and King Arthur's Tomb is not the vague detail of earlier poets: it is all precise and described as if the poet were telling what he has seen with his own eyes.

It was inevitable that, apart from his main interest in the Norse Sagas to which the greatest part of his work belongs, he should be drawn to the matter of Arthurian romance.

(1) One of the many crafts he followed was that of printer, and at his Kelmscott Press published beautifully printed and bound books that rival the best mediaeval illuminated books in beauty and the loving care lavished upon their making.

His purely mediaeval works consist of shorter poems, some dramatic in form, others of the ballad type, based on subjects from the Arthurian romance, and other mediaeval themes. Examples of these we see in his first volume, The Defence of Guenevere and other Poems, (1858). Poems from this volume that are based on the Arthur legends are : The Defence of Guenevere, King Arthur's Tomb, Sir Galahad, and The Chapel in Lyonesse.

After having read these, it is inevitable that one should compare them with Tennyson's poems on the same subject. It has been said that Tennyson, being essentially a thorough representative of the nineteenth century, writes on the subject of the Middle Ages from the point of view of a nineteenth century outlook -- he infuses into his poems the atmosphere, the ideals and the morals of his own century. He makes of Arthur, not a typical representative of fourteenth century Chivalry, but rather a nineteenth century gentleman.

"He writes of the Court of King Arthur, as if it were an old tale worth exploiting by a modern civilized poet. For him it is a story of no time or place".⁽¹⁾ For Morris, on the other hand, it is not merely an apt subject around which to weave a story, but an intensely real period and background in which he is able to live and experience the spirit and passion of the people and their times. When he describes the emotion of Guenevere, he is not merely a sympathetic

(1) H. Clutton-Brock: The Life and Works of William Morris - p. 84.

poet who interprets very successfully the thoughts of a woman who once lived: he is Guenever.

For Morris it is a story of a time better than his own, not, of course, the real, legendary time of King Arthur, but the Middle Ages still familiar to Malory.

"The 'Idylls of the King' were as far as possible removed in spirit and manner from Morris's Arthurian pieces. While Tennyson's knights are gentlemen of the nineteenth century, Morris, alike in the Arthurian poems of this volume, and in those founded upon Froissart, and in all his later work in which the scene is laid in the Middle Ages, is genuinely and profoundly mediaeval. One of his most singular characteristics is that he seems always to have been more at home in distant and purely imaginary ages than he was in his own generation. His whole life is an attempt to revive the past; not to revive by slavishly copying, but as it were to reincarnate the spirit of the past. And it is at this point that his work as 'artist, manufacturer and socialist' touches his work as poet". (1)

The poems are not easy to read. They have not yet acquired the 'cantering facility' of the writer's later and longer works. They are confused and overcharged with emotion, there is a sort of breathless passion about them, owing, largely, of course, to the subject-matter.

Here are the opinions of three critics on this point.

Clutton-Brock says: " 'The Defence of Guenevere' and 'King Arthur's Tomb' are troubled and confused Morris has too much to say in them; he is like a child trying to tell a story and at the same time to express its own delighted interest in every detail of the story; and he becomes

(1) H. Walker: The Literature of the Victorian Era, p. 530.

both breathless and rambling in the effort. He is full of strange news about wonderful people in a wonderful world of his own discovery; and he tells it all as news, making no distinction of emphasis between one fact and another". (1)

Hugh Walker: "In this volume Morris has not completely 'found himself'; he is too much under the influence of Rossetti; and the burden of the Pre-Raphaelite symbolism cumbers his faculty for narrative". (2)

Oliver Elton: "The style varies; sometimes it is level and musical, lovely and temperate, as it is to be in most of Morris's poetry afterwards; more often it is condensed, full of abrupt transition and broken melodies which express tragical frustration or despair or defiance". (3)

Yet Elton is correct, I think, where he says that Morris is rough, not from inexperience but because his subjects call for discords. In the Defence of Guenevere he projects himself - better probably than any other poet except Shakespeare - into the mind and heart of a distraught queen.

Realization of her guilt, fear of the impending punishment and a sort of challenging condonation of her sin -- all these struggle in the impassioned utterance of the queen who is being judged. Naturally she will not deliver a calm, logical, reasoned defence as of a grave, impassive advocate at the bar of justice. She can only plead her great love which is her only justification. She wants these men, rough warriors who cannot understand her, to see, to realize how it is

(1) Op. cit., p. 84.

(2) Op. cit., p. 530.

(3) A Survey of English Literature 1830 - 1880;
London, Arnold, 1927, Vol. II, p. 35.

with her and Lancelot. To her their guilt is not guilt: it is a noble, wonderful, almost godlike innocence because there can be no wrong in their perfect love. She simply cannot realize that there is anything unclean or sinful, in their love. If it clashes with the laws of man and God, then it is the laws that are wrong, not their love.

There is the beautiful, arresting beginning of the poem:

"Her hand close to her mouth touching her cheek,
As though she had had there a shameful blow,
And feeling it shameful to feel ought but shame
All through her heart, yet felt her cheek burn so,
She must a little touch it;" (1)

Although she is the one who is being tried she remains dignified. What a beautiful, calm despair in :

"O Knights and lords, it seems but little skill
To talk of well-known things past now and dead.
God wot I ought to say, I have done ill,
And pray you all forgiveness heartily!"(2)

Yet, she feels, that that is not all there is to it. There is her side of the matter too: She gives the powerful comparison of the choice between the two cloths, and then -- the poignant cry at the wrong choice :-

"Ah Christ! If only I had known, known, known".

She appeals to Gawain, her chief accuser, to remember his own mother and to have pity. She pleads that he must not let her, Guenevere, haunt him, - in vain :-

(1) The Defence of Guenevere, ll. 3 - 7.

(2) Ibid., ll. 11 - 14.

"Ah! God of mercy, how he turns away!"

In Morris' poem we do not get real repentance on the part of Guenever. She persists in the sorry pretence that her relationship with Lancelot was purely platonic. Morris succeeds in making us feel sorry for a guilty woman who is defending herself and pleading, not because of the repentance of conviction, but rather from fear for well-merited punishment; he does not succeed in convincing me that Guenever had enough justification that I can condone her action.

Both Tennyson and Morris have tried to idealize the relationship existing between Guenever and Lancelot, but one is disillusioned if one goes to the original of Malory. Then one sees the unlovely intrigue in all its sordidness.

Those carresses described by Lancelot were not inspired by mere friendship only :-

" she would let me lie
And kiss her feet or, if I sat behind,
Would drop her hand and arm most tenderly,
And touch my mouth. And she would let me wind
Her hair around my neck, so that it fell
Upon my red robe
. till the bell
Of her mouth on my cheek sent a delight
Through all my ways of being;"(1)

Why, even over Arthur's tomb they feel the consuming temptation of their passion ... it is no blasphemy to cuckold a dead man !

" Guenevere, bend low
And kiss me once! for God's love kiss me!
.
Yea once, once for the last time kiss me, lest
I die".

(1) King Arthur's Tomb, ll. 41 - 49.

"Christ! my hot lips are very near his brow,
Help me to save his soul! -- Yea, verily,
Across my husband's head, fair Lancelot!
.... This thing we did while yet he was alive,
Why not, O twisting knight, now he is dead?" (1)

Knelt before the rood in her cell she harangues God,
alternately pleading for forgiveness and begging God to
overlook her sin. We can admire the genius in the
poetry of Morris but we lose patience with the Queen.
There is a childlike simplicity in the prayer Morris
puts into the mouth of Guenever, but her contradictions
are absurd :

"If even I go to hell, I cannot choose
But love you Christ, yea, though I cannot keep
From loving Launcelot; O Christ! must I lose
My own heart's love? see, though I cannot weep,
Yet am I very sorry for my sin;
Moreover, Christ, I cannot bear that hell,
I am most fain to love you, and to win
A place in heaven some time -- I cannot tell --
Speak to me, Christ! I kiss, kiss, kiss your
feet;
Ah! now I weep!" -- The maid said, "By the tomb
He waiteth for you lady,"

So Guenevere rose and went to meet him there".(2)

It is to be their last meeting, where Guene-
ver will refuse Lancelot even a last kiss: but it is a
meeting of two, who, drained of passion, separate too
late after the man they both loved and honoured is dead.
Like Guenever, we should all like to have our cake and
eat it! I must admit I like Tennyson's Guenever best.
She is only frail and human; one can at least pity her,
for she does try to make amends, while Morris's queen
is rather a hypocrite. Of course, one must realize

(1) King Arthur's Tomb, ll. 203 - 212.

(2) Ibid., ll. 173 - 185.

that Morris may not in these poems have attempted to give a justification or condonation of the lovers' actions.

Perhaps he may - more than any other modern poet - have succeeded in associating himself with that strange contradiction in mediaeval thought which we noted in discussing courtly love. In this event his Arthurian poems would be greater achievements than is generally realized from a superficial judgment.

In Sir Galahad - A Christmas Mystery the maiden knight is described as sitting in a forest shrine, brooding over all the knights he knows, including his father, who joy in doing brave deeds for the sake of the women they love, while for himself there is only the Quest of the Holy Grail. Then in a vision four ladies and two angels appear who arm him for his high quest and his earthly longings are stilled: he is at peace. Sir Bors, Sir Perceval and Perceval's sister appear and tell him that all the knights who set out to seek the Grail have died or come back foiled. Yet we know that Galahad will achieve the quest. This is a poem that presents a more human Galahad than Tennyson's saintly knight.

In The Chapel in Lyonesse Morris weaves a dream-like fragmentary mystery around a knight who is merely mentioned in Malory. The poem shows how receptive Morris was to suggestions and impressions, and how he could create an imaginative picture from an evocative suggestion. In other of his mediaeval ballad poems we too find lovely names :- "Miles and Giles and Isabeau, tall Jehane de Castel beau."

Although his other mediaeval poems do not treat of Arthurian themes they are so good that one cannot resist lingering over them awhile to savour his artistry.

In them Morris draws for us a very grim picture of the Middle Ages, such as we noted above (pp. 95 - 97). He does not limn his beloved period for us in soft, sentimental colours; the picture is stark and harsh, cruel, hard, intolerant. Most of the poems have tragic themes. He is at least true to his period: he is a realist and does not draw for us a romantic fairy-land.

There is an almost frightening grimness about Sir Peter Harpdon's End and The Haystack in the Floods. No unnatural 'deus ex machina' appears at the last moment to save the hero. The period is one when might was right and the good did not always triumph while evil was appropriately punished. By his matchless suggestive description Morris heightens the tragedy in his tales for the reader. In a poem like The Haystack in the Floods he exploits this characteristic of his of telling a story by suggestion. It is as if he tries to see how much he can tell by leaving it unsaid so that the reader must fill out the bare outline with his imagination. In this poem we get that unforgettable picture which is proof of Morris's power to describe detail from his remarkable observation :-

"And the wet dripp'd from every tree
Upon her head and heavy hair,
And on her eyelids broad and fair;
The tears and rain ran down her face".

There is the powerful rhetorical repetition :-

"Had she come all the way for this,
To part at last without a kiss?"

And then a little touch, a descriptive flash sandwiched into the narrative, that is more telling than reams of description -- so psychologically true and real, which only a master-hand and mind can give :-

"She laid her hand upon her brow,
Then gazed upon the palm, as though
She thought her forehead bled, and -- "No".
She said, and turned her head away,
As there were nothing else to say ..."

(cf. the similar action of Guenever above).

Truly in these poems Morris is revealed to us as the master of the telling phrase, the pregnant sentence --- a quality which he seems later to have lost in the voluminousness of his writing. These mediaeval poems are his exquisite miniatures, where his later works, the Scandinavian translations, are vast canvases, allowing only of broad treatment and not the deft touches of this earlier work. In these earlier poems he is still quotable; this he is no longer in his later long works.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE (1837 - 1909) was one of the first of a long succession of poets to treat the subject of the Tristan and Iseult story in a modern way, with his Tristram of Lyonesse (1882). The poem is written with all the lavish word-music of which this supreme word-master was capable. No one was better fitted than he to associate himself with the pathos and passion of this tale and tell it in all its passionate power.

He retold the better known and more poetical mediaeval version (in which Tristan dies before Iseult of Cornwall arrives in Brittany to heal him of his wounds), and has given all its main scenes. (He was well acquainted with French, and could read his sources in the original language). He does not aim at telling a swift and straightforward story. He takes the chief moments and lingers lovingly over them with his matchless descriptive and melodic gifts. Especially, and quite naturally, does he analyse and dilate at length on all the aspects of the passion of the two lovers, rather in the manner of, but with immeasurably greater artistry than, the old Provencal trouvères when they gave their exhaustive disquisitions on the amour courtois.

Where Tennyson in the plan of his Idylls had been able to do less than justice to this story, it is a matter for gratefulness that Swinburne should have turned his great poetic gifts to the task of telling the tale. Unlike the other and earlier poets he did not depart from the original traditions of the mediaeval romance, but kept very close to them. Long as his poem is he does not attempt to tell the whole story, but in the Prelude and the nine following Cantos he concentrates on the chief moments in the passion of the two lovers, as brought out in a few significant scenes. These are the drinking of the love-potion, the lovers' sojourn in the woods, Tristan's maiden marriage with Iseult of Brittany, and the death scene; also a picture of "the other" Iseult's realization of her position and the mounting hatred which leads to Tristan's deception and death.

Swinburne's notorious lushness of description in the sensuous passages so ever present in his work is not wanting in this poem. It is a little more reticent than the cloying prodigality of such things in the Laus Veneris, for example, but none the less present.

So he tells of Iseult how

" Her mouth
was as a rose athirst that pants for drouth,⁽¹⁾
Even while it laughs for pleasure of desire".

and the first part "The Sailing of the Swallow" ends with the description of their recognition of each other after the swallowing of the draught :-

"Their Galahault was the cup, and she that mixed;
Nor other hand there needed, nor sweet speech
To lure their lips together; each on each
Hung with strange eyes and hovered as a bird
Wounded, and each mouth trembled for a word;
Their heads neared, and their hands were drawn
in one,
And they saw dark, though still the unsunken sun
Far through fine rain shot fire into the south;
And their four lips became one burning mouth".

Even so must have been the anagnoresis of the Paradisal pair after that bitter feast of forbidden fruit in the very dawn of the world!

Much of the poem is taken up with long passages describing the thoughts and emotions of the three actors, and these are among the finest parts of the poem. Swinburne uses all the resources of his poetic craft to portray the various moods and facets of the story of passionate love and no less deep hatred and revenge.

(1) Tristram of Lyonesse: Part II: The Queen's Pleasance.

There is a wonderful portrayal of Iseult of Cornwall's selfless love as revealed in her prayer. She knows that she and Tristan have sinned, not merely by breaking a commandment, but by the very intensity of their love: she worships Tristan as she ought to worship God.

"Shall I more love thee Lord, or love him less -
Ah miserable! though spirit and heart be rent,
shall I repent, Lord God? shall I repent?
Nay, though thou slay me! for herein I am blest,
That as I loved him yet I love him best
More than mine own soul or thy love or Thee,
Though thy love save and my love save not me."

She knows that because of her sin in loving so deeply she has sacrificed all hope of heaven itself :

"Where we shall never, love,
Never stand up nor sing! for God above
Knows us, how too much more than God to me
Thy sweet love is, my poor love is to thee!"

Even though she should never attain heaven, she would rather lose Tristan's love than that he too should be punished -

"Nay, Lord, I pray thee let him love not me,
Love me not any more, nor like me die,
And be no more than such a thing as I.
Turn his heart from me, lest my love too lose
Thee as I lose thee, and his fair soul refuse
For my sake thy fair heaven, and as I fell
Fall, and be mixed with my soul and with hell.
Let me die rather, and only; let me be
Hated of him so he be loved of thee,
Lord: for I would not have him with me there
Out of thy light and love in the unlit air,
Out of thy sight in the unseen hell where I
Go gladly, going alone, so thou on high
Lift up his soul and love him ---".

Yet scarcely has she, in the selflessness of her love, renounced him, when she pleads to have him back:

"Yea, since I surely loved him, and he sinned
Surely, though not as my sin his be black,
God, give him to me - God, God, give him back!"

For now how should we live in twain or die?
I am he indeed, thou knowest, and he is I.
Not man and woman several as we were,
But one thing with one life and death to bear.
How should one love his own soul overmuch?
And time is long since last I felt the touch,
The sweet touch of my lover, hand and breath,
In such delights as puts delight to death,
Burn my soul through, till spirit and soul and
sense,
In the sharp grasp of the hour, with violence
Died, and again through pangs of violent birth
Lived, and laughed out with refluent might of
mirth;
Laughed each on other and shuddered into one,
As a cloud shuddering dies into the sun."

Truly Swinburne's knowledge of the psychology of a woman who loves as much as Iseult does is profound, and his genius here partakes of that essentially feminine quality, in the minds of the men who have best portrayed women in literature, as Shakespeare in many of his plays and Alexandre Dumas fils in his Camille, to name only two.

Swinburne has also finely portrayed Iseult of Brittany whose feelings, when she realizes her true state, change from deepest love to deepest hatred, and the desire for revenge, so that at last she betrays the husband whom she loves and hates at one and the same time. Her wish is not so much to repay him for scorning her and failing to make her in every respect his wife, as to ensure that the other - and first - Iseult too shall not have him.

What a sympathetic picture of her as the ingenuous child princess who sees Tristan for the first time :-

"This maiden with her sinless sixteen years
Full of sweet thoughts and hopes that played
at fears
Cast her eyes on him but in courteous wise,
And lo, the man's face burned upon her eyes

As though she had turned them on the naked sun:
And through her limbs she felt sweet passion run
As fire that flowed down from her face, and beat
Soft through stirred veins on even to her hands
and feet
As all her body were one heart on flame,
Athrob with love and wonder and sweet shame".

As sympathetically has Swinburne drawn Tristan with the conflict in his mind when he goes to Iseult of Brittany's bridal chamber, torn between pity for the innocent young girl on the one hand, and his pledged faith to the distant Iseult on the other.

" Yet at last,
Soul-sick with trembling at the heart, he passed
Into the sweet light of the maiden bower
Where lay the lonely lily-featured flower
That, lying within his hand to gather, yet
Might not be gathered of it. Fierce regret
And bitter loyalty strove hard at strife
With amorous pity toward the tender wife
That wife indeed might never be, to wear
The very crown of wedlock; never bear
Children, to watch and worship her white hair
When time should change, with hand more soft than
snow,
The fashion of its glory:"

Compare this passage with the one describing the same scene in the French prose romance :-

"Tristan espousa Yseult. Et furent les neupces et la feste grans. La nuyt vint que Tristan deust aler coucher avec Yseult; mais l'autre Yseult lui defent qu'il ne gise a sa femme charnellement, mais l'acoler ne le baisier ne lui deffend elle mie. Tristan se coucha emprés Yseult tout nu a nu, et le luminaire luisoit si cler que Tristan pouoit bien veïr la beauté d'Yseult. Elle avoit la gorge tendre et blanche, les yeulx vers et rians, les sourcilz bruns et bien assis, face pure et clere. Et Tristan la baise et acole. Et, quant il lui souvient de Yseult de Cornouaille, si a toute perdue sa volenté du surplus faire. Ceste Yseult lui est devant et l'autre Yseult est en Cornouaille qui lui deffend, si chier com il a son corps, que a ceste ne face chose qui a villenie tourne. Ainsi demoure Tristan avec Yseult sa femme".

Tristan loves Iseult of Brittany only in so far as she

reminds him of Iseult of Cornwall.⁽¹⁾

It is clear that, although we do feel acutely with Iseult of the White Hands in her anomalous and unenviable position, the main sympathy must lie with Tristan and la beale Yseult in their ill-starred love. The poem stresses the theme of "brief joy, long sorrow".

"It is a forlorn view of life and the tragedy is heightened by the irony of it. The death of the lovers is brought about by the Iseult whom they thought they could afford to neglect, and on whom they never spent a thought ... Yet in another sense their lot is less tragic than happy: they pass away before their love has lost the bloom, when it is still all in all to them, and leaves no room for fear or doubt". (2)

The poem concludes :-

"Peace they have that none may gain who live,
And rest about them that no love can give,
And over them while death and life shall be
The light and sound and darkness of the sea".

The difference in the tale, so far as the conception is concerned, between Swinburne and his mediaeval predecessors, is that where they laid stress merely on Tristan's surrender to love, without giving it an excuse, with Swinburne the episode of the philtre becomes the beginning and the end of the plot. The blame is thus, as it is also in Wagner's treatment of the theme, shifted from the delinquents. Whether they are thus the creatures of Fate, and so guiltless,

(1) From the Tristan of Thomas (ed. J. Bedier, 2 Vols. 1905). (In Bérout's version Iseult of Brittany is alluded to as "Yseut a la crine bloie" and "le bele franche au chief bloi").

(2) MacCallum: Op. cit., p. 281.

or less guilty; or whether their love has any merit being thus forced upon them, are questions that we must leave to the ethical convictions of everyone singly who reads this story.

Be it as it may, Tristram of Lyonesse is considered by many to be Swinburne's most perfect work.

In A Tale of Balen (1896) Swinburne tells once again of the two brothers who slay each other owing to the relentless fate that follows Balen⁽¹⁾ from the time that in an ill-starred moment he wielded the mystic spear of Longinus and struck the Dolorous Stroke in the Grail Castle, for it was the dread and cursed spear that had wounded the Light of the World.

Yet, in truth, Balin's misfortune dates from an earlier time which was not even that when at the beginning of his career he refused to return the sword to the maiden whom he had freed of its enchantment, whence his name - Li Chevalier as Deux Espeés.

Balen is the type of man who is chosen as a plaything by Fate, who is star-crossed from birth. It was his own doom to be followed by a relentless destiny: death followed wherever he went, death for all who were associated with him, and - eventually - for himself. So many knights, and damsels, met destruction owing to the baleful influence that seemed to emanate from him. Every deed of his, however well-intentioned, bore the curse and brought death and sorrow. And so he ran his short course until he had fulfilled the destiny which

(1) More commonly, as also in Malory, "Balin".

Merlin with his terrible fore-knowledge had seen, and he slew, and was slain by, the very one whom he loved best of all.

This poignantly tragic tale Swinburne has told with a straightforward vigour and strength in The Tale of Balen. Long as the poem is the narrative nowhere halts for psychological analysis or long descriptive passages as in the Tristram. The stanza-form gives it a lyric-epic tone and the form fuses admirably with the meaning.

Here and there we do find the long drawn out and rather exaggerated similes which tend to tire the reader, and make him impatient because it clutters up the narrative and threatens to make one lose the thread of thought, as for example in the description of the encounter between Balen and Launceor :-

"As the arched wave's weight against the reef
Hurls, and is hurled back like a leaf
Storm-shrivelled, and its rage of grief
Speaks all the loud broad sea in brief,
And quells the hearkening hearts of men,
Or as the crash of overfalls
Down under blue smooth water brawls
Like jarring steel on ruinous walls,
So rang their meeting then.

As wave on wave shocks, and confounds
The bounding bulk whereon it bounds
And breaks and shattering seaward sounds
As crying of the old sea's wolves and hounds
That moan and ravin and rage and wail
So steed on steed encountering sheer
Shocked, and the strength of Launceor's spear
Shivered on Balen's shield, and fear
Bade hope within him quail".

This is nervous, feverish writing, and there is too much of it in Swinburne. It might be called the reverse of bathos, where the occasion does not call for quite so much inflation of description: it is

superlatively splendid bombast. Swinburne's weakness lay in his very strength - in his overwhelmingly easy fluency, the uninterrupted spate of his utterance. His writing is one monotonous plateau of excellence. One could almost sometimes welcome a landscape of varying height of expression even if the variety of contour should be caused by varying quality. Such ornamental writing can be borne in short lyrics, but when it is sustained for hundreds and thousands of verses it exhausts the mind and ear just as one's palate would be sated by an unvarying diet of the richest and most delicious food. This is the reason why of all men who pay theoretical homage to the Faerie Queene few read it in toto. The same applies to Swinburne in bulk.

As Elton says⁽¹⁾:

"The paradox of Swinburne is this, that while in all his volumes there is hardly a line which fails of its intended melody, we are from first to last alive to the fatal distinction between the blameless writing that we cannot remember and the perfect writing that we cannot forget".

The difference, he says, is made by the presence or absence of outline. That is the trouble with Swinburne: he is all just vague perfection.

The point where Swinburne differs from other voluminous poets is this: Where most long poems of other poets contain many hundreds of ambling lines that are distinguished from ordinary prose only by the regular rhythm, practically every line of Swinburne's verse is poetry on the highest plane.

(1) Survey of English Literature: Vol. II, p. 55.

In the presence of such prodigality of lyrical wealth and gifts of technical skill in creating metres and melodies there is, really, no place for adverse criticism. So we must admit that the "delayed action" which annoys in the lines quoted above is, of course, due to the very structure of his stanza, which demands that every stanza should be almost all one sentence, with the main statement at the very end.

Note how cunningly he has knit the clauses, not to mention the enjambement, in the following:-

"And as the strong spring round him grew
Stronger, and all blithe winds that blew
Blither, and flowers that flowered anew
More glad of sun and air and dew,
The shadow lightened on his soul
And brightened into death and died
Like Winter, as the bloom waxed wide
From woodside on to riverside
And southward goal to goal.

It may not all be very clear but it is charming none the less, and he seems to be able to keep a grasp on his almost untamed fancy. Yet he could tell a story as rapidly as anyone and in that same complicated tune:-

"Swift from his place leapt Balen, smote
The liar across his face, and wrote
His wrath in blood upon the bloat
Brute cheek that challenged shame for note
How vile a king-born knave might be,
Forth sprang their swords, and Balen slew
The knave ere well one witness knew
Of all that round them stood or drew
What sight was there to see".

Unforgettable is his picture of the dire Lady of the Lake :-

"A lady like a windflower fair,
Girt on with raiment strange and rare
That rippled whispering round her, came.
Her clear cold eyes, all glassy grey,
Seemed lit not with the light of day
But touched with gleams that waned away
Of quelled and fading flame."

Truly heart-wrenching is the scene of the brothers' recognition of each other after the tragic fratricidal fight :-

"But Balen rose on hands and knees
And crawled by childlike dim degrees
Up toward his brother, as a breeze
Creeps wingless over sluggard seas
When all the wind's heart fails it: so
Beneath their mother's eyes had he,
A babe that laughed with joy to be,
Made toward him standing by her knee
For love's sake long ago".

But so one could go on till one had quoted all the poetry Swinburne wrote. It requires little argument to prove that Swinburne's Arthurian poetry, like his other, is of a superlative kind. Had he handled other portions of the legend such as the love of Lancelot and Guenever they would all have been on the same high level of excellence. Think what he could have made of the last grim battle and the passing of Arthur!

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON was born in 1809, became poet-laureate in 1850 (the year of his marriage) in succession to Wordsworth, was raised to the peerage in 1884 (being the first of the few men who have been thus honoured purely as a reward for literary and not for political or philanthropic labours), and died in 1892 after a period of literary activity of great richness and diversity of more than sixty years.

He was the youngest of three literary brothers- but Frederick and Charles, although they too produced much that was good, are completely lost in the blinding lustre of their younger brother. The fruits of his early collaboration with them we already have during their university years in Poems by Two Brothers.

At Cambridge he formed the centre of a brilliant coterie of young intellectuals, gifted in different directions, and his poetical training began in his undergraduate years, where among the young lights of the Apostles Club, and especially under the influence of his intimate friend Arthur Henry Hallam, his intellectual and poetical education commenced.

At the age of twenty Tennyson wrote the prize poem 'Timbuctoo', which was lauded with extravagant praise. In 1830 his first volume of poetry appeared and in 1832 his second. In this latter volume we get a foretaste of his interest in the Middle Ages in The Lady of Shalott. It is, however, with the two volumes of 1842 that Tennyson really was heralded as a great new poet. In the second of the two volumes a serious study of Arthurian legend, already indicated ten years before, is shown with the appearance of Sir Galahad, Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere and above all by Morte d'Arthur, which was later to be expanded into The Passing of Arthur in the Idylls. These two volumes contained most of what he had previously written with this difference: the latest collections show the care lavished on his work by a conscientious craftsman.

Not many English writers practised self-criticism to a greater extent than Tennyson. He revised, altered and excised ruthlessly and his emendations were, mostly, very judicious. In this way he substantially altered, among others, Oenone, The Palace of Art, The Lady of Shalott.

Tennyson's interest in the Age of Knighthood had begun early, as we see from the tentative essays,

The Lady of Shalott, Sir Galahad and Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere. Now he began nursing the idea of drawing on a vast canvas a sort of Epic or Drama of Arthur. He meant the Idylls to be his most serious contribution to poetry, the long tarrying work on a large scale and a great theme.

He called his essays in this direction 'Idylls'; -- 'little pictures' of picturesque scenes and incidents, for, although planned on a heroic scale, and to be written in a heroic measure, he must have realized that they fell short of being truly epic.

The poems which he had previously written upon episodes or characters of Arthurian romance -- except for Morte d'Arthur -- were lyrics, that did not permit of being expanded. These poems, therefore, are only indications of the attraction that the theme held for Tennyson. In Morte d'Arthur he found and perfected the line along which he would carry out the plan. In this poem for the first time he exploited blank verse, and it is remarkable that in this early experiment he showed a skill and mastery which he never afterwards surpassed.

He worked at his plan intermittently, however, and not at all chronologically, and had begun, as we see, at the end with Morte d'Arthur.

When the collected twelve books of the Idylls were issued, the work was dedicated to the memory of the Prince Consort who had died some time before. In the 'Dedication' Tennyson identifies Albert the Good with his 'king's ideal knight', in a very

attractive summary of his qualities. X

For the materials of his Idylls Tennyson drew principally upon two sources, Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur and Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Mabinogion. He followed his originals rather closely in most of the tales -- a fact that has been urged against him as a reproach. But the same objection holds for Shakespeare, so that, at least, Tennyson sins in good company. We may, therefore, ignore this objection. The great cycles of romance (including the Arthurian legends) have become part of the raw material of literature and are there to be utilized by any man who can do so, especially a Tennyson.

Of more importance than the measure of fidelity to sources is the method and the quality of the poetic treatment.

The Idylls are not really mediaeval in spirit. In truth, Tennyson's interest in the Middle Ages is academic rather than actual. He took the middle ages for his theme, but he is an intensely modern poet. It is doubtful if there was ever another English poet (except perhaps Chaucer) who was more a product of his own age than Tennyson. He stands out as the poetic exponent of the cautious spirit of Victorian liberalism. His poetry is important as a record of the intellectual and spiritual life of the time. At once sceptical and mystical in his own temper, he was peculiarly fitted to become the mouth-piece of his century's doubts, difficulties, and craving for the certainties of religious faith.

This brings us to the following question: What was Tennyson's purpose in writing the Idylls? Was he the modern poet clothing an old theme in modern thought to teach his contemporaries something that he firmly believed? Are the Idylls intended to be didactic? What of the vexed question about the allegory contained in this work?

One would imagine that any great poet has some sort of message to impart in his work. As every poet must inevitably have some sort of articles of faith, if he is a truly great soul and has learnt some lessons of life, and if he is not to be a mere poet-aster - an instrument of sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal - so, too, we shall find that Tennyson has something to teach in the Idylls, and that is that there is more betwixt heaven and earth than the philosophy of the nineteenth century dreamed of.

Of course, it is in his In Memoriam that Tennyson gives us his complete philosophy of life and death but in the Idylls he also brings out a great conviction of his as we shall see.

Of the Arthurian tales he speaks as "New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul".⁽¹⁾ He also adds, however, "poetry is like shot-silk with many glancing colours. Every reader must find his own interpretation according to his ability, and according to his sympathy with the poet".

This would seem to indicate that he had no obvious message to impart; he did not want to write a

(1) Dedication to his tragedy "Lochner".

metrical homily or a poetical sermon with a moral that hits one in the eye. He merely wrote -- in my opinion -- an epic, admittedly a very episodic one, taking a few high-lights of the Arthur cycle, in order to sketch for us the figure of Arthur, the perfect gentleman, knight and King; to show us his ideal, which, human nature being what it is, is foredoomed not to be realized; but -- and this is the important point -- when all seems lost all is not lost.

Being a product of his time, as we have said, Tennyson naturally reveals in his writings, the two contending aspects of the nineteenth century. Orthodox religion is struggling to maintain its position in the face of the advancement of scientific research and knowledge which, superficially, seems to strike at the root of all established faith.

All Tennyson's work shows that throughout his life he was also trying in his own mind to reconcile these two movements that seem to contradict each other in every way. We can trace in his development a similar series of mental and spiritual steps as we see in Shakespeare. We see him, develop from the youthful poet, under the influence of Keats and Coleridge, intensely alive to the sense impressions of beauty, colour, smell and movement, and not concerned with the more serious aspects of life, to the mature poet of independent spirit, who has left the juvenile irresponsibilities behind to wrestle with the great problems, and having gone from doubt finally attained a grand, calm peace and conviction of faith.

Thus in In Memoriam he sketches for us one

of the problems he has probed and solved. When questioned on faith or dogma Tennyson would always say: "I have given my belief in In Memoriam." And here faith has the last word.

"Tennyson had a profound interest in the progress of science. His general acceptance of the scientific view is real and sincere, dominating his thoughts about Nature which Wordsworth knew only 'by simple observation and interpreted by religious and sympathetic intuition'. Ever docile to the lessons of Science, amid a grim 'fight with Death' Tennyson yet gives us God and immortality. 'the indestructible and inalienable minimum of faith which humanity (the 'man in men') cannot give up because it is necessary to life', because 'the man in us is deeper than the methodical thinker'". (1)

The ideal of In Memoriam remains the nucleus of his message to mankind in all his work. So, in the Idylls, although the history of the Round Table seems to end with the Order crushed and all its ideals brought to nought, yet Arthur's last words are prophetic, and indicate the continuity that exists in all man's striving. The good cannot be irretrievably vanquished.

There is thus a thread of allegory throughout the Idylls. But I think it is unnecessary to press this search for allegory too far. To maintain, for example, that the Round Table is 'but an image of the mighty world'; that Arthur represents 'religious faith'; Merlin 'Science'; Modred 'the sceptical understanding'; the three Queens 'Faith, Hope and Charity', as some critics do, is, in my opinion, criticism gone rampant and carried to the absurd length where the critic sees

(1) R. Brimley Johnson: Tennyson and His Poetry, London, Harrap.

more in a poet's work than was ever intended to be read into his work.

Let us rather take the Idylls on their face value and examine them as a work of art in which the author develops a perfectly straightforward theme - in his own words: 'the dream of a man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin'.

It is a tale of individuals - idealized, it may be, a little beyond reality - who are real enough in their strength and their weaknesses, demonstrating in their brief act in the drama of life the lesson summarized in the three lines from The Holy Grail, of which, Tennyson himself said: "I have expressed there my strong belief in the Reality of the Unseen". The end, when the king speaks of his work and of his visions, is intended to be the summing up of all in the highest note by the highest of human men. These three lines in Arthur's speech are the (spiritually) central lines of the Idylls:

"In moments when he feels he cannot die
And knows himself no vision to himself,
Nor the High God a vision". (1)

Thus, as Elton says, "Arthur who binds together all the virtues, is left and dies. It is a tragedy; but, as in Shakespeare, the world is to begin again after it, with the prophecy of a new hope and order". (2)

The tragedy of the whole Round Table is fore-

(1) The Holy Grail.

(2) A Survey of English Literature: Vol. I, p. 354.

shadowed in the very first book.

Arthur binds together the knights into an order with very high ideals :

"A glorious company, the flower of men,
To serve as model for the mighty world,
And be the fair beginning of a time.
I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
To reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their
King
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honour his own word as if his God's,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
.....
Not only to keep down the base in man
But teach high thought, and amiable words
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man". (1)

He is the epitome of uncompromising purity and uprightness, and his standards are almost impossibly high, yet he inspires intense loyalty.

" . . . The King in low deep tones
And simple words of great authority,
Bound them by so strait vows to his own self,
That when they rose, knighted from kneeling,
some
Were pale as at the passing of a ghost,
Some flush'd and others dazed, as one who wakes
Half-blinded at the coming of a light.
But when he spake and cheer'd his Table Round
With large, divine, and comfortable words,
..... I beheld
From eye to eye through all their Order flash
A momentary likeness of the King:
And ere it left their faces
Down from the casement over Arthur, smote
Flame-colour, vert and azure, in three rays.."(2)

Lancelot is " ... his warrior whom he loved
And honour'd most"

and the two "For each had warder either in the fight,
Swore on the field of death a deathless
love".

(1) Guinevere.

(2) The Coming of Arthur.

This same Lancelot it is who is sent to bring Guenever home and on that first day the damage is done: the seed of tragedy is sown, for they are kindred spirits. They would have made a better match. The Queen could never hope to measure up to the standard of the King: She is too human, too red-blooded, passionate, in love with life and love. From the day that she had arrived at Arthur's Court, whither Lancelot had brought her to wed the King, she realized the mistake:

"Her journey done, glanced at him, thought him cold,
High, self-contained, and passionless, not like
him,
'Not like my Lancelot'". (1)

"..... 'I am yours,
Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond'".

Whether the King is aware of this from the beginning, or only realizes later - when the whole miserable intrigue is so obvious that even he who could not have dreamt that he would be so betrayed by the two who were nearest his heart, must see - is not clear, but it would seem that he did not knowingly condone the relationship for he tells her :

"I hold that man the worst of public foes
Who either for his own or children's sake
To save his blood from scandal, lets his wife
Whom he knows false, abide and rule the house:
.....
Worst of the worst were that man he that reigns!
Better the King's waste hearth and aching heart
Than thou reseated in thy place of light,
The mockery of my people, and their bane". (2)

In Gareth and Lynette we see the Knighthood in all its fresh, clean, beautiful youth, as yet unstained by the rot which will later set in, and like a canker eat

(1) Guinevere.

(2) Idem.

into the fair heart of the flower of Chivalry. This is a wholly delightful, romantic tale, without a suggestion of a shadow. But already in The Marriage of Geraint we learn that the foul breath of scandal, yet not wholly unmerited, has become attached to the fair, name of the Queen.

Vivien is the mouthpiece of the intolerant world. She is the type of all scandal-mongers. She is Evil personified, taking a devilish delight in disillusioning and torturing Balin, with her instances bearing out the suspicion that he had felt but that he had thrust aside, thinking that he must have imagined it. He is forced to believe in the guilt of the Queen and Lancelot, so that he cries out ...

"... and cursed the tale,
The told-of, and the teller".

It is this bitter cry of despair of his that brings upon him Balan and that leads to the fratricidal battle.

In all her actions Vivien is the spirit of evil that is bent on besmirching all that is clean and fine. She goes about in Arthur's court dropping her poisoned seeds here and there to germinate slowly. So she contributes towards the breaking up of the Fellowship.

Even old Merlin, of wisdom all compact, cannot resist her evil strength. With all the wisdom of the ages at his command he falls for the seductiveness of her carnality. Vivien soon has him in her toils and so destroys him. This is symbolical of how sin conquers both the heart and the head.

For a moment the higher ideals triumph as the knights ride bravely forth after the Holy Grail. Does not this religiously inspired search symbolise that same divine discontent, the spirit of 'do or die', adventure for adventure's sake, the eternal courage and blind faith of Youth which appears in all Myth and Legend? . Is not the "wandering flame" of the Grail the same as that which led the heroes of Ancient Greece over uncharted seas to the far-off Colchis to seek the Golden Fleece? Or that sent Oates out to die in the storm, and many thousands of other men, women and children to find their deaths in opening up new frontiers. And will the failure of the many not always inspire the fresh attempts of others?

Then the picture darkens again. Pelleas, the simple youth who comes from his broad acres in the country, knows not the wanton ways of woman, for,

"Out of the waste islands had he come.
Where saving his own sisters he had known
Scarce any but the women of his isles,
Rough wives, that laugh'd and scream'd against the
gulls
Makers of nets, and living from the sea". (1)

How rudely is his faith in womanhood -- and, worse still, in his sworn companions of the Order -- shattered when he is foully betrayed by Gawain. But he is to be wounded even more. He doubts, but there is no one to remove his doubts:

"Then fared it with Sir Pelleas as with one
Who gets a wound in battle, and the sword
That made it plunges thro' the wound again,
And pricks it deeper: and he shrank and wail'd,
. 'Is the Queen false?' and Percivale was mute.
'Have any of our Round Table held their vows?'

(1) Pelleas and Etarre.

And Percivale made answer not a word.
'Is the King true?'" (1)

To Lancelot :-

"'No name, no name,' he shouted, 'a scourge am I
To lash the treasons of the Table Round'
'Yea, but thy name?' 'I have many names,' he
cried:
I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame,
And like a poisonous wind I pass to blast
And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen'". (2)

Life is not worth living when there is nothing more for
which to live :

"Slay then", he shrieked, 'my will is to be slain'.

.... and the irony of it that the Queen should say to
him:

"Or hast thou other griefs? If I, the Queen,
May help them, loose thy tongue, and let me know".

The baleful figure of Modred is here - that same Modred
who falsely listened at the key-hole when his mother
spoke of Arthur to Leodogran, is biding his time

". . . . the same that afterward
Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom".

In 'The Last Tournament' things have developed to a
stage where the Red Knight can openly scoff :

"Tell thou the King and all his liars, that I
Have founded my Round Table in the North,
And whatsoever his own knights have sworn
My knights have sworn the counter to it -- and say
My tower is full of harlots, like his court,
But mine are worthier, seeing they profess
To be none other than themselves -- and say
My knights are all adulterers like his own,
But mine are truer, seeing they profess

(1) Pelleas and Etarre.

(2) Idem.

To be none other; and say his hour is come,
The heathen are upon him, his long lance
Broken, and his Excalibur a straw".

From the mouth of the clown Dagonet comes the bitter
truth:

"Ay, ay, my brother fool, the king of fools!
Conceits himself as God that he can make
Figs out of thistles, silk from bristles, milk
From burning spurge, honey from hornet-combs,
And men from beasts -- long live the king of
fools!" (1)

Finally the King is left alone with his
ideals, in splendid isolation. With a small, gallant
band he goes to what he must realize is the end of
everything. Yet we get the invincible splendour of
his faith when he tells Bedevere, 'the latest-left of
all my knights'

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world,
Comfort thyself:
Pray for my soul . . . More things are wrought by
prayer
Than this world dreams of
.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God". (2)

Tennyson's last Arthurian poem was the lyric,
Merlin and the Gleam (1889) which seems to be a sort
of last word to the Idylls. The poem (like the
'gleam') is symbolical of poetry, and its general note
is one of hope and encouragement where the aged wizard
bequeathes his quest of the Gleam - that is, the poetic

(1) The Last Tournament.

(2) The Passing of Arthur.

ideal - to his younger fellows :-

"O young Mariner,
Down to the haven,
Call your companions,
Launch your vessel,
And crowd your canvas,
And, ere it vanishes
Over the margin,
After it, follow it,
Follow the Gleam".

After enjoying an initial popularity that knew almost no bounds, and that lasted till well after his death, Tennyson's work in general, and the Idylls in particular, early in the present century suffered a temporary eclipse and set-back in popular taste. There was, namely, a natural reaction to the unparalleled popularity the poet had enjoyed in his life-time.. The opposite reaction would seem to be coming at present, and his work is swinging back into favour.

Here we must take leave of the Arthurian story in poetry. Not that the last word was spoken by Tennyson and Swinburne. We have noted how the legend has produced, through the centuries, a steady stream of poetry: a stream that is sometimes a flood and sometimes a mere trickle, but always flowing unbroken, for it has always fascinated, and will always fascinate the poets, not only of England but of the world. The nineteenth century was indeed the Golden Age of the Arthurian legend, not only in the literature noted in the preceding pages, but also in the revival of interest in origins and the critical studies of old MSS. that were unearthed in European libraries and painstakingly edited. And it holds its interest to-day. From time to time fresh studies - the fruit of scholarly research - see the light of day, and new

poems and dramas are penned: modern writers have especially recognized the fine dramatic possibilities of the legend. Although other matters engage our poets' interest now, we feel sure that they will turn to him again.

Who knows whether another Shakespeare or Milton may not be destined for English literature in the fulness of time - for Arthur shall grow not old but live to come again and be

"REX QUONDAM, REXQUE FUTURUS".

CHAPTER XII: Conclusions.

"When I came back from Lyonesse
With magic in my eyes,
All marked with mute surmise
My radiance rare and fathomless,
When I came back from Lyonesse
With magic in my eyes."

Thomas Hardy: Lyonesse.



E have now followed Arthur from the first mention of his name in written records, through English literature, up to the present time over a period of more than eleven hundred years. And in so far as he may be a mythical personage from the dawn of Celtic civilization he has been with us not hundreds, but - it may be - thousands of years. Even now he is still honoured in poetry and prose, for the makers of literature still find in the legend pertaining to him and his knights fit matter for their craft.

But he has lost his power to stir the deepest national emotions - he is only a vague figure in the storied past. The legends now seem remote, naïve and even childish, so that they are fit chiefly for children to read - in suitably edited versions. Students do, indeed, still busy themselves with erudite works on minor aspects of the subject and bring all the weight of their learning and industry to bear on textual and philological matters arising from the few manuscripts that still bear editing.

The poetry directly inspired by the legend appears fitfully at intervals, and though the treat-

ment is just and the matter worthy, yet it fails to move us as the romances must have moved the mediaeval audiences of the *trouvères* and minstrels.

A number of scholars have made painstaking and thorough studies of the origins and growth of the legend and subsequently published their findings. Nothing new seems to be left to discover, nor even does there seem to remain any new way of restating the old views.

And what a welter of conflicting views there is in these many works. Theories are abundant and diverse, and their advocates are all equally positive in their conclusions. Reconciliation and order must come, for the different views, theories and hypotheses, however ingeniously contrived and ably stated, when they are so mutually contradictory, cannot all be correct. Either of the extremes must be discarded or finally accepted as a deeper and more penetrating study brings some sort of finality. This is the task awaiting scholars: this is still the Arthurian problem. After the amazing activity in critical exegesis of the Arthurian legend in the nineteenth century, especially among European scholars, surely the time has come for English researchers to assume responsibility and to attempt to achieve final clarity.

For the research of the last century has not brought complete agreement or spread the light into all the dark corners. In fact it has had the very opposite effect. It has caused numerous dusty old manuscripts to be unearthed in the various libraries of Europe, and made them available to all who wish to

study them. It has vastly increased our knowledge of how the old romances came to be; of their mutual interrelation; of their nature and scope. That has been done, yes, and one cannot praise too highly the indefatigable and loving labour expended on, and the brilliant learning devoted to, the various aspects of Arthurian romance.

This overwhelming flood of knowledge has, however, also had a confusing effect. In the analytical processes of literary research what was a relatively clear problem in the beginning, when not so much was known, has become obscured by the very abundance of theories, and the figure of Arthur is buried under the débris of scholarship - the flood of books and articles - that confound the serious searcher.

That is why I have attempted to consolidate and unify the different problems in the foregoing pages - to get some sort of footpath cleared through the immense clutter of discovered and concluded details.

That is why I have examined not only Arthurian Romance as such in its historical evolution, but have also gone to the commentaries and surveys of other and more learned writers on Arthurian subjects in order to see what guidance they can give me and other searchers.

And what has been the fruit of this labour? Here we may repeat the conclusion we noted at the outset of this study:

"Arthur must have flourished about the beginning of the sixth century in England; he probably was a British war captain who

may or may not have been known as Arthur, and perhaps helped to fight against the Saxons; he has little claim to be considered a Celtic divinity and the extent to which Arthurian romance is Celtic or Norman-French in origin has not yet been satisfactorily determined".

This surely is not a very impressive result for the accumulated Arthurian lore listed in J.D.

Bruce's survey, Volume II, pages 380 - 412 and 446 - 460: 48 pages in all (Evolution of Arthurian Romance).

Let us see how English and American scholars help in the way of elucidating the problem. It will be sufficient to note shortly the argument of the half-dozen most important: Rhys, Nutt, Weston, Chambers, Bruce, Loomis. But before I can present very shortly the main statements of each of the above I must unavoidably make what may seem a small digression.

We have noted above in passing how most problems generally evoke two widely divergent views that lead to theories which are diametrically opposed in their premises, inferences and conclusions: so it is with various aspects and details of the Arthurian legend, so too with the Arthurian legend as a whole.

In most of the contrasting theories on the question of origins in Arthurian legend we have the views of what may be described as the "Celtic School" on the one hand, and on the other the "Continental School" (whose theories - it is to be expected - are positively, and sometimes violently, Anti-Celtic). The Celticists are essentially students of comparative mythology, and they see the details of Arthurian story as having their ultimate source in the corresponding

themes and motifs of British and Gaelic myth, especially as reflected in the great and well-preserved body of old Irish literature. The origin of the basic themes of mediaeval Arthurian romance must therefore derive from the Britons whose old literature, preserved in a great body of oral tradition, provided the Norman-French romancers with the matter and the inspiration for their versions of the old tales. The wide divergence of the twelfth century romances of the trouvères from the simple, often crude originals is due, of course, to the reshaping of the old matter by the sophisticated courtly spirit infused into the bones of the old mythic stories. (Whether the Norman-French trouvères obtained this original matter through the channel of the insular Britons, or the Celts of Brittany is a point to which we shall return below).

The scholars who support the "Continental" view do not concern themselves at all with myth as such, and therefore do not admit that the motifs of Arthurian legend are derived from Celtic myths and hero-tales, but affirm that they can all be traced to analogues in European and Oriental stories. (They do occasionally admit that the sources of some romantic themes are to be found in *märchen* and folk-tales without, however, saying of what folk). Furthermore they deny that the Britons shaped the legend even roughly, as we know it, and credit the Norman-French trouvères with the invention of the greater part of the Arthurian legend (i.e. the framework of the story as opposed to the many later Arthurian romances). They admit that the tradition of Arthur as a great war-leader against the Saxons may have some historical basis, but claim

that the chivalrous tales of Arthur and his brilliant court of knights-errant are entirely the creation of Norman genius. They consistently refuse to allow that elements which the Celticists trace to Welsh and Irish parallels are anything else but motifs gathered from European, classic and oriental sources.

Only two sections of the Arthurian story are grudgingly allowed to be of Celtic origin, the original legends, namely, dealing with Tristan and with Merlin - not the later elaborations which, of course, are the invention of trouvères

Because, as I have said above, some of the Arthurian critics who are also Celticists, trace certain parts of the Arthurian legend to Celtic mythology, it would have been advantageous to take a rapid look at the development of the Science of Mythology as it has developed over the last hundred-and-fifty years. Interesting as such an excursion would be we must resist the temptation, however, to follow such an enquiry, as it would lead us too far afield.

We must be content merely to refer, in passing, first to the Philological School of Mythologists, as represented in Max MÜLLER (1823-1900) who based his system on the linguistic studies, early in the nineteenth century, of the brothers Karl and Wilhelm Grimm. The school of Müller and his disciples traced the matter of most ancient stories to myths of the Sun God. By applying linguistic laws and a little ingenuity to the comparison of the names of the gods in different languages it was easy for these mythologists to demonstrate

the essential similarity between different mythical characters.⁽¹⁾ And if the episodes in the myths even of totally differing characters and names showed a correspondence, these characters could also be reduced into one solar hero. John Rhys was, to a certain extent, a disciple of this school of mythologists "who saw sun gods everywhere".

Scarcely had Müller's system acquired wide recognition when many critics arose to attack the weaknesses in its methods and premises, and other schools of thought advanced their interpretations of myth. Some of the most formidable critics were Sir E.B. Tylor, William Robertson Smith and Andrew Lang, representing the "Anthropological School". They discounted Müller's philological arguments but did not discard all his propositions.

One of the most valuable contributions of the Anthropological School was the principle that "the treatment of similar myths from different regions, by arranging them in large compared groups, makes it possible to trace in mythology the operation of imaginative processes recurring with the evident regularity of mental law; and thus stories of which a single instance would have been a mere isolated curiosity take their place among well-marked and consistent structures of the human mind. Evidence like this will again and again drive us to admit that even as 'truth is stranger than fiction' so myths may be more uniform than

(1) As for example: Diaush - Pitar (Sanskrit) = Zeus pater (Greek) = Jupiter (Latin) = Tyr (Teutonic).

history".(1)

In other words mythologists began to study the recurrence of any particular mythological motif and to compare the similarities in the different versions. The result was the discovering of the wide-spread nature of a few identical basic myths found among all nations, savage and civilized, who could never have influenced each other's religious thought by direct contact.

"The diffusion of identical myths, Lang argues, is due to the universal prevalence of similar mental habits and ideas at one time or another, but he admits that this argument may be pressed too far, and that it will 'scarcely account for the world-wide distribution of long and intricate mythical plots'".(2)

This method of comparing myths for their similarities in order to trace origins is still a useful principle used by the students of Arthurian legend. Alfred Nutt used the methods of the Anthropological school. Those mythologists also demonstrated clearly the relation between myth and primitive history: the mortal hero is exalted to godhead, the gods consort with semi-historical personages.

A revolution in mythological thought and method was effected by the enquiries of Sir James G. Frazer with the publication of The Golden Bough towards the end of the last century.

In his work he relates his views in mythology

(1) Sir E.B. Tylor: Primitive Culture: (London 1871), p. 282. Quoted by Lewis Spence: An Introduction to Mythology, p. 55.

(2) Lewis Spence: Op. cit., p. 70.

chiefly to Vegetation and the deities connected therewith, and associates it (the vegetation principle) with the divine king whose lot is so closely bound up with the agricultural activities of the tribe. Most myths then, according to Frazer, relate to the cult of some god of vegetation, and they are not unconnected with fertilizing or generative functions. Frazer's gods are therefore very closely related to the earth, the seasons, and the germinating seed.

Miss Jessie L. Weston is a disciple of Sir J.G. Frazer in her study of the origins of the Grail Legends: so, too, was W.A. Nitze.

After this short note on some of the chief mythological "movements" of recent times (a note whose unavoidable brevity is probably not conducive to much lucidity), and now that we have placed our Arthurian authorities in their mythological "milieu", I may proceed from where I had to break off on page 345 above.

John Rhys began to examine the Arthurian legend in the light of Celtic mythology in his Hibbert Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as illustrated by Celtic Heathendom in 1886. This work was followed by Studies in the Arthurian Legend (1891) and by Celtic Folklore, Welsh and Manx (1901) and other related articles and books.

He explains the whole of Arthurian romance in terms of Solar Mythology, identifying the central figures of the Arthurian story with Celtic heroes like Lugh and Cuchulainn. Thus Gawain is clearly a solar hero from various characteristics and peculiarities:

his gay, sunny disposition, his shining countenance, but most of all from the fact that his strength waxed till noon, after which it waned again. But not only Gawain: Peredur (Perceval), Owein (Yvain) and even Lancelot too, from a comparison of the details in their stories, are personifications of the Sky-god, even as is Arthur himself. Rhys compares the Welsh stories from the Mabinogion of these heroes with the corresponding French romances and comes to the conclusion that the Welsh stories are the originals, or at least closer to the original myth.

He equates Pelles, the Grail Keeper (who is also the "Maimed King") with Pwyll who was once head of Annwn - Hades. The Grail too, then has its origin in the Cauldron of Plenty and Fertility of the Head of Hades.

The weaknesses in Rhys' studies are the following:- His parallels are sometimes very far-fetched: stages in the derivation of one name from another being assumed owing to a scribal misreading or misspelling of the name. Moreover, although he had a profound knowledge of Welsh literature he had little knowledge of Norman-French literature (or did not concern himself with it much) and his sources are the Mabinogion (which have come to us in late redactions and MSS. only) and Malory's Morte D'Arthur, and not the original French romances.

However, I cannot subscribe to the criticism of E.K. Chambers which we have mentioned above.⁽¹⁾

(1) See Chapter III, p. 76 above.

Rhŷs's work must always remain an example of thoroughness in the study of the Arthurian Legend.

Working independently in the last decade of the nineteenth century was the great folk-lorist Alfred Nutt who wrote much and lectured widely on Celtic literature and related matters. He, too, was a "Celticist" who vigorously advanced the claims of the Britons as the original shapers of the Arthurian legend, although he had a bias towards identifying the Arthurian themes with similar ones in Aryan mythology generally. In several of a series of very readable and instructive pamphlets⁽¹⁾ he and others have advanced convincing arguments to prove the early existence of British mythical and legendary matter, not only oral but written, which was imparted to the continental poets both before and after the Conquest by Welsh bards as well as Breton singers. In other words, he argues convincingly that the Arthurian traditions existed in literary form before even Geoffrey of Monmouth, and that to the British belong the honour of creating the Arthurian legend long before Chrétien and his compeers. This claim is borne out in another of the pamphlets (No. 11) of the series, The Mabinogion by Ivor E. John.

Two of Nutt's greatest works were his The Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal, 2 Vols., 1895 - 97 and Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail with Special Reference to the Hypothesis of its Celtic Origin, 1887.⁽²⁾

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- (1) Popular Studies in Mythology, Romance and Folklore; David Nutt (London) - Nos. 1, 3, 4, 8, 14.
- (2) In spite of all efforts I was unable to obtain any of his major works. I had to form my judgments on lesser essays and many references to him by other authorities.

About the beginning of the present century Miss (later Dr.) Jessie L. Weston - a fertile writer - produced a whole series of works on Arthurian matters, the wide range of which may be seen from these few selected titles:

The Legend of Sir Gawaine, 1897.

The Legend of Sir Lancelot du Lac, 1901.

The Legend of Sir Perceval, 2 vols., 1906 - 1909.

The Quest of the Holy Grail (1913)

From Ritual to Romance (1920)

and translations of German verse romances, e.g. Parsifal. She was indeed a devoted Arthurian scholar. That she had the courage of an independent mind and the ability and learning to defend her views the third-named work abundantly proves, although the redoubtable Bruce disposes of her arguments as he does with most of those of the writers with whom he disagrees. There is nothing particular to state about her critical work, apart from praising her scholarship and the enthusiasm with which she writes, except with regard to the last-named work. Here again she is perhaps a little too original. Under the influence of Sir J.G. Frazer's Golden Bough she also became an ardent apostle of the Vegetation-god branch of mythology. In this line of research nearly every mythical theme is reduced to terms of agriculture and seasonal myths, and the ceremonies and rites practised in order to ensure plentiful crops. Her attempts to resolve the more esoteric aspects of the Grail legend in terms of this mythological system by tracing the legend to a western development of the cult of Diana and seasonal myths of fertility like the Eleusinian mysteries,, we may dismiss as a curiosity of scholarship.

When we come to James Douglas Bruce the Arthurian commentator and arbiter par excellence what shall we say? A close study of his great Evolution of Arthurian Romance, 2 Vols. (1922 - 23) is compulsory for anyone who wants to become acquainted with Arthurian literature. His knowledge not only of French Mediaeval Arthurian romance but also of the vast range of critical works on all the aspects of the Arthurian romance is truly staggering. In his discussions of the various matters he quotes, discusses and criticizes all the Arthurian critics, even the authors of fugitive Arthuriana in literary periodicals. He is broad-minded and fair enough to present all the conflicting views on any matter however trivial, and never dismisses any worthwhile theory or viewpoint without adequate examination. Yet he has his natural limitations. He seems to have little knowledge of Celtic literature and less interest in it except in so far as it touches the fringes of his own especial interest - French mediaeval romance. But, more, he is stubbornly anti-Celticist. Throughout his work one feels his conviction that there was no Arthurian legend to speak of before Chrétien de Troyes came. I shall return to him shortly at the end of this section when I give my own views on the origin of the Arthurian legend, in order to indicate the points on which I have to differ from him.

Another writer who has written a fine and very scholarly work on Arthurian origins is Sir Edmund K. Chambers in his Arthur of Britain (1927). In this he has made an exhaustive examination of the old Latin chronicles and histories in order to determine the

historicity of Arthur. The way in which he has followed up every little reference in what has been written, and also in topographical researches and local traditions, is indeed admirable.

He says with regard to the question whether Arthur lived and what his status was :-

"History asked to determine how much veritable fact may underlie the imposing structure of the Arthurian Legend, can only give a cold response". (1)

Yet when one reads all the accumulated facts and the weight of evidence he adduces, one cannot help feeling that he is convinced that there is enough proof to warrant a belief in the existence, once, of a British hero named Arthur who was the dux bellorum against the Saxons.

Chambers deals rather harshly with Rhys's philological juggling when he discusses Arthurian legend in the light of Celtic myth. He evidently wants to have no dealings with vague myths but prefers documented history. We have noted above⁽²⁾ the impatience with which he disposes of Rhys's philological arguments. He is himself however uncritical when he depreciates that repository of myth - misunderstood and garbled, it may be, but a store-house of mythical data nevertheless - namely Malory's Morte D'Arthur.

We have seen so far how Rhys and Nutt have adduced impressive proofs for the origin of the

(1) Arthur of Britain: p. 168.

(2) See text supra: p. 76.

Arthurian legend in Celtic literature; how Dr. Weston seeks some of the origins in the classic myth of ancient Greece; how Bruce will have none of this but hugs his Chrétien and his Byzantine folk-tales; how Chambers is also cool towards romantic mythic flights.

So we come to the most recent work that I could trace that handles the questions of Arthurian origins, and we have another triumphant exposition of Irish myths and hero-tales as the original fount of the themes of Arthurian Legend, and everybody is back in his place as a blazing solar hero: I refer to Roger S. Loomis's: Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance (1927).⁽¹⁾

Loomis proves that there was a great and well-known body of Arthurian tradition before the second half of the twelfth century when the Norman-French trouvères began to write romance poems, and cites the famous bas-relief sculptures over the north-east portal (Porta della Pescheria) of the Cathedral of Modena, which date from the beginning of the eleventh century. They portray an Arthurian adventure which has not yet been fully identified - although one theory is that the theme is the rescue of Guenever (Winlogée) on the occasion of one of her many abductions.

Arthurian names and stories were also current in northern Italy before the first written Norman-French romances. These Arthurian stories could only have come

(1) Roger Sherman Loomis was the husband of Gertrude Schoepperle, author of several works on the Arthurian legend. Some years after her death he married Laura Hibbard (also an Arthurian student and writer of works on the Arthurian Legend). This is surely a unique example of teamship and kindred interest in literary history.

from British sources - certainly from Breton conteurs. Loomis attaches great importance to the Arthurian traditions current in Brittany from the time of the Celtic exodus from Britain to the Continent. He denies that the Welsh had any share in imparting the traditions either to the English or the Normans: only the Breton conteurs were the intermediaries. In this connection, however, he again claims that one of the most influential of all the conteurs, the only transmitter of the Matter of Britain to non-Celtic society whose name has been preserved, was the Welshman Bledfri (Bledhericus, Bleheris - French Bréri).- the Bréri to whom both Thomas (in his Tristan) and Wauchier de Denain in the Continuation of Chrétien's Perceval refer, but whom Bruce considers "no doubt merely one of those innumerable instances in mediaeval literature of a writer's bolstering up his narrative by the citation of fictitious authorities" (1)- like Wolfram von Eschenbach's Kyot and Geoffrey of Monmouth's "liber".

Loomis uses the comparative method in order to equate many Arthurian knights with characters in Irish myth, and all in the person of the sun or sky-god. He makes much (in accounts of fights) of the "Old God" and the "Young God" - every fight is therefore a manifestation or symbol of the sun that sets (the old God) being vanquished by the ascending Young God; or as symbolical of the solar year. In these parallels he goes much further than Rhys, and his arguments are sometimes forced and far-fetched. In his discussion of the romance of La Mule sans Frein (Chapter XII) for example, the mule

(1) Evolution of Arthurian Romance I, p. 156.

that bears Gawain to his quest is itself "the old god who brings the young god to the scene of his trial!"

One more sentence will be sufficient to show the conclusions to which Loomis comes with his train of thought and argument:-

"Altogether the case is complete that Grail Bearer, Grail Messenger, Perceval's wife, and Perceval's sister are identical, and are but variant names of a vegetation goddess(!!) known centuries before in Wales and Ireland". (1)

He sees in the Grail legend, not the Diana cult as Miss Weston does, but the Eleusinian mysteries themselves, the rituals connected with Demeter and Kore like those in Samothrace.

He says that if we could imagine an initiate into these cults of Eleusis attending a performance of Wagner's Parsifal he would recognize in it the rituals he knew and understood.

Loomis thus represents the mythological wheel "come full circle" - he combines, in his interpretation of the Arthurian legend in the light of Celtic myth, the Solar mythology of Max Müller and the Vegetation mythology of Sir James E.^G Frazer: one could not have it fairer!

But this is enough: we could go on almost indefinitely exploring the work of those many people who have a theory and a great deal of erudition, and who try to say the last word on the matter of the Arthurian Legend.

(1) Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance: p. 283.

Let us see where we have arrived, and sum up:-

We have read enough to see where Arthur stands now. The Arthurian legend is the playground for men and women of greater or lesser wisdom to run about in, and some have cast off all restraint and run wild. The wildest and most grotesque mythical interpretations have been made, and all in the name of serious Arthurian research. And everyone takes another stand, brings up another theory or interpretation propped by an imposing show of learning, and each theory or interpretation is correct in its narrow way, and contains a part of the truth. If ever a successor of Bruce comes, and he takes up the commentary where his great forerunner left it off, he will discuss and criticize these later works from his own point of view and in the light that has been granted him. For it would seem that everyone has a preconceived idea which he sets out to prove to his own satisfaction. The hypothesis is formulated and then all the evidence that bears it out is adduced. And, of course, if one collects all these facts that bear out the hypothesis one may at the end propound a view with all the sanction of a law.

Nowhere does one see a humble enquiry, the collection and collation of all the evidence and a conclusion then made, which shall be valid, and constant and final.

And this, surely, is what the Arthurian Legend needs: an enquirer who is unprejudiced, with no a priori views, and free of that load of scholarship which can be such an embarrassment and hindrance that

it prevents the student from approaching the problem with an unencumbered and unfettered mind.

After a century-and-a-half of research and writing the result is still:

"Arthur must have flourished about the beginning of the sixth century ----"

and so on and so on: we know it by now. And so the doctors disagree while the patient languishes, and those to whom we look for guidance give us stones for bread.

I am not prepared, and I think no other serious student need be, to accept all the dicta of the great Arthurian scholars as final: in this field no one is, as yet, the ultimate authority.

My reasons for this statement are the following:-

(a) Nearly everyone has attempted to approach the problem from another angle, and give some sort of fresh view - views which, as we have seen - may differ to a degree where they are in direct opposition.

(b) Even the greatest scholars tend to minimize the views and findings of rivals, not always with impersonal and irrefutable arguments, but often with more or less acrimony, coloured by own opinions. Instances of this are many - I mention a few :

1. One of the more humble labourers in the Arthurian vineyard was Dr. Sebastian Evans. He, too, was a book-lover and mediaevalist, and in his limited way a creative artist. Besides his good translation of Geoffrey's History, and the fine

one of the High History of the Holy Grail (the French Perlesvaus) he wrote one or two Arthurian poems of merit, besides an original contribution to the solution of some of the problems: The Quest of the Holy Grail: an Introduction to the Study of the Legend.

Oliver Elton who is always just in his judgments praised him. (1)

J.D. Bruce, of whom one should have expected something better, dismisses Evans curtly - and cruelly - with a footnote to his Bibliography:-

" I purposely omit from the above list, as destitute of value, various writings on the Grail, such as those of Sebastian Evans and others" (2)

2. Sir E.K. Chambers, as we have seen above (3), disparages Rhÿs, and so makes himself not guiltless of the charge of being "uncritical", for Rhÿs was by no means so very uncritical in taking Geoffrey of Monmouth and Sir Thomas Malory as sources of myth: they were sources of myth in so far as they were collections of British traditions.

3. Bruce depreciates some of Nutt's work (4), and a good deal of Miss Weston's. (5)

(1) See: Survey of English Literature, 1780 - 1830, Vol. II, pp. 105 and 106.

(2) Bruce: Evolution of Arthurian Romance: Vol. II, p. 399.

(3) Chapter III, pp. 75 - 76.

(4) Evolution, I: pp. 108, 269, 305, 357.

(5) Evolution, I: pp. 67-68, 86, 282-288; II, 90-103.

4. When Dr. Oskar Sommer, in Volume III of his great edition of the Morte D'Arthur, went exhaustively into the matter of Malory's sources, his work was generally hailed as scholarly and definitive. Eugene Vinaver in his own book dismisses most of Sommer's conclusions with remarks implying that much of the great old scholar's enquiry was superficial and valueless.

So it is with the study of the Arthurian Legend: if that is how the wise ones are handled how shall we foolish ones fare?

In a study where so much must necessarily be presumed, much is conjectural; where such widely divergent views can be so convincingly adduced, every man's guess - or call it opinion - is as good as another.

Anyone who makes a deep and loving study of the Arthurian legend - even if his methods are not profoundly scientific - must inevitably begin to arrange the few known facts in a sort of order in his own mind according to his own lights. I, too, may perhaps advance a few thoughts which, I hope, will help to solve the puzzles around Arthur or, at any rate, will indicate lines of thought and research that may lead to solutions.

A. In the course of my reading - and its range and depth have not been too limited - I have noted the matters on which agreement seems to have been generally reached, but on which I should still like to add one or two thoughts I have not seen advanced elsewhere.

B. Also, I have noted those parts on which there is no agreement yet, but rather difference in opinion, usually represented in two opposite views. I should like to comment on these and restate the view that to me seems correct.

A. Agreement reached:

Agreement on broad principles has been reached by scholars on the following points :-

- (1) There is some historical basis for assuming that Arthur once lived - the dux bellorum against the Saxons.
- (2) He was of British descent and so ultimately Celtic.
- (3) The Norman French trouvères took the mass of old British tradition as the foundation on which to base a whole new literature of romances that arose as a result of the Provençal cult of courtly love in the twelfth century.

I think the whole argument of this study so far has borne out these three statements. To them I want to add the following :-

I have already indicated above (Ch. III) how the composite tradition of Arthur may have originated. (The argument may present obvious weaknesses, especially to one who, holding some other theory, is a priori inimical to mine - yet, for lack of more positive evidence mine is as interesting a possibility as any other).

I see the matter thus :-

- (1) There must undoubtedly have been in the Celtic pantheon a god - under some name, even Arthur, Artorius or any other - who corresponded, perhaps in name but certainly in characteristics and traditions, to the Arthur of the early Welsh poems, Triads and Mabino-gion stories, who was the compeer of the other recognized Celtic gods.
- (2) Arthur may possibly have been, and very probably was, a Celtic leader of the "heroic" period, that is, of the first to the sixth centuries of the Christian era. He could even have been a Gaulish Celt. Evidence from the earliest chronicles is very slim that there was a historical British Arthur who fought against the Saxons in the sixth century. If there had been a real Arthur - the hero of the Battle of Badon Hill - the chroniclers would have been more explicit and detailed. This does not entirely, however, discount the possibility that there may have been such a man, not necessarily a King Arthur but a British champion and a redoubtable fighter, who may have had any name, but became identified with a semi-historical Arthur, perhaps a very minor British chieftain of some uncertain time and place.
- (3) Marvellous tales of Arthur and/or the great fighter and demigod of a dim past lived on in the floating traditions of insular and Breton Celts long before a written tradition could cast them into permanent and inflexible form. In the course of time and many

centuries later the Norman trouvères learned of these traditions which so appealed to their imagination that they - in the way indicated in Chapters III and VI - seized on the matter and made it the nucleus for their literature of chivalry and romance.

That there was ever an actual mediaeval Arthur, a chivalrous knight and king of England is, of course, historically impossible: all the kings of England from William the Conqueror onwards are known and catalogued in written history. Arthur thus, I am convinced, evolved in the process of a thousand years of story-telling and his origins are to be found in

(a) a lost Celtic god (the remnant, perhaps of Gwydion, as Rhŷs conjectured) and

(b) a historical petty Celtic chieftain (perhaps even Maelgwn Gwynedd's uncle - see p. 25 supra) who by accident or confusion or faulty memory became associated with another Arthur to whom some slight references exist in the earliest British Chronicles.

This is something like the composite 'Arthurian torso reconstructed by Rhŷs - and such a process of evolution of the British hero is, I maintain, not only possibly but probable.

What we must utterly reject is Bruce's fond idea that Arthur was entirely a creature of Geoffrey of Monmouth's fertile imagination. If we credit the suave Canon of St. Asaph with so much originality (which is not borne out by any other recorded evidence) then he must have been the greatest inventive genius of the Middle Ages - greater than Chrétien de Troyes

and worthy of comparison at least with Dante. Instead of this, I think, Geoffrey was a clever man with a journalistic bent, well-up in the traditions of the British peoples and clever enough to turn a well-told and topical tale. He is merely an early representative of the class of "slick" writers whom we have even now who can serve up a "best-seller" based on old well-known materials - a sort of mediaeval Fulton Oursler. He is no more than this: what "made" him was the grateful material he handled.

B. Differences of Opinion:

We glance for a moment at the points on which there is divergence of opinion. Notice must be of the briefest even at the risk that exigencies of space will necessitate categorical statements which cannot be supported by an imposing weight of proof or argument (after all, nearly every detail of the Arthurian legend contains within itself the germ of a long dissertation or discussion - and this essay of mine is also, after all, a short survey).

The points where there is divided opinion, and a restatement of the most likely view will be useful, may be best put as questions to which I shall try to supply the answer.

- (1) Did the British traditions of Arthur come to the French (a) via the continental Celts, that is, the Bretons of Brittany or (b) the insular Celts, that is the Britons of Western England (the Welsh)?

I think the weight of evidence lies with (a) although (b) is at least as important.

We have noted the Celtic emigration to Armorica. Practically nothing survives to-day of a national and independent Armorican (Breton) literature. The emigrants must, however, have carried with them their religion, their legends and their traditions. Although they became within a very short time to all intents and purposes French rather than remaining British they retained much of their original culture including some remnants of their language which became a dialect of French. Their lais of old traditional matter would have been the first channel for the dissemination of the Arthurian legend on the continent, even before the Conquest. Romances based on these earliest traditions have however been lost, superseded as they were by the later romances based on Arthurian traditions garnered on the spot in Britain after the Conquest, when conditions for the growth of a society Arthurian romance were more favourable, that is in the time of chivalry and feudalism.

- (2) Are the details of the Arthurian legend for the greater part derived from (a) Celtic sources or (b) European and oriental sources?

Here the answer is very decidedly (a): we see this in a number of ways, first being the very way in which the trouvères utilized the British Arthurian matter.

When Anglo-Norman French society came into renewed contact with the old British matter - of which they had already had some knowledge across the Channel, and before the Conquest, from their Breton neighbours - they realized that they were now actually at the source

of the traditions. They must daily have become acquainted with more and more of the traditions and, besides, Geoffrey's book was making the matter as well-known as their own songs of Roland and Olivier had ever been. They did not take a merely polite and academic interest in the Arthurian legend as if it were the simple but rather quaint *märchen* or folk-tales of their conquered foe which it would be worth-while getting to know for mere goodwill or patronage.

The reverse was the case. They quickly saw the advantage to them of accepting and embracing this new literature which, despite much they found awkward, incomprehensible and unmanageable, contained so much that was new, original, virile and worthy and, above all, was so suited to the genius of their song-makers. They thus made it their own - partly, it may have been, as Evans saw it (cf. pp. 147, 148 *supra*) - because it held promise of becoming the epic material of a new Anglo-British-French nation and empire.

Indeed did they adapt it and change it, and expand it with many motifs garnered from many parts of the world including the East, but the central mass of basic Celtic material was there: they re-shaped but they never tried to re-make it altogether into a French national literature. This is how the matter presents itself to me, in a general way. More pertinent reasons for my belief in the essentially Celtic nature of French mediaeval Arthurian romance are the following - they represent what I consider Celtic elements that I have not found noted before by any of the authorities I consulted: ,

(a) References in romances to historical British characters:

In Marie of France's lai of Guigemar (non-Arthurian) there is a King Meriaduc of Brittany. Does this not perhaps refer to the Celtic Conan Meriadoc whose career we have noted on p. 31 above?

(b) Direct references to Wales and Welsh heroes in French romances, even those of Chrétien, e.g. Perceval li Gallois - Perceval the Welshman. I am convinced that from internal evidence, e.g. the use of the dart as a weapon (short throwing spear (?)), it is clear that Peredur son of Evrawc (from the Mabinogion) is the original of Chrétien's Perceval li Gallois, and not vice versa as some have tried to argue.

Why should so many heroes of mediaeval French romances be British, and the setting of the story the vague romantic Britain rather than French and France, when the trouvère could as easily, and to greater national advantage, have made it otherwise? My answer is: because he did not dare - the hearers would know he was tampering with well-known tradition and making unwarranted changes.

(c) The romance of Yvain contains a motif of a rain-making, or storm-raising charm, as well as other primitive elements, that I can only consider Celtic, as being quite foreign to well-known French practice and culture.

(d) Add to this various instances of primitive social arrangements as to eating and sleeping in various romances, pointing to a ruder society than that of the highly civilized and refined Norman-French.

Also the free-and-easy sexuality of the characters in some French romances, where the hero is often tempted or invited to enjoy the favours of the lady of the castle in which he is making a casual stay, reminds one of the practice of rude hospitality prevailing in some simpler communities even to-day. (Cf. the Eskimos and various native tribes among whom sexual relationships are not connected with moral ideas.) In this respect I refer to the stories of Tristan and Iseult, Perceval, and Yvain⁽¹⁾ to name only three.

(e) Where so many tales in French Arthurian romance revolve around the Fairy Mistress theme, most often where a water-fairy is involved, such as Morgain la Fée, the sources would also seem to be Celtic, for Celtic literature is closely bound up with magic themes, chief of which are those that entail a mortal hero loved by a water spirit: cf. in this respect Cuchulainn and Liban, Arthur and Morgan. There is a full discussion of this matter in Lucy Allen Paton's exhaustive study⁽²⁾

Even in the Morte D'Arthur we see how wide-

(1) Cf. A.C.L. Brown: Iwain, a Study of the Origins of Arthurian Romance: Harvard Studies & Notes in Philology & Literature, Boston, Ginn & Co., 1930.

The author makes out a good case for the Celtic sources of Chrétien's romance, by comparing the story to a great number of Irish and other tales ("various parallels - frequently far-fetched as it seems to me", says Bruce, *Evolution*, Vol. I, p. p.94,n.) in which there is close correspondence of detail; especially the journey of the hero to the Otherworld in Iwain corresponds closely to the Celtic idea. Referring to an Irish tale preserved due to the fact that it told of Cuchulainn who was regarded as a historical personage, Brown says: "..... In the same way, the original tale of Iwain, from which according to the hypothesis Chrétien drew, was connected no doubt with the historical Owen, a hero of the Brythonic Celts." Iwain, p.39, and see also p. 120.

(2) See p. 230 supra.

spread is Morgan's influence where she affects the lives of Arthur, Lancelot, Pelleas, Merlin, Tristan and Alisander le Orphelin.

(f) In many romances we meet with sudden, unexpected and unexplained acts of savagery that seem to accord ill with French usage, but that can be brought into relation with Celtic practice. Among these are the numerous cases of impaled heads of knights, as in Erec, Li Biaus Descouneus, Le Chevalier as deux Espées, La Vengeance de Raguidel, and others. They all re-echo the incident where Kulhwch, having accomplished all the tasks set him, wins Olwen's hand and then slays her father, the gaint Yspaddaden Penkawr, and cuts off his head and sets it on a stake. (Cf. the head-cutting motif in so many Celtic tales, e.g. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and Bricriu's Feast.)

(g) There is a curious and important incident in Chrétien's Le Chevalier de la Charette, which re-^{the recent}counts of the kidnapped Guenever by Lancelot. She is imprisoned by Meleagant in a castle on the island of Goirre. This castle can be approached by two bridges only, the one quite submerged, and the other consisting of a sword blade laid on edge. Lancelot chooses the latter, painfully wounding his hands and knees in crawling across it. Now to me it is clear that here we have a clear instance (not understood by Chrétien or the other French romancers) of an invasion of the Celtic Otherworld. Goirre (cf. Isle de Voirne - Glass Castle) represents the abode of the dead beyond the waters (cf. the domain of the Fomors) which can be crossed only by bridges along which no one would care to return. Negotiating the submerged bridge gives

access to the castle by way of the water itself; the sword bridge, I can state confidently, is none other than a faint remembrance of the Knife of Ossla Gyllelvawr⁽¹⁾ from Kulhwch and Olwen which when laid across a stream served as a bridge for Arthur's whole army. (This is one of the points which, although it suggested itself to me, seems to have struck none of the many authorities who discuss this story with its strange motif).

(h) One last point: There are innumerable references to chess (cf. the automatic chessmen in Perceval) in Arthurian romances. Now it is admitted that the Norman-French may have become acquainted with the game through contact with the Saracens and other Arabic nations on the Crusades. Yet, judging from the new translation of the Mabinogion by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, the game described in the Mabinogion tales (Dream of Rhonabwy and Peredur) is not chess as we know it, but a Welsh game called gwyddbwyll (in which the king on one side is hunted by men, without a king, on the other, and the game is played on a board like a chess-board).

These instances of Celtic elements in the romances - a few of many - are sufficient to demonstrate my view that we have sufficient evidence to maintain that French Arthurian Romance is essentially of Celtic origin. It does not matter how much the Norman-French genius has transmuted the old metal: it has always been essentially Celtic, and in my

(1) See Ch. II, p. 44 supra.

opinion it is sheer wilfulness to deny it its true nature.

One or two last questions remain for us to think over and to answer in the light of all the discussions above.

What of the future of the Arthurian legend as a source of inspiration in literature: has it had its day or can it charm Englishmen again? What is its real value, and has this value ever been truly grasped so that the story's great central theme could be utilized to the full in a manner worthy of it? Is it now only a field for critics to prowl around in, or can it also still serve as a theme for creative literature - "the literature of power that moves" as opposed to "the literature of knowledge that instructs".⁽¹⁾

The comparatively rare appearance, in later years, of works inspired in either field by the Arthurian legend would almost seem to justify the conclusion that the legend is now a spent force, and that not much more remains to be wrung from the once great subject by either critic or creative writer.

There are many desert patches in the fair Arthurian field, many places where the fair music of the song is suspended in an uneasy silence. Why does the Arthurian theme seem so attractive to our greatest poets so that they return again and again to sip tentatively of the nectar of this flower, yet as often

(1) The phrases are de Quincey's, see R.A. Scott-James: The Making of Literature: London, Martin Secker, 1932.

wander off again and neglect it altogether? Why was not the enchantment of the Arthurian story sufficient to cause, for the great romantics, Byron, Shelley and Keats, the procuring "for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith"? Why did Milton pick up the subject and drop it again? Why did Shakespeare ignore it altogether?

The truth lies in the very nature of the legend. And moreover the very way in which the process of growth and development of the legend took place held in itself the causes of its decay. Wholly British in origin, and having an own intrinsic worth and native interest that cannot be denied, it is yet an alien thing that has become what it is through the contamination of foreign influences. The original blend of myth and history has been worked not by the spirit of native popular imagination but by the fantastic spirit of foreign romance. The indigenous stories had been appropriated to express the unreal and untenable ideals of an alien class. The native charm had been lost in the artificiality of the accretions to the original. And they had become altogether too fantastic, too unreal, too untrue, too remote. The essential truth and eternal greatness of the central theme had become too much obscured by fantastic incidentals. And so the great themes of the legend, the nobility, the spirituality and the sublimity of the subject, have been diluted to make it fit matter only for idle tales to beguile the leisure of children.

Arthurian poetry thus no longer succeeds in

awakening national aspirations, and it has not taken on the stature of national importance. Its historical foundation was too shaky, and it was merely a French treatment of very old dim British legend. When it became the property of the alien class that class did much to develop it into a form fit for polite literature, but in the process of re-shaping it, deprived it of most of its virility and vitality. Besides, in the very beginning of the change, the trouvères by consciously putting the accent on the element of courtly love, lost sight of its great central truth and meaning. The Norman-French poets were dazzled by the details of episode and pageantry in the story and had not the wisdom and power to utilize its main tragic theme, and so failed to establish it and make it develop along the lines it should have taken. They were like children playing with materials fit for handling only by adults, and so they created a pretty story out of matter that should have produced a sublime tragedy. Malory had a momentary vision of the magnitude of the story but even he could not influence its development, for its main features and their treatment were already fixed when he retold the romances. He could unify and consolidate, but he could not alter beyond indicating where the real strength of the legends lay.

In the hands of the trouvères the wild Celtic legends gained assurance and a sleek, sophisticated beauty, but lost much of their spontaneous charm and simplicity - their appeal was now to the head rather than to the heart. We see this very clearly when we compare the best of the Arthurian romance stories with old Irish tales which correspond somewhat in theme.

The average modern Englishman who has mostly Anglo-Saxon-Norman blood in his veins, and only a little of the Celts, is left unmoved to-day by tales of the minor peccadilloes of Gawain, or the fantastic peregrinations of Perceval, even the stodgy adultering of Lancelot. But let our Englishman read the annals of the Ultonians and the Fianna. No fighting here like that of the automatons of romance who prance about solemnly ahorse or afoot at the jousts and strike ponderous and sluggish blows in senseless tournaments. Here we have fierce, red-blooded, living champions in action, who lived, wooed and strove lustily in a time when a man fought and killed his enemy for a prize worth taking: a herd of shaggy, long-horned cattle, or a broad-hipped, tawny-haired woman. It was a time then when passions were violent, and love was mostly tragic, because the artless artistry of the native bards recognized the rightness of truly tragic themes. We are still deeply stirred by the love stories of Naoise and Deirdre, of Cuchulainn and Emer, and of Branwen and her fatal beauty.

If the Arthurian legend, as we learn to know it in the early Welsh poems and stories, could have continued developing and growing in its native surroundings and retained its original spirit it might to-day have presented a wealth of myth and legend as great as that of classic Greece. But the influence of national history sent it in another direction, and it became a thing of transient greatness and fleeting influence. With the growth of a new English nationalism in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries the Arthurian legend was no longer a national tradition: it belonged to a past phase of the nation's growth, and no longer

reflected national aspirations. It could evoke no deep emotions, no patriotism. Its details carried no promising materials for the modern poets and, in fact, the whole business was considered rather childish and silly and hardly worth a poet's serious attention. Only one or two of its parts still had possibilities: the mysticism of the Grail Quest, and the lawless passion of Tristan and Iseult.

The Norman-French trouvères had failed to grasp the essential beauty and possibilities of the Arthur-Guenever-Lancelot story. The tragic potentialities of the story of a noble man who sinned, albeit in ignorance, and who came to a downfall as the punishment for that one sin, a man who was too great and noble; of another man who was as base as he was noble; and of a woman who sinned because she was so very woman: all these elements are in the Arthur story even to-day for the poet who has the vision and the power to forge them into a mighty dramatic work.

For the grand central theme is still there, waiting for that happy union of romantic and imaginative faith with true genius, that will revive the old story to produce an imperishable English epic. Arthur still awaits the native singer who will fashion it into an epic poem or great prose tragedy (perhaps the fittest form into which the matter can be cast) on the terribly tragic theme of Arthur's sin and suffering.

He is still unborn, but surely he will come, who will arouse Arthur, where he rests in his Elysium, and call him forth once more to walk among men, and gladden the hearts, not only of his Britons, but of all

who love and honour him :-

For such a one the lines from John Leyden's
"Scenes of Infancy" :-

"Say who is he, with summons strong and high
Shall bid the charmed sleep of ages fly;
Roll the long sound through Eildon's caverns vast,
While each dark warrior rouses at the blast:
The horn, the falchion grasp with mighty hand
And peal proud Arthur's march from Fairyland?"

I feel certain that Arthur may still be a
force in the cultural history and literature of Europe.
Arthur could still serve for a poem on a truly epic
scale - the scale, say, of the Aeneid or the Paradise
Lost and the poet would have to be of the stature and
temper of Milton, no less.

Or it could be made into a tragedy or a series
of tragedies, for it is perhaps too long for a single
work - by a successor of Shakespeare or the Goethe of
Faust.

To portray properly its pomp and pageantry,
and to portray the vast canvas of the whole panorama
of mediaeval Europe, however, the fittest medium for the
story would be a motion picture production. The film
is perhaps the only medium which has the resources and
technique to do full justice to the story. A truly
epic film could be made, provided the production were
supported by studious research and preparation and in-
telligent direction with, however, a nice balance be-
tween restraint and lavishness so that the proper
measure of spectacle and magnitude which the subject
would demand, could be obtained without the blundering
of riotous fancy^{*} which the "super-colossal" school of

production would inevitably give free play.

If the main events of the whole composite legend were combined in due proportion and logical sequence, with the various currents and influences and branches of the story interweaving into a well-knit whole, so that the plot gradually unfolded to its inevitable tragic end - what a great and lasting work of art it might be. Such a screenplay would, of course, demand nothing less than superlative excellence in every part: scenario, costumes, scenes, effects, photography, dialogue and acting, but especially in sympathetic direction. The story itself is worthy of such treatment for it carries its own constant and unfailing appeal.

It contains all the ingredients required to capture and hold the interest of all who love a good story: courage and adventure, love and hatred, jealousy and scheming, colour and movement, glamour and wonder. It has all the themes that contain moving and tragic possibilities: baseness and treachery that bring ruin, adulterous love that causes sorrow and brings repentance - yet this apparent gloom is relieved by enough of faithfulness, honour, courage and nobility, and withal by the hope of Arthur's return from Avallon when all wounds shall have been healed over, all wickedness expiated.

But most important of all, despite its origins - both in pre-historic times and in the Middle Ages when moral standards were not strict - it is an intensely moral tale that carries its great moral truth and message in its own artistic excellence.

And its lesson is that sin will always bring sorrow, but must as inevitably be punished: the sin and the suffering and the sorrow, however provide the crucible from which souls will rise purified and refined with all the dross removed. It conforms, therefore, to that ideal which I believe should be the ideal of all great literature, namely to please and to instruct, and so more deeply, as all "sublime" art should, to purge or cleanse the emotions. It will, in short, "make men better" and so serve to the one great end to which all creation moves, namely, that all shall be done to glorify God.

**Explicit: Si finist ycy Maistre
M.M.S. son liure de lestoire del roi
Artus.**

**Dieu nous maint tous a bonne fin.
Amen.**

APPENDIX I : Tristan and Iseult.

"Ich weiz wol, ir ist vil gewesen,
die von Tristande hânt gelesen;
und ist ir doch niht vil gewesen,
die von im rehte haben gelesen".

Gottfried von Strassburg: Tristan.

The Tristan story could only be noted very shortly in the main text above. It may not be out of place -- and it will certainly have some interest and value -- to note rapidly some of its main features, and attempt to arrive at an idea of its development. Such a short examination will reveal that in it we have a valuable storehouse of Celtic traditions. (A study of its origins can serve as a pointer, too, towards the general Celtic nature of the Arthurian story as a whole).

The original Tristan story, critics seem to be agreed, is undoubtedly Celtic, although -- as in other legends related to the Arthurian story -- opinion is sharply divided on the question of the extent to which we can trace purely Celtic elements and traditions in the story as we have it now. Some critics would see in it, too, a creation wholly of French genius, yet there is much in the Tristan tale that can be traced much further back than French mediaeval chivalric and romantic notions. In fact, close examination of the story reveals many traits to be found in undoubtedly pure Celtic saga and tradition, that point to the existence, once, of a version of the story much older than the extant French redactions.

The earliest French mediaeval romance Tristan poems date from a little after the middle of the twelfth century. Chrétien says in Cliges that he wrote a poem "about King Mark and the fair Iseult". Of this poem

no MS. has been preserved. The earliest MSS. of the Tristan story that have come down to us (listed here in modern editions) are :-

- (1) One of a poem by the Anglo-Norman Thomas, (1155-1170): Le Roman de Tristan par Thomas, ed. J. Bédier, 1902-1905.
- (2) Another by the Norman poet Béroul (end twelfth century): Le Roman de Tristan par Béroul, Ed. J. Muret, 1903.
- (3) A Middle High German poem by Eilhart von Oberg (about 1180-1190): Ed. F. Lichtenstein, 1877.
- (4) Another by Gottfried von Strassburg (about 1210): various good editions, the latest by K. Marold (1906).
- (5) The Prose Tristan, MS. 103, Bibliothèque nationale.
- (6) Two poems The Madness of Tristan, (end twelfth beginning of the thirteenth centuries): Les deux poèmes de la Folie Tristan, ed. J. Bédier, 1907. (The "Oxford" and the "Berne" MSS.)

Another old redaction, useful as a study of sources, is a Norse prose saga of Tristan,: Saga af Tristan ok Isondar, ed. Brynjulfson, 1878, Tristams Saga ok Isondar, ed. E. Kôlbing, 1882.

These different versions all in the last instance derive from a common original source, which, in its turn, must have been composed of very old elements, much older than the French mediaeval romance poems. This might have been Chrétien's lost Tristan poem, but

it is not likely. The lost original must date from about the middle of the twelfth century, before any of the redactions noted above, but after Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia (1138), which had made the traditions of Arthur common property (for in the Tristan poems Tristan is associated with Arthur). At that time Chrétien was too young to have written such a mature work as the original Tristan romance must have been.

The existence once of such a lost original Tristan poem, the source of all the earliest extant romances, is one of the few questions on which scholars of romantic and Arthurian matters are in complete agreement. It is by collating the details of the story as found in the many versions noted, that the composite, hypothetical prototype has been constructed, of which, naturally, no manuscript or copy exists, but which in its theoretical form clearly shows how many purely primitive traits survive in the later sophisticated romance redactions. It indicates what the nature may have been of the original primitive and plain tale which the French trouvères so eagerly seized upon and pressed into service as a means for disseminating their doctrines of courtly love.

The task of reconstructing the composite story as it may have been -- the "Ur-Tristan", as it is generally called -- was ably attempted by J. Bédier in the second volume of his great edition of Thomas's Tristan. (In 1907 W. Golther in his Tristan und Isolde made a similar and independent reconstruction). Space does not permit a summary of this story being given: a detailed one is given by Bruce, Evolution, Vol. I,

pp. 166 - 171, i.e. of the Bédier-Golther reconstruction).

M. Bédier has listed the following traits which he concludes to be of Celtic origin:- (a) the story of Mark and the horse's ears; (b) Tristan's ability to imitate the songs of birds; (c) the arc qui ne feut (Tristan's bow that never misses the mark); (d) the fairy castle of Tintagel; (e) the stream flowing through Iseult's chamber; (f) the room in which the knights of Arthur sleep side by side with Mark and his queen. These, Bédier concludes, are the only features of the Tristan tradition that seem to be genuinely Celtic. They are parts of a brutal tale of a husband duped by a lover redoubtable for his physical strength and a master of primitive arts. It is, however, not this 'barbaric Decameron' that we think of as the story of Tristan and Iseult, states Bédier; the story of Tristan and Iseult, he says, is significant only as it is tragic -- the tale of two hapless mortals bound to each other by a supernatural power, and living in the midst of a society in which their love violates a sacred and indissoluble tie. Because M. Bédier is satisfied that among the Celts the marriage tie was neither sacred nor indissoluble he infers that we must attribute to the French the first tragic treatment, and hence the real invention of the story. In other words, M. Bédier has traced some Celtic elements in the Tristan story but he believes that its origin as a tragic story is entirely French. The chief texts of the Tristan story are those of Béroul, Eilhart von Oberge, Thomas, the Folie Tristan, and the prose Tristan romance. M. Bédier concludes that these all derive

from a single twelfth century poem now lost, and the author himself owed little or nothing to previous redactions: he created the story at one stroke in all its excellence.

From Bédier's conclusions it would seem thus that, whatever the raw materials were which the unknown poet who made the Ur-Tristan worked over, the fact remains that the tale was created whole and perfect in all its tragic intensity by a Norman-French writer, and its spirit and meaning are wholly French.

But we may also ask what were the form and the source of the version from which the French poet drew. Did he, merely taking the name of an unknown Celtic warrior, invent the tale out of nothing, incorporating in it the few Celtic traits Bédier lists, or did he have for his source a still earlier version - the Ur-ur-Tristan - which may even have been an original Celtic tale containing many more purely Celtic traits and traditions than Bédier thought?

The same Celtic narrative genius which created the tales we have noted in Chapter III above could -- I feel sure -- have been responsible for such a tale of lawless and tragic passion as that of Tristan and Iseult: not such a tale, indeed, as the full and detailed reconstructed archetype, but one with the padding and trappings of French courtly lore removed so that the basic unadorned narrative of elemental passion remained.

The story of Tristan, even as we have it in the French versions, does not -- to my mind -- fit into the general pattern of French mediaeval romance. It

is rather a tale that in the extant French (and German) redactions has been so retold and consciously altered as to serve as a medium for the expression of French courtly ideals and sentiment, but originally was a plain love-story of which we have many similar examples in Irish saga, although they may not all be of such a high order and what I may call "modern excellence" as the Tristan.

The tragic compulsion of the love-draught -- which is the central fact of the story -- was a strange and disturbing element for the Norman-French redactors, that they did not quite like, nor know how to handle. They had to try and minimize the significance of this factor which would clash with the proper teachings of the amour courtois, where love -- even unfaithful adulterous love -- was a matter of free choice; as a paraphrase of ll. 187 - 194 of Gottfried von Strassburg's Tristan expresses it:

"The service of love is voluntary service,
which the lover joyfully accepts with
his whole mind".

Because the irresistible compulsion of the potion would seem to detract from the voluntary quality of their love, a new system of ethics, a new concept of faith and morality had to be invented. And thus we get the baffling picture of a Tristan who fears to be unfaithful to his fine amante if he should have normal relations with his own wife. he would rather not commit 'adultery' with his wife in order that he may remain true to his lover (herself another man's wife), a truly nice point of mediaeval morality! In this and in other extravagances we see the French influence transforming the natural primitive tale into an artificial and

sophisticated romance which represents the quintessence of the amour courtois doctrine.

But where did the French poet get his conception of Tristan, the great warrior, harper, athlete and lover? Such a hero already existed in British literature.

Tristan (Drystan) is mentioned, we found, in the Welsh Triads. His passion for his uncle's wife was an old and well-known story, as other triads attest. He is mentioned along with mythical characters from the Celtic pantheon such as Edeyrn, son of Nudd (i.e. Llud), and Mabon, son of Modron, as one of the chief counselors of Arthur in The Dream of Rhonabwy. In these and other loci, the names, story and characters are all British -- probably Cornish, and in some cases even possibly Pictish (see discussion by Bruce, Evolution, Vol. I, pp. 171-186).

That there was more to the matter than Bédier thought has been the view of another scholar, Miss Gertrude Schoepperle. The most important critical work, for our purposes, on the subject of the Tristan legend is her Tristan and Isolt, A Study of the Sources of the Romance, 2 vols.: New York University Monographs No. 4; London, David Nutt & Frankfurt, Joseph Baer & Co., 1913.

In this penetrating study she traces the derivation of the story to an Aithed (Elopement Story) of which that of Diarmaid and Grainne is the type, and -- to a lesser extent -- the theme of the Imrama, (adventurous voyages to unknown destinations) such as that of Maelduin. (Another story from Irish legend which may

have helped to suggest and inspire that of Tristan and Iseult is the famous love-story of Naoise and Deirdre, the wife of Conchobar).

Schoepperle says that Bédier is right in affirming that the extant versions reflect the personality of the French redactors, but Gaston Paris (in articles in Romania (1886) and Revue de Paris (1894 -- M.W.S.) was also right in his feeling that the tragic story of Tristan was of Celtic origin. Contrary to Bédier she has found that the tragic treatment of unlawful love was possible among the Celts, as there are numerous tragic versions of the theme in old Irish literature (as in Diarmaid and Grainne), and she also found much other evidence of Celtic influence -- a much larger number of Celtic traits than Bédier recognized.

By a comparative study of the poems and traditions she found in Eilhart von Oherge's version features to which there were no analogues in French literature, but which she frequently met in accounts of primitive beliefs and customs in Celtic romance. She was thus led to attribute a higher value to the Bérout-Eilhart version than to that of Thomas or the prose romance, as preserving an earlier version of the Tristan story. She concludes that the version of Eilhart von Oherge is the most primitive version of the Tristan story extant, and therefore represents most faithfully the original Tristan prototype. The most common source of all the later versions, the archetype from which proceed all the other extant versions of the Tristan story -- the one reconstructed by M. Bédier from the versions listed above, and which corresponds

so closely to the Eilhart version -- Miss Schoepperle calls the estoire. The Folie of the Berne MS. alludes to such a source, as does Bérout:

"Si comme l'estoire dit,
La ou Beron le vit escrit".

The estoire, then, according to Schoepperle was the common source whose chief features are preserved in Bérout, Eilhart and the Folie, while Thomas has modified it; M. Bédier has given chief place to the Thomas fragment (his poem has not been preserved whole), which compares best with his reconstruction.

Miss Schoepperle does not, of course, imply that the story as we have it now was entirely a Celtic creation. The incidents of the latter part of the estoire, present several of the favourite situations of the conventional courtly lyrics of the period, and imply the currency of the notions of courtesy that were then in vogue. So, for example, in the latter part of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries there were pastourelles and a whole class of chansons de mal mariée in which the moral tone is light to say the least. The episode of Kaherdin (Iseult of Brittany's brother) and Camille in the Tristan story is of the nature of a pastourelle, that of Kaherdin and Gargeolain that of a chanson de mal mariée.

But to return to the additional and unmistakable Celtic traits that she claimed to have discovered, besides those listed by Bédier: Miss Schoepperle notes the following:

- (1) The Story of Morholt: It will be recalled

that a great knight called Morholt, brother-in-law of the Irish king, comes from Ireland to exact the tribute of every third child of fifteen years old, but is ready to settle the matter with any suitable Cornish champion. All the Cornish knights hold back, but Tristan undertakes the combat, which takes place on the Isle of Saint-Samson only the combatants being present. Tristan mortally wounds his adversary, who dies before reaching Ireland again. Iseult removed the fragment of Tristan's sword from her uncle's skull and kept it; from this she was later able to recognize Tristan as her uncle's slayer.

Classic myth and legend offers many examples of dragons and monsters to which tributes of humans are offered. . There are the stories of Beowulf, St. George, and Theseus and the Minotaur. Then there is the Celtic legend of the Fomorians. After the death of Nemed, the Fomors oppressed the Nemeditians and levied upon Ireland an annual tribute of two-thirds of the sons and daughters of the Nemeditians (besides also a tax of grain and milk) to be paid on each day of Samhain - the first of November. The great hero Lugh eventually abolished the Fomorian tribute by conquering the monsters at the Second Battle of Moytura. Miss Schoepperle's conclusion is that the story of Tristan and Morholt, and of Lugh and the Fomorians are accounts of people suffering under a tribute (of young people to be carried off to slavery? -- M.W.S.), imposed by a foreign power.

(2) The Voyage of healing at the hands of the enemy: Tristan, too, had been wounded in the combat with Morholt, and as the wound will not heal, he has

himself put into a boat and set adrift on the sea, that the boat may wander where it will. It drifts to Ireland, where Tristan is healed by an enemy, namely Iseult, Morholt's niece. The voyage in a rudderless boat is a favourite story in Old Irish literature, where such voyages are often impelled by religious motives, as in The Voyage of Maelduin. In Eilhart's poem, the poet confides to the reader that no one can heal Tristan's wound but Iseult. (Malory tells us: "Then came there a lady that was a right wise lady, and she said plainly unto King Mark, and to Sir Tristram, and to all his barons, that he should never be whole but if Sir Tristram went in the same country that the venom came from, and in that country should he be holpen or else never", Bk. VIII, ch. viii, -- M.W.S.). The theme is popular in primitive fiction, cf. Telephus who was wounded by the spear of Achilles, and Cuchulainn's healing of the wounds that he dealt the war-goddess Morrighu, and a similar situation in the lai of Guigemar. All of these stories are founded on a primitive belief that a wound establishes some strange relationship or affinity between the victim and the person or weapon inflicting the wound. In the Grail story the lance which had wounded the Fisher-King could alone heal him. Miss Schoepperle says that this episode of Tristan's setting out in a rudderless boat to secure the healing of his wound at the hands of Morholt's kinswoman is paralleled in Greek, Irish and Norse literature, but is not found elsewhere in French romance. The theme of the rudderless boat is not found in the Norse or the Greek stories. It seems possible then, in view of the other Celtic connections of Tristan, that the Morholt story is

traceable to Celtic tradition.

(3) The Idyllic life in the forest: This part of the story conforms to a more Celtic type. In the closely-woven fabric of feudal society it has no place. It is not in fights and tournaments that Tristan excels (although French redactors approximate him to their own heroes). He is a woodland hero, nimble of hand and foot; he has extraordinary possession of the five senses and is fertile in ruses. He can tune his voice to the birds, take prodigious leaps, snare the fish and trap the game. (Tristan corresponds, in fact, to the members of the Fianna Eirinn, the men of Finn Mac Coul's band, who had to pass a great number of incredibly difficult tests before being admitted to membership -- see Charles Squire, Celtic Myth and Legend, pp. 203 - 207 -- M.W.S.).

The two lovers live on herbs and the simplest food while they shelter in the forest from pursuit by King Mark. Theirs must have been a care-free life like that of the other two hunted lovers described in the following translation of The Elopement of Deirdre with Naisi, from The Book of Leinster (about 1150), which will show at once the quality of old Irish lyric verse:

"Naisi, with mead of delicious hazel nuts
Came, to be bathed by me at the fire.
Ardan, with an ox or boar of excellence,
Aindle, a faggot on his stately back.

Though sweet be the excellent mead to you
Which is drunk by the sons of Ness, the rich
in strife,
There has been known to me, ere now,
leaping over a bank,
Frequent sustenance which was sweeter.

When the noble Naisi spread out
A cooking hearth on the hero-board of tree,
Sweeter than any food dressed under honey
Was what was captured by the son of Usnach".

(Have not the same spirit and intense love of an open-air life been recaptured and expressed in matchless lines by a later poet in whose veins there also flowed Gaelic blood, hot with the love of gallant fighting, but whose frail body was laid away too soon on a Samoan hill-top:

"I will make you brooches and toys for your delight
Of bird-song at morning and star-shine at night.
I will make a palace fit for you and me
Of green days in forests and blue days at sea.

I will make my kitchen, and you shall keep your
room,
Where white flows the river and bright blows the
broom,
And you shall wash your linen and keep your body
white
In rainfall at morning and dewfall at night.

And this shall be for music when no one else is
near,
The fine song for singing, the rare song to hear .."

How much might he too have written of Chivalry had he
lived longer. -- M.W.S.)

This is scarcely the kind of life which would
have held attractions for the fragile fines amantes of
the Norman-French extraction, nor is it lauded in the
romances of the times.

(4) The Harp and Rote: This is another Celtic
story which has all the possibilities of having been
woven into the Tristan story. It has been lost in
the version of Eilhart but preserved in the Folie
Tristan, (Berne MS.), the prose romance, and Thomas.
A stranger visits Mark's palace. After they have dined
the king who has learned from the stranger that he is a

minstrel, asks him to play, and, - like all the kings of mediaeval romance who will never learn prudence - promises to grant the don required before knowing what it will be. The stranger demands as his reward for having played nothing less than Iseult herself. He carries her weeping to his ship. Tristan sets off to the shore to try and win her back. He plays so beautifully that the stranger does not notice the tide rising above the gang-board. Tristan offers to carry the queen to the ship on his horse. As soon as he has her safely up he rides off, flinging a taunt to the helpless stranger for his folly. What the stranger won with his rote, says Tristan, he himself has won back with his harp.

There is a similar story in The Wooing of Etain. The same theme of regaining a queen by means of a ruse is found in the story of Pwyll, Prince of Dyved, where Pwyll nearly lost his wife Rhiannon owing to the unguarded granting of a boon.

(5) The Love-potion: The belief in love-charms is of course universal among primitive peoples and in the Middle Ages. It partly expresses the overpowering and often arbitrary compulsion of love and also serves to remove the moral responsibility in a case of guilty love. The fatal charm which draws the two lovers together in the story of Diarmaid and Grainne is the 'love-spot' possessed by Diarmaid which makes him irresistible to any woman who sees it. The theme of the geis - a charm which can only be broken at grave risk - is a common one in Irish literature. We have noted above that the element of compulsion implied in a fatal

and irresistible charm is really inimical to the doctrines of courtly love, and the Norman-French poets such as Thomas minimize the effect of the potion, and emphasize the natural compulsion of love.

Considering all these portions of the estoire, to which she has found parallels in other Celtic stories, but of which there are no analogues in French literature, and taking them in conjunction with the Celtic traits noted by Bédier in his study, Miss Schoepperle comes to the conclusion that the Tristan story as a whole is a Celtic rather than a French creation. The estoire, it is true, is already permeated with the ideals of amour courtois, so that the later redactors were not the first to introduce these ideals into the story. But the original source of the ^{he} archetype she concludes must have been purely Celtic. Yet the original Celtic tale, stripped of its later elaborations and accretions, is still a great and tragic tale which owes its excellence to its Celtic creator(s).

She sums up thus (Tristan and Isolt, pp. 469-470) :-

"Our study of the traces of Celtic elements in the earliest extant versions of the Tristan story leads us to a conclusion that reconciles the opposing views of Gaston Paris and M. Bédier. The story of Tristan as it was first conceived, and conceived in no less of tragic beauty than in the form in which we now have it was Celtic. Gaston Paris, in the glowing pages in which he discusses it, speaks to us of the story as it was. The story of Tristan as we have it in Eilhart, in Béroul and in Thomas, is French, and M. Bédier, in his discussion of it speaks to us of the story as it is.

In the present study we have tried to show, by examining in detail Celtic romances of a character similar to Tristan, that the stories current among the Celts in the twelfth century not only reflect a 'milieu' entirely different from that with which the twelfth

century French poets were familiar, but that they imply sentiments, emotions, conceptions of honour, moral ideas -- an entire psychology, different from that of the French. A Celtic story would have to be altered, in fact almost transformed, before it could be presented to a French audience. The poet must infuse into the Celtic lovers the spirit of French Chivalry. He must supply them with a French background. He must adapt them to French life. He must complete their story according to French ideas. He must connect them with the literary figures familiar to a French audience. He must modify, efface, transform, supplement, create.

Such seems to have been the work of the poet who first conceived the idea of presenting the story of Tristan to a French audience. Such seems to have been the work of the poet whom we find telling the story in the latter part of the twelfth century. Such has been the work of every poet that has told it to this day".

Connecting up with Miss Schoepperle's work, I can add one or two further remarks. A few aspects of the story arising from the concluding incidents should be noted. The French redactors radically changed the simple course of the original story by complicating it with the two women who loved Tristan. Iseult of Brittany - Iseult of the White Hands - is no mere pale echo of Queen Iseult of Cornwall - La Beale Isoud; she is a woman, and an important character in her own right, who first arouses our sympathy for her unenviable part in the story, her fight to win her husband's love, and then shocks us into recognition of the tragic possibilities in jealousy, where she, like some dire, fateful figure plans the deception which will kill the very man she loves -- an issue which, however, is justified for her, as that action robs her rival of him as well.

Although we realize that the French poets, in giving this ending to the story, were inspired by the

examples in classical literature of Oenone and of Theseus, we nevertheless feel grateful that they thus invested the story with an excellence it did not have before. In the original story Tristan perished ingloriously at the hands of his uncle, even as Naisi, too, after the return of the lovers, lured back from exile by promises, was treacherously slain by Conchobar. Diarmaid, too, although not slain by the wronged husband, was entrapped to his death. In each case, thus, death followed on the guilty love. This was the version of the prose romance, and the version that Malory followed, but the poetic version of the embassy to the first and best-loved Iseult, the signal of the black sail (as in the story of Theseus), is the more striking and tragic. So the poets improved on the base and disappointing ending of the original.

Yet even for the two Iseults there is a parallel in Celtic literature, namely in the Brythonic branch, for we have met the two Essylts - Essylt Vinwen 'of the white visage', and Essylt Vingul 'of the narrow visage' - in the Welsh Mabinogion tale Kulhwch and Olwen. It is clear that this tradition may really in its turn have given the first glimmering of a suggestion for the two later Iseults to the unknown French creator of the Ur-Tristan, the estoire.

It is clear, too, that Tristan was not, and never really could be, a story of courtly love. It is too natural, too unaffected, too true a love-story for that. This even the French redactors such as Thomas realized, and their poems are expressive of their protest. Thomas paints the lovers more in their human

frailty, the victims of the magic spell which they are powerless to resist, and less as the exponents of the theory of courtly love. The estoire may, like Li Chevalier de la Charette, have been one of the most striking expressions of the twelfth century idealization of unlawful love, but the tale told by the poets is of two very human lovers, torn by moral struggle. When, in Thomas, the lovers are adjured by the good hermit Orgrin, Tristan complains :-

" Sire, par foi,
Se ele m'aime (en bon foi,
Vos n'entendez pas la raison)
S'el m'aime, c'est par la poison"

and Iseult had declared :-

"Sire, por Deu omnipotent,
Il ne m'aime pas, je ne lui,
Fors par i herbé dont je bui,
Et il en but: ce fu pechiez".

And in Eilhart Tristan had insisted that he was "nichem untrûwe" (to his king): it was all due to "der vil unsêlige trang". "..... It is laid on us by God; we are powerless to resist it" (Schoepperle, Tristan and Isolt, pp. 449 - 450). And when Tristan had a loving wife in Brittany, for whose embraces he longed, he suffered cruelly in preserving his loyalty (as expected of him as the true lover of the distant Iseult):

"Il out boen voleir de li faire,
Mais l'amur le fait molt restraire.
Gente la sent, bele la set,
E volt sun buen, sun desir het
Car s'il n'en cust si grant desir,
A son voleir poust asentir.
Mais a sun grant desir s'asent".

Thomas, far from being the first to introduce courtly ideals into the tradition of Tristan, modified the extravagant lengths to which those ideals were

carried in his source (Schoepperle, pp. 176 - 177).

Eilhart, too, had an intimation of the truth. When Tristan first met Iseult of Brittany, love was kindled by the memory of the other Iseult in Cornwall:-

'Wie heizet dîne swestir?'
'Geselle, sie ist Îsalde genant'.
do wênte der hêre Tristrant
daz sie on hête irkorn.
He dâchte, 'ich habe Îsaldin vlorn:
Îsaldin habe ich wedir vunden'".

He weds her, but it is a maiden marriage:

"Mit dem edelin wîgande
was sie mêr denne ein jâr
(daz hôrte ich sagin vor wâr)
daz sie nî wart sîn wîp.
Daz vortrûg die vrouwe âne nît".

But after having parted from Queen Iseult in anger he returns to Brittany, consummates his marriage, and lives happily with his wife and her kin:

"Do vorkôs ouch her Tristrant
ûf sînen gesellin Kehenîsen
und gewan dar nâch zu wibe
sîne swester dorch den zorn ..
.....
dô hâten vroude genûg
Tristrant und daz wîp sîn".

Verily, it is for this that Bruce has shown in detail that the romance of Lancelot, which epitomizes courtly love in its greatest excellence, was written (by Chrétien) originally as a counterblast to the heresy of the Tristan romance; that it is in truth an Anti-Tristan. The original Tristan story, the final form of the Celtic story, as it had evolved out of old Celtic tradition, we may therefore conclude, was by the beginning of the twelfth century well-established as an important and well-known tale belonging to the Celtic literary tradition. It was one of

the tales that the Norman-French trouvères may have heard as current in Britain, in a fuller form than they had had it from the Bretons on the continent before.

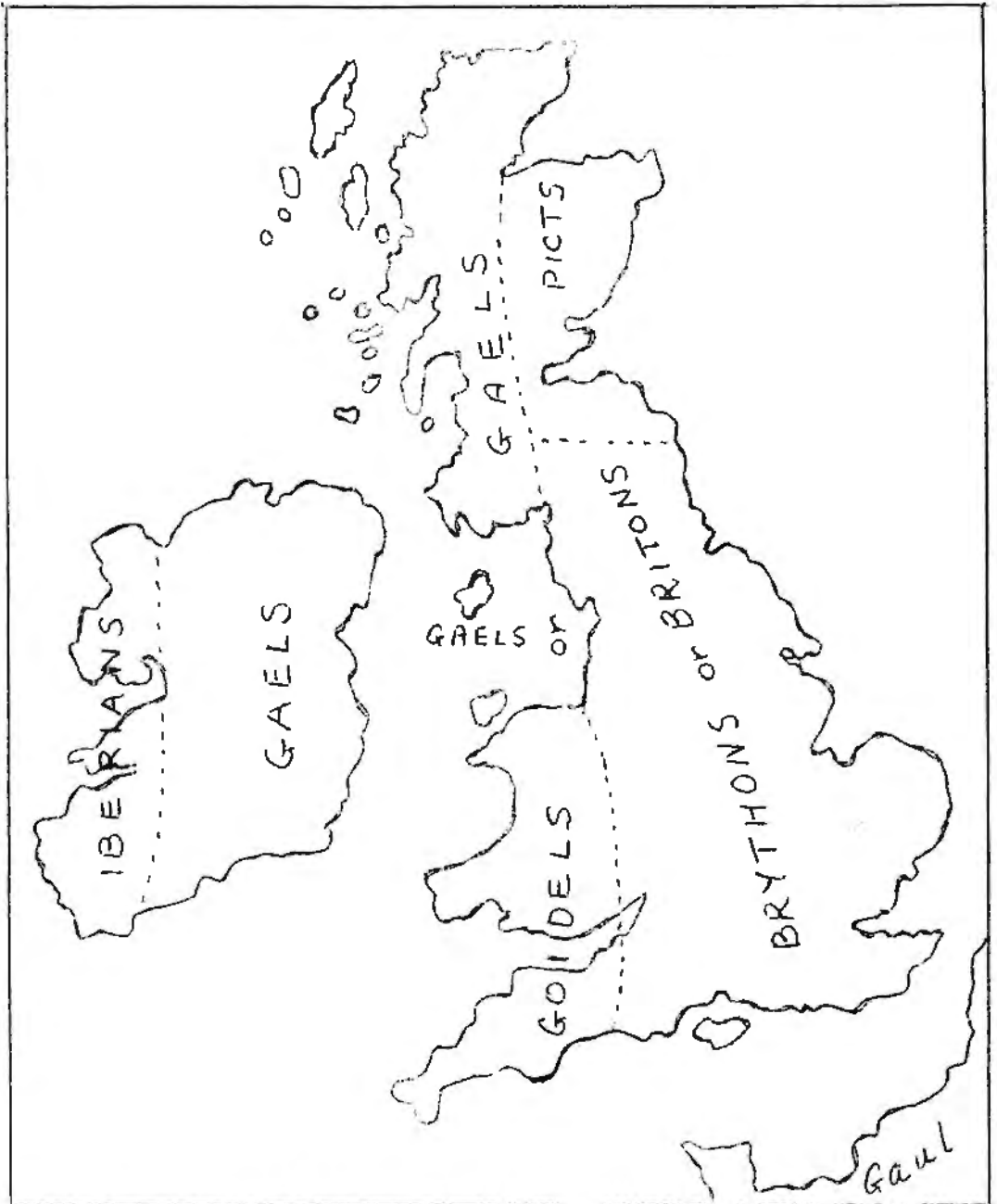
In content it would have corresponded more or less to the Ur-Tristan or estoire version, with the following differences: it would have lacked the account of Tristan's enfances, which - according to the practice of the trouvères who invariably invented an early history for a popular hero - was most certainly added later by the French maker of the estoire; it may have begun with the coming of Morholt, or with Tristan setting off in search of a wife for Mark (without the pretty story of the swallow and the golden hair); it probably had a more expanded version of the lovers' exile in the wild; it may have had the duplication of Iseult, but the ending was much more commonplace, consisting only of the events moving up to the death of Tristan as an act of vengeance on the part of Mark (the version used by the prose romance and Malory). Yet it would not have been a bare, episodic tale. It had the same central theme of an intense and fatal passion due to magical effect of the potion, the same sympathetic story of two hapless and persecuted lovers, the same psychological conflict of two people aware of their unfaith to feudal lord and husband respectively, but powerless to resist their mutual passion, the same foreknowledge that their happiness was destined never to attain permanency, the same sense of impending doom. It probably contained a large body of Celtic mythical and traditional matter, such as is indicated in the relevant Triads, which was discarded when it became a French romance tale. Judging from other tales that

relate the relationship, it would already have contained episodes associating Tristan with King Arthur, but in a relationship such as that existing between chieftain and follower in the Celtic heroic saga-cycle.

Such, I feel certain, was the story with which the Norman-French conquerors of Britain became acquainted. Such was the tale which they, with surprise and delight, discovered and appropriated. "Imagine", they may have said, "such a superlative story existing in the rude literature of these barbarians: let us make a worthy courtly tale out of it!" It is always easier to expand and to improve rather than to create. And this, I think, is the literary history of the evolution of the world's greatest love-story. This is my reconstruction of the Tristan story. Perhaps in this piece of speculation there may lurk a germ of truth, which later research will, it is hoped, establish beyond doubt.

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APPENDIX II



Map of the British Isles at the time of the first Roman invasion, showing distribution of the tribes inhabiting the islands.

Note on Ogam Script: The Ogam script, said to have been invented by Ogma (or Cermait -- "the honey-mouthed"), the Celtic god of literature and eloquence, was an indigenous script of Ireland, originally developed for use in inscriptions on upright pillar-stones, or cut on wands when used to make divinations.

The letters consisted of notches cut across a line or at an angle or above or below it, thus:-

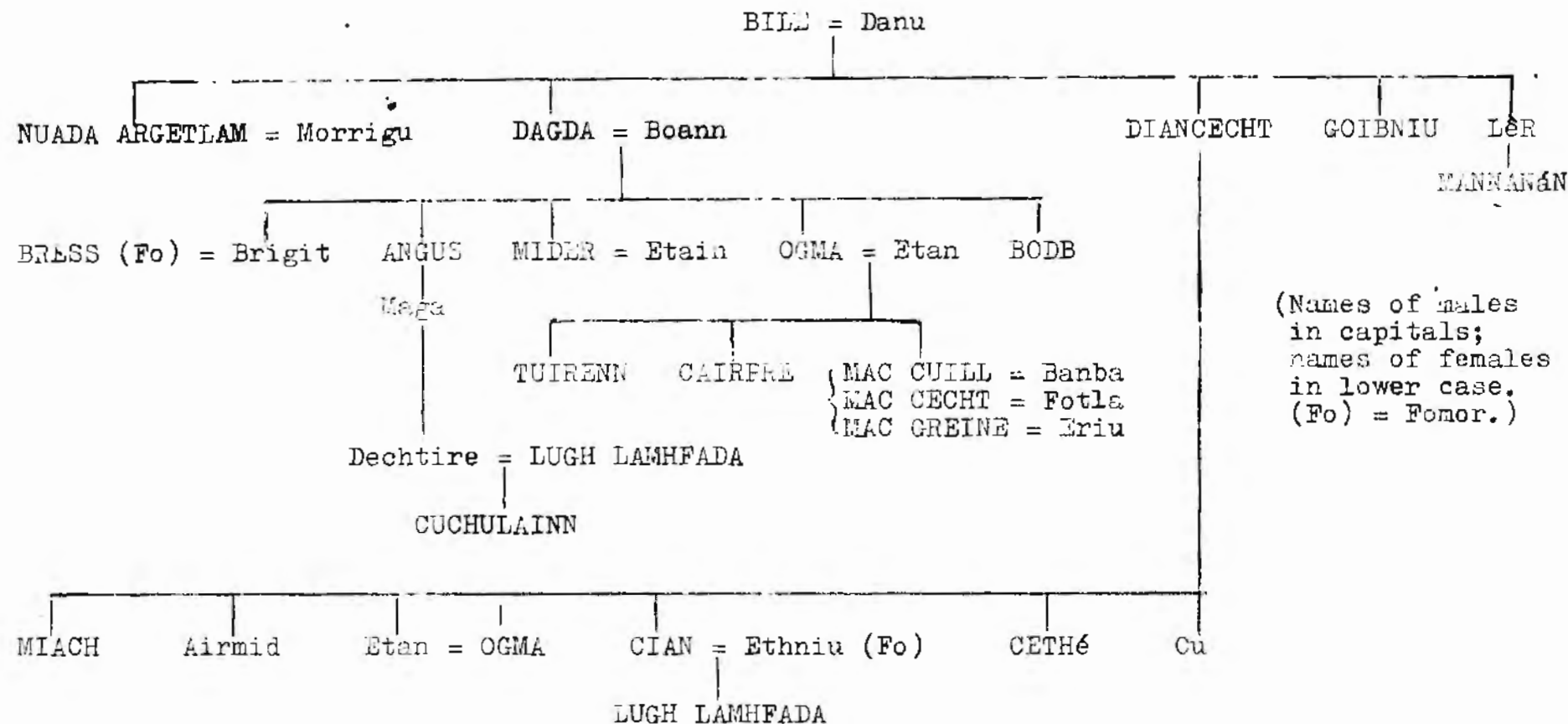
VOWELS:

. or ————
A O U E I A O U E I

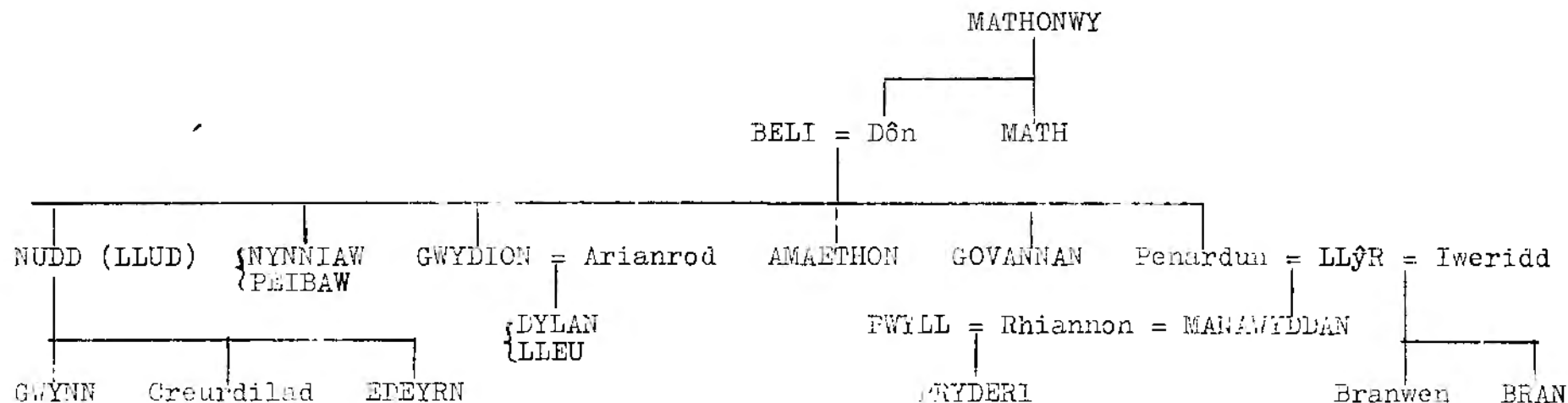
CONSONANTS:

—————
B L F S N H D T C Q V M G N G S T R P
E R C M A Q U I E R C I A S M O D O V I N I A

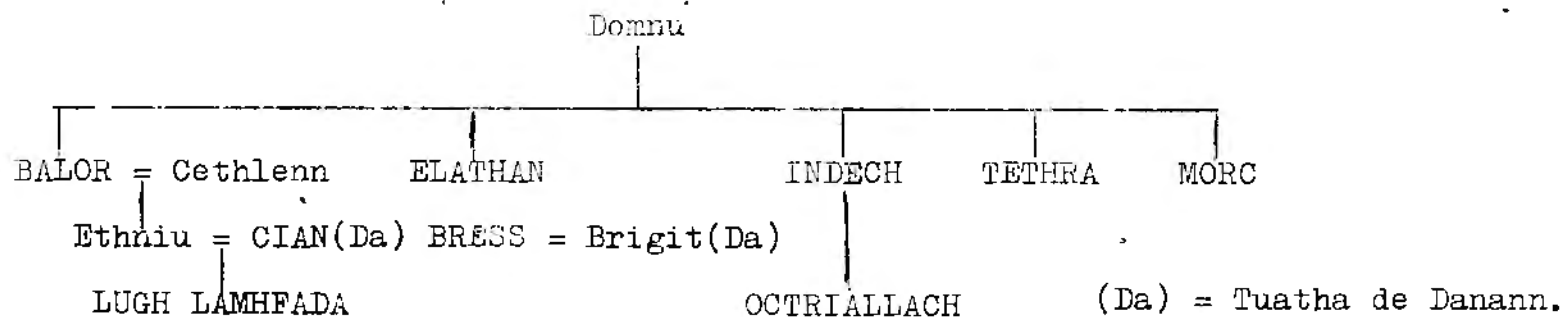
APPENDIX III.



Genealogy of the Tuatha de Danann (The Children of Danu - The Gaelic gods).



The Children of Dôn (The British gods).



The Children of Domnu (The Fomorians).

B I B L I O G R A P H Y.

" O for a book and a shady nook,
Either in-a-door or out,
With the blue sky overhead
And the street-cries all about;
Where I may read all at my ease,
Both of the new and old.
For a jolly good book, whereon to look,
Is better to me than gold. Anon.

" Certainly I must confess my own barbarousness,
I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas,
that I found not my heart moved more than with
a trumpet."

Sir Philip Sydney: Apologie for Poetrie.

It is no part of my intention to append an impressive bibliography. The extant bibliography of Arthurian texts and studies, especially the latter, is too vast to be listed here: it has been more than adequately done elsewhere:

(a) J.D. Bruce: The Evolution of Arthurian Romance, gives a 'select Bibliography of Arthurian Critical Literature' filling no less than forty-seven pages, the list enumerating several hundred books and articles.

(b) Margaret J.C. Reid: The Arthurian Legend, has listed all the original poems, plays and prose works after 1485, which have Arthurian subjects -- a list of the works of forty-eight authors.

I supply here only the titles of works that have actually, in greater or lesser measure, been consulted for purposes of the present study. The list may thus be said to represent the minimum reading for the purpose of getting a fair knowledge of the Arthurian legend and its related problems. While certain of these works may be considered essential reading and

require to be exhaustively studied there are others that need to be read only cursorily or in part, and some contain only incidental references which, however, are useful for a full understanding of detail.

All the works listed have not been equally thoroughly studied: in fact they could not, and did not need to be. They have accordingly been grouped in such a way as to indicate

- (a) their nature, and
- (b) the extent to which they were used, so that works less thoroughly studied are so noted.

Where the list, especially in the first section may present a somewhat meagre appearance, the explanation is simply that Arthurian literature is woefully scarce in our South African libraries. In my researches I found references to many other valuable sources that were, however, unobtainable. In fact the greater part of the books required for this study had to be acquired by private purchase and at great pains, in most cases from overseas. Nearly all the Arthurian studies are now out of print and have become collectors' items.

The difficulties attendant upon a course of study wherein texts for consultation are not readily obtainable, are self-evident, and will account in part for any errors of omission or fact my work may have. For personal views I am, of course, entirely responsible --- except in so far as I have by independent means, arrived at the same conclusions as some of my authorities.

LIST A : CRITICAL WORKS.

- (i) Select list of surveys, studies, and monographs on the origin and development of the Arthurian Legend and Romance.
(Exhaustively studied).

1. BARROW, SARAH F. : The Medieval Society Romances. Columbia Univ. Studies in Eng. & Compar. Litt., New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1924.
2. BRINKLEY, ROBERTA F: Arthurian Legend in the Seventeenth Century
Johns Hopkins Monogr. in Lit. Hist. III, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1932.
3. BROWN, A.C.L. : Iwain, A Study in the Origins of Arthurian Romance.
Harvard Stud. & Notes in Phil. & Litt., VIII, Boston, Ginn & Co 1903.
4. BRUCE, J.D. : The Evolution of Arthurian Romance, from the beginnings down to the year 1300. 2 Vols.
Göttingen, Van den Hoeck u. Ruprecht, 1928.
5. CHAMBERS, E.K. : Arthur of Britain.
London, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1927.
6. HOPE-MONCRIEFF, A.R: Romance and Legend of Chivalry.
London, Gresham Publ. Co.,
7. JONES, W. LEWIS : King Arthur in History and Legend. C.U.P., 1911.
8. LOOMIS, R.S. : Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance.
New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1927.
9. MACCALLUM, M.W. : Tennyson's Idylls of the King and Arthurian Story from the XVIth Century.
Glasgow, Maclehose, 1894.
10. MAYNADIER, G.H. : The Arthur of the English Poets.
Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1907.
11. REID, M.J.C. : The Arthurian Legend: Comparison of Treatment in Modern and Mediaeval Literature - A Study in the literary value of Myth and Legend.
Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd, 1938.
12. RHYS, JOHN : Studies in the Arthurian Legend.
Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1891.
13. SCHÖPPERLE, GERTRUDE S. : Tristan and Isolt: A Study of the Sources of the Romance,
New York Univ. Monogr., IV, London, David Nutt, 1913.

14. SQUIRE, C. : Celtic Myth and Legend, Poetry and Romance.
London, Gresham Publ. Co.,
15. VINAVER, E. : Malory.
Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1929.

.

(ii) General list of essays and critical works.
(Exhaustively studied).

16. ARNOLD, MATTHEW : The Study of Celtic Literature.
London, John Murray, 1929.
17. BRIMLEY-JOHNSON, R : Tennyson and his Poetry.
'Poetry and Life' Series,
London, Harrap.
18. CHAMBERS, E.K. : Sir Thomas Malory:
The Engl. Assoc. Pamphlets,
No. 51. O.U.P., Jan. 1922.
19. CLUTTON-BROCK, A : The Life and Works of William
Morris. (Details of ed. lost).
20. JOHN, IVOR B. : The Mabinogion.
Popular Studies in Mythology,
Romance and Folklore, No. 11.
London, David Nutt, 1901.
21. LEWIS, C.S. : The Allegory of Love: A Study in
Medieval Tradition.
London, O.U.P., 1948.
22. NUTT, ALFRED : The Influence of Celtic upon
Mediaeval Romance.
Pop. Stud. in Myth., Rom. &
Folklore, No. 1. London, Nutt,
1904.
23. SCHOFIELD, W.H. : Chivalry in English Literature:
Chaucer, Malory, Spenser and Shakes-
peare.
Harvard Stud. & Notes in Comp. Litt
Harvard Univ. Press, 1925.
24. WESTON, JESSIE L. : King Arthur and his Knights : A sur-
vey of Arthurian Romance.
Nutt's Pop. Stud. No. 4, 1899.

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(iii) Histories of Literature.
(The relative sections exhaustively studied).

25. DE RAAF, K.H. en : Stromingen en Gestalten: Geschied-
GRISS, J.J. enis der Nederlandsche Letteren.
Rotterdam, Brusse's Uitg. Mij., 192
26. ELTON, OLIVER : A Survey of English Literature,
1830 - 1880. 2 Vols.
London, Arnold, 1927.

27. HARVEY, PAUL : The Oxford Companion to English Literature.
O.U.P., 1944.
28. LEGUOIS, E and CAZAMIAN, L. : A history of English Literature.
London, Dent, 1937.
29. MACLEAN, MAGNUS : The Literature of the Celts: Its History and Romance.
London, Blackie, 1906.
30. MEIKLEJOHN, J.M.D. : English Literature: A New History and Survey from Saxon times to the death of Tennyson.
London, Meiklejohn & Holden, 1904
31. SAINTSBURY, GEO. : A Short History of English Literature.
London, Macmillan, 1916.
32. SCHOFIELD, W.H. : English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer.
London, Macmillan, 1931.
33. WALKER, HUGH : The Literature of the Victorian Era.
C.U.P., 1921.
34. WALKER, HUGH : The Age of Tennyson.
London, Bell & Sons, 1909.
35. WARD, A.W. and WALLER, A.R. : The Cambridge History of English Literature.
Vol. I : From the beginnings to the cycles of romance.
C.U.P., 1949.
36. WARD and WALLER : The Cambridge History of English Literature.
Vol. II : The End of the Middle Ages. C.U.P., 1949.
37. --- : Chambers's Encyclopedia: A Dictionary of Universal Knowledge for the People.
London, W. & R. Chambers, 1874.
38. --- : The Encyclopedia Britannica.
(Recent American ed., details missing.)

(iv) Other studies and critical works.

(More cursorily studied).

39. GARDNER, E.G. : The Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature.
London, Dent, 1930.
40. KEMPE, DOROTHY : The Legend of the Holy Grail: Its sources, character and development.
London, Humphrey Milford, O.U.P., for the Early Eng. Text Soc., 1934.

41. KER, W.P. : English Literature: Mediaeval. London, Butterworth, Home University Library, 1932.
42. LOOMIS, R.S. and : The Arthurian Legend in Mediaeval Art. New York: Mod. Lang. Assn of America Monogr. series, 1938.
43. NEILSON, W.A. : The Origins and Sources of the Court of Love. Harv. Stud. & Notes in Phil. & Litt., Boston, Ginn & Co., 1899.
44. NUTT, ALFRED : Ossian and the Ossianic Literature. Nutt's Pop. Stud., No.3; 1899.
45. NUTT, ALFRED : Cuchulainn, the Irish Achilles. Nutt's Pop. Stud., No. 8, 1900.
46. PATON, LUCY ALLEN : Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance. Radcliffe College Monogr. No.13. Boston, Ginn & Co., 1903.
47. WATTS, H.E. : Life of Miguel de Cervantes. London, Scott, 1891.
48. WESTON, JESSIE L. : The Quest of the Holy Grail. London, Bell; The Quest Series, Ed. G.R.S.Mead 1913.
49. WILLIAMS, C and : Arthurian Torso. Containing the posthumous fragment, The Figure of Arthur, by Chas. Williams, and a commentary on the Arthurian Poems of Chas. Williams, by C.S.Lewis: London, O.U.P., 1948.

LIST B : TEXTS.

- (i) Mediaeval Romance (mostly translations, with introductions and notes by the editors named).

All but the last one listed here are in the "Everyman" ed. of Messrs Dent, London.

(Exhaustively studied)

50. COMFORT, W.W. Eric and Enid by Chrétien de Troyes: (Contains: Erec et Enide, Cligés, Yvain, Lancelot). 1913.
51. EVANS, SEBASTIAN : The High History of the Holy Grail. 1929.
52. GUEST, CHARLOTTE E : The Mabinogion. 1913.
53. JONES, GWYN and : The Mabinogion. 1949.
- JONES, THOMAS
54. MASON EUGENE : French Mediaeval Romances, from the Lays of Marie de France. 1924.

55. PATON, LUCY A : Histories of the Kings of Britain by Geoffrey of Monmouth. 1911. Transl. by Sebastian Evans.
56. PATON, LUCY A : Arthurian Chronicles, containing Wace's Roman de Brut and Layamon's Brut. 1928. Transl. by Eugene Mason.
57. PATON, LUCY A : Morte Arthure, containing the alliterative Morte Arthure, transl. by Andrew Boyle, and the text of the stanzaic Le Morte Arthur. 1912.
58. RHYS, JOHN : Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur, 2 Vols., 1928.
59. STRACHEY, EDWARD : Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur, Globe ed., London, Macmillan, 1909.

(ii) Modern Poetry. (Closely studied).

60. ARNOLD, MATTHEW : Poetical Works. Introd. by Sir A. Quiller-Couch. Humphrey Milford, O.U.P., 1942. "Tristram and Iseult".
61. HAWKER, The Rev.R.S. : Cornish Ballads and other Poems. Oxford & London, Parker, 1869. "The Quest of the Sangraal".
62. MORRIS, WILLIAM : Poems by William Morris. Humphrey Milford, O.U.P., 1933. World's Classics Series. "The Defence of Guenevere", "Sir Galahad", "King Arthur's Tomb", "The Chapel in Lyonesse".
63. PERCY, Bishop THOMAS : Reliques of Ancient English Poetry of the old heroic Ballads, Songs etc., ed. by Edward Walford. London, Warne, 1880.
64. SCOTT, WALTER : Poetical Works. London, Routledge, 1893. "The Bridal of Triermain".
65. SWINBURNE, A.C. : Collected Works. Vol.II. London, Heinemann, 1924. "Tristram of Lyonesse", "The Tale of Balen."
66. TENNYSON, ALFRED : Poetical Works. Globe Ed. London, Macmillan, 1898. "The Lady of Shalott", "Sir Galahad", "Morte d'Arthur", "Merlin and the Gleam", "Idylls of the King".
67. Various POETS : The Arthurian poems listed in Chapter X, from various sources.

(iii) Other Texts and related matter.
(Less closely studied).

68. BJÖRKMAN, E. : Morte Arthure: Alt- und mittel-
englische Texte.
Heidelberg, Carl Winter, 1915.
69. CAMPION, J. and : Sir Perceval of Gales. Alt- u.
HOLTHAUSEN, F mittelenglische Texte.
Heidelberg, Carl Winter, 1913.
70. JANTZEN, HERMANN : Hartmann von Aue und Gottfried
von Strassburg, Eine Auswahl.
Sammlung Götschen Band 22.
Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1944.
71. JANTZEN, HERMANN : Wolfram von Eschenbach: Parzival.
Eine Auswahl. Samml. Götschen b.
921. Berlin, de Gruyter, 1944.
72. SKEAT, The Rev. W.W.: Lancelot of the Laik: A Scottish
metrical romance.
Early English Text Society Re-
prints, No. 6, 1865.
73. SOMMER, H. OSKAR : The Vulgate Version of the Ar-
thurian Cycle. 7 Vols., ed.
from the French MS., Add. 10292,
Br. Mus., 1316. Privately print-
ed, Washington, D.C., 1916.
74. TOLKIEN, J.R.R. and : Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.
GORDON, E.V. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1936.
75. VISSCHER, L.H. : Ferguut : Volksroman uit de
XIVde Eeuw met eene inleiding
over den Fabelkring der ridders
van de ronde Tafel.
Utrecht, Robert Natan, 1836.
76. CHAUCER, GEOFFREY ..: Works. Globe Edition, ed. by
Pollard, Heath, Liddell & McCor-
mick.
London, Macmillan, 1932.
77. DE CERVANTES SAA- : Don Quixote. 2 Vols., "Everyman".
VEDRA, MIGUEL Introd. by J.G. Lockhart.
London, Dent, 1947.
78. SPENSER, EDMUND : The Faerie Queene. 2 Vols.,
"Everyman" ed., Introd. by J.W.
Hales. London, Dent, 1948.

LIST C. MISCELLANEOUS WORKS.

(1) Historical works - for background of the
subject. (The majority closely studied)

79. BATESON, M : Mediaeval England. Unwin, 1903.
80. BREASTED, J.H. and : Outlines of European History,
ROBINSON, J.H. Pt.I, Boston, Ginn & Co., 1914.
81. COULTON, G.G. : Mediaeval Panorama: The English
Scene from Conquest to Reforma-
tion. C.U.P. 1938.

82. FROISSART, JEAN : Chronicles of England, France, Spain, etc.
London, Dent, "Everyman", 1930.
83. GREEN, J.R. : A Short History of the English People. Macmillan, 1916.
84. MITCHELL, R.J. and : A History of the English People.
LEYS, M.D.R. Longmans Green & Co., 1950.
85. PLUNKET, I.L. : Europe in the Middle Ages.
O.U.P., 1930.
86. QUENELL, M and : Everyday Life in Anglo-Saxon,
QUENELL, C.H.B. Viking and Norman Times.
London, Batesford, 1936.
87. CAESAR, C.JULIUS : De Bello Gallico, Bk. VI.,
Ed. by Prof. John Brown.
London, Blackie, 1896.

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(ii) Various works, more or less closely related to
the different aspects of Arthurian romance.
(Consulted to varying extent).

88. ANONYMOUS : Parsifal, Lohengrin, Tristan and
Isolde, Librettos of the Wagner
Operas.
New York, Crown Publishers.
89. COX, G.W. and : Popular Romances of the Middle
JONES, E.H. Ages.
London, Longmans, Green & Co.,
1871.

(This book - strongly and handsomely bound in red leather - contains an introduction by the first-named author: a very learned discussion which attempts to determine the place of the Arthurian story in Aryan myth, according to the fashion then in vogue, 80 pp.; a very good summary or retelling of Malory's Morte D'Arthur, well-compressed into 142 pp; and further, summaries of seven (or eight, if one includes "Beowulf") other mediaeval romances. I obtained it too late to make use of the erudite facts and discussions of the Introduction. Its statements are rather dogmatic and old-fashioned, but interesting nevertheless.)

90. EDWARDES, MARIAN : A Dictionary of Non-classical
and SPENCE, LEWIS Mythology.
London, Dent, "Everyman",

(Spence is an authority on American Indian mythology, but is rather uncertain on Celtic myth.)

91. FRAZER, J.G. : The Golden Bough: A Study in
Magic and Religion. Abr. ed.
New York, Macmillan, 1947.
92. HADDEN, J.C. : The Operas of Wagner: their plots,
music and history.
London, Thos. Nelson & Sons, 1908.
93. HOPE-MONCRIEFF, A.R: Classic Myth and Legend.
London, Gresham Publ. Co.

94. KER, W.P. : Epic and Romance: Essays on Mediaeval Literature. London, Macmillan, 1931.
95. KUPFER, GRACE H. : Legends of Greece and Rome. London, Heath & Co., 1915.
96. MACKENZIE, D.A. : Teutonic Myth and Legend. London, Gresham Publ. Co.,
97. PEACOCK, THOMAS LOVE: The Misfortunes of Elphin. London, Macmillan, 1927.
98. QUILLER-COUCH, A : Studies in Literature, First Series. C.U.P., 1924.
99. SPENCE, LEWIS : An Introduction to Mythology. London, Harrap, 1931.
100. TWAIN, MARK : A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur.
(No details of ed.: title page missing.)
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INDEX OF CRITICS.

- ARNOLD, Matthew: 4, 40, 42,
284, 302-305.
- BARROW, Sarah F: 111, 115--
118, 119-121, 121-125,
181.
- BÉDIER, J.: 6, 383, 384,
385, 387, 388, 395.
- BRIMLEY-JOHNSON, R.: 332.
- BRINKLEY, Roberta F.: 276.
- BROWN, A.C.L.: 7, 370.
- BRUCE, J.D.: 7, 10, 30, 74-
75, 81-82, 169, 171, 175,
181, 188, 208, 213, 232,
234, 345-354, 361, 365,
383, 387,
- BRUGGER, E.: 6.
- CHAMBERS, E.K.: 20, 21, 36,
43, 49, 75-76, 81, 219,
251, 351, 354-355, 361.
- CLUTTON-BROCK, H.: 307, 308.
- COMFORT, W.: 165, 166.
- D'ARBOIS DE JOUBAINVILLE, H:
6, 284.
- ELTON, O.: 309, 324, 333,
361.
- EVANS, S.: 143, 147-148,
216, 360-361, 368.
- FRAZER, J.G.: 57, 349-350,
353, 358.
- FLETCHER, R.H.: 7.
- FOERSTER, W : 7.
- GARDNER, E.G.: 164, 253.
- GOLTHER, W.: 7, 383.
- GREENWOOD, Miss A.D.: 255.
- GUEST, Lady Charlotte E.:
32, 39-42, 65, 67, 150,
168, 216, 284, 290, 329.
- HARVEY, Paul: 16,
- HIBBARD, Laura: 356.
- JOHN, Ivor B.: 352.
- JONES, Gwyn & Thomas: 39,
296, 372.
- JONES, W. Lewis: 15, 20, 23,
25, 26, 49, 74, 147, 154.
- KITTREDGE, G.L.: 7, 239.
- LEGOUIS, E. & CAZAMIAN, L.:
155, 267, 268.
- LEWIS, C.S.: 5, 111, 129-
132, 134-135, 170, 171.
- LOT, F.: 6.
- LOTH, J.: 6.
- LOOMIS, R.S.: 7, 356-358.
- MACCALLUM, M.W.: 5, 197,
231, 255, 259, 268, 269,
274, 277, 281, 321.
- MACLEAN, Magnus: 53, 58, 59.
- MADDEN, F.: 6, 284, 290.
- MAYNADIER, G.H.: 5, 270,
293.
- MEYER, Kuno: 6.
- NEILSON, W.A.: 111-115.
- NEWELL, W.W.: 7.
- NITZE, W.A.: 6, 221, 350.
- NUTT, A.: 6, 215, 221, 284,
295, 349, 352.
- O'CURRY, Eugene: 6.
- PARIS, Gaston: 6, 114, 388.
- PARIS, Paulin: 6.
- PATON, Lucy A.: 146, 147,
230, 370.
- POTVIN, C.: 6.
- REID, Margaret J.C.: 5, 212,
289-290, 297-298.
- RHYS, John: 6, 17, 18, 25,
28, 38, 39, 41, 49, 51,
61, 69, 70-74, 75, 81,
221-222, 348, 350-351,
361, 365.

SCHOEPPERLE, Gertrude: 7, 57, 63, 356, 387-396, 398.	TOLKIEN, J.R.R. & GORDON, E.V.: 188, 296.
SCHOFIELD, W.H.: 7, 94, 97, 173, 198, 211, 243, 247, 270.	VICAVAR, E.: 156, 239, 243, 247, 251, 252, 253, 254, 285, 362.
SAINTSBURY, G.: 197, 240, 256, 266, 279.	WALKER, Hugh: 244, 308, 309.
SCOTT, Sir Walter: 6, 87, 249, 272, 279, 281-282,	WARD, A.W. & WALLER, A.R.: 255,
SKENE, W.F.: 34.	WESTON, Jessie L.: 6, 215, 221, 295, 350, 353.
SOMMER, H.O.: 7, 172, 285, 362.	ZIMMER, H.: 7.
THURNEYSSEN, R.: 7.	

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INDEX OF SUBJECT MATTER.

(NOTE: For reasons of space a few abbreviations are used: they are all fairly obvious, and should offer no difficulty in reading, e.g.: under "Arthur", the note "Summary of addit. Celt. elements in Arth. story" will be readily understood as "Summary of additional Celtic elements in the Arthurian story".

Relationships are indicated by the following:-
D. = daughter; s. = son; f. = father; m. = mother; br. = brother; sr. = sister. Throughout A's = Arthur's. Further, Br. = British, Celt. = Celtic, Gae. = Gaelic, Gau. = Gaulish. Ind. Crit. = "and see Index of Crit- ics."

As the titles of most chronicles, poems and plays dealing with Arthur are long, works not listed separately under their alphabetical heading will be found under the name of the writer (where this is known), e.g.: William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum Anglica 20, 21, 142; De Antiquitate Glastoniensis 218, in order to avoid duplication. Otherwise, where needed, full cross-references are given, e.g.: Gerald de Barri, see Giraldus Cambrensis, and the page references and notes are given under the latter, and better-known, name.

Subject to the above the Index is as full and references as copious as possible.)

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- | | |
|--|--|
| ACHILLES and Telephus, 391. | Ambrosius Aurelianus 20, 24-25, 26, 29; identif. with Merlin 149-150, 205. |
| Addison, Joseph, <u>The Spectator</u> 274. | Amergin, Druid of Iberians 64. |
| <u>Aeneid</u> , 148, 274, 378. | Amour Courtois 9, 83, 106-138, 158, 160, 223-224, 226, 230, 232-235; and moral laws 126-128; extravagances in <u>Lancelot</u> 233, and <u>Tristan</u> 386. |
| Agravaine, 225. | Andreas Cappelanus: <u>De Arte Honeste Amandi</u> (<u>De Amore</u>) 113, 114, 117, 136. |
| Airmid, d. of Diancecht 61. | Anglesey, Isle of 58. |
| <u>Aitheda</u> , Celt. elopement stories 387. | <u>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</u> 26. |
| Alain de Lisle: <u>Prophetia Anglicana</u> 21. | Angus, Celt. Eros 61, 62, 168. |
| Alba (= Albion) 64. | Anna, A's s. in Geoffrey of Monmouth 73, 150. |
| Albert, Prince Consort 328. | <u>Annales Cambriae</u> 19, 24. |
| Alexander, Bish. of Lincoln 142. | Anwn, Celt. Hades 37, 68, 351. |
| Alexander the Great 158. | Anoeth, see Oeth. |
| Allegory as lit. genre, <u>Pearl</u> , <u>Piers Plowman</u> , <u>Roman de la Rose</u> , <u>Vita Nuova</u> 267. | Antor (Dctor) 207. |
| Alisander le Orphelin 371. | |
| <u>Amadas et Ydoine</u> 180. | |
| <u>Amadis de Gaul</u> 260, 283. | |
| Amaethon, Br. god of Agric. 67, 70, 71. | |

- Apologia pro Vita Sua (Card. Newman) 291.
- Apples, Isle of, Celt. Elysium 206, 219.
- Arawn, Head of Hades 68, 70 71.
- Argante, A's s. in Layamon 73, 156.
- Arianrod, Br. goddess 67, 72, 73.
- Armorica, see Bretons.
- Arnold, Matthew, 4, 10; Lectures on the Study of Celtic Literature 40, 42, 284; 301, 302-305; Tristan and Iseult 302-304. Ind. Crit.
- Ars Amatoria, see Ovid
- Artegall, Sir (Spenser, Faerie Queene) 267.
- ARTHUR, dux bellorum 12, 17-18, 28, 35, 50, 355; grave at Glastonbury 14, 23; Comes Britanniae 17-18, 28, 71; A's twelve battles 17; hound Cabal 18, 46; s. Anir 19; other legend. ss. Amhar, Llacheu (Lohot) Borre, Gwydre 19; A begets Modred on his s. Margawse 19; A's death 19, 22; A's second coming "The Hope of Britain" 21, 29-30, 154; Hist. evid. of his exist. 27-30; as Culture god 33, 45, 69, 70-71; Kulhwch's uncle 43; as Bard 48, 205; Head of the gods 50, 69; relat. with Morgan le Fay 73, 370-371; corresp. to Gwydion 72-73; comp. with Eochaid Airem 73-74; the 'passing of A' - his 'exitus dubius' 144, 154, 156, 189; knightly feats 150; 'roi fainéant' 151; A's relat. to Modred 189, 265; weapons and equipment: dagger, sword, lance, mantle and ship 43; Excalibur 43, 193, 209; A's origins 12, 78-84 & see below Arthurian Story; developm. of leg. in England 175-176, 188-199; La Morte Artu 201-204; story akin to Gk. tragedy 202-203, 217, 232; essent. tr. nat. & epic qual. 377;
- Arthur contd.
- A. leg. & 17th Cent. politics 274-276; A. leg. in mod. poetry 258-300, 301-341; failure as national epic 373-378; its future in Eng. Lit. 378-379; A. & Merlin 176; A. & Guenever see discuss. under Tennyson; Orig. of Arth. story: Trojan 'theory' 275; confl. theories - Celt. & Continental schools 343-347; inconcl. of theories 359-360; addit. views advanced 364-368; summary of addit. Celt. elem. in Arth. story 368-372; Summary & Conclusion 366-372.
- Arthurian Society 7.
- Aryan religion 60.
- Ascham, Roger, on Le Morte D'Arthur 126, 242.
- Atres Perillox, Li, 180.
- Aunters of Arthur 176.
- Avallach see Isle of Apples.
- Avallon (Avalon, Avilion) 29, 189, 206, 218-219, 379.
- Avellaneda, Alfonso de, plagiary of Don Quixote 263.
- BADB, The, Gae. war-goddesses 60, 69.
- Badon, Battle of, 19, 24, 25, 26.
- Bages (Filé) see Bards.
- Balan 69, 209.
- Balin 38, 69, 209.
- Ballads, Arthurian etc., 259-260.
- Balor, Fomorian. 62.
- Balzac, Honoré de 107.
- Ban of Benoit, King 229.
- Banba, Fotla & Eriu, Queens of Ireland 64.
- Bards 58.
- Barrow, Sarah F. 111, 119, 121-122, 123-124. Ind. Crit.
- Battle of Otterburn 259.

- Bean-Sidhé (Banshees) 64.
 Beauchamp Earl of Warwick,
 Richard 239.
 Bec, Abbey of 22.
 Bede, Ecclesiastical His-
 tory 25-26, 140, 141,
 146.
 Bedevere (Bedwyr) 35, 36,
 48, 150, 167, 193, 194.
 Bédier, J.: Ed. of Thomas'
 Tristan 6, 383, 385,
 Ind. Crit.
 Beheading Game 177, 188,
 371.
 Beli, Br. god 66.
 Belinus, King 68.
 Beltaine (Feast of Midsum-
 mer) 56, 60.
Beowulf 62, 390.
 Béroul: Tristan 63, 384,
 388, 389.
Bevis of Hampton 260.
 Bilé, Gae. All-father 60,
 66.
 Binyon, Lawrence: Arthur,
 Tristram's End 298.
Black Book of Caermarthen
 19, 34, 39, 43.
 Blackmore, Richard: Prince
 Arthur, King Arthur.
 273 - 274.
 Bledfri (Bleheris, Bréri)
 357.
Blessed Damsel (Rossetti)
 291.
 Boann (= Boyne) 60.
 Boccaccio: Decameron 107.
 Bodb the Red, Gae. god 61.
Book of Aneirin (Aneurin)
 34.
Book of Ballymote 58.
Book of the Dun Cow 58.
Book of Leinster 392.
Book of the Order of Chi-
 valry 243.
Book of Taliessin 34, 37.
Books of Lecan and Lismore
 58.
- Bottomley, Gordon: Merlin's
 Grave 298.
Boy and the Mantle 278.
 Brân, Br. god of Underworld
 37, 47, 50, 67, 68.
 Brandegore, King - see Brân.
 Branwen 67, 376.
Branwen the Daughter of Llŷr
 37, 40, 47.
 Brennius, King 69.
 Bress, Fomorian 61, 63.
 Bretons 54; Br. emigr. to
 Brittany (Armorica) 30-31,
 158, 367; Armorican (Bre-
 ton) literature 31-32,
 203; influences Provençal
 trouvères 158-160. Breton
 Lais - see Marie of France.
Bricriu's Feast 371.
Bridal of Triermain - see
 Walter Scott.
 Brigit, Gae. goddess 61, 63.
 Brinkley, Roberta F.: Ar-
 thurian Legend in the 17th
 Century 276.
 Britons & Gaels 52-54.
 Broccliande, Forest of 208.
 Bron, The Rich Fisher 213.
 Brown, A.C.L.: Iwain, A Stu-
 dy in the origins of Ar-
 thurian Romance 370.
 Bruce, J.D.: Evolution of
 Arthurian Romance 7, 81,
 181, 188, 208; import. of
 his work 354; 383.
 Brugger, E. 6.
Brut (Layamon) 154-157, 188.
 Brute (Brutus), eponymous
 founder of Britain 142,
 148.
 Buelth (Builth) 18.
 Bulwer-Lytton, Edward: ...
 King Arthur 290.
 Burne-Jones, Edward 291.
 Byron, Shelley and Keats
 not attracted by the sub-
 jects of mediaeval ro-
 mance 283, 374.

- CABAL (Cavall), A's hound - see under Arthur.
- Caer Colvin - see Coll.
- Caerleon (-on-Usk) 17, 161.
- Caer Sidi (Caer Wydyr) - see Celt. Otherworld.
- Caesar, Julius: Gallie War 54, 57.
- Cairpré, s. of Ogma 62.
- Calidore, Sir (Faerie Queene) 267.
- Camlan(n), Battle of 19, 46, 47, 144.
- Camulodunum (= Colchester) 68.
- Camulus, heaven-god Cumhail 68.
- Caradoc, one of A's knights 179.
- Caradoc of Llancarven: Vita Gildae 168.
- Caratacus (Caradawc) 67.
- Carr, J. Comyns: King Arthur, Tristram and Iseult 294, 298.
- Cauldron (Dagda's Undry) 60, 212.
- Cauldron of Diwrnach the Goidel 38.
- Cauldron of Hades (Plenty and Fertility) 37, 38, 68, 212, 221-223, 351.
- Caxton, William 14, 94, 188, 239, 240-243.
- Celtae (= Gaels) 53.
- Celts 52-57.
- Celtic & Norman-French literature contrasted 375 - 377.
- Celtic Otherworld 37, 45, 207, 371.
- Celtic religion 54-60.
- Celtic Revival 284.
- Celtic traits in Tristan 384, 389-395.
- Cervantes, Miguel de : Don Quixote 250, 261-264.
- Chambers, E.K.: Arthur of Britain 75-76, 251, 351, 354-355, 361. Ind. Crit.
- Chansons de Geste (Charlemagne Cycle) 98, 129, 189.
- Chansons de mal mariée 104, 389.
- Chapel in Lyonesse - see Morris.
- Charlemagne 29, 87, 97, 148, 158.
- Charles I, King 271.
- Charles II, King 273.
- Chastity belts 109.
- Chastity tests 177-179, 189.
- Châtelain de Coucy 181.
- Chatterton, Thomas 278.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey 93, 99, 196-198; att. symp. towards knighthood & Chiv., Prologue to Canterbury Tales, Knight's Tale 197; not attr. to Arth. matter but portr. contemp. chivalry: Troilus and Cressida, Palamon and Arcite, Squire's Tale, Lay of the Franklin 197; C. in satirical vein: Wife of Bath's Tale, Tale of Sir Thopas 197-198.
- Chevalier a l'Espée 180.
- Chevalier au Lion - see Yvain.
- Chevalier de la Charette (Chrétien de Troyes) 165, 168, 170, 229, 233, 371, 398; poem is anti-Tristan 399.
- Chevaliers as deus Espées 180, 371.
- Chevy Chase 259.
- Chivalry: Prof. Hearnshaw, J.R.Green, Bishop Stubbs 92-93; 92-100; its decay 243-247; 261, 262.
- Chrétien de Troyes, Provençal trouvère 9, 34, 86, 110, 112, 152, 158, 164-171; his infl. 171-175; 187, 212, 216; contr. w. Robert de Boron 218-220; 229, 365, 381, 383, 399; Erec et Enide 34, 164, 167-169, 371; Cligés 109,

Chrétien (contd.)

Cligés 121, 165, 167, 169, 381; Yvain 161, 165, 169, 369; Lancelot - see Chev-
alier de la Charette su-
pra; Perceval le Gallois
- see under sep. heading.

Cian, f. of Lugh 62.

Clariss et Laris 180.

Clermont, Pope Urban calls
to First Crusade 245.

Cligés (Chrétien) 109, 121,
165, 167, 169, 381.

Cole, Old King, origin 68.

Coll, Duke of Caer Colvin
68.

Conan Meriadoc (Kynan Meri-
adawc) 31, 369.

Conchobar Mac Nessa, King
of Ulster 62, 65, 397.

Concilium in Monte Romarici
135.

Conte del Graal - see Per-
ceval le Gallois

Cordeilla 41, 143.

Cour Amoureuse 113.

Courtly Love - see Amour
Courtois.

Courts of Love 107, 109,
112, 113, 114.

Court of Love 112-113.

Credné, brasier of Celt.
gods 61.

Creudylad (Kreiddylat) 41,
46, 66, 70.

Cromm Cruaich, Gae. idol
57.

Crusades 87, 109, 245,
372.

Cuchulainn, ch. hero of Ul-
tonians 59, 62, 65, 161,
350; relat. to Liban 370,
Emer 376, Morrigu 391.

Cymbeline (Shakespeare)
143, 266.

DAGDA, Celt. god 60, 64,
212.

Danu, m. of Gae. gods 58,
60, 66.

D'Arbois de Joubainville, H.
6. Ind. Crit.

Davidson, John: The Last
Ballad 228, 294.

Debate of the Body and the
Soul, (Debate of) The Owl
and the Nightingale 112.

Débats d'Amour 113

Dechtiré, m. of Cuchulainn
62.

Defence of Guenevere - see
Morris

Demeter and Kore 358.

de Quincey, Thomas 373.

Dialogue of Merlin 205.

Diancecht, Gae. god of Heal-
ing 61, 62.

Diarmaid, Celt. Apollo 394,
397.

Diarmaid and Grainne 387,
388.

Diodorus, Gk. hist. 54.

Divorce in M.A. - see Mid-
dle Ages.

Dolorous Stroke 209.

Domnu, m. of Fomors 48, 60.

Dôn, m. of Br. gods 50, 65,
66.

Don Quixote (de Cervantes)
95, 261-264, 286, 287.

Dover Castle 14

Drayton, Michael: Polyol-
bion 270.

Dream of Macsen Wledig 31,
40,

Dream of Rhonabwy 41, 43,
46, 372, 387.

Droit du Seigneur 104.

Druids 55-56, 58.

Dryden, John 196, 272-273;
King Arthur, or The Brit-
ish worthy 273; Prologue
to The Pilgrim 273-274.

Drystan - see Tristan

Dumas fils, Alexandre:
Camille 319.

Durmant le Galois 180.

Duromart 180.

Dylan, Br. marine god,
twin-br. of Lleu 67, 72.

- EARLY ENGLISH TEXT SOCIETY
7.
- Edeyrn, s. of Nudd 387.
- Edward III, King 243.
- Edward IV, King 239.
- Eilhart von Oerge: Tristan
175, 384, 388, 389, 398.
- Elaine of Ascalot (Astolat)
192, 227.
- Elaine, d. of Pelles, m. of
Galahad 216, 230.
- Elathan, King of Fomors 63.
- Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen
86, 112, 164.
- Elton, Oliver 361, Ind. Crit.
- Eleusinian Mysteries - see
Demeter.
- Elizabeth I, Queen 265
- Ellis, George: Specimens of
Early English Romances
280.
- Elopement of Deirdre with
Naisi 392.
- Emer - see Cuchulainn
- Enid and Geraint - see Ten-
nyson.
- Eochaid Airem, semi-hist.
king of Ireland 59, 61,
62, 65, 73.
- Ercing (Archenfield) 19.
- Erec et Enide (Chrétien)
34, 164, 167-169, 371.
- Eriu after wh. Ireland is
named (Erin) 64.
- Escamor 180.
- Estoire ("Ur-Tristan") 389,
395, 398, 400-401.
- Essylt Vingul & Essylt Vin-
wen 46, 397.
- Etan, wife of Ogmá 62.
- Etain, wife of Mider 61,
65, 73, 76.
- Ethniu, d. of Balor, m. of
Lugh 62.
- Etna, divine smithy 79.
- Eucharist, orig. in Grail
leg. 212-214.
- Euhemerus, 4th cent. B.C.
philosopher 77.
- Evans, Evan: Some Specimens
of the Welsh Bards 279,
284.
- Evans, Sebastian 360-361;
transl. of Geoffrey of
Monmouth's Historia 143;
& of Perlesvaus 19, 216,
219, 361. Ind. Crit.
- Excalibur (Caliburn) - see
Arthur.
- FABLIAUX 102.
- Faerie Queene - see Spenser.
- Fairy Mistress motif 161,
230, 370.
- Falstaff - see Shakespeare.
- Fenians, Heroes of Ulster
75, 392.
- Ferdiad, Ult. warrior 65.
- Fergus 180.
- Fer-Sidhé (Farshees) 64.
- Fetishes 108.
- Feudal System 87-92;
break-up 99.
- Fianna Eirenn - see Fenians.
- Field, Eugene: Proper Trewe
Idyll of Camelot 287.
- Field, Michael: Tragedy of
Pardon, 298, 299; Tristan
de Leonois 298.
- Fielding, Henry: Tragedy of
Tragedies 276-277.
- Filé (Bages) - see Bards.
- Finn and the Fenians 59.
- Finn Mac Cumhail (Finn mac
Coul) ch. hero of the Fe-
nians 65, 68, 392.
- Fir Bolg, anc. inhab. of
Ireland 63.
- Fisher King (The Rich Fish-
er), Keeper of the Grail
Castle 170, 213, 219,
391.
- Flamenca 181.
- Fletcher, R.H. 7.
- Flollo, champ. of Gaul 151.
- Floriant et Floriette 180.
- Foerster, Wendelin 7.
- Folie Tristan 384, 389, 393.

- Folklore Society, The 7
- Fomorians (Fomors) Celt. gods of sea and Underworld 60-63, 66, 390.
- Fool, The (in King Lear) - see Shakespeare.
- Frauendienst 135-136.
- Frazer, Sir J.G.: The Golden Bough 353, and see under 'Mythology' and Ind. Crit.
- Frederick Barbarossa 29.
- Frere, J. Hookham: The Monks and the Giants 287.
- Froissart, Jean: Chroniques 95, 97, 99, 181, 187, 250
- GAELS & BRITONS 52-54.
- Galahad 169, 208, 209, 216, 220, 231.
- Galerant 181.
- Galli, Aquitani, Belgae - see Gaul.
- Gareth (Beaumains) 182.
- Gareth and Lynnette - see Tennyson.
- Garwen & Gwyll - see Indec.
- Gaul 53-54, 68-69.
- Gawain (Gwalchmei) 14, 20, 41, 72, 161, 167, 171; light lover 178, 337; 182, 188; his death 191; Grail hero 216, unsuit. & repl. by Galahad 216, 220; 224, 229, 358.
- Gawain, Sir F. Madden's coll. romances 6, 284, 290.
- Gawain and the Green Knight 176, 177, 188, 189, 377.
- Geis, compuls. charm or obligation 394.
- Geoffrey of Gaimar: History of the Britons (lost) L'estoire des Engles 151.
- Geoffrey of Monmouth 9, 15, 25, 40, 41, 49, 65, 68, 69, 73, 82, 139-151; Historia Regum Britanniae 22, 139-151; his sources 49, 140 - 141.
- Geoffrey of M. (cont.) reas. for its popul. & success 145-148; Imp. and infl. 149-152; Prophecies of Merlin 142, 206; 158, 159, 168, 171, 184, 188, 201, 204, 205; Vita Merlini 206-207; 223, 266, 352, 357, 365-366, 383.
- Gerald de Barri - see Giraldus Cambrensis.
- Gerbert de Montreuil 177 186.
- Gereint filius Erbin (poem) 34.
- Gereint the son of Erbin (prose tale) 19, 32, 34, 41, 42, 46, 168.
- Geste des Bretons - see Wace.
- Giants' Dance - see Stonehenge.
- Gifflet, rest. A's sword to lake (Fr. pr. Mort Artu) 193.
- Gildas: De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae 24-25, 26, 140, 141, 146.
- Giraldus Cambrensis: Itinerarium Cambriae, De Principis Instructione 23.
- Glastonbury assoc. w. Avalon 189, 218-219.
- Glewlywd Gavaelvawr, A's porter 35, 43.
- Gloriana (in Faerie Queene) 267.
- Goethe 378.
- Goibniu, Celt. divine smith 61, 67.
- Goirre (Isle de Voirre) - see Celt. Otherworld.
- Golther, W. 7; Tristan und Isolde restores Ur-Tristan 383.
- Golyerus and Gawain 176, 183.
- Gordon, A.L.: Rhyme of Joyous Garde 295.
- Gorlois, first h. of Igerne, m. of A. 144.
- Gottfried von Strassburg: Tristan 173, 174, 386.

- Govannan, Br. god of smith-craft 67, 70, 71.
- Grail, The Holy 38, 170, 183, 210-223, 294; ident. with Celt. Cauldron of Plenty 221-222, 351.
- Grail Castle 38, 169, 219.
- Grail, orig. of Leg. 68, 220-223.
- Grail quest & Med. Church doct. 210-212, 214-215.
- Grainne 394.
- Gray, Thomas: The Bard 279 284.
- Green Knight 260.
- Gregory, Pope, & med. views on marr. love 134.
- Grendel, monster of the abyss 62.
- Grimm, Karl & Wilhelm, 347
- Guanhumara - see Guenever.
- Guenever 19, 43, 47, 48, 61, 73, 76, 107, 144, 161, 167, 168; fails in chastity test 179; 195; discuss. under 'Lancelot' 223-235; 235, and see under 'Arthur' and main discuss. under Tennyson.
- Guenever's abductions 168, 285, 356.
- Guest, Lady Charlotte 32, 65, 67, 150, 168, 284; Ind. Crit; and see under Mabinogion.
- Guigemar, Lay of 369, 391.
- Guillaume de Palerne 181.
- Guinor, Caradoc's chaste w. 189.
- Guy of Warwick 260.
- Guyon, Sir (Faerie Queens) 267.
- Gwalchmei - see Gawain.
- Gwendolena, Merlin's w. in Vita Merlini 207.
- Gwenhwyvar - see Guenever.
- Gwyar - see Morrigu, 72.
- Gwydbwyll, Welsh form of chess 372.
- Gwydion, Br. Mercury 48, 50, 67, 71, 72-73.
- Gwyn, s. of Nudd 50, 66, 70, 71.
- Gwyrthur 66, 70.
- HARDY, THOMAS: Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall 298.
- Hartmann von Aue: Erec and Iwein 173, 174.
- Hawker, R.S.: Quest of the Sangraal 290, 291-292.
- Hawthorn, giant - see Yspaddaden.
- Haystack in the Floods - see Morris
- Heber, R.: Morte Arthur 282; Masque of Guendolen 283.
- Heinrich von Freiberg: Tristan 174.
- Heinrich von dem Türlain: Die Crône (Krône) 173, 174, 216.
- Hengist 17.
- Hengist & Horsa 149.
- Heroes of Ulster 59, 79.
- Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon: Historia Anglorum 21-22, 142.
- Henry I, King 148.
- Henry II (Beauclerc) 23, 86, 87, 148, 160, 184.
- Hephaestus (Vulcan) 79.
- Heywood, Thomas: Life of Merlin 271.
- Hibbard, Laura 356.
- Hibbert Lectures - see Rhys.
- High History of the Holy Grail - see Perlesvaus
- Historia Regum Britanniae - see Geoffrey of Monmouth.
- Holinshed, Henry 143, 266.
- Holy Grail, The - see Grail.
- Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion 7.
- Hope of Britain - see Arthur.
- Hovey, Richard: Quest of Merlin, Taliessin, = ..contd.....

- Hovey (cont.)
Marriage of Gawain, Birth of Galahad 295.
 Huchown, Scot. kn., 189.
 Hughes, Thomas: The Misfortunes of Arthur 265.
 Human sacrifices by Celts 57.
 Hunbaut 180.
 Hurd, Richard: Letters on Chivalry and Romance 280.
 Hy-Breazail 64.
 IBERIANS 52, 53,
Idylls of the King - see Tennyson.
 Igerne, m. of Arthur 144, 150.
Ille et Galeron 180.
 Impaled heads 371.
Imrama, adv. voyages into the unknown 387.
 Incest motif 72-73, 202, 232, 265, and see throughout Arthur & Modred.
 Indec, Garwen & Gwyll, A's mistresses 48.
 Indech, Fomorian 48.
In Memoriam - see Tennyson.
 Innocent III, Pope 214.
Ipomedon 180.
 Irish Literature, three cycles of Leg. 59.
 Iseult of Brittany 46, 319-320, 396.
 Iseult of Cornwall 36, 48, 63, 390, 396.
Ivanhoe - see Scott.
 Iweridd (= Ireland) w. of Br. god Llŷr 67.
 JACK THE GIANT-KILLER 277.
 James II, King 274.
 Jean Bodel: Chanson se Saisnes 15.
Jehan et Blonde 181.
 Johannes Nostradamus: Lives of the Provençal Poets 113.
 John, King 148.
 Jones, Gwyn & Thomas: Mabinogion 39 Ind. Crit.
 Jones, W. Lewis 74, 147, Ind. Crit.
 Joseph of Arimathea (de Boron) 182, 212, 213, 214.
 Joseph of Arimathea 38, 211, 213, 218.
 Joseph of Arimathea (Eng. alliv. poem) 176.
 Joyous Garde 204.
 Jus primæ noctis - see Droit du Seigneur.
 MAHERDIN & CAMILLE (pastourelle) 389.
 Maherdin & Gargeolain (chanson de mal mariée) 389.
 Kay (Cai, Kei) 19, 35, 36-37, 48, 150, 167, 182,
 Keble, Manning & Newman (Oxford Movement) 291.
 King and Parliament, struggle betw., in 17th cent. 275-276.
King Arthur and the King of Cornwall 260.
King Arthur's Death 260, 278.
King Arthur's Tomb - see Morris.
King Henry IV Sec. Pt., see Shakespeare.
King Lear - see Shakespeare.
King Rience's Challenge 278.
Knight's Tale - see Chaucer
 Koll's famous sow 48.
 Kulhwch 37, 38, 42, 101, 371,
 Kulhwch and Olwen 18, 28, 38, 41-47, 62, 66, 68, 70, 72, 372, 397.
 Kynan - see Conan.

Kyot, Wolfram von Eschenbach's reputed source
169, 357.

N.B.: Between 'King Rience's Challenge' and 'Knight's Tale' INSERT
Kittredge, G.L.: 7, 239.

LADY OF THE FOUNTAIN (Chrétien) 32, 41, 46, 169.

Lady of Shalott - see Tennyson.

Lady of the Lake 325, and see Fairy Mistress, also Morgan, Muirgen, Argante etc.

Lailoken 207.

Lais, Breton - see Marie of France.

Lancelot 107, 129, 165, 166-168, 171, 176, 179, 182, 192, 223-235, 371.

Lancelot and Elaine, see Tennyson.

Lancelot and Guenever 103, Chrétien's share in creat. story, 165; their love destr. to Round Table Order, 202, 217; supr. ex. Courtly Love, 230-231; 223-228; treatm. in Morte Artu 231-232; Tennyson & Malory 225-227; Morris, 307-313; Tennyson 335-339.

Lancelot del Lac 195.

Lancelot of the Laik 188, 195.

Lanseloet 174.

Lang, Andrew - see Mythology.

Laon, Leyden & Lyons, named after Lugh 69.

Last Tournament - see Tennyson

Layamon: Brut, 149, 154-157, 189.

Lay of the Franklin - see Chaucer.

Lay of the Honeysuckle - see Marie of France, 160, 161.

Lay of the Last Minstrel - see Scott.

Lay of Sir Lounfal (Marie of France) 160.

Leabhar Gabhala (Bk. of Invasions) 63.

Leir (Leir) 41, 143.

Legend of King Arthur 278.

Leodegrance (Leodogran), King, f. of Guenever 47-48.

Lêr, Gae sou-god 61, 64, 66.

L'esperance de Bretagne - see 'Hope of Britain' under Arthur.

L'estoire de Merlin (Vulgate) 176, 184, 201, 204.

L'estoire del Saint Graal (Vulgate) 184, 201, 204, 211, 215, 219, 220, 230.

Lewis, C.S.: Allegory of Love 5, 129. Ind. Crit.

Lewis, M.G. (Monk): Tales of Wonder 280.

Leyden, John: Scenes of Infancy 281, 378.

Liban - see Cuchulainn.

Libeaus Desconus 174, 176.

Li Biaus Descouneus (le Bel Inconnu) 174, 371.

Lionors, has s. Borre by A. 19.

Literary Criticism and moral judgments 119, 379-380.

Literature - its nature and function: 119, 330, 379-380.

Livres de Caradoc 189.

Livres de Lancelot (Vulgate) 184, 204, 230, 232.

Lleu (Lugh), Br. sun-god, twin-br. of Dylan 67, 69, 72.

Llongborth, Geraint at Battle of, 34.

Llud (Wudd) Llaw Eraint, Br. Zeus 40, 46, 66, 70, 71, 72.

Llud and Llevellys 40, 150.

Llyfr Coch o Hergest - see Red Bk. of Hergest.

- Llŷr, Br. sea-god 41, 50, 65, 66, 67.
- Lohot, A's s. 167, and see Arthur.
- Longinus 255.
- Loomis, R.S.: Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance, 7, 356, Ind. Crit.
- Lot (Loth), King of Orkney 19, 72.
- Lot, F. 6.
- Loth, J. 6.
- Love Charms (Love spot) 394.
- Love draught in Tristan 386.
- Lovelich : Holy Grail 176.
- Lowell, James Russell: Vision of Sir Launfal 294-295.
- Luchtainé, carpenter of Celt. gods 61.
- Ludgate Hill, temple to Llud 66.
- Lugh Lamhada, Gae. sun-god 62, 350, 390.
- Lugus - see Lugh.
- Lytton, Lord - see Bulwer-Lytton.
- MABINOIGION (Lady Charlotte Guest's) 18, 31, 32, 38, 39-42, 65, 67, 150, 284; Tennyson's source 329, 351.
- Mabinogion (Gwyn & Thomas Jones) 39, 42, 296, 372.
- Mabon son of Modron 36, 50, 68, 387.
- Maccallum, M.W.: Tennyson's Idylls of the King 5, Ind. Crit.
- Mac Cuill, Mac Cecht & Mac Greine, ss. of Ogma 62, 64.
- Macpherson, James: Ossian 65, 278, 279.
- Macsen Wledig 31.
- Madden, Sir F.: Ed. of Gawain romances 6, 284.
- Maelgwn Gwynedd 25, 365.
- Magic Sword 207, and see Excalibur.
- Maglocurus - see Maelgwn.
- Maid of Astolat (Ascalot) see Elaine.
- Maid Marian - see Peacock.
- Mained King - see Pelles.
- Malleore - see Malory.
- Malory, Sir Thomas 2, 14, 19, 21, 72, 73, 93, 95, 163, 168, 182, 193, 194, 208, 216, 225, 227, 238-257, 400
and see separate references under Morte D'Arthur below.
- Man, Isle of 64.
- Manannan mac Lër, eponym of Isle of Man 61, 64.
- Manawyddan 36, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71.
- Manawyddan the Son of Llŷr 40.
- Manessier 177, 186.
- Maponos, Gau. sun-god 68.
- March son of Merchion - see Mark.
- Margawse, A's s. in Malory 19, 72.
- Marie, Countess of Champagne 86, 109, 112, 114, 164.
- Marie de France 31, 160-1, 162, 369.
- Mark, King of Cornwall 46, 48, 57, 63, 182, 235, 400.
- Mark Twain: A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur 286-287.
- Marlowe, Christopher 265.
- Marriage of Geraint - see Tennyson.
- Marriage of Sir Gawain 260, 278.
- Masefield, John: Tristan and Isolt 298.
- Math, benevol. Br. god of Underworld 67.
- Math the Son of Mathonwy 40.
- Maxinus - see Macsen.

- Maynadier, G.H.: The Arthur of the English Poets 5, Ind. Crit.
- Mediaeval Revival 277-283.
- Medrod (Medrawt) - see Modred.
- Meleagant 168, 371.
- Meliador 180, 181.
- Melwas, Guenever's abductor 168, 285.
- Melyagraunce - see Meleagant.
- Meraugis de Portlesguez 180.
- Merlin 23, 144, 149-150, 176, 204-210, 213, 269, 336, 371.
- Merlin (Ballad) 260.
- Merlin (de Boron) 182, 200, 207, 208.
- Merlin (Fr. Pr. Vulgate rom) see L'estoire de Merlin.
- Merlin (15th c. poem) 176.
- Merlin and the Gleam - see Tennyson.
- Merlin and Vivien - see Tennyson.
- Merlin & Vivien 208, 209, 336.
- Mervelles de Rigomer 180.
- Meyer, Kuno 6.
- Miach, Celt. god 61.
- Midas, King 63.
- Mider, s. of Dagda, h. of Etain 61, 65, 73.
- Mider-Etain-Angus, love-triangle, and also
- Mider-Etain-Eochaid triangle, compared to Arthur-Guenever-Modred strife: 73, 76, 168.
- Middle Ages: indiff. att. to relig. 96; harshness of times in contr. to chiv. ideals 95-97; disadv. of women 98; crudity of castle life 100-101; med. soc. life 100-102; med. marr. & divorce 102-104, marriage de convenience; wardships & child
- Middle Ages (contd.) marriages 103; extra-marital relat. & infid. common 102-104, 109-110, 178, 230-231; and see chapter on Courtly Love. Complexity of the period, 137.
- Miló, eponymous lead. of the Milesians 64.
- Milesians, first settlers of Ireland 62, 64.
- Millais, John Everett 291.
- Millard, F: Tristan and Iseult 294.
- Milton, John: proj. Arthuriad not wr. 271-272; attr. by subj. - Epistle to Manso 271, Epitaph of Damon 272; 273, 374, 378.
- Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border - see Scott.
- Mirabilia 18, 46.
- Misfortunes of Elphin - see Peacock.
- Modena Cathedral - Arthurian sculpt., 356.
- Modred 19, 48, 50, 61, 72, 73, 76, 144, 191, 192; his incestuous birth 202; 225.
- Monasteries - contr. to developm. of Grail leg. 210-219.
- Mont St. Michel, giant of 150
- Morc, Pomorian 63.
- Morgain la Fée - see Morgan.
- Morgan le Fay 73, 282, 370-371.
- Morholt 57, 389-390, 391, 400.
- Morrighu, goddess of battle 60, 67, 72, 73, and see Cuchulainn 391.
- William Morris 4, 10, 96; The Haystack in the Floods 96, 314-315; 249, 291, 301, 305-315; mediaevalism 305-308; Defence of Guenevere 306, 307, 309-311; King Arthur's Tomb 306, 307, 311-313; Sir Galahad 307, 313; Chapel in Lyness 307, 313; Sir Peter Harpdon's End 314-315.

- Mort Artu (Vulgate) 36, 184, 192, 193, 201, 204, 211, 217, 232.
- Morte Arthur, Le (stanzaic) 176, 192-195 - part. source of Malory;
- Morte Arthure (allit.) 176, 189-192,
- Morte D'Arthur, Le (Malory) 6, 9, 35, 68, 69, 95, 184, 192, 194, 195, 212, 224, 235, 237, 238-257; pr. by Caxton 240-241; purpose of the work 242-248; var. editions 284-285; source of Tennyson 329; 351, 355, 370, 391.
- Moytura (South), 1st Battle of 64, 390.
- Moytura (North), 2nd Battle of 64.
- Muirgen, see Morrigan.
- Mule sanz Fraín 180, 357.
- Müller, Prof. Max - see Mythology.
- Myrddhin, anc. Welsh bard 205.
- Mythology -- and prim. relig. 55; short acc. of developm. of Mythic Science 347-351; (a) Philological School; Grimm bros. 347, Max Müller 347-348; (b) Anthropological Sch.; Tylor, Smith & Lang 348-349; 'recurrence test' 349; (c) Vegetation Sch.; Frazer, Golden Bough 349-350; Nitze 221, 350, 353; Weston Quest of the Holy Gr., From Ritual to Romance 350, 353. (d) Solar Myth. Rhys, Hibbert Lect., Stud in Arth. Leg. 350-351. Nutt 284, 295, 349, Voyage of Bran, Stud. on Leg. of the Holy Gr., 352; opposit. by Bruce 354; Loomis: Celt. Myth & Arth. Rom. 356-358.
- Myvyrian Archaeology 47, 284.
- NAOISE (NAISE) 397.
- Naoise & Deirdre 376, 388.
- Natanleod (A.S.Chr.) 26.
- Neilson, W.A.: Origins and Sources of the Court of Love 111-112. Ind. Crit.
- Nemedians, myth.inh. of Ireland 63, 390.
- Nemetona, war-goddess 69.
- Nemon, one of Nuada's wives, the Badb 69.
- Nennius: Historia Britomum 15, 18, 24, 27, 35, 36, 146, 149, 150, 204, 205, 206.
- Nowell, W.W. 7.
- Newman, Cardinal 291.
- Nibelungenlied 174.
- Nicodemus, Apocr. gospel of 214.
- Nimue (Niniane, Viviane) - see Vivien.
- Nitze, W.A. 6.
- Novel, 18th cent. 276.
- Nuada Argetlam, Celt. god of war 60, 66, 72.
- Nudd - see Llud.
- Run's Priest's Tale 198
- Nut-brown Maid 259.
- Nutt, Alfred 6, 215, 221, 284, 295, & see Mythology. Ind. Crit.
- Nynniaw & Peibaw, Celt. twin-gods 67, 70.
- O'CURRY, EUGENE 6.
- Oedipus leg. of. to Arthur 232.
- Oeth and Anoeth, 69, 72.
- Ogier the Dane 30.
- Ogma, Celt. god of Literature 61, 62, 69.
- Ogmig (Ogan) script 61, 402.
- Ogmios, Gau. god 69.
- Ogyrvan the giant, f. of Gwenhwyvar 47.
- Olwen 62, 371, & see Kulhwch
- Order of the Bath 95.
- Order of the Garter 243.
- Order of the Golden Fleece 244.

- Origins of the Arthurian Story: Trojan Leg. 275; confl. theories 343-347; Celtic-Continental contr. 345-347; inconcl. of ths. 359-350; critics differ 360-363; addit. views adv. in this thesis 364-366, 366-368; Conclusion: 366-372.
- O'Shaughnessy, A.W.J.: Lays of France 162.
- Ossian - see Macpherson.
- Ossla Gyllelvawr 44, 372.
- Oursler, Fulton 366.
- Ovid's Ars Amatoria 117, 130, 134, 136.
- Owein (Yvain) 351.
- Owein and Lunette - see Lady of the Fountain
- Oxford Movement (Keble, Manning & Newman) 291.
- PALAMON AND ARCITE - see Chaucer.
- Palgrave, F.T.: The Golden Treasury 161.
- Paradise Lost 272, 378 & Paradise Regained 272, and see Milton.
- Paris, Gaston 6. Ind. Crit.
- Paris, Paulin 6.
- Parsifal (Wagner) 353, 358.
- Partholon, race of 63.
- Partonopeus 120.
- Parzival - see Wolfram von Eschenbach.
- Pastourelle - see Kahardin.
- Paton, Lucy A.: Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance 230, 370. Ind. Crit.
- Peacock, Thomas Love: Maid Marian 244, 285, 286; 285-287; Gryll Grange, Headlong Hall, Crotchet Castle 285; Misfortunes of Elphin 285-286.
- Peibaw - see Nynniaw.
- Pellam, King 38.
- Pelleas (and Morgan) 371.
- Pelleas and Estarre - see Tennyson.
- Polles, King, Grail Keeper 38, 216, 230, 351.
- Penardun, w. of Llŷr 67.
- Perceval 41, 166; Grail seeker in Chrétien's Perceval le Gallois 169-170; 171, 182, 216, 219, 220, 242, 351, 369.
- Perceval le Gallois (Conte del Graal) by Chrétien: 169, 172, 177, 185, 189, 212, 213, 357, 369.
- Percy, Bishop: Reliques of Ancient English Poetry 196, 260, 278-279, 280, 282.
- Peredur the Son of Eyrwac 32, 41, 42, 46, 216, 369, 372.
- Peredur - see Perceval
- Perlesvaus (The High History of the Holy Grail) 19, 216, 219, 361.
- Peter of Blois, Archd. of Bath 93.
- Philip Augustus 86.
- Pilgrim's Progress 95.
- Pliny, Roman historian 54.
- Posidonius, Gk. traveller 54.
- Potvin, Chas. 6
- Powys, J.C.: The Glastonbury Legend 298.
- Preiddeu Annwn 37, 38, 43.
- Pre-Raphaelites 290-291.
- Fridwen, A's ship 37, 38, 43.
- Primitive religion 77-79.
- Prince Arthur (in Faerie Queene) 267, 269.
- Prometheus 45.
- Prophecies of Merlin - see Geoffrey of Monmouth.
- Prophetic Almanacs 271.
- Fryderi, s. of Pwyll 38, 48, 49, 50, 68, 70, 71.
- Pseudo-Robert de Boron Cycle 249.
- Pseudo-Wauchier 177, 186.

- Purcell, Henry: music of
Dryden's King Arthur 273.
- Pwyll 38, 41, 50, 68, 351,
394.
- Pwyll Prince of Dyved 38,
40, 394.
- QUEST OF THE HOLY GRAIL 169,
170, 202, 204, 216, 232,
252, 377.
- Queste del Saint Graal (Vul-
gate. 184, 201, 211, 215,
220, 230, 251.
- RABELAIS, FRANCOIS 107.
- Rain-making Charm 369.
- Raoul de Houdenc 86, 175.
- Red Book of Hergest 19, 34,
38, 39, 47.
- Red-Cross Knight (in Faerie
Queene) 267.
- Reid, Margaret, J.C.: The
Arthurian Legend 5, 297-
298. Ind. Crit.
- Reliques - see Bishop Percy.
- Renaissance - marks end of
M.A. 99; 186-187; 246-
247.
- Renaud de Beaujeu 86, 174.
- Rhiannon, m. of Pryderi 49,
50, 68, 394.
- Rhys, John: Studies in the
Arthurian Legend 6, 345.
Ind. Crit.
- Richard Coeur de Lion 260.
- Rience, King 209.
- Ritho, giant 150
- Ritson, Joseph: Collection
of English Songs, Ancient
Engleish Metrical Roman-
cees 280.
- Robert de Boron 182, 200,
207, 211, 212-214; contr.
w. Chrétien 213-220;
Joseph d'Arimathea 213-214
Merlin 182, 200, 207, 208.
- Robert of Gloucester 140, 142.
- Robert of Thornton 189.
- Robin Hood Cycle 259.
- Robinson, E.E.: Morlin,
Tristan 298.
- Roland and Oliver 368⁸.
- Roman de Brut (Geste des
Bretons) - see Wace.
- Roman de la Rose 113, 267.
- Rossetti, D.G. 291.
- Round Table, The 14, 153,
156.
- Round Table Knights, and
Order of the R.T. 35, 93,
166, 202, 204, 215, 216,
217, 232, 252.
- SABRINA 143.
- Saint Patrick, opposes the
Druids 58.
- Samhain, Summer's End 56,
390.
- Sanam, f. of Lionors 19.
- Schoepperle, Gertrude: Tris-
tan and Isolde 7, 356,
387-396. Ind. Crit.
- Schofield, W.H.: Chivalry
in English Literature
7, 198. Ind. Crit.
- Scholemaster - see Ascham.
- Scott, Sir Walter 6, 87,
249, 272, 279, 281-282;
Ed. of Sir Tristrem 6,
173, 188, 282; Marmion
272, 279, 281, 282.
Ivanhoe, The Talisman
279; Lay of the Last
Minstrel 279, 281;
Minstrelsy of the Scot-
tish Border, Bridal of
Triermain 282.
- Saint Greal (Welsh) 19, 216.
- Seven Sleepers of Ephesus
30.
- Shakespeare, William, debt
to Geoffrey of Monmouth
41; slight Arth. refs.
in his plays: King Henry
IV, Pt. II - Falstaff,
265, & Justice Shallow,
266; Fool in King Lear
266; also, 374, 378.
- Sidhe, fairy mounds 64.
- Siege Terilous 207, 209.
- Siegfried 30.

- Sigmund, talismanic sword 207.
- Simcox, G.H.: Farewell to Ganore, Gawain and the Lady of Avalon 293.
- Sir Lancelot (of) Du Lake 260, 278.
- Sir Patrick Spens 259.
- Sir Perceval of Gales 176.
- Sir Tristrem 6, 173, 188, 282.
- Skene, Dr. W.F.: Four Ancient Books of Wales 34.
- Sommer, H.O. 7, 172. Ind. Cri.
- Sone de Nausay 180.
- Southey, Robert, 6; transl. of Amadis de Gaul 283; Ed. of Malory's Morte D'A. 283.
- Spear of the Dolorous Stroke 38.
- Spenser, Edmund 267-270, 280, 282; The Faerie Queene 267-270, 324; Chivalr. ideal 267-270, contr. w. Malory 269.
- Squire, J.C.: Celtic Myth and Legend 52 ff.
- Squire of Low Degree 260.
- Squire's Tale - see Chaucer.
- St. George 390.
- St. Paul's Cathedral 66
- Stephen, King 142, 148.
- Stevenson, R.L. - romanticism: poem comp. to an Irish aithed lyric 393.
- Stonehenge 56, 150.
- Strabo, Gk. geogr. 54.
- Swan Children of Lër 65.
- Sword Bridge 371.
- Swinburne, Algernon Charles 4, 10, 236, 291, 301, 302 315-326; Tristram of Lyonesse 315-322; Laus vene-ris 317; The Tale of Bal-len 322-324; Pict. of Iseult of Brittany comp. with that in Fr. pr.rom. 319-320.
- Symonds, A.: Tristan and Iseult 298.
- TACITUS, Roman hist. 54, 91.
- Táin Bó Chualigán 65.
- Tale of Balen - see Swinburne.
- Tale of Sir Thopas - see Chaucer.
- Talliesin, Celt. bard 42, 68, 205, 285.
- Talliesin (Guest's Mabino-gion) 42.
- Tallweh, f. of Tristan 46.
- Tara, royal seat of Irish kings 64.
- Tennyson, Alfred 4, 10, 19, 166, 168, 194, 202, 216-217, 225, 232, 235, 236, 291, 293, 295, 296, 301, 326-340; Idylls of the King 5, 9, 35, 217, 236, 296, 327, 328; Victorian liberalism 329-330; his rel. faith and philos. of life in the In Memoriam 330-332; Allegory in the Idylls 332-333; Enid and Geraint 42, 168; Marriage of Geraint 42, 168, 336; Gareth and Lynette 174, 335; Lancelot and Elaine 193, 226, 227; Merlin and Vivien 208; Poems by Two Brothers 326; Lady of Shalott, Sir Galahad, Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere, Morte D'Arthur 327, 328; The Passing of Ar-thur 327, 339; Canons, The Palace of Art 327; Loorine 330; The Holy Grail 333; Guinevere 334, 335; The Coming of Arthur 334; Pellicea and Starre 337, 338; The Last Tournament 338-339; Merlin and the Gleam 339-340.
- The Idylls lyric rather than epic, modern rather than mediæval 328-329.
- Theseus 57, 207, 390, 397.
- Thomas: Tristan 173, 357.
- Thomas Aquinas 134.
- Thurneysen, R. 7.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. & Gordon, E.V.: Ed. of Gawain and the Green Knight 296. Ind. Crit.
- Tom Thumb 277.

- Transubstantiation, doct. of 214.
- Triads 34, 47-50, 69, 70, 205, 284, 387, 400.
- Tribruit (Tryvrwyd) Battle of 36.
- Tristan 41, 46, 48, 57, 63, 166, 167, 176, 210, 371.
- Tristan and Iseult 121, 163, 224, 370, 377.
- Tristan and Iseult (var. poems and pr. versions) 57, 235-236, 299, 381-401.
- Tristram - see Tristan
- Tristram and Iseult - see Arnold.
- Tristram of Lyonesse - see Swinburne.
- Troilus and Cressida - see Chaucer.
- Troubadours 82-83, 99-100 202-204.
- Tuatha de Danann, Gaeir. gods 59, 60-65, 66, 75.
- Turch Trwyth (Troit, Troynt) 18, 45, 70.
- Tuirenn, Children of 62.
- Tylor, E.B. - see Mythology
- ULRICH VON ZATZIKHOVEN:
Lanzelot 173, 174, 229.
- Undry of Dagda - see Cauldron.
- Urban, Pope - see Clermont.
- 'Ur-Tristan' - see Estoire.
- Uther Pendragon, A's father 36, 144, 150, 207, 269.
- VENGEANCE DE RAGUIDEL 180, 371.
- Vinaver, Eugene: Malory 251, 285. Ind. Crit.
- Vindicata Salvatoris 214.
- Virgil 148.
- Virgin Mary, Cult of 98.
- Vita Merlini - see Geoffrey of Monmouth.
- Vivien 208, 209, 336, and see Morgan, Argante, Mar-gawse & Morrigu.
- Vortigern (Wurtgern) 26, 27, 149, 205.
- Voyage of Healing 390.
- Voyage of Maelduin 387, 391.
- Vulcan 79.
- Vulgate Prose Cycle of Romances 172, 176, 183-184, 200-237, 249.
- WACE: Roman de Brut 149, 151-154, 155, 188.
- Wagner, Richard 173, 295, 321, 358.
- Walganus (Walwen) - see Gawain.
- Walpole, Horace: Castle of Otranto, 279.
- Wanore (Gaynor) - see Geun-ever.
- Walter, Archd. of Oxford 140, 141, 142, 184.
- Walter Map: De Nugis Curialum 184.
- Walther von den Vogelweide 174.
- Wardships - see Middle Ages.
- Warinus 22.
- Warner, William: Albion's England 265.
- War Song of Dynas Vawr - see Peacock, 286.
- Wauchier de Denain 177, 186 357.
- Westminster Abbey 14.
- Weston, Jessie L.: The Quest of the Holy Grail, 6, 221, 353. Ind. Crit.
- Westwood, William: Sword of Kingship, Quest of the Sangreall 293.
- Wharton, Thomas: History of English Poetry, Observations on the Faerie Queene The Grave of King Arthur 280.
- White Mount (Tower Hill) 47.
- Wife of Bath's Tale - see Chaucer.
- William III, King 273, 274.
- William of Malmesbury: Gesta Regum Anglica, 20, 21, 142.

- Wm. of Malmesb. (cont.)
De Antiquitate Glastoniensis 218.
- William of Newburgh: Historia Rerum Anglicarum 22-23.
- William of Normandy (The Conqueror) 20, 85, 202, 365.
- Williams, Charles 5.
- Winchester, Round Table at 14.
- Wolfram von Eschenbach:
Parzival 169, 173, 174, 357.
- Wordsworth, William 288-290
Goody Blake, The Idiot Boy, Resolution and Independence, Peter Bell, 228; The Prelude, Laodamia 289; The Egyptian Maid 289-290.
- YANKEE AT THE COURT OF KING ARTHUR - see Mark Twain.
- Yder 180.
- Yellow Book of Lecan 180.
- Yr Ych Brych 38.
- Yspaddaden Penkawr (the giant Hawthorn, f. of Olwen) 42, 62, 371.
- Ynyswitrin - see Celtic Underworld.
- Yvain (Owein) 167, 370.
- Yvain (Chrétien) 161, 165, 169, 369.
- Yvain and Gawain 176.
- ZIMMER, H. 7.

