

S.:—I see you possess a good memory and an enthusiastic admiration for the Romantic. For my part, I consider the plot fanciful and unreal, therefore a blemish of the poem. No woman in her senses, however high-spirited, would so defy her guardian and friend. No guardian, in such circumstances, would be so stupid as to allow the elopement which ensued. The chances are, too, notwithstanding the fleetness of the steed, that his double burden would ensure his early capture in the pursuit. But the whole thing is utterly absurd and untrue. Surely no such valorous man as Sir Guy would be mean-spirited enough to desert his hard-won wife through self-destruction, knowing the while that his cowardly rival would thereby succeed to the hand, and possibly to the affections, of his beloved. The final scene represents a cowardly double suicide. The merest tyro in the knowledge of mediævalism knows that the proper thing to be done in such a plight as Sir Guy's was to fight to the bitter end, to prolong life till the very moment of conquest, and then, indeed, to die,—but a martyr's, not a coward's, death. That such a story should receive favour and credence is to me incomprehensible.

Q.:—My dear fellow, it is not a question of probability, but of effect. The plot is romantic, quaint, and magical, an antique story of love and adventure wrapt in a beautiful garb of at once fair and delicate texture. With such a theme, such happy adaptability of metre, so highly emotional and delicate a harmonizing of the eternal periods; of the swift, brief storm of life with the solemn soothing of the passing-bell; with so liberal and masterly a use of the secret resources of the poetic art, the "Rhyme of the Duchess May" shines to-day and forever "a gem of purest ray serene."

S.:—"Have at him, man!" says my cool reason,—but something motions back, commanding, "Wait, listen, learn!"

Q.:—Do you mean it, friend? May all the nine aid me, and chiefly Euterpe, to kindle and fan in you the spark of subtler, more æsthetic, life. You have read the poem, you say; surely you have felt,—something! Take the overture,—the beginning of that wonderful refrain, "Toll slowly." What does it mean? The bell-ringers are playing their music for the dead; the white poplars cast their gleaming sun-shadows upon the