

"The Coming of Arthur."

"The Coming of Arthur" is a remarkable proof of Tennyson's ingenuity in construction. Tales about the birth of Arthur varied. In Malory, Uther Pendragon, the Bretwalda of Britain, besieges the Duke of Tintagil, who has a fair wife, Ygerne, in another castle.

Merlin magically puts on Uther the shape of Ygerne's husband, and as her husband she receives him. On that night Arthur is begotten by Uther, and the Duke of Tintagil, his mother's husband, is slain in a sortie. Uther weds Ygerne; both recognize Arthur as their child. However, by the Celtic custom of fosterage, the infant is intrusted to Sir Ector, as his dalt, or foster-child, and Uther falls in battle.

Arthur is later approved king by the adventure of drawing from the stone the magic sword that no other king could move.

This ancient popular element in the Arthur story is disregarded by Tennyson. He does not make Uther approach Ygerne in the semblance of her lord, as Zeus approached Alemena in the semblance of her husband Amphitryon. He neglects the other ancient test of the proving of Arthur by his success in drawing the sword.

The poet's object is to enfold the origin and birth of Arthur in a spiritual mystery. This is deftly accomplished by aid of the various versions of the tale that reached King Leodogran, when Arthur seeks the hand of his daughter Guinivere, for Arthur's title to the crown is still disputed, so Leodogran makes inquiries. The answers first leave it dubious whether Arthur is son of Gorlōis, husband of Ygerne, or of Uther, who slew Gorlōis, and married her.

The Celtic custom of fosterage is overlooked and Merlin gives the child to Anton, not as the customary dalt, but to preserve the babe from danger.

Queen Bellicent then tells Leodogran from the evidence of Blews, Merlin's master in necromancy, the story of Arthur's miraculous advent.

"And down the wave, and in the flame, was borne a naked