

We have the familiar scene of Arthur's court, and in that court we find the old familiar faces, chief among them Arthur and Guinevere; Launcelot, "flower and sun of all my chivalry;" Mage Merlin; Mordred, the illegitimate son of Arthur; and Vivien. The *dramatis personæ* is the same, but the characters are portrayed in widely different fashion, each acting and reacting in totally different ways.

To save Mordred from contempt and hate, a nice adjustment of good and evil must be made. In proportion as he is made more admirable, just so far must the character of others be made less admirable, and their evil influence on his life more inevitable. So poetic justice is conserved.

And here lies the great pity of it all. To save Mordred, Arthur is sacrificed. None but a pessimist could be so ruthless. Arthur the noble, the ideal, becomes for us a mere image of clay—a faulty, sinful man. But Mordred is not yet sufficiently excused. To exonerate him still further, Vivien, a maiden of the court, is made to exert her baneful influence upon him in his moments of weakness, to tempt him and rouse all that is evil in his nature.

The whole plot is complicated, and the atmosphere is modern and scientific rather than Arthurian. Love intrigues are duplicated and triplicated. We are steeped in the plots and counter-plots of a tragedy which in comparison with Tennyson's story seems scarcely wholesome.

Arthur has sinned, but he has confessed; and in the gladness of sin confessed he forgets that he may yet have to cope with the results of that sin of long ago. And so it happens that in his hour of greatest triumph, fresh from the huzzas of the coronation scene, he is brought face to face with the consequences of his sin. Merlin reveals to him that Mordred, the puny hunch-back Mordred is his son—illegitimate, but indubitably his own. Here comes the first crisis in the tragedy. And in his hour of trial Arthur fails to show true greatness in the acceptance of his new cross. He casts the burden from him in bitterness of spirit. And it is through this repulse from his father that the iron first enters Mordred's soul. As yet there is no hate, only a great sense of loss, a yearning for the love denied him. It is Merlin who recoils from Arthur's weakness, and sums the situation.

"Yea, I am dead to one great hope I had,  
And thou art dead to what thou might'st have been,  
And he is dead to what is best of all,  
The holiest blossom of life's golden tree."