

Arthur which, he says, he translated out of the Welsh. Mr. Skene thinks that Arthur was King of Strathclyde and not of South Wales. In Geoffrey's book Arthur appears as the son of Uther Pendragon and of Igeria, widow of Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall. The treachery of Modred is here represented as the cause of Arthur's defeat, and he is carried wounded to the Isle of Avalon and there left. The legend grew and extended to all Christian countries. Additions were made of the stories of the "Holy Grail," "Vivien," and "Lancelot." Six different romances on the subject existed. Sir Thomas Mallory in 1461 prepared a prose digest of them, which was printed by Caxton in 1485. The book had almost fallen into oblivion when it was republished in 1816. A useful reprint is included in Macmillan's Globe series. In 1838, the *Mabinogion*, containing further tales, was edited by Lady Charlotte Guest, afterwards Lady Charlotte Schreiber. The laureate obtained from Mallory nearly the whole of the stories embodied in "Elaine," "Gareth and Lynette," and "The Passing of Arthur," part of those in the "Holy Grail," and "Pelleas and Ettarre," whilst the "Coming of Arthur," "Balin and Balan," and "Merlin and Vivien," were suggested by Mallory. "Enid" was taken from the *Mabinogion*, the "Last Tournament" and "Guinevere," are original.

Tennyson was very early interested in these legends. In the volume of 1833 we have the "Lady of Shalott." In 1837 he wrote "St. Agnes," and in the second of the two volumes published in 1842 appeared "Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere," and the magnificent and perfect "Morte d'Arthur." In the former of these two we have a stanza which contains the germ of much of the great poem:—

She looked so lovely as she swayed
The rein with dainty finger-tips
A man had given all other bliss
And all his worldly worth for this,
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips.

In 1857, Tennyson printed a poem entitled "Enid and Nimue," which he immediately suppressed. Nimue was the Vivien of the later poems. In 1859 appeared a volume entitled "Idylls of the King" containing four poems of the greatest excellence, which must still be considered the principal parts of the whole collection. These were the poems entitled "Enid," "Vivien," "Elaine," "Guinevere." The surpassing beauty of these poems was recognized at once. Even those who criticized the matter could not deny the splendour of the form. Mr. Swinburne, who took exception to some of the characters, and notably to the leading one, bore testimony to the "exquisite magnificence" of the style; and it would be difficult to find a phrase that would more exactly convey the true characteristics of the form of this poetry.

Tastes will differ as to the relative merits of the four poems. The *Saturday Review* declared "Vivien" to be the most powerful, and it certainly is the most disagreeable. Yet this poem has an important place in the series. Longfellow regarded "Enid" and "Elaine" as the best. The public generally have placed "Guinevere" first, and next to this "Elaine," and probably the public are right. The names were altered slightly in later editions. "Enid" became "Geraint and Enid," and in the final edition fell into two parts, first, the "Marriage of Geraint," and second, "Geraint and Enid." "Vivien" became "Merlin and Vivien," and "Elaine," "Lancelot and Elaine." In 1862 a new edition of these four poems appeared, with a dedication in memory of the Prince Consort.

In 1869 appeared "The Holy Grail and other Poems," these being the "Coming of Arthur," "Pelleas and Ettarre," and the "Passing of Arthur," embodying the *Morte d'Arthur*. In 1872 another volume was published, containing "Gareth and Lynette" and the "Last Tournament." In 1885 the last part in "Balin and Balan" was published in the volume, "Tiresius and other Poems." In 1878 the Idylls were collected, except those published in 1872 and (of course) the one of 1885. In 1889 the final edition appeared, and was reprinted in 1891. Several additions and alterations were made, and the poems were divided into twelve—perhaps in imitation of Virgil and Milton.

The design of the poem was to set forth the ideal man, and especially the ideal king, in the person of Arthur—a man who should be supreme in goodness over his subjects, a very conscience to his Knights. The story is not a mere allegory like the Fairy Queen or the Pilgrim's Progress, nor is it exactly a history, it is a representation of human life under the conditions of the chivalry of the Middle Ages. It is a representation of modern thought clothed in an antique garb. If it has an allegorical character, it is because all life and all language is allegorical.

The character of Arthur is grand, majestic, pure and unselfish. The only objection made against it is to its coldness and lack of humanity. If we admit that Arthur differs from other men in the "blamelessness" of his life, it must also be remembered that his origin is mysterious and, in a way, supernatural. It would, however, be an error to say that his simple innocence rendered him incapable of sympathy. Purity is more truly and deeply sympathetic than guilt. But, it has been said, if Arthur is compared with the Christ, he seems hard and cold. To this we do not reply that the human must not be compared with the divine. Jesus Christ is the ideal man and the standard by which all others must be judged. But two things should be remembered—Christ is the ideal *Homo* (human being), Arthur is the ideal *Vir* (man). In Jesus Christ there is neither male nor female. Again, Christ's king-

dom was not of this world. If it had been, His servants would have fought. Arthur's was of this world, and he and his servants had to fight. Yet his character was not only pure and high, it was human, tender, generous and merciful.

Tennyson brings, and clearly enough, in various places, the two aspects of Arthur's character, according to the point of view of the judge. Thus Vivien, the harlot and the traitress, could only think of him as a fool who

Blinds himself and all the table round
To all the foulness that they work.

But Merlin views this feature of his character differently:

O true and tender! O my liege and King!
O selfless man and stainless gentleman,
Who wouldst, against thine own eyewitness, fain
Have all men true and leal, all women pure;
How, in the mouths of base interpreters,
From over-fineness not intelligible
Is thy white blamelessness accounted blame!

We find the same kind of contrast, only fuller and put with more feeling and passion, in the two estimates of Guinevere, the one made under the infatuation of her passion for Lancelot, the other when her eyes are opened during her last interview with the King.

Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,
That passionate perfection, my good lord—
But who can gaze upon the sun in heaven? . . .

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.

But afterwards she knows better.

Ah, great and gentle lord,
Who wast, as in the conscience of a saint
Among his warring senses, to thy knights—
To whom my false voluptuous pride, that took
Full easily all impressions from below,
Would not look up, or half despised the height
To which I would not or I could not climb. . . .

Now I see thee what thou art,
Thou art the highest and most human, too.

The origin of Arthur was mysterious and supernatural. While reputed to be the son of Arthur and Yverne, it is made evident that his origin was not from these. The suspicion that he was not their son led to the rumour that he was baseborn, and so his succession to the throne of Uther was disputed. But he was chosen King, and Bellicent, the daughter of Uther, and so Arthur's reputed half-sister, tells of his coming to the throne and of his mysterious spiritual influence on his knights.

Arthur sat
Crown'd on the dais, and his warriors cried,
"Be thou the King, and we will work thy will
Who love thee." Then the King, in low, deep tones,
And simple notes 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 passage of a ghost,
Some flushed, and others dazed, as one who wakes
Half blinded at the coming of a light.

Such was the noble beginning, and one worthy of the King's high purpose, as declared by himself in his parting words to Guinevere. He was the first, he said, who drew the knighthood-errand of the realm and all the realms under him as their head in the Order of the Round Table:—

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.

For a time all went well, until the rumours of the Queen's unfaithfulness, and her intrigue with Lancelot let loose the baser elements of the court, and gave them an influence which they could not obtain whilst Arthur and his noblest knights were dominant. In the first poem, "Gareth and Lynette," there is as yet no cloud in the sky. All is serene and pure:—

Ever and anon a knight would pass
Outward or inward to the hall; his arms
Clashed; and the sound was good to Gareth's ear.
And out of bower and casement shyly glanced
Eyes of pure woman, wholesome stars of love;
And all about a healthful people slept
As in the presence of a gracious King.

But the very next poem (formerly "Enid," now divided into two, "The Marriage of Geraint" and "Geraint and Enid") shows that rumours had already begun to circulate about the Queen and Lancelot. It was said that when the great knight went to fetch her for Arthur, "she took him for the King, so fixt her fancy on him."

Geraint, fearing that Enid, who dearly loved the Queen, might be contaminated, removed her from the court, and in the course of the story we have an account of his first meeting with her, wooing and winning her, of his subduing her cousin Edyrn, son of Nudd, who became one of Arthur's knights and acknowledged to Geraint,

By overthrowing me you threw me higher,
since he became a new man

"and came to loathe,
His crime of traitor, slowly drew himself
Bright from his old dark work, and fell at last
In the great battle fighting for the king."

In "Balin and Balan," originally published as an introduction to "Merlin and Vivien," the shadows deepen. The accursed Vivien, who had found herself a place among the ladies of the Queen by deception, began to circulate exaggerated rumours respecting her mistress and Lancelot. But there were others ready to second her efforts. The crafty and cowardly Modred, the son of Bellicent, reputed, therefore the King's nephew, was jealous of Arthur's greatness and hated Lancelot.

Gawain, the courtly but unprincipled brother of Modred; Tristram, the reckless lover of the wife of King Mark, and others, were ready to use and be used by Vivien. "She hated all the knights," and at last fixed upon Merlin, greatest and wisest of men, and played upon him until she gained the secret of the charm by which men might be sunk in unconsciousness. Then she put forth the charm of woven paces and waving hands, and so he lay as dead in the hollow oak "and lost to life and use and name and fame."

Next to this comes the exquisite poem of "Lancelot and Elaine," where we see the power of unlawful love detaining the great knight and keeping him from recognizing and responding to the pure love of the "lily maid of Astolat." He might, perhaps, have felt a pure passion, but partly attachment and partly a false sense of honour forbade.

But now
The shackles of an old love straitened him
His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Everything in this poem is full of charm—the death of Elaine, her passage in the barge to Camelot, her letter to Sir Lancelot, telling him

"I loved you and my love had no return,"

and finally Lancelot's remorse—

Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man
Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break
These bonds that so defame me: not without
She wills it; would I if she willed it? nay,
Who knows? But if I would not, then may God,
I pray him send a sudden angel down
To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,
Among the troubled fragments of the hills.

"The Holy Grail," which follows, is a splendid poem. The Grail is, of course, the chalice used by the Lord as the first Eucharist on the eve of the Crucifixion, and its quest was for the pure. Arthur seems to suggest that there was better work for man than following even lofty imaginations—namely, the doing of the ordinary duties of life. In regard of the actual seeing of the Grail each one beholds what his vision enables him to discern.

In "Pelleas and Ettarre," we have a deeper depth. Pelleas, the twin brother of Elaine, sees in Ettarre only beauty and virtue, but to her the unlawful love of the courtly Gawain is more welcome than the devotion of the purest of men. This Idyll prepares us for "The Last Tournament"—when Arthur and his knights are confronted by the Red Knight who has founded his round table of knights who have sworn the counter to all that his knights have sworn, the difference being, he says, that his knights do openly what Arthur's knights do privately in contravention of their vow. The overthrow of this rabble was easy, but it could not restore peace to the soul of the King when he thought of the evil wrought among his knights. The poem ends with the death of Tristram.

Next comes the crowning Idyll of the collection, Guinevere. At last Modred had found Lancelot in the Queen's chamber. They had met once more before parting forever. Vivian found out the engagement and told Modred, who called, "Traitor, come out, ye are trapt at last." And the Queen fled to the Abbey of Almesbury, and Lancelot returned to his own land whither he was followed by the King, who returned from this war to say farewell to the Queen, and then to fight his last battle with Modred.

There are few passages finer in any language than that which describes the sudden appearance of the King at the Abbey and his parting with the Queen. The severity, the calm, the pathos, the sorrow over the dissolution of the Round Table, the grief at his disappointment in her whom he had hoped to find his "helpmate," "one to feel my purpose and rejoicing in my joy"—and yet the assured hope that she may still be his—all this is inexpressibly beautiful and grand.

Let no man dream but that I love thee still,
Perchance, and so thou purify thy soul,
And so thou lean on our fair father Christ,
Hereafter in that world where all are pure
We two may meet before high God, and thou
Wilt spring to me, and claim me there, and know
I am thine husband—not a smaller soul,
Nor Lancelot, nor another.

The last poem, "The Passing of Arthur," tells of the last battle, the wounding of Arthur, the entrusting of the brand Excalibur to the bold Bedivere, and of his at last throwing it into the mere. This is the necessary preparation for the end. Then is Arthur met by the Lady of the Lake—perhaps Divine Grace—supported by the three Queens—perhaps Faith, Hope and Charity—and is taken into their barge, from which he speaks to Sir Bedivere and tells him the meaning of those changes which they both deplored.

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

A STORY is told of Thomas Carlyle that, after passing several sleepless nights owing to the horrible noise made by a Cochon-China cock in a neighbouring garden, the great writer interviewed the proprietor of the fowls and expostulated. The owner, a woman, did not think Mr. Carlyle had much cause for complaint; the cock crew only three or four times in the night. "Eh, but woman," said the unfortunate philosopher, "if you only knew what I suffered waiting for him to crow!"