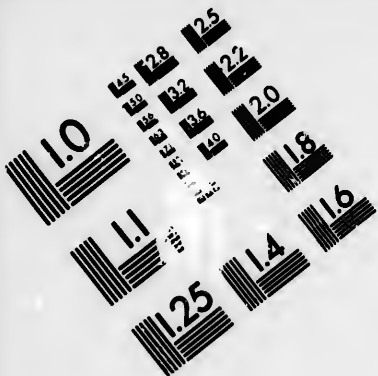
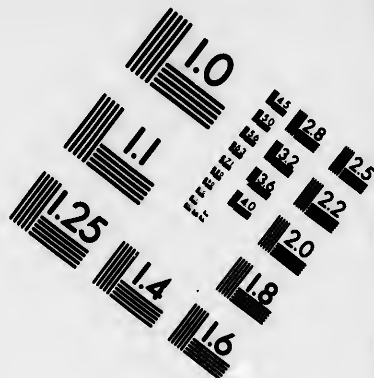

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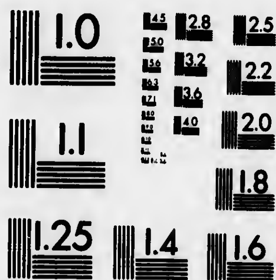
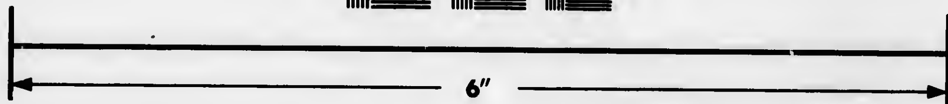
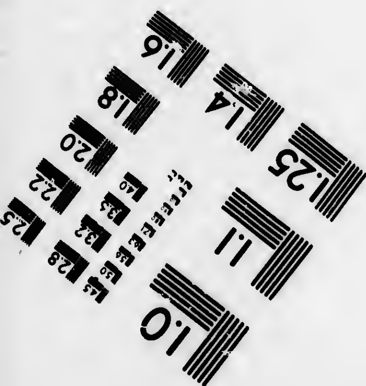
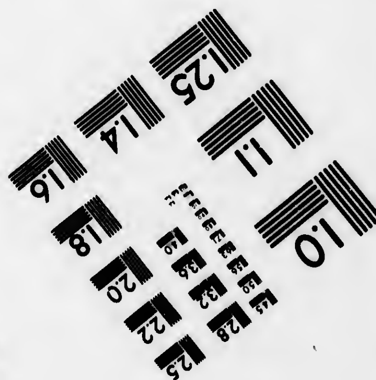

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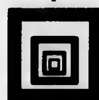

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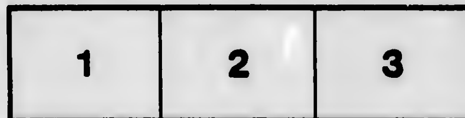

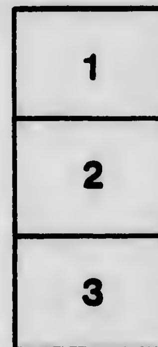

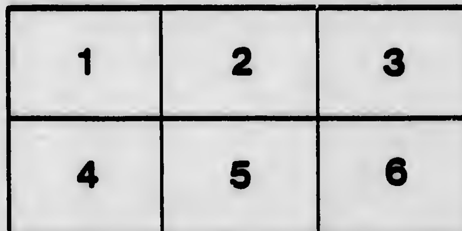

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AN ATHENÆUM ESSAY.

The Idylls of the King:

THEIR GROWTH AND MEANING.

BY

R. W. BOODLE,

MONTREAL.

(Reprinted from the "Canadian Monthly," April, 1881.)

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The idylls of the King ..
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THE IDYLLS OF THE KING:

THEIR GROWTH AND MEANING.*

BY R. W. BOODLE, MONTREAL.

THERE can be little doubt that, by 'The Idylls of the King,' rather than by any other of his works, posterity will measure the greatness of their author. To the mass of the reading public, notwithstanding all that critics have said about its merits, 'In Memoriam' is almost as unreadable as 'The Anatomy of Melancholy,' its persistent obscurity and the narrow range of feelings and interests, to which it appeals, being in themselves faults and bringing their own reward. But beyond this, in his Arthurian poem, its author has taken higher ground. He has challenged comparison with Homer and Virgil, with Milton and Tasso. He has realized the dream of Milton and Dryden, and fulfilled the promise of the long years of English literature, by enriching the language with an Epic taken from the History of England. Far then from dating, with Mr. Buxton Forman, the decadence of Tennyson from his writing the Idylls, we fully agree with the American critic, Mr. Stedman, when he calls them their author's master-work — the greatest narrative poem since 'Paradise Lost.'

The greatness of the Arthuriad is two-fold. It is great from an artistic as well as from a moral point of view, for the artistic and moral purposes of their author are in equal prominence. Tennyson's perfection as an artist, when at his best, has never been doubted, and he is never greater than in the best parts of the Arthuriad. But no one can read the poem without being touched more deeply than he would be by mere artistic perfection. Much credit is due to the dexterity with which Tennyson has selected and recast his materials; but by far the hardest part of his task was to give to his reconstruction of the Arthurian legend an ideal moral unity. How far he has succeeded in this part of his task must be allowed to be an open question. Moral unity is very hard to attain; and, where Milton has failed, we must not be too rigorous with others. Yet the attempt had to be made. If he had merely told again the tale of Malory, he might have written a series of interesting narrative poems of the kind that charm our leisure in the 'Earthly Paradise'; but he would not have taken his place among those poets, who have reconstructed our views of the past, by giving an ideal reality to that background of mingled fact and legend, which is at once the picture that we dwell upon, and the curtain that conceals what is lost to us.

The Achæans became a subject race, or lurked in obscure corners of Hellas; the feudal grandeur of the Highland clans is no more; the dominion of Puck and the fairies is over; yet the glories of their past still linger among us, owing to the genius of Homer, Shakespeare and Scott. What they did for their subjects, Tennyson has done for the British King who resisted the English invaders. The Arthurian legend is, in fact, one of many similar formations, that the time spirit,

* Read before the Athenæum Club, Montreal.

as it were, by way of compensation, has allowed to grow about what is past; so that what inexorable nature with its death-struggles and eventual survival of the fittest has banished from the world of fact, survives as a new creation and a fit representative in the ideal world of fiction. Like the canopy of vapours above, like a ruin in the world about us, this and like tales of the past have taken different shades from the rays of the rising and the setting sun; variously viewed by different ages,' the historical has been re-coloured, and an unhistorical element added. History is baffled, and the work of fancy triumphs over the critical instinct of the inquirer.

In the case of the Arthurian legend,* this has been a work of time. At first a reality in the writings of the Welsh poets, Arthur soon became a tradition. This tradition, magnified and distorted, is found in the work that goes by the name of Nennius. From a tradition, nominally historical, the story of Arthur was changed to a mere romance by Geoffrey of Monmouth; from this point it began to grow, attracting to itself fragments from different sides, taking colour from the periods in which these additions were made, from the institutions among which the tangled web was spun, from the countries of the writers, from their beliefs and modes of life. Among the additions that were made to the original romance, none was of greater importance in determining the ultimate fate of the story than the element contributed by Walter de Map. 'The Church, jealous of the popularity of the legends of chivalry, invented as a counteracting influence the poem of the Sacred Dish, the "San Graal."' Walter de Map made this a part of the Arthurian cycle, and in doing so, takes his place as the first of the allegorizers.

* The gradual development of the Arthurian legend, from its beginning to the days of Spenser, is the subject of a paper contributed by the writer to the CANADIAN MONTHLY, Dec 1880.

The legend, in its latest shape, was re-written by Sir Thomas Malory, and printed by Caxton, as a work valuable historically, as well as for its moral tendency. Thus the allegoric turn, given to the legend by Walter de Map, was confirmed, Caxton's preface holding up the character of Arthur as an example for imitation. The hint thus given was taken by Spenser, who treated Arthur as an embodiment of the Aristotelian virtue of Magnificence. From Spenser, in whom the moralizing tendency is confirmed, to Tennyson in our own days, the position of the Arthurian cycle in men's minds may be described as that of an episode, regarded as more or less historical, but as a fair subject for expansion, and most valuable as illustrating the play of the virtues and the passions. Still, all early writers regarded Arthur and his knights, as part of their secular faith, just as Milton regarded the story of the Creation and the Fall as a religious belief. To us, Arthur and Guinevere are, if anything, more real than Adam and Eve; to Milton, who actually thought of writing a great poem upon the subject,* they were only less so. It is not proposed to examine the various additions to Arthurian literature made, between the days of Spenser and Tennyson, by Blackmore, Dryden, Lytton and others; but as a preparatory step to the chronological study of the Idylls, it will be well to notice the main points, in which the treatment of Tennyson differs from that of the earlier writers.

The leading differences between Tennyson and his predecessors lie in their aspect with regard to Arthur's mission. By all of them he is regarded as a great king, the creator of an order of knights with a high ideal, the personification of an early chivalry. But in Geoffrey and his followers, it is his success which is brought into prominence; while in Tennyson the pathos of the whole poem lies in his failure. The

* See the Latin poems entitled 'Mansus' and 'Epitaphium Damonis.'

mournful beauty of decline, which is imaged by the dying year, and the sympathy that the magnificent failure of Arthur excites, are, so to speak, the ground tone of the Idylls; while the triumphant glory of success pervades the earliest writers. What was incidental with them has become essential in Tennyson.

Solon bade us call no man happy till we have looked to his end, and these early writers adopted the maxim. They gave their hero a glorious life, and he leaves it by the most glorious of all deaths—death in battle. Dunlop has noticed this point in his 'History of Fiction.' 'It appears strange at first sight, that Arthur and his knights should be represented in romance, as falling in battle, as well as Charlemagne with all his peerage, at a time when success in war was thought necessary to complete the character of a warrior. But the same fate has been attributed to all the fabulous chiefs of half-civilized nations, who have invariably represented their favourite leaders as destroyed by a concealed and treacherous enemy. . . . This has probably arisen from poets and romancers, wishing to spare their heroes the suspicion of having died in bed by the languor of disease, to which any violent death is preferred by barbarous nations.' But what was incidental, because inevitable in early writers, has become the chief point in Tennyson. We have, it is true, two Idylls devoted to Arthur triumphant, but the interest of the poem is centred in the decline and fall. The notes of approaching ruin sound more loudly as the tale proceeds, and the interest of most of the Idylls, as well as of the Arthuriad as a whole, clearly culminates in the catastrophe.

The world, like the individual, as age advances, becomes more sensible to the beauty of pathos; it has not the same contempt for the unsuccessful. Our admiration may be excited by the career of a successful man, but our sympathy lies with the struggle of the doomed. Though Homer is a greater poet than Virgil, it is the Trojans rather than the Greeks, who have our love and pity; our favourites in fiction, and history are the advocates of a fallen cause — Hector and Turnus, Demosthenes and Hannibal, Montcalm and Lee. Life presents a constant paradox. The world has pronounced a cynical maxim about success, and its is the shrine at which our worship is offered up. So far our practical instincts take us; but imagination, constantly in antagonism with the facts of the world, sides against our reason. What has failed is idealized; success is left to rest upon its merits. Thus the aspect of the whole story of Arthur has been changed; the Romance writers described the glorious king, Tennyson enlists our sympathy for an unsuccessful reformer and a falling cause.

The form that this idealization of failure assumes, is also distinctive and important. Living in an age, when industrialism and the commercial spirit were beginning to feel their strength, while the influence of chivalry, though fast declining, was not yet extinct, Spenser, as his model of a perfect man, took Prince Arthur, an ideal embodiment of the chivalric feeling. A similar tendency has influenced Tennyson in the process of writing the Idylls, and in the colouring he has given to them. Many writers have read in the character of Arthur an allegory, and Tennyson himself lets us into the secret, that his object was to shadow forth sense at war with soul. It is not inconsistent with this to see, in the gradual dissolution of Arthur's order, a symbolic account of the decline of supernaturalism, a regretful picture of the growing disregard of miracles, and of the lessening hold of Christianity upon the world—the partial rejection of which has been a marked result of the movements of the thought of late years. Fifty years have passed since Carlyle described the 'Temple now

lying in ruins, overgrown with jungle, the habitation of doleful creatures.'* What was so long ago apparent to the philosopher has been brought more strikingly home to us all since. The last decade has been a period of rapid growth of thought; of large expansion, during which, if not Christianity itself, yet various doctrines and ways of thinking that were generally associated with Christianity, have been discarded and sent to join 'all things transitory and vain' in the wilds of the Miltonic Limbo. These have been years of intense mental effort and strivings of spirit, and have for the present ended in a kind of world-wearied Pessimism. And this period has left deep traces on the ideal of Arthur created by Tennyson. From this point of view, as well as from many others (e. g. the characters of Æneas and Arthur), it would be instructive to compare Tennyson with the writer of the Æneid. Just as Virgil, while describing the coming of his hero to Italy and the foundation of the Trojan kingdom, is constantly thinking of the fortunes of the Julian family in his own day, and of the Empire that was being founded while he wrote; so Tennyson depicts the decline of the Round Table, and the general laxity of its morals in language that would be equally appropriate to what was going on while he wrote, and is still continuing—the Religious Revolution of the nineteenth century. In the following pages it will be shown that the Arthuriad, from first to last, faithfully reproduces the political and moral atmosphere of the period during which it was taking shape, in just as marked a manner as the feelings that most Englishmen entertained with regard to the Manchester Peace Party, at the time of the Crimean War, are mirrored in our author's 'Maud.' One of the special marks of Tennyson's workmanship is the manner in which he introduces into an apparently foreign subject matters of contemporary interest and significance. A striking thought in a book, published at the time when some poem of his may be supposed to have been in the process of construction, will often be found echoed quite naturally in the strange context. But though this feature is very marked in Tennyson—a poet, it must be remembered, whose originality, like Virgil's lies far more in his style that in his manner, in the turn he gives a thought, rather than in the thought itself—it is a feature that is to a greater or less extent common to most poets.

The poet is one possessed of nicer feelings, quicker sensibilities than ordinary men. Hence he is the first to perceive the changes in the tone of public opinion. He is like a thin-skinned animal, with an animal's quickness of instinct, an animal's sensitiveness to what is external and atmospheric in nature. When, however it is said that a poet is more quickly affected than the ordinary individual, it must not be forgotten that all he sees, he sees as a poet, and not exactly as the rest of us do. The lens of his mind is a coloured medium, and so everything appears to him coloured and refracted. Imagination and artistic proprieties affect his impression of external nature and of events. He cannot see the thing as it is, or at least he cannot see things exactly as they appear to the rest of the world. To illustrate this will be unnecessary to those who remember how constantly Scott's pictures of scenery are medievalized, and how Wordsworth fills his descriptions with religious thought. And this is not only true, when it is external nature, that the poet is studying. The emotions and feelings, the religious and political beliefs of the poet, are after all, those of the poet, and not those of the ordinary man, and so perhaps are felt in a sense less deeply. This qualification has to be made and must be illustrated.

A political landmark or a church,

* Sartor Resartus, 1831.

let us say, is doomed. It is invested with the love and veneration, the countless feelings so hard to analyze which go to make up the ordinary conservative frame of mind. To part with it is a sore blow to the ordinary individual ; it is a strain to his feelings, and he deeply regrets the loss. The poet, too, feels this to some extent; but then he is a poet, and he has also another point of view. The collapse appears to him as a ruin, and the artistic beauty of the ruin is some compensation to him for the melancholy fact. He feels the loss less deeply, because he does not look at the facts as clearly—or, perhaps, we should say, because he takes in their *import* more thoroughly. His eyes are fixed alike on the present and the past ; he sees institutions rise and fall, and the present loss is to him no new one. He is able to grasp more clearly than others the permanent, that is unchangeable and that will last when time has done its work with what is mutable and evanescent. Thus the poet is a kind of spiritual Captain Cuttle, with his gaze turned into the distance, even when he is considering what is present before him. Sometimes this feeling is expressed consciously, as by Tennyson in the lines—

> Our little systems have their day ;
> They have their day and cease to be :
> They are but broken lights of thee,
> And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

Sometimes it finds unconscious expression, as in the fine lines that end the battle scene in the 'Passing of Arthur,' where the wave is described, creeping over the field strewn with the dead,

> And rolling far along the gloomy shores
> The voice of days of old and days to be.*

What then? The poet sees more clearly, we see less clearly : he feels more quickly, we feel less deeply. He is almost an Hegelian contradiction—that is, he is a poet. It follows that he is more prone than the ordinary thinker to acknowledge facts, for in every fact he has a consolation. And the more of the true poetic nature he has, the more instinctive are his utterances. What he feels forces itself into what he writes. It cannot be kept out. If in one way his view of things is less true because less common-place, in another he is a truer witness because his mind is stronger, being self-sustained by its width of interest. He is a strong man where others are weak. His strength even appears to many to be a lack of feeling, and occasionally, as in the character of Goethe, is capable of producing it. We accordingly find in the Idylls, read chronologically, a veracious echo of the tone of public opinion and a test of the average feeling in regard to questions, which it is so hard to gather from the mere party statements of writers and thinkers actively engaged in the contest upon either side. The Round Table symbolizes more or less distinctly the Christian world, at first with an enthusiastic belief in, and full of the feelings of, Christianity, but by degrees falling away and lapsing into immorality and scepticism. Arthur in its midst, an ideal and not a real man, speaks and acts like a modern Christ, passing verdict after the manner of a Greek chorus upon the phases of thought as they are presented to the reader. All this will be shown in further detail, as we examine the poem chronologically.

It has been noticed before now, that the two great sources of Romance that were the glory of the Middle Ages, the Carlovingian and Arthurian cycles, took shape under the influence of the story of the Gospels ; that Charlemagne and Arthur were pictures of the Christ adapted to the lay life of Christians in general. This is especially the case with Arthur ; and the likeness has been increased by Tennyson in his new rendering of the Arthurian legend (e.g., by his striking out

* This is Matthew Arnold's habitual mood. Cf the conclusion of Sohrab and Rustum, and of the second part of Tristram and Iseult. He has given a description of the feeling, as part of the true poetic nature, in the poem 'Resignation.'

such episodes as Arthur's incest, resulting in the birth of Modred), so that it is impossible to read the Idylls without thinking of the Gospels. It is not only that we have points of external similarity, such as the mystery of their life and death, their position as leaders of bands of reformers, their failure brought about by treachery, and their immaculate and almost colourless piety. But Tennyson has supplemented all this by making his hero constantly use the words of his prototype. This is a feature of such constant occurrence that it will be unnecessary to illustrate it. Should illustration be needed, it will be found in detached passages in the following pages.

I will now sum up the results at which I have arrived from this part of my study. The story of the Idylls, as we have it, is a kind of idealization of failure—the picture of how Arthur came into the world and lived the life of a reformer, founding an order and binding them

> By such vows, as is a shame
> A man should not be bound by, yet the which
> No man can keep.

So the order dissolves internally, and the high ideal of Arthur passes away. In the midst he is a kind of chivalrous Christ; and the decline of belief in Arthur and his vows, and the corresponding dissolution of the society they held together, are a picture, the original of which is to be found, as will be seen, in the sentiments and feelings of the years during which the poet was framing his Idylls. Tennyson had before his eyes the decline of orthodox Christianity, while he was occupied in describing the fall of his chivalric ideal, and sometimes his description of the latter reads like a page from the history of the former—to such an extent had the times impressed themselves upon his nature. At the same time, it has been proved by other writers that the poem is an allegory of sense at war with soul, King Arthur being the King within us. Nor shall we find any difficulty in accepting this duplicate interpretation (remembering how it is certainly true in the case of the 'Fairy Queen') if we realize the comparatively conservative aspect with which Tennyson regards the religious movements of the day. The real inconsistency, as will be seen, arises from the difference of the aim with which he set out from that with which he concluded his Arthuriad. Starting in 1832 and 1842 with purely tentative work, which, however, included a poem afterwards a part of the whole, he produced, in 1859, the four original Idylls, King Arthur being an 'ideal knight.' As he grew older, the tendency to allegoric meaning increased, and was prominent in his volume of 1869 entitled 'The Holy Grail;' the poem 'Gareth and Lynette,' (published latest of all in 1872), is a pure allegory of the temptations that assail men at different stages of life. After this came the additions and alterations made through the whole series of poems (published in the Complete Edition of 1875)—alterations, which have changed the poem to such an extent that Tennyson was quite justified in at last proclaiming it, in his Epilogue to the Queen, as

> 'Shadowing sense at war with soul
> Rather than that gray king.'

As, however, in no case has Tennyson deliberately destroyed the old work, the series of poems, composing the Arthuriad, when analyzed carefully, present the appearance of successive strata of thought contorted and inspissated into one another. I shall now proceed to consider these periods chronologically.

I.

Of the four pieces that make up the early work upon the subject of Arthur, two only deserve attention, the others, Sir Galahad and Sir Lancelot, being interesting merely as showing that the young poet's thought dwelt early

> On the dreams of all
> Which filled the earth with passing loveliness,

to quote his own words in 'Timbuctoo'—and that he was specially interested in Arthurian literature. Of the other two the 'Lady of Shalott' is an early treatment of the theme that Tennyson afterwards turned into the most touching of all the Idylls, the story of Elaine. It is quite different in character from the Idylls being written in the so-called Pre-Raphaelite manner.

In the 'Morte d'Arthur' we have the earliest contribution to the completed series. It was accompanied by an introduction, relating how Hall had written an epic on King Arthur in twelve books, but had destroyed all but one, because they were 'faint Homeric echoes.' The day is past for Homeric epics, 'nature brings not back the Mastodon,' and 'truth looks freshest in the fashion of the day.' The remaining book is the 'Morte d'Arthur.' How far are we to take this seriously?

At a much later period the Arthuriad became an allegory, and the lines have been pronounced to be an early sketch of the plan of the series. But, if so, the idea was dropped, for in the first instalment of the Idylls (in fact, in the case of the only Idylls properly so called), we have an ideal picture, but not an allegory; a beautiful quartette of poems, but no hidden meaning. But it will be quite safe to say that the lines point to an early project to write upon a subject, pointed out by our history, by the romances of the Middle Ages and by the intention of Milton and Dryden. The most natural mode of treatment, the old-fashioned epic, seemed to the author, apparently, unsuitable to the times. It was accordingly left for him to write a narrative poem, with more or less application to his own day; and this he has done.

With the words of Hall before them, critics have agreed in noticing how much more Homeric the 'Morte d'Arthur' is than any other part of the completed poem. This must strike everybody. As a rule, Tennyson's manner is more that of Virgil (whom he constantly imitates and translates, doing so even in the poem before us) than that of Homer, but here it is not so. We may say then generally, in regard to Tennyson's early essays upon the Arthurian legend, that we have two inconsiderable pieces and two of more account—one in the Pre-Raphaelite, another in the Homeric style, the latter differing so little from the Idylls that next followed that it was worked into the body of the complete poem. And when we compare the calm dignity of the 'Morte d'Arthur' with the world-worn mystical tone pervading the latest written poems of the series, we feel that it was fortunate that the Laureate wrote when he did the conclusion of his modern epic. His feelings were probably more hopeful with regard to the future, he had more belief in the ideals of the reforming spirit, with which the times that preceded the Reform Bill of 1832 were informed.*

It is instructive to compare Arthur's parting-speech with the original in Malory. 'Comfort thyself,' said the king, 'and do as well as thou mayest, for in me is no trust for to trust in. For I will into the vale of Avilion, to heal me of my grievous wound. And if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul.' It will be seen that all by which we best remember the speech is Tennyson's work. The imagery of the passage is due to two sources.

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* Since writing the above, I find this difference of tone noticed by Mr. Swinburne in an article upon 'Tennyson and Musset' in the February number of the *Fortnightly Review*. The following is the characteristic comment passed on the lines,

> I have lived my life, and that which I have done
> May he within himself make pure!

'If this be taken as the last natural expression of a gallant, honest, kindly, sinful creature like the hero of old Malory, it strikes home at once to a man's heart. If it be taken as the last deliberate snuffle of "the blameless king," it strikes us in a different fashion'—a merciless but acute piece of criticism.

The description of Avilian is almost a literal translation from the 'Odyssey' (VI. 43-6). The idoe of the 'round world bound by gold chains about the feet of God,' comes from the 'Iliad' (VIII, 19), read by the light of Bacon's words, 'when a man passeth on further, and seeth the dependence of causes, and the works of Providence; then, according to the allegory of the poets, he will easily believe that the highest link of nature's chain must needs be tied to the foot of Jupiter's chair.' ('Advancement of Learning' I. 1. 3.)

To come to what is more relative to the present study, the thoughts of the passage, we are struck by two leading ideas—Arthur's hopefulness about the future, and his discourse upon prayer. For the origin of these we must look to the times. As to the former, the celebrated lines, 'the old order changeth,' &c., were quite in keeping with the 'times, when reforms were begun with a young hopefulness of immediate good which has been much checked in our days.'* Now in all Tennyson's early works he appears to us as a moderate Liberal, full of sympathy with the progress of the day. For the origin of the lines upon prayer, we have to look to the Oxford Movement, then in its first decade. With rigorous logic the efficacy of prayers for the dead was insisted upon, if the efficacy of prayer at all was to be a part of the belief of Christians. It was pointed out that prayers for the dead had been left an open question in the Thirty-nine Articles of 1571, while the doctrine was expressly condemned in the previous Forty-five. In view of this we can better understand Tennyson's motive for adding the lines—

> More things are wrought by prayer
> Than this world dreams of, &c.

It is not necessary to tie our author down to a belief in the fashionable doctrine. All that need be said is, that the doctrine was 'in the air' at the time when the poem was in process of gestation; that it was historically in keeping with Arthur and his times; and that Tennyson was thus led to insert the lines as we have them.

If, then, we are to sum up the impression derived from the earliest instalment of the Idylls, we shall say that it is an Homeric picture of the passing of a great king, suggesting two thoughts as uppermost in the mind of the writer—the efficacy of prayer for the dead, and belief in the future to be brought about by progress.

II.

The next contribution to the story of Arthur was made in the year 1859. The volume, entitled 'Idylls of the King' and containing Enid, Vivien, Elaine, and Guinevere, was prefaced by a Dedication to the memory of the Prince Consort. This, the motto of volume 'flos regum Arthurus,' and its title, sufficiently indicate the nature of the work, as a series of *pictures* from the court of Arthur. But what was Arthur? He was not, as perhaps Tennyson originally intended him to be, the hero of an Homeric epic, nor was he an allegorical character, as he has since become. The dedication tells us that he was intended as an 'ideal knight.' Now an ideal character must be kept distinct in thought, on the one hand from an allegorical personage, on the other from a study from real life.

The history of fiction, and especially of poetry, shows a constant action and reaction from Realism to Idealism, from nature painting to typical representation; and in accordance with this there are two distinct theories of poetry—Aristotle defining it as a process of imitation, Bacon as one of creation or, we may say, of idealization. Meanwhile, as poetry becomes ideal, as it tends to describe types rather than the realities of nature, in so far it ap-

* George Eliot's 'Middlemarch.'

proximates to allegory. So that, as in the case of Tennyson, we find the same mind at different periods producing three different kinds of work —Realistic, Idealistic, and Allegorical—great minds naturally falling into allegorical writing as age comes upon them. This is manifestly the case with Goethe, as may be seen by comparing the different parts of 'Faust' and of 'Wilhelm Meister'; it is even true in the case of such a master of realistic painting as Shakespeare. In some of his early work, he is so far from allegory, or from having 'moral purpose' in what he writes, that he is not even Realistic. The best instance of this is the 'Midsummer Night's Dream'—a mere work of fancy, without an afterthought in it, except as an illustration of the wonder-working poet's eye. By degrees his plays become more realistic, the perfection of this branch of art being attained in his two plays of 'Henry IV.' From this point his art changes into something higher, into the creation of ideal concretes—the character of 'Hamlet' being an illustration of this stage. At last his work becomes distinctly allegorical in the 'Tempest.' I accordingly view ideal representation as the connecting-link between Nature-painting and Allegory.

To this intermediate stage belong the four original Idylls, four pictures of Arthur's court, four attempts to give an ideal representation of chivalry or the Christianized heroic from a modern point of view,—

> Arthur's wars in weird devices done,
> New things and old co-twisted, as if Time
> Were nothing,

as Tennyson wrote, when his work became more self-conscious. These four pictures, to which unity is given by the sin of Lancelot and the Queen, a thread that runs through all, have accordingly nothing but the traditionally miraculous about them—nothing, I mean, of the supernatural introduced, the justification for which is found in the hidden meaning that is conveyed by it. As an instance of this the description of the gate at Camelot, given in Elaine,—

> The strange-statued gate,
> Where Arthur's wars were render'd mystically,

may be compared with the later description in 'Gareth and Lynette,' of the 'Lady of the Lake,' with her arms stretched 'like a cross'—

> And drops of water fell from either hand ;
> And down from one a sword was hung ; from one
> A censer, either worn with wind and storm ;
> And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish.

Nor is there anything in the four beautiful poems which cannot be said to tell simply the tale apparent on the face of it, though there is a single passage that calls for attention. In a soliloquy, after Arthur has left her, Guinevere speaks of him in the following terms,—

> Ah, great and gentle lord,
> Who wast, as is the conscience of a saint
> Among his warring senses, to thy knights.

This is in perfect keeping with the Arthuriad in its latest phase, and shows that Tennyson had thus early conceived the idea of Arthur, as Soul warred upon by Sense, with the difference, however, that in the earlier poems, Arthur is a concrete ideal of this sentiment; in the later, Soul is the prominent notion and the King the allegory under which it is typified. The line between the two is, perhaps, hard to draw, but in the absence of other allegorical indications, I am justified in drawing it. We may, in fact, look on this as the point where Ideal and Allegory meet. In the earlier work the character is the chief point, and the simile is introduced to illustrate the religious sentiment, so common in the Middle Ages, of which the Arthur is the ideal; yet he lives and moves like a man among other men. He has not yet passed into the company of allegorical phantoms, such as the Stars and Death in 'Gareth and Lynette.'

Having ascertained the precise nature of the poems with which we are concerned, our next task will be to see to what extent they reflect the

years in which they were composed. The special bearing of 'Maud,' published in 1855, upon the times has been noticed; we have to ask what are the prominent religious or political ideas that are illustrated by the volume of Idylls, published in 1859? In what colours is the back-ground painted before which the characters move? What impression of the mental state of the writer do the poems convey? The answer, that most people would naturally give, would be that from a political or theological point of view the poems are without special signification, that there is nothing in them to indicate any disturbance of faith on the writer's part, nothing to mark them as the product of an age of mental or moral disturbance.

I will make this clear by a piece of negative criticism. Every one must remember the plaintive beauty of the death of Elaine, her calm resignation to fate. Had Tennyson written the poem in 1871, could he have resisted the hint of a quite different death-scene, given by Malory (xviii. 19), 'then she shrived her clean and received her Creator. And ever she complained still upon Sir Lancelot. Then her ghostly father bade her leave such thoughts. Then she said, Why should I leave such thoughts? am I not an earthly woman? and all the while the breath is in my body I may complain me, for my belief is I do none offence though I love an earthly man . . . .' The poem is perfect as it is, but it would have been different, had it been written twelve years later. There is nothing in it of the turbid passion that marks the Last Tournament. Thus, as far as poems of this nature can be taken as indicative of beliefs of their author, we should say that his out-look into life was hopeful. There are no approaches to the fatalism of despair, that is reflected in the latest poem of the series, 'Man is man and master of his fate.' Fortune and her wheel, 'are shadows in the cloud.' Heaven is not yet 'the dream to come' of Tristram, but 'that other world,' 'where we see as we are seen,' 'where beyond these voices there is peace,' the place of general restitution. The belief in divine judgment ('he hears the judgment of the King of kings') is undisturbed. The preface points to a period of contented loyalty to the constitutional monarchy, and the poems to a satisfied acquiescence in the powers that be. The guilty Guinevere is made an abbess 'for the high rank she had borne,' and Lancelot 'reverences the king's blood in a bad man.' Nor is there, on the other hand, any over-strained pietism. The great knights do not yet take refuge from an evil time in cloistered gloom; and nunnery life is regarded as ignorance of the world. It is from this source only, from the garrulousness of the little novice, 'closed about by narrowing nunnery walls,' that we gather an inkling of the supernatural halo that shrouded the birth and early days of Arthur.

In this manner, in the absence of anything striking in their thoughts from a controversial point of view, these poems are in keeping with the times in which they were written. The years that followed the Crimean war were a period of lull in political history (there being changes of Administration, but for trivial causes), a decade of Whig rule conducted in a Conservative spirit, culminating in the long and comparatively uneventful dominion of Lord Palmerston. If from the political we look to the religious annals of the times, we read the same story. Justin McCarthy has remarked that the literature of Queen Victoria's reign divides clearly into two periods, and that 'it was in the later period that the scientific controversies sprang up, and the school arose which will be, in the historian's sense, most closely associated with the epoch' (ch. 29). The Idylls are the natural product of the earlier period, and of the calm, as regards controversy, which was broken in the very year of their

publication, by the appearance of Darwin's 'Origin of Species.' This absence of controversial spirit is, in reality, one of the charms of the poems. Their interest lies rather in the field of every day life, in the loves and hatreds that agitate the breasts of ordinary men, than in the considerations of the high problems with which later poems, such as the 'Holy Grail,' and 'Gareth and Lynette,' are concerned. Jealousy between husband and wife, and self-reformation, are the theme of Enid; the guilty love of Guinevere, the pure love of Elaine, and the remorse of Lancelot, distracted between the two, are the subject of the third poem; the pathos of a ruined life and life purpose is ennobled in Guinevere.* In the second of the series the tale is different, and the feelings and emotions to which it appeals are not so obvious. Yet neither has it a theological bearing. It seems to be the tale of one 'lost to life, and use, and name, and fame,' through the baneful influence of a woman. But this, which is the impression produced by Vivien, in its original shape, has been altered by the additions which Tennyson subsequently made to the poem.

In his rendering of this episode, our author has changed the story as we find it in Malory (Book iv., chap. 1). Merlin 'was assotted and doted on' Nimue, and 'would let her have no rest, but always would be with her . . . . to have her love, and she was ever passing weary of him, and fain would have been delivered of him, for she was afeard of him because he was a devil's son, and she could not put him away by no means. And so on a time it happed that Merlin shewed to her in a rock whereas was a great wonder, and wrought by enchantment, that went under a great stone. So by her subtle working, she made Merlin to go under that stone to let her wit of the marvels there, but she wrought so there for him that he came never out for all the craft that he could do. And so she departed and left Merlin.' Tennyson's poem is the reverse of this, Vivien feigning love for Merlin, who flies from her to Broceliande. There he tells her the dream that drove him from the court, a dream of a wave ready to break—

> You seem'd that wave about to break up on me,
> And sweep me from my hold upon the world,
> My use, and name, and fame.

Thus, in the original edition, it was a personal fear that drove Merlin away; but, in the new 'Merlin and Vivien,' besides the long passage describing her migration from Mark's court to that of Arthur, and her stay there, seven lines are introduced to explain Merlin's 'great melancholy.' This passage, which begins with the words 'He walk'd with dreams' and alludes to the 'battle in the mist,' gives a more general turn to the seer's melancholy and adds a theological touch that was wanting in the first edition.

There is another point of view from which 'Vivien' demands our attention. The years immediately preceding the publication of these Idylls will be recollected as the time when the English public first began to interest themselves in table-turning, spirit-rapping and other ghostly doings. These phenomena and others, falling under the head of Spiritualism, had interested Americans ever since the year 1848; but though reports of marvels crossed

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* Enid is taken, with very little alteration, from 'Geraint ab Erbin,' translated by Lady Charlotte Guest, in her 'Mabinogion.' Elaine and Guinevere come from Malory's 'Arthur.' In the case of the former, Tennyson had two tales of love to work upon. By one Elaine, Lancelot becomes the father of Galahad, and this story is alluded to in the 'Holy Grail.' The other Elaine is Tennyson's heroine. She has, however, been somewhat toned down in the change from Malory to Tennyson. It is interesting to remark that the celebrated scene in the oriel window between Lancelot and the Queen, occurs in both episodes. In the story of Elaine, the mother of Galahad, the Queen and Lancelot are at the window (Malory xi. 8): in the story of Elaine of Astolat, the King is with the Queen at the window when the dead Elaine passes up the river below (xviii. 20). It is, perhaps, unnecessary to say, that the other Elaine does not die in the story.

the Atlantic, they excited, for some time, little attention in England, and were received with ridicule and contempt. The first thing that drew any considerable degree of attention to them was the coming to London of Mrs. Haydon, the American medium, in 1854. She was visited by several scientific men. Mr. D. D. Home, another medium, came to England in 1855, and the manifestations which occurred in his presence soon aroused newspaper controversy. 'Vivien' must have been written in the midst of this; and we at once have the reason why Tennyson was attracted to this special subject rather than to any other. It admitted of his giving it a turn suited to his genius. Merlin was mesmerized—for so may we interpret the account given by our author of 'woven paces and of waving hands.' Tennyson must have been thinking, too, of Spiritualistic phenomena when he wrote of Enid :—

> So she glided out,
> Among the heavy breathings of the house,
> And, *like a household Spirit*, at the walls
> Beat till she woke the sleepers.

Another such touch comes in the lines :

> And then from distant walls
> There came a clapping *as of phantom hands*.

As well as in the following,

> In the dead night, grim faces came and went
> Before her, or a vague spiritual fear—
> *Like to some doubtful noise of creaking doors,*
> *Heard by the watcher in a haunted house.*

This again is an illustration of Tennyson's way of working. He does not necessarily feel sympathy with Spiritualists and Table-turners ; but the phenomena attracted attention at the time, and, by a natural process finding their way into his mind, are preserved, like flies in amber, in the pages of his immortal poem.

III.

We may now pass to the next period of Tennyson's work. All his latest contributions to the Idylls might be classed together as belonging to the allegorical and didactic period, but it will be convenient as well as more in accordance with chronology to consider by themselves the volume published in 1869 and the 'Last Tournament,' which first appeared in the 'Contemporary Review,' in the year 1871. 'Gareth and Lynette,' the 'Epilogue,' and the alterations made in the completed poem, will form a supplement to the rest.

Reforming England of 1869 had strangely changed from England of the year 1859. The difference of the two periods is sufficiently well shown by the political leaders—Palmerston, the popular statesman who gave his people rest, and Gladstone, the master-spirit of Reform. Since the year 1865 politics had become a very serious matter. For three years England had been agitated by the Reform Bill, Disraeli had educated his party, and the Fenian troubles had brought up the Irish question. With the advent of the Liberal party to power, an era of great changes seemed at hand. If, turning from politics, we look to the literary and religious annals of the times, we shall find a corresponding advance. The awakening had been earlier here. The 'Origin of Species' had been published in the same year as the first volume of Idylls. In 1862, appeared Maurice's 'Claims of the Bible and of Science,' and Colenso's 'Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Examined.' In 1863, came Huxley's 'Evidences as to Man's Place in Nature,' and in 1864, the 'Papal Syllabus,' and, what testified to the troubled state of moral and religious thought, Swinburne's 'Atalanta in Calydon.' The 'Fortnightly Review' was established in 1865, as an organ of extreme opinion, and Dixon's 'Spiritual Wives' followed in 1868. This list is the best test of what people were thinking about.

It would be natural in the case of Tennyson, no cloistered poet, or one self-centred in the Palace of Art which he had tried and abandoned,

that his new poems should bear the impress of the times. The volume entitled the 'Holy Grail' contained the Higher Pantheism, which, if it means anything, seems to indicate a changed point of view.

> The sun, the moon, the stars, the hills and the plains—
> Are not these, O soul, the vision of Him who reigns?
> Is not the vision He? tho' He be not that which He seems?
> Dreams are true while they last, and do we not live in dreams?

Such are the lines in which he returns, though from another point of view to the opinion of the 'the flowing philosophers,' who had been the subject of a spirited little poem published in 1830, but omitted in late editions :—

> All thoughts, all creeds, all dreams are true,
> All visions wild and strange ;
> Man is the measure of all truth
> Unto himself. All truth is change :
> All men do walk in sleep, and all
> Have faith in that they dream :
> For all things are as they seem to all,
> And all things flow like a stream.

How the changes in the atmosphere of thought affected and still affect the moral tone, we all know. The years 1868-9 were specially tainted by Mrs. Beecher Stowe's publication of Lady Byron's confessions about her lord, and by the strange perversion of moral sentiment that the discussion in the public press exhibited. I will quote by way of illustration a solemn protest made by the *Saturday Review*, the appropriateness of which struck me forcibly at the time. 'The old and manly protests against the immorality and turpitude of Byron's life and works are now silenced. The traditional representatives of that part of the press which used to arrogate to itself special claims to be the guardian of religion and morality, have gone over to the other side. The Tory *Quarterly*, and *Blackwood*, and *Standard*, uphold the Satanic School and its Coryphæus. It is announced to be a kind and good deed to introduce Don Juan to family reading ; and an epigrammatist congratulates the world and himself, that at last the sinner—and such a sinner as Byron, a deliberate and inveterate offender against everything that has been held to be true, and pure, and good—has been canonised. And we are simply scorned and sneered at, because we think that it is a duty to confront an author, who is always a teacher, with his life, and we are told that it is simply "ludicrous to test genius by morality," and we are forbidden to object to the authority of Sterne or Rousseau, on the plain and homely ground that their lives were foul and licentious. This is the present aspect of the popular mind towards Byron, and it is of evil omen . . . Not only must we not utter word or protest against the shameless immorality of "the noble poet," but we must accept the man Byron as more sinned against than sinning. His wife is a moral Clytemnestra, a moral Brinvilliers, but the man who could and did violate every sanctity of life, every truth, and every honour, is the spoiled child of England, and our national darling and idol. This, we again assert, is of no good omen. We must, with all sorrow and indignation, confess that the popular verdict is with Byron. But what then? "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; and the prophets prophesy falsely. and my people love to have it so ; and what will ye do in the end thereof?"' (Jan. 29, 1870.)

It is now time to turn to the consideration of the poems. I must again utter a word of caution relative to Tennyson's own position. Because he is the mouthpiece of certain sentiments, it is by no means necessary to look, upon them as his. He is often like Hamlet's actor, but the abstract and brief chronicle of the times — his poems, from this point of view, being mainly valuable as telling us, not what we should think or what he thought, but what he saw and what people said. In reviewing the poems of this period we find three tendencies illustrated.

First, Arthur becomes more allegorical; the poems as a whole running to mysticism and double meaning. This is due to change in the author himself, and is especially marked in the 'Coming of Arthur,' the 'Holy Grail,' and the additions to the 'Morte d'Arthur.' Secondly, the spirit of the times is reflected in two ways: (1) The time was distinctly theological: points in relation to theology, suggested by the advance of science and by criticism, were discussed openly in the Press and the Pulpit. As a contribution to these questions the 'Holy Grail' was added to the series. (2) Side by side with this, a laxity had come over morals, and a tendency had shewn itself to drift from the moorings of Christianity and Christian morals. Of this, 'Pellas and Ettarre,' and the 'Last Tournament,' are distinctly illustrative.

These three tendencies, once remarked, will be recollected by all who have studied the poems, but it will be well to illustrate what has been said by a few points, and first by two contrasts which are suggested by the 'Holy Grail.' The superhuman power of knowledge is there associated with intensity of religious feeling in the person of the holy nun. In 'Vivien,' it had been identified with intellect in the 'little, glassy-headed, hairless man,' who 'read but one book.' The similarity of language in the two passages shows us, as such similarity does in Shakespeare, that their author intended us to contrast them. There is no inconsistency between them, but there is clearly a change of view. With regard to Lancelot's sin, the 'Holy Grail' may be compared with 'Elaine.' In the earlier written poem its moral aspect is prominent, 'his honour rooted in dishonour stood;' in the later work we have the theological point of view,' in me lived a sin.' As before, there is a marked similarity of language with contrasts of thought. In the 'Holy Grail' we have probably more of Tennyson's own thoughts than elsewhere. It is doubtless the author's commentary upon the religious questions of the day, and specially upon the miraculous. One is reminded of Hegel's summary of the spiritual results of the Crusades. As these wars were the logical result and culmination of Christianity, so were they the *reductio ad absurdum* of the old view of the Catholic Church. Somewhat similarly does Arthur look upon the Holy Quest. In the early days of innocence, heaven, symbolized by the Holy Cup, had touched earth.

> But then the times
> Grew to such evil that the Holy Cup
> Was caught away to Heaven, and disappear'd.

The saintly Galahad catches a glimpse of higher things, 'but one hath seen, and all the blind will see.' In Malory, Arthur welcomes the incentive given by Galahad. 'Sir, ye be welcome, for ye shall move many good knights to the quest of the Sancgreal, and ye shall achieve that never knights might bring to an end.' (B. xiii. ch. 4.) In Tennyson, Arthur looks upon the quest as 'a sign to maim this order which I made.'

In reading the poem, we cannot help thinking it a distinct failure, taking it, as it was doubtless intended, as a contribution to the religious question. If Arthur believed in the sign he should not have blamed his knights for following it; if it was an hallucination, the whole poem is a mistake. That Tennyson himself does not feel this, is another proof of the comparatively superficial view—superficial because poetical—that he takes of religious questions. We can expect no new revelation just yet; we are still in what has been aptly called the period of dormant anarchy, the second period of all revolutions. If we did expect one, Tennyson is hardly one who is able to give it. Still he felt imperatively drawn to take up the theological question; and in doing so, in working out his allegory of the quest after holiness, he was compelled to use me-

taphor and imagery that were hardly novel, just as the writer of the Apocalypse had to draw upon the Books of Daniel and Enoch. His allegory has sometimes a meaning underlying it and sometimes is mere imagery. At the conclusion, Arthur pronounces beatitudes, clearly imitated from those of the Sermon on the Mount, 'Blessed are Bors, Lancelot and Percivale,' the different characters brought before us in the poem, representing five types of holiness at the present day. Whether the five correspond to the meek, to those that hunger and thirst, to the pure in heart, to the peacemakers who are pure in spirit, and to the merciful, I cannot feel certain. Some sort of correspondence, it is probable, Tennyson intended, adapting the ideas of Scripture to the requirements of an ideal Christian chivalry. These ideas are brought out by Galahad, the type of sanctity, that lives in a higher world; by the pure and great Percivale, who, lacking humility only attains holiness by effort. Bors, is a type of mundane goodness; Ambrosius, of mechanical religion, without much spiritual exaltation. In Lancelot we have a noble, passionate nature, that would make religion beget purity, and not purity holiness. With all of these there is contrasted the low voluptuous nature of Gawain.* Arthur's concluding harangue gives, to my mind, a very uncertain sound. It would be hard to imagine a more unpoetical theme than the confessions of an half-hearted believer.† Dante and Shelley, Keble and Swinburne, Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold, have each of them a poetical justification; but what has Tennyson in this unlucky passage? Still, it is redeemed by the power of style, and is interesting too, as being characteristic of the average beliefs of the day, and of Tennyson, their born exponent. Arthur first rebukes the age that will not see miracles, adding a *qualified* acceptance of the miraculous and of the higher life. Then follows a regret for those who have determined to act upon their beliefs, and adopt a mere life of religious seclusion. The conclusion follows, that a man should do his work here, and after death, he shall see—what he will see; yet, even here, we are occasionally visited by higher visions.

In reviewing the allegorical work of this period, it will be unnecessary to notice the account of Arthur's birth at any length; so much has been written by others upon this point. That the coming of the Soul into being is conveyed under the type of Arthur's birth, is sufficiently apparent, through the passage, that brings this view most unmistakably before us, comes from the subsequently published 'Gareth and Lynette':

> For there is nothing in it as it seems
> Saving the King; tho' some there be that hold
> The King a shadow and the city real.

It is clear too, that the varying accounts of the manner of birth represents the comments of different schools upon the origin of being. At the same time the whole story, and especially Leodogran's Dream, reminds us of the Gospel History and of the reluctance of his own people to recognise the Christ as king upon earth.

As another piece of distinctly allegorical writing, I may point to the last battle scene. The original in Malory is as follows:—'Never was there seen a more doleful battle in no Christian land. For there was but rushing and riding, foining and striking, and many a grim word was there spoken either to other, and many a deadly stroke.

* It may be remarked, in passing, that Tennyson has done great violence to tradition in the character of Gawain. In the Welsh triads, Gwalchmai is one of the three learned Knights, and by no means deserves the rank given him in the Idylls.

† Cf Tennyson's early poem of 1830, since omitted by our author, upon the 'Confessions of a second-rate sensitive mind not in unity with itself,' with its three emphatic lines:

> 'Oh, weary life! oh, weary death!
> Oh, spirit and heart made desolate!
> Oh, damned vacillating state!'

. . . . . And thus they fought all the long day, and never stinted till the noble knights were laid to the cold ground, and ever they fought still, till it was near night, and by that time was there an hundred thousand laid dead upon the down.' Tennyson's version is as like a confused battle as he could make it without losing the allegory. Yet, the following words clearly point to his intention to depict a strife of such an allegorical character :

And some had visions out of golden youth,
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts,
Look in upon the battle; . . .
. . . . . shrieks,
After the Christ of those who falling down
Look'd up *for* heaven, and only saw the mist ;
. . . .
Oaths, insult, filth and *monstrous blasphemies*,
Sweat writhings, *anguish*, labourings of the lungs,
In that close mist, and *crying for the light*,
Moans of the dying, and *voices of the dead*.*

In regard to this battle, it must be acknowledged that we have a real difficulty in its interpretation. As a piece of writing it is very effective, and Tennyson could hardly have omitted it in the history of Arthur, so prominent a place does it occupy, not only in the pages of Geoffrey, from whom its grimness comes originally, and in those of Malory, but also as the battle of Camlan, in the accounts of the Welsh writers (c. f. the notes to Lady Chartotte Guest's 'Mabinogion'). It had therefore to be in the poem, but beyond this it is emphatically allegorized. Of what struggle between good and evil, we may reasonably ask, is the battle a type? The importance of the question is enhanced by Tennyson's reference to the battle in some lines added to 'Vivien,' as well as in the 'Epilogue to the Queen.' The laureate there expresses his hopes for the future of England, adding that the fears of those who mark signs of storm in the future may turn out to be vain—

Their fears
Are morning shadows, huger than the shapes,
That cast them, not those gloomier which forego,
The darkness of that battle in the West,
Where all of high and holy dies away.

A writer in the *Contemporary Review* (May, 1873), regards the battle as 'a picture of all human death, its awfulness and confusion. The soul enduring sees the mist clear up.' This I do not mean to deny, yet, though Tennyson himself surrounds the last contest with Death, in 'Gareth and Lynette,' with every semblance of horror, the battle itself proves to be the least formidable of all the encounters, and ends in a piece of most unreal and unbecoming burlesque, 'Lady Lyonors and her house making merry over death.' Nor in fact does the battle of good and evil in the soul of man take place in the hour of his death. It is the struggle of his life time, and specially of his maturing youth and mellowing manhood. By the time of his attaining three score years and ten, the victory has been given to one of the contending forces, and the human soul is already an heaven or an hell, as the principles of good or evil have attained the mastery. It would, it seems, be safest not to press the interpretation too far, to regard the battle as necessary, poetically and traditionally, the allegoric turn being given to it to make it a piece with the rest of the poem as well as to enhance its horror and mystery. This does not preclude a secondary interpretation as in Spencer, alluding to the ultimate battle in the world at large, between the principles of Christianity and of renascent Paganism. Protestant Christianity 'that once had fought with Rome,' dying by those of its own household. 'My house,' says Arthur, 'hath been my doom.' *

* Even in his most serious passages, Tennyson loves an allusion to other writings. In the present we have allusions to Cardinal Newman's hymn, 'Lead kindly light,' and to Hamlet's melancholy estimate of man and nature, II. 2.

* The gloom that surrounds the last battle is also justified, if we recollect the period which closed the era of the gods of Asgard, Ragnarok, or the twilight of the gods. Should

It is an easy step from this to the testimony given by these poems, to the waning influence of Christianity in the world, its cause and effects. Absolute truth is unattainable,

> Truth is this to me, and that to thee;

the sacred fire of Christianity is confessedly low,

> Poor men, when yule is cold,
> Must be content to sit by little fires.

The advance of knowledge has caused faith to wither, 'seeing too much wit makes the world rotten'; yet this faith, while it lasted, was a potent means of good,

> My God, the power
> Was once in vows when men believed the King!
> They lied not then, who swore, and thro' their vows
> The King prevailing made his realm.

But the causes, that kept alive a vivid Christian enthusiasm, are over,

> Fool, I came late, the heathen wars were o'er,
> The life had flown, we sware but by the shell.

We are in times of change, and the religion of Christianity, of monastic Puritanism, of self-denial, self-repression, is over, and we are free to act as we will, 'the days of frost are o'er'; 'thou nor I have made the world.' We must take facts as we find them,

> Can Arthur make me pure
> As any maiden child? . . . .
> Bind me to one? The wide world laughs at it.
> . . . We are not angels here
> Nor shall be.

Thus in the midst of a standard of morals that is disregarded, and of rampant hypocrisy, there is a tendency, as with Rousseau before the French Revolution, to cast aside the restraints of civilization, to follow the instincts of animal nature.

further illustration be needed, we have one ready to hand in Carlyle's description of his father's death. 'That last act of his life, when in the last agony, *with the thick ghastly vapours of death rising round him to choke him,* he burst through and called with a man's voice on the Great God. . . . God gave him strength to wrestle with the King of Terrors, and as it were even then to prevail' (*Reminiscences*).

> Love?—we be all alike: only the King
> Hath made us fools and liars. O, noble vows!
> O, great and sane and simple race of brutes
> That own no lust because they have no law!

These are a few passages in which these Idylls reflect the mood of thought current at the time of their production. Antinomianism, that constantly tends to burst out in times of revolution, when 'the gloom, that follows on the turning of the world, *darkens* the common path,' had openly shown itself in the England of the day. Any one, who would seek for illustration of the state of things I have described, should turn over the pages of three forgotten publications, in which a lax morality and cynical indifference to proprieties is coarsely exhibited. These writings, which appeared as Christmas Annuals for the edification of the prurient taste of the age, were entitled the 'Coming K—,' 'Siliad' and 'Jon Duan.' Tennyson on his side, though his utterances as we have seen upon points of dogma are of rather an uncertain, fluctuating nature, keeps before the minds of his readers, the presence of the ideal ignored on earth, but bright in the heavens. The harp of Arthur unseen by Tristram

> Makes a silent music up in heaven,
> And I, and Arthur, and the angels hear.

We may now turn to the latest additions to the Arthuriad.

IV.

The last written portions of the work are the poem of 'Gareth and Lynette,' published in 1872, the 'Epilogue to the Queen, and the alterations introduced throughout the entire series of poems. In the political and religious state of England a slight change had taken place, for while on the one hand the same tendencies that were noticed before continued—'the Descent of Man' appearing in 1871, and Tyndal's 'Belfast Address,' the so-called 'high water-mark of materialism,' being delivered in 1874—on the other,

the Conservative reaction, which in the hands of Lord Beaconsfield took an Imperialistic turn, occurred in the early part of 1874. Now the author's edition of the poems in their latest shape was issued in 1875. We should, therefore, naturally expect little change in the texture of religious thought of which the tales are composed, while if we found something that betokened political reaction, we should be able to account for it. Perhaps we may read an indication of this feeling in the lines,

> Ye are over fine
> To mar stout knaves with foolish courtesies.

So, too, the Epilogue, alluding to Canada, takes for a moment the tone that a few years afterwards was exaggerated by coarser spirits into the bray of Jingoism.

The song of Arthur's knighthood before the king has, to my mind, somewhat of the hollow ring of the so-called Conservative reaction, brought on by the combined forces of Beer and Bibles, by harrassed interests and fear of Roman Catholicism:

> Shall Rome or heathen rule in Arthur's realm?
> Flash brand and lance, fall battleaxe upon helm,
> Fall battleaxe and flash brand! Let the King reign.

Meanwhile the allegory is more pronounced. Arthur is now 'the Sun of Glory.' The hero of 'Gareth and Lynette' no longer fights with flesh and blood, but with Death and other symbolical personages:

> He seem'd as one
> That all in later, sadder age begins
> To war against ill uses of a life.

The words with which Lancelot hails the young knight are scriptural:

> Blessed be thou, Sir Gareth! Knight art thou
> To the King's best wish.

What small belief we may have had in the reality of Camelot is rudely dispelled by the beautiful lines, which reveal its mystical and allegoric nature:

> The city is built
> To music, therefore never built at all,
> And therefore built for ever.

The religious belief inculcated by the poems has more of a Pantheistic tendency. 'In Memoriam' spoke of

> The great *Intelligences* fair
> That range above our mortal state,
> In circle *round the blessed gate.*

We now read of 'the *Powers* who walk the *world.*' Two lines freshly added to the poems, taken together, bring this strain of thought clearly before us. 'Man's word,' Arthur says, and the words have a didactic sound about them, 'is God in man.' This is illustrated by a fresh charge added to the list in 'Guinevere,' 'to honour his own word as if his God's.' Tennyson's first great teacher, it would seem, had come to be his last. We recognize in these lines a recollection from him, the strength and dignity of whose verses, when most inspired, is unsurpassed even by Milton, and who spoke of his God as 'a presence,'

> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in *the mind of man.*

Duty, too, which the master had seen as the stay of the stars and of the most holy heavens, is thus attributed to a cataract:

> Thou dost His will,
> The Maker's, and not knowest.

In considering the additions and alterations made to the poems, for the benefit of those who have not compared them, I may say that the original Dedication, 'Gareth and Lynette,' and the 'Holy Grail,' are unaltered. One verbal alteration only occurs in the 'Last Tournament,' and several of more account in Geraint, Elaine and Guinevere. To the 'Coming of Arthur,' 'Pelleas and Ettarre,' the 'Passing of Arthur,' and especially to 'Vivien,' considerable additions have been made. Some of these changes have been noticed in previous parts of this study. None of them is more striking than the verses that give the moanings of

the King in his tent before the battle. These twenty lines begin with the words, 'I found him in the shining of the stars,' and are of great significance; for, First of all, the whole scene reminds us of the scene of the passion in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was obviously in our author's mind when he wrote them.

Secondly, the confusion of Pantheism, Duodæmonism and general hopelessness in Arthur's mind is significant at once of the times and of their exponent.

Thirdly, the contrast between the despair embodied in these lines, and the calm hope that marks Arthur's concluding speech, is noticeable, if not actually amounting to inconsistency. 'The last line,' I have written elsewhere,* 'is obviously added to clear the speaker from inconsistency, but it does not clear the poet.' The key to this is the fact that, though the two passages come in the same poem, they were written at the interval of more than thirty years.

Lastly, the thoughts of this passage are easily traced to their source. J. S. Mill's 'Autobiography' was published in 1873. No one can forget the excited discussions that this book provoked. There were two passages especially that were the subject of frequent reference. One was James Mill's opinion, given by his son, which, though not a new remark, struck the people with a novel force, that 'human life was a poor thing at best, after the freshness of youth and of unsatisfied curiosity had gone by.' The other was his opinion that Duodæmonism was, as a theory of the world, a more tenable view than the current Monotheism. 'He found it,' writes his son, 'impossible to believe that a world so full of evil was the work of an Author combining infinite power with perfect goodness and righteousness. . . . The Sabæan, or Manichæan, theory of a good and an evil principle struggling against each other for the government of the universe, he would not have equally condemned, and I have heard him express surprise that no one revived it in our times.' To this passage, and to the discussion it produced, I should trace part of the thoughts of Arthur's speech. The feeling of hopelessness as to individual effort, a disappointed feeling that aided in bringing on the Pessimism of our day, was widely felt at the same time, and it, too, finds expression in this passage. As a striking embodiment of the same thoughts, I may quote an obituary notice of Earl Stanhope, written by S. R. Gardiner in the *Academy* (December, 1875). 'Instead of carrying into literature,' he writes, 'the heat of political battle, he seems to have regarded politics with the sober judgment of a student who has become aware how very little effect is produced by the best-intentioned actions of the ablest men.'

The long passage introduced at the beginning of 'Vivien' calls for special remark. It is the account of Vivien's coming to the court at Camelot from the tainted atmosphere that surrounded King Mark in Cornwall. Here she settled, creating scandals and polluting the air where she lived:

> Thro' the peaceful court she crept
> And whisper'd: then as Arthur in the highest
> Leaven'd the world, so Vivien in the lowest,
> Arriving at a time of golden rest,
> And sowing one ill hint from ear to ear,
> . . . .
> Leaven'd his hall.

The special appropriateness of these lines to the time in which they appeared must be obvious to those who remember a leading feature of the era of Lord Beaconsfield's administration. It was not one, perhaps, of the faults of Imperialism; but it happened to coincide in time with the period of its sway. These years were the times in which the papers dealing with petty personal scandal, such as 'Vanity Fair,' 'The World' and 'Truth,' played a leading

* 'Modern Pessimism,' CANADIAN MONTHLY, December, 1879.

part. 'Vanity Fair' was of earlier birth, its literary ancestor having been the 'Tomahawk' (now extinct); but the other papers will be specially remembered as having their palmiest days in this period of underhand politics and intrigue. The disreputable series of the 'Coming K——' and its successors in part also coincides with this period.

The series of poems upon Arthur is appropriately closed by the 'Epilogue to the Queen.' The passage in which the writer points out the true nature of the poems, as an allegory, has been quoted before. With what limitations we may accept this has been shown. In this Epilogue, Tennyson recurs to the underlying subject of the whole series, the hopes and fears, the political and religious prospects of the day. He expressses his trust—

> That Heaven
> Will blow the tempest in the distance back
> From thine and ours: for some are scared, who mark,
> Or wisely or unwisely, signs of storm......

And, in the lines that succeed, these signs were enumerated—political instability, infidelity, luxury, cowardice, licentious art, and ignorance supreme. It may not be unnecessary to remind the reader that, about the time that Tennyson published these lines, there appeared 'The Warnings of Cassandra,' by Mr. W. R. Greg. These warnings, which excited no small share of public attention, insisted on many of the points here specified. The Epilogue ends with the belief that the 'crown'd Republic's common-sense' will bring England safe through her troubles.

Thus wisely, with hope for the future, has Tennyson closed his series. His last word shall be mine. In this Study much has been omitted. I have not attempted to show what has been shown before, the meaning of the allegory in each individual case, or the correspondence of season from the birth of Arthur on 'the night of the New Year' to his Passing just before 'the new sun rose bringing the New Year.' Much, doubtless, that would have fittingly made a part of this Chronological Study, has been neglected also. But I cannot close without a remark on the interesting comment upon the age and its difficulties that the Arthuriad will afford to posterity. Not with less certainty, than that with which we recognise the utterances of extinct theories of science, the religious belief of the Puritan, and the influence of the classical Renaissance in the majestic roll of 'the organ voice of England'; will a future age listen in the haunting music of Tennyson's lyre to the last and noblest hopes of Old-World Christianity, mingling with the daring thoughts of new-born Science, with the Scepticism and Melancholy Unrest of this our Nineteenth Century. The poem is a distinctive product of the age: to it with its mingled stream of Art and Science, of moral earnestness and intellectual perplexity it belongs.