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The Treatment of the Arthurian Material in Tennyson's Idylls

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THE TREATMENT OF THE ARTHURIAN MATERIAL IN TENNYSON'S IDYLLS

by

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THE ARTHURIAN EPIC

Chapter I

Historical Sketch

There is scarcely any subject in the whole range of English literature which presents so tempting a field for research, or one which so well repays careful investigation, as the cycle of Anglo-Norman romances relating to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

Strangely enough, the impression seems to exist, even among those who are otherwise well informed on literary questions, that these romances are the crude outgrowth of an illiterate age, based on legendary tales and fantastic medieval conceits which render them unworthy of serious study except, perhaps, as they reappear in modern setting and adorned with the polished verse of Alfred Tennyson.

This cyclus of romances, built up as it was on a tiny germ of history, on the bardic poems of Wales and Brittany, on local traditions, Church legends and Latin chronicles, was nevertheless, in its fully developed form, the outgrowth of the political, ecclesiastical, and social conditions of the court of Henry II of England.

Walter Map, who may be considered as the originator and author of nearly all that is imperishable in these tales, was a man of consummate genius, vast learning, and of high repute at court. His object in writing these tales of chivalry was not only to amuse and entertain his readers, but to instruct them in the rocognized theology of the day; and so skilfully and successfully did he accomplish his object that his works obtained an instantaneous popularity and were read or recited (for it was the listoning age) in castle, town, and hamlet.

Nor was his influence confined to England alone. The chord which Map struck vibrated throughout the whole of Europe. In France, Normandy and Provence, in Germany, in Spain, in Italy, in Flanders and even in Greece, the brilliant creations of the English writer seized upon the imagination of the Continental writers who reproduced, in whole or in part, the fantasies of the English narrator; or, enchanted with so successful a form of writing, invented additional romances based on episodes which Map had omitted.

One point in the history of this cyclus seems to have been generally overlooked. It is to the clergy of the Church that we are indebted for nearly all that is of lasting merit in these romances. The Latin Chronicler, Geoffrey of Monmouth, or Geoffrey "Arturus," as he was styled by his critics, who wrote (or trans-

lated) the story which formed the groundwork of all subsequent romances, was a priest residentiary in the famous Abbey of Monmouth and afterwards, Bishop of St. Asaph. Layamon, who translated and amplified the Arthurian tale as it then existed, as part of his Brut, or History of Britain, making use of that form of the English language which has been called Semi-Saxon, was a parish priest of the Church, living at Ernley, on the banks of the Severn. Robert of Gloucester, who incorporated in his Chronicle the story of Arthur in the current Early English of his day, was an Archdeacon of the Church, familiar with University life at Oxford, and was one of the most noted ecclesiastics of the age. And finally, Walter Map, poet, thoologian, wit, and courtier, whose genius transformed pre-existing traditions and legends into a spiritualized romance in Anglo-Norman French, was Archdeacon of Oxford, and Chaplain to Henry II.

It is true that Norman writers like Robert Wace, Robert de Borron, Luces de Gast, and Helie de Borron, who were not ecclesiastics, added perfection to the Arthurian cyclus; but granting all that can be said on this score, the fact remains that this finest of Christian prose epics owes its existence, virtually, to the Church, since it is to the glowing imagination of Map that we are indebted for the greater part of all that is artistic and imperishable in Arthurian Romance.

The fact that the writers of these tales were, for the most part, trained theologians, and that Map especially was, besides this, a man of commanding genius, is highly important. Apart from a knowledge of this fact it would be impossible to account for the unique character of what we may call the aim, the idea, the total meaning of this cyclus as a whole.

Viewed from the standpoint of the Church, the idea or aim of the story is the inculcation of that spotless spirituality and ideal perfection which Christianity crowns with a beatitude and which saints battle to attain. In overy romance, though pre-eminently in La Queste del Saint Graal, we find, clothed in richest imagery, the fierce encounters which the Christian knight must surmount if he would attain ideal purity here and the Beatific Vision hereafter.

The theme is noble, grand, and imperishable, and one which, in the twelfth century, could have suggested itself only to a priest of the Church.

So far, we have been considering exclusively the unique and fully developed romances of Walter Map, since they come to us as the most perfect version of the Arthurian Epic which we possess; and we have purposely passed by, with only a casual allusion, the writings of those who preceded him in this department of fiction.

It is unquestionable that Map's version is virtually an original production, not only in its idea or

aim but also in the general invention of the story; and yet a careful search among the older Arthurian writers discloses the fact that Map was indebted to others for the rough ground-work of one of his romances at least, and for the crude outlines of many incidents and characters which he reproduced in more polished form.

Nor was Map alone in thus making tributary the writings of his predecessors. The Arthurian cyclus was a thing of slow growth, the production of different ages and of many minds. At each stage in its history it received additions or embellishments which stamped it with the characteristics of the individual mind of the narrator, and of the times in which he lived, each successive romancer taking from his predecessors just as much or as little as he pleased and enlarging the result to suit his own caprice or that of the public.

The Arthurian tales of Alfred Tennyson are in some respects the most highly finished of all versions of this celebrated cyclus. Thousands have read these, the most celebrated of Tennyson's poems. At times the music of the verse rises in power as the poet's imagination depicts the grand festivities of Court, the brilliant tournament or the deadly battle. At times it sinks into the softest, tenderest strains as Enid, gentle in her nature, bears without a murmur the harsh commands of her suspecting husband; or when Guinevere receives in deep

passionful repentance her King's withering rebuke. Who is there who has not been touched by Tennyson's descriptions? Yet how few of these readers know anything of the original romances from which the poet borrowed the scenes which, in many instances, he has so faithfully reproduced? The late Poet Laureate added but a little that is positively new to the mass of incident that already existed. On the contrary he omitted large portions of the original cycle and presented only detached fragments of that which the old writers had left as a grand epic whole. He added, it is true, innumerable pre-Raphaelite touches; he elaborated the minor details, and he gave a more delicate coloring to passages which otherwise might have grated on modern ears.

TENNYSON'S IDYLLS OF THE KING

Chapter II

Though all the romances of Map and his followers had, with one or two exceptions, shown a preference for the Norman French, yet the great compilation, La Mort Darthur of Sir Thomas Maleore or Malory, published in 1485, was translated "oute of certeyn bookes of Frenssho" into Middle English.

Sir Thomas Malory can scarcely be regarded as one of the Romancers except by way of courtesy, since this cyclus must be considered to have received its finishing touches when Walter Map published his Roman de la Mort Artus. Still, keeping this fact in mind, we may very justly accord Malory a niche in this old Poets' Corner, as the last, for many a long year, indeed for over three hundred years, who did anything to revive an interest in England's oldest romances or legends. We must not forget, however, that the Roman is not an original work but simply a compilation. That Malory's work is not an artistic or perfect production is evident to every critical reader. It contains no well-conceived plot, or rather no plot at all. Advontures, battles, tournaments, and festivities are commingled in such inextricable confusion, and with such a persistent disregard of the unities, that one might almost suppose the author to have been suffering from an

intellectual nightmare while performing his task. At one time we read of some battle in which Arthur is engaged, but before the issue is settled we are snatched away to witness a passage of love between Lancelot and Guinevere; and scarcely is this satisfactorily concluded, when we are plunged into a melee, where spears are broken and swords clash together, to watch the prowess of Tristram. In addition to this want of system, the compiler has boen guilty of so many sins of omission that anyone who has read the originals from which Malory transcribed, must regret that the execution of the work was not performed by more skilful hands.

However much we may regret the imperfections of Malory, we must still be very grateful to him, for it was Malory's version of Arthur that appealed to Tennyson. Lord Hallam Tennyson later reported that his father, as a child, read Malory and was fascinated with it. This interest grew with the man, for Alfred Tennyson called his interest in Arthur his hobby.

Alfred Tennyson first conceived the idea of writing an epic about Arthur when he was twenty-four years old. He did write some of the stories at this time, but it took him nearly a lifetime to complete his Idylls. Tennyson made the gay promise of writing, "His epic, his King Arthur, some twelve books,"[1] in 1842. The final stroke was written in 1885. The final result was twelve books

1 Paull F. Baum, Tennyson Sixty Years After, North Carolina Press, 1948, p. 178.

arranged in this order:

The Coming of Arthur

The Round Table

Gareth and Lynette

The Marriage of Geraint

Geraint and Enid

Balin and Balan

Merlin and Vivien

Lancelot and Elaine

The Holy Grail

Pelleas and Ettarre

The Last Tournament

Guinevere

The Passing of Arthur

The books were not written in this order. In 1830 Tennyson wrote part, if not all, of his first experiment with the matter of Arthur: "Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere. A Fragment." This was a descriptive-decorative piece in a stanza resembling that of "The Lady of Shalott." Nothing of the story was given except the closing lines:

> 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.[2]

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2 Paull F. Baum, Tennyson Sixty Years After, North Carolina Press, 1948. p. 176.

"The Lady of Shalott" was published in 1833, and is considered by some critics to be the finest thing of its kind in the English language. It is an example of what is probably the best way for moderns to handle the Malory material. At any rate, it marked Tennyson's way very clearly; it added virtuosity and brilliance to Malory's colored lights on the chivalry of the Middle Ages.

In 1856 the Merlin and Enid Idylls were written, and privately printed the next year with the title: "Enid and Nimue: The True and the False." In 1859, the Elaine and Guinevere Idylls having been written meanwhile, "The True and the False: Four Idylls of the King" was published. The labels "true" and "false" were later removed. These Idylls were, to give them their present titles: "The Marriage of Geraint," "Geraint and Enid," "Merlin and Vivien," "Lancelot and Elaine," and "Guinevere." (The resulting five Idylls came with the division of the original "Enid" into two parts.)

The stories from Malory and from Tennyson have much in common; indeed, in the major points they are the same. We must take note, however, that Tennyson's verse is much less "earthy" than is Malory's prose. Malory, in all his stories, seems to take a great deal of pleasure in the fact that men are men, and women are women, and as such, are expected to go to bed together. Malory writes often of his characters "having pleasure together." Malory seems to expect and even enjoy a certain amount of

adultery; Tennyson also uses the theme of adultery, but he makes the reader feel that he does not approve of it.

Here is the first sign of the maladjustment of Malory to modern literary uses which has disturbed some critics. Part of this maladjustment is due to the differences in atmosphere between Malory's work, and for example, Tennyson's, but also the differences in tempo; for in Malory, where so much happens so rapidly, the reader has little opportunity or desire to examine details, and most modern renderings are slow-motion in comparison.

THE COMING OF ARTHUR

Chapter III

The story of "The Coming of Arthur" as told by Map and Malory, and the version given in Tennyson have much in common, but there is also a difference. To show the difference it becomes necessary to retell the story.

In Map and Malory the scene begins with the death of Uther Pendragon. The great Uther is dying; the nobles stand around his death bed; Merlin suddenly stands among them, and, regardless of Court etiquette, abruptly asks: "Sir, shall your son Arthur be king after your days of this realm?" The dying king replies with solemn brevity: "' I give him Gods blessing and mine, and bid him pray for my soule; and righteously and worshipfully that he claime the crowne upon forfeiture of my blessing.' And therewith hee yielded up the ghost." The nobles hear the stern command of their sovereign. They learn now, if they never knew it before, that the dying king has a son, and that that son is to succeed him on the throne of Britain. This accomplished, the Court prophet vanishes to put his plan into execution.

It is not enough for Merlin simply to bring the youth forward as the rightful heir and cause him to be crowned King. This might lead to anarchy and war. A mysterious sword, fast in the body of an anvil, appears one Sunday in the Cathedral church at London, and an in-

scription, in golden letters, tells that none save the lawful heir to the throne can draw it forth. A tournament is at once proclaimed. The chivalry of England assembles to essay the adventure, and Arthur, till then an unknown youth, becomes the hero of the hour. Every king who is present, every knight who has taken part in the adventure, sees the successful competitor. The barons may refuse obedience, but they cannot deny that Arthur alone has accomplished the feat. They were present; they saw it; they had all accepted the challenge; they had all been defeated. They may entertain murderous thoughts, so that a guard of honor has to be appointed to protect the life of the youth; but not one of them dares deny that the honor is fairly won. In sight of the assembled chiefs, the solemn coronation service of the Church is performed; the crown is placed upon Arthur's head by the hands of the holy Dubricius, the Te Deum is chanted, and the knightly throng disperses.

Some of the disappointed kings frown and become rebels. They vow bitter war and withdraw, wrathful and revengeful, to their own lands. But act as they may, there was not a king, nor a baron of any note in England but had seen the young King; or at least knew, from those who had seen him, that Arthur had been proclaimed by the barons and crowned by the Holy Church as the rightful successor of the mighty Uther Pendragon. Accordingly

the barons, in the romance, do not attempt to deny that Arthur has been duly made King of the realm; they simply refuse to recognize the beardless youth as their sovereign, or as the heir of so dreaded a warrior as Uther.

No sooner have the nobles departed to their several homes, than the treason, which had been smoldering in the breasts of some few, bursts forth into open rebellion. Six of the discontented kings gather together their forces and attack Arthur in his fortress at Caerleon. Instantly, Merlin is on the ground and confronts the rebels. They rejoice to see the great Seer and ask, "For what cause is that beardless boy Arthur made your king?" "Sirs," said Merlin, "I shall tell you the cause. For he is king Uterpendragons sonne, born in wedlock . . . and whosoever saieth nay, he shall bee king and overcome all his enemies, and or that hee die hee shall be long, king of all England, and hee shall have under his obeysance Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, and many moe realmes than I will now reherse." A parley is accordingly arranged between Arthur and his subject though rebellious kings. The youth is escorted by Merlin and the Archbishop of Canterbury and many barons, "and whon they were met together there was but little meekness, for there was stout and hard words on both sides. But alwayes king Arthur answered them, and said he would make them to bow and he lived." In the battle which ensues the King

makes good his word, for he utterly routs them and puts them to ignominious flight. Soon, however, the rebellion spreads. Eleven kings band together against the young monarch, and Merlin, to aid his master, contrives to prevail upon the kings Ban and Bors to cross the sea from France to assist his sovereign.

And now the campaign is fully opened. Arthur takes the field at the head of his forces; a series of battles is fought; the island is finally subdued, and the traitorous kings are forced to submit to his authority. These heroic deeds reach the ears of Leodegraunce, king of Cameliard, who, at this time, is hard pressed by his giant foe, king Rience of North Wales, and he accordingly sends ambassadors entreating Arthur to come to his rescue. Arthur has now vanquished all his foes; the realm is at peace; and the King sets out to assist Leodegraunce whom he loves, and finds but little difficulty in the enterprise. Rience, he slays in single combat; the rest of the marauders are put to flight; Arthur gains the gratitude of his friend, and even the haughty Guinevere, the king's daughter, is impressed.

After the King's return to Caerleon, it seems that Arthur himself, at this time, is harassed with doubts as to his real parentage. He inquires of Sir Hector and Sir Ulfias what they know in reference to his lineage. They tell him that Uther Pendragon was his father, and queen Igraine his mother. Even then, not

feeling thoroughly assured, he commands Merlin to bring the queen into his presence, adding: "If shee say so her selfe then will I beleeve it." In all haste the queen is brought, and upon her arrival she asserts in the presence of Merlin, Sir Hector, and Sir Ulfias, "Merlin knoweth well and you, sir Ulfias, how king Uther . . . wedded me, and by his commandment when the child was borne it was delivered to Merlin, and nourished by him; and so I saw the child never after, nor wot not what is his name, for I never knew him yet. . . . Then Merlin tooke the king by the hand, saying, 'This is your mother.' And therwith sir Ector bare witnesse how he nourished him by king Uthers commandment, and therwith king Arthur tooke his mother, queene Igraine, in both his armes and kissed her, and either wept upon the other."

The report of this public acknowledgement of Arthur as her son by queen Igraine, spreads far and wide over the country, and henceforth, not a single whisper of doubt is heard as to his being the rightful heir to the throne, and every breath of slander is dispelled. All doubts on this head being forever set at rest, and Arthur's sovereignty being widely acknowledged through his brilliant victories, Merlin is sent to Cameliard to ask the hand of Guinevere, the beautiful daughter of Leodegraunce, in marriage.

Arthur is no longer a beardless youth; no longer

an untried knight. His prowess has been proved in many a hard-fought battle; he has forced his enemies to lay down their arms and do homage to him as King; he is, moreover, the acknowledged son of Uther; and Leodegraunce, cheerfully and unhesitatingly, complies.

Such, in brief, is The Coming of Arthur as told by Map and by Malory.

It is generally understood that Tennyson's series of Arthurian poems was completed when he wrote the Idyll entitled "The Coming of Arthur," professedly as an introduction to the whole series, and we can therefore examine his work as a finished whole.

The first point which strikes the reader of the Norman romances, as he opens Tennyson's poem, is the silence of the Idylls on the subject of the Holy Grail.

The minor point of the parentage of the King, seems to be the one point in "The Coming of Arthur" that requires to be made clear. This done, no other introduction is needed; the King's respectability is established in accordance with nineteenth century notions, and he is henceforth a fit person to be presented to socially orthodox readers. The fact of the story being an epic, or of the Holy Grail forming the point of unity in this epic, does not seem to have entered the poet's conception of the story. Of Uther Pendragon and Igraine, the Idyll gives no account that is intelligible to modern readers, and the whole story of Arthur, as a stripling,

entering the old abbey and drawing forth the sword is totally ignored.

The poem of "The Coming of Arthur" opens with the distress of Leodegraunce, king of Cameliard, whose territory, it seems had been overrun with bandits and wild beasts, and in his trouble he sends to Arthur with the piteous cry:

> "Arise, and help us thou!
> For here between the man and beast we die."

This would be an intelligible statement, were it not for what immediately follows:

> And Arthur yet, had done no deed of arms.

It must seem strange, even to the casual reader, that a warrior king, like Leodegraunce, should send for succor to an untried and almost unknown youth, one who had "done no deed of arms." It is an inconsistency, and, like many others, due to Tennyson alone. Having transformed King Arthur into an unknown and untried knight, what more natural than that Leodegraunce, a king in his own right, should hesitate to bestow the hand of his daughter Guinevere upon a mere potential hero?

It is at once apparent how widely Tennyson has diverged from the romance. But this is not all. He has effected this divergence at the sacrifice of unity, consistency, and beauty. Having adopted so unkingly a view of

Arthur, and having made a petty king of Cornwall hesitate whether or not to give his daughter in marriage to a "doubtful king," it becomes necessary to introduce a new string of incidents to account for the final marriage of Arthur and Guinevere, Accordingly, Bedivere is represented in the Idyll, in the grotesque character of a kingly ambassador urging his master's suit by repeating the slanders and tainted gossip of envious foes; and what is more, as actually blackening the King's character with his

"Sir, there be many rumours on this head,"

and (with an unctuous deprecation of what he knows to be untrue) actually repeating this untruth with embellishments of his own.

At this juncture, while Leodegraunce is debating within himself "whether there were truth in anything" said by this knight, there comes to Cameliard Lot's wife, Bellicent of Orkney, although nothing in the context calls for it, and although her appearance, in its very unnaturalness, shows to what straits Tennyson was reduced by his departure from the romance. However, her visit affords the king a fine opportunity to make further inquiries, which Bellicent answers to his gratification, but so long a tale does she tell, that she thoroughly wearies out the aged monarch and at length, in defiance of all the laws of knighthood, he actually goes to sleep in her presence!

She spake and King Leodegran rejoiced,
But musing, shall I answer yea or nay
Doubted and drowsed, nodded and slept.

His drowse, nod and sleep seem, however, to have had a most beneficial effect upon his spirits, for as soon as he awakes his perplexing doubts no longer disturb him.

And Leodegran awoke, and sent
Ulfias, and Brastias and Bedivere,
Back to the court of Arthur answering yea.

To crown all these inconsistencies, Tennyson places the twelve great battles, by which Arthur established his sovereignty in Britain, after the arrival of the Roman embassy. In other words, Tennyson makes Arthur the Emperor of the civilized world before he is so much as King of Britain. So much, then, for Tennyson's introductory Idyll, "The Coming of Arthur."

LANCELOT AND ELAINE

Chapter IV

Tennyson has followed closely the lines of the original romance of Map and Malory. He has reproduced the tale with exquisite beauty of thought and touch of fancy. The central figure of the Idyll is Lancelot. On either side of Lancelot stand the contrasted figures of Elaine and Queen Guinevere, both of whom loved him well, but differently, - the one a simple maiden, full of sweetness and purity, the other also beautiful, of queenly dignity and splendor, but voluptuous and sin-stained. Color is not mentioned, but one gets the impression that Elaine is very fair and Guinevere is dark. (In other sources, Sir Bernard speaks of his daughter's "golden hair," and at another time King Arthur speaks of the joy he has in burying his face in "Guinevere's golden hair.") Lancelot is the peerless knight, gallant and courteous as ever, but with face marred by long conflict between "the great and guilty love he bare the queen" and his loyalty to his King. Woven in and out of the Idyll is the story of the development to which the love of Lancelot and Guinevere has now attained. In following the narrative of Malory we find that this illicit romance has covered a period of about twenty-five years. (In the Idyll about the Holy Grail, Lancelot is held in a trance one night for every year he has sinned, and this trance lasted for twenty-four nights and days. The Elaine Idyll

takes place about a year after the Holy Grail Idyll.)

All the personages mentioned up to now have had historical prototypes; in other words, though their characters as romantic heroes or heroines are fictitious and ideal, still there is a germ of real fact underlying the superstructure of romantic creation. But in the case of Lancelot this is apparently wanting.

In the first place, the very name is French, while those we have mentioned before are pure Keltic. Some writers are of the opinion that he is a reproduction of a certain Welsh king, Mael, but this seems to be doubtful. In the oldest French manuscript of the romance, the name is written L'Ancelot, where the first letter represents the definite article. The word Ancel (Latin, Ancilla) means a servant, and Ancelot is its diminutive. Also, Mael is Welsh for servant. Lancelot seems to be, therefore, the Welsh Mael translated into the Romance tongue and means "a darling servant" or knight. But this is not all. King Mael is said to have lived in the sixth century, and is spoken of as redoubtable for arms and gallantry though of a barbaric kind. One writer actually states that he carried off Guinevere and was, in consequence, besieged by Arthur. Mael is also said, like Lancelot, to have ended his days in a monastery. This theory does not seem, on critical grounds, to rest on anything more solid than mere conjecture. Whether or

not Map constructed the character of this famous knight on that of any pre-existing Kymric model is, of course, an open question. We cannot but think that Lancelot is the creation both in name and character of Walter Map, and embodies his idea of the purely heroic, chivalric knight of the twelfth century.

Following Map's romance, Lancelot was the son of King Ban, one of the two foreign potentates whom Arthur, by Merlin's advice, called in to assist him in conquering the eleven confederate kings who refused to acknowledge his title to the throne. This King Ban, while besieged by his enemy Claudas, escapes from his castle under the cover of night to seek the assistance of Arthur, to whom in former years he had rendered such valuable aid. No sooner is he without the castle gates, than the seneschal betrays his trust and admits the besiegers. The castle is fired, and the flames reaching the eyes of the unfortunate monarch during his flight, he expires with grief. His distracted wife, the Lady Helen, who had been his companion on the journey, abandoning for a moment the care of her infant son, flies to the assistance of her husband, and on her return finds the little Lancelot in the arms of the beautiful nymph Vivien. On the approach of the mother, the nymph suddenly springs with the child into a deep lake and instantly disappears; hence her adopted child is afterwards known as Lancelot du Lac.

The fairy, when her protege had attained the age of eighteen, takes him to Arthur's Court in order that he may receive the honor of knighthood. At the first appearance of the youth in his white armor, which the nymph had expressly made for him, the graces of his person, and the manifest bravery of his nature, make an instantaneous and indelible impression on the heart of the Queen; while her beauty fascinates him in spite of his nobler feelings.

According to another version, it is Lancelot, and not Merlin, who is sent as ambassador to ask the hand of Guinevere, and then commenced that fatal love which, though it appeared at first only as a tiny cloud on the horizon of romance, afterwards cast its shadow over Arthur's whole life and darkened his end.

Before comparing parallel passages from the romance of Map and the Idyll of Tennyson, we may state in passing that the poem of Lancelot and Elaine is one of the finest, if not the finest, of the whole of the series of Tennyson's Arthurian poems.

This estimate is based on the fact that in this instance the poet has followed strictly the lines of the original romance; and he has reproduced the tale with such exquisite beauty of thought and additional touches of fancy, that we can imagine what the delight of the Norman romancer would be, could he read his own narrative as re-

set in artistic verse by the poet Tennyson.

The Idyll begins with the announcement of a tournament to be held at Camelot. Guinevere refused to go, giving as her excuse ill health. Lancelot took his cue from her and also refused to go, giving as his excuse "an old wound" which was giving him trouble. Arthur believed them both and left. As soon as Arthur had gone, Guinevere reprimanded Lancelot, telling him that for both of them to stay away would cause talk by their enemies. Lancelot immediately made plans to go. Guinevere told him that he could go disguised and win the tournament, then he could tell Arthur that he had planned this because "the other knights were afraid of his name." The prize to be given was the last of nine diamonds. Lancelot had won the other eight, and intended to give them all to Guinevere when he had won them all.

Lancelot chose the least traveled roads purposely, and finally found himself lost. After a long ride he arrived at the castle of Astolat. Sir Bernard, the lord of Astolat, received his stranger guest with every mark of distinction. "This old baron had a daughter that time, that was called the faire maide of Astolat; and ever she beheld sir Lancelot wonderfully; and she cast such a love unto sir Lancelot that shee could not withdraw her love, wherefore she died; and her name was Elaine la Blaunch. So . . . shee besought sir Lancelot to weare upon him at

the jousts a token of hers. 'Faire damosell,' said sir Lancelot, 'and if I graunt you that, yee may say I doe more for your love than ever I did for lady or damosell.' Then hee remembered him, that hee would ride unto the jousts disguised, and for because he had never before that time borne no manner of token of no damosell, then he bethought him that he would beare on of hers, that none of his blood thereby might know him. And then hee said 'Faire damosell, I will graunt you to weare a token of yours on my helmet and therefore what it is shew me.' 'Sir,' said shee,'it is a red sleeve of mine, of scarlet, well embroadered with great pearles.' And so shee brought it him. So sir Lancelot received it and said: 'Never or this time did I so much for no damosell.' And then sir Lancelot betooke the faire damosell his shield in keeping, and prayed her to keep it untill he came againe.'"

With what power do the full strains of Tennyson's verse resound the simple music of Map's prose.

> she stood
> Rapt on his face as if it were a God's.
> Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire,
> That he should wear her favor at the tilt.
> She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.
> "Fair lord, whose name I know not --noble it is,
> I well believe, the noblest --will you wear
> My favour at this tourney?" "Nay," said he,
> "Fair lady, since I have never yet worn
> Favour of any lady in the lists.
> Such is my wont, as those, who know me, know."
> "Yea, so," she answer'd; "then in wearing mine
> Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,

That those who know should know you." And he turn'd
Her counsel up and down within his mind,
And found it true, and answer'd, "True, my child.
Well, I will wear it ; fetch it out to me :
What is it?" and she told him "A red sleeve
Broidered with pearls," and brought it: then he bound
Her token on his helmet, with a smile
Saying, "I never yet have done so much
For any maiden living," and the blood
Sprang to her face and filled her with delight.

Lancelot and Sir Bernard's son, Sir Lavaine, then start for the tournament, and upon their arrival attract little or no attention, Lancelot wearing, as he does, the unblazoned shield of Elaine's younger brother, Sir Torre. But soon he enters the lists and performs such deeds of valor that

King, duke, earl,
Count, baron -- whom he smote, he overthrew.

At length, a spear piercing his armor enters his side and, breaking off, leaves the spear-head embedded in the wound. Then the heralds, by the King's order, blow the trumpets, and the prize is awarded to "the knight with the white shield and that beare the red sleeve." But, forgetful of the prize he had won, Lancelot gallops from the field, and having reached the woods, he turns to Elaine's brother and beseeches him: "'O gentle knight, sir Lavaine, helpe me that this trunchion were out of my side, for it sticheth so sore that it almost sleyeth mee.'
'O, mine owne lord,' said sir Lavaine, 'I would faine helpe you but it dreads me sore and I draw out the trunch-

ion that yee shall bee in perill of death.' 'I charge you,' said sir Lancelot, 'as yee love me, draw it out.' ' . . . and forthwith sir Lavaine drew the trunchion out of his side; and sir Lancelot gave a great shrieke and a mervailous, ghastly grone, and his blood brast out . . . that at last hee sanke downe . . . and sowned paile and deadly.'"

Here, again the poet follows closely the very wording of the old romance. Sir Lancelot, gasping, charges Sir Lavaine

> "Draw the lance-head;"
> "Ah my sweet lord Sir Lancelot," said Lavaine,
> "I dread me, if I draw it, you will die."
> But he, "I die already with it: draw --
> Draw," -- and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave
> A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,
> And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank
> For the pure pain, and wholly swoon'd away.

Sir Gawaine is sent by King Arthur to seek the unknown and mysterious knight, and, after a fruitless attempt, he comes by chance to the castle of Astolat. Then in answer to Elaine's questioning him about the champion of the jousts, she discovers that it is the unknown knight who had worn her favor, and whom she loved, who had carried off the prize. Elaine explains to Sir Gawaine what has happened, and shows him the shield that Lancelot had left with her. Gawaine leaves the diamond (the prize) with her, knowing that Lancelot would return for his shield, and returns to Court.

After Gawaine's departure for the Court, Elaine obtains her father's permission to seek Sir Lancelot, and accordingly goes forth, accompanied only by her younger brother. Before long, they meet Sir Lavaine, who, learning the object of their journey, leads them to the hermitage where Sir Lancelot is lying sick of his grievous wound, "And when shee saw him lie so sicke and pale in his bed, shee might not speake, but sodainly shee fell unto the ground in a sowne, and there shee lay a great while."

Nothing could surpass the poetic beauty with which this is told by Tennyson:

> There first she saw the casque
> Of Lancelot on the wall: her scarlet sleeve,
> Tho' carved and cut, and half the pearls away,
> Stream'd from it still; and in her heart she laugh'd,
> Because he had not loosed it from his helm,
> But meant once more perchance to tourney in it.
> And when they gain'd the cell wherein he slept,
> His battle-writhen arms and mighty hands
> Lay naked on the wolfskin, and a dream
> Of dragging down his enemy made them move.
> Then she that saw him lying unsleek, unshorn,
> Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
> Utter'd a little tender dolorous cry.
> . . . . . .
> And slipt like water to the floor.

After Lancelot's recovery, they all bid adieu to the good hermit and return to the old baron's castle. There, Lancelot stays some time, but at last determines to leave for the Court, and, when he is about to depart, Elaine says: "'My lord sir Lancelot, now have mercy upon

me, and suffer mee not to die for your love.' 'What would yee that I did?' said sir Lancelot. 'I would have you unto my husband,' said the maide Elaine. 'Faire damosell, I thanke you,' said sir Lancelot, 'but certainely,' said hee, 'I cast mee never to bee married.' . . . 'Alas!' said she, 'then must I needes die for your love.' 'Ye shall not,' said sir Lancelot, 'for wit yee well, faire damosell, that I might have been married and I would, but I never applyed mee to bee married; but because, faire damosell that yee will love mee as yee say yee doe, I will, for your good love and kindnesse, shew you some goodness, and that is this: that wheresoever yee will set your heart upon some good knight that will wed you, I shall give you together a thousand pound yearely to you and to your heires; thus much will I give you, faire maide, for your kindnesse. And alway while I live to be your owne knight.' 'Of all this,' said the damosell, 'I will none.' . . . Then she shriked shrilly, and fell downe to the ground in a sowne; and the gentlewomen beare her into her chamber, and there she made ever much sorrow."

How tenderly and faithfully has Tennyson described this scene:

". . . and do not shun
To speak the wish most near to your true heart;
Such service have ye done me, that I make
My will of yours, and Prince and Lord am I
In mine own land, and what I will I can."

Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,
But like a ghost without the power to speak.
And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish.
. . . . . .
And said, "Delay no longer, speak your wish,
Seeing I go to-day:" then out she brake:
"Going? and we shall never see you more.
And I must die for want of one bold word."
"Speak: that I live to hear," he said, "is yours,"
Then suddenly and passionately she spoke:
"I have gone mad. I love you: let me die."
"Ah, sister," answer'd Lancelot, "what is this?"
And innocently extending her white arms,
"Your love," she said, "your love -- to be your wife."
And Lancelot answer'd, "Had I chosen to wed,
I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine:
But now there will never be wife of mine."

. . . And she said,
"Not to be with you, not to see your face --
Alas for me then, my good days are done."
"Nay, noble maid," he answer'd, "ten times nay!
This is not love: but love's first flash in youth,
Most common: yea, I know it of mine own self:
And you yourself will smile at your own self
Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life
To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age:
And then will I, for true you are and sweet
Beyond mine old belief in womanhood,
More specially should your good knight be poor,
Endow you with broad land and territory
Even to the half of my realm beyond the seas,
So that would make you happy: furthermore,
Ev'n to the death, as tho' ye were my blood,
In all your quarrels will I be your knight.
This will I do, dear damsel, for your sake,
And more than this I cannot."

While he spoke
She neither blush'd nor shook, but deathly-pale
Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied:
"Of all this will I nothing;" and so fell,
And thus they bore her swooning to her tower.

And so Lancelot departs; and so the maiden pines and pines, week after week, for eleven long weeks, till

Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field
Approaching thro' the darkness, call'd.

"And then she called her father . . . and heartely shee praied her father that her brother might write a letter like she would endite it. And so his father graunted her. And when the letter was written, word by word, like as shee had devised, then shee praied her father that shee might be watched untill she were dead. 'And while my body is whole, let this letter be put in my right hand, and my hand bound fast with the letter untill that I bee cold, and let me be put into a faire bed with all the richest clothes be laide with me in a chariot to the next place where as the Thamse is, and there let me bee put in a barge, and but one man with me, such as yee trust, to stere me thither, and that my barge be covered with black samite over and over. Thus father, I beseech you let me be done.' . . . (and) anon shee died. And so when shee was dead, the corps and the bed and all was led the next way unto the Thamse, and there a man and the corps, and all were put in a barge on the Thamse, and so the man steered the barge to Westminster."

And when her spirit had flown to where the weary are at rest, her brothers followed the procession to the waterside. Tennyson, in the poem, is much more concise, and much more specific. There seems to be no reason for moving the letter to Elaine's left hand, unless our attention is needed on the lily. Elaine asked for her "richest clothes"; Tennyson covers her in cloth of gold, and dresses her in white, obviously to call attention to

her beauty.

> In her right hand the lily, in her left
> The letter -- all her bright hair streaming down --
> And all the coverlid was cloth of gold
> Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white
> All but her face, and that clear-featured face
> Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead.
> But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled.

As the King and Guinevere (or according to Tennyson, as Lancelot and Guinevere) are talking at the palace window overlooking the river, a barge is seen slowly drifting to the royal landing. "'That faire corps will I see,' said king Arthur. 'And the king tooke the queene by the hand and went thither. . . . Then the king and queen went in (to the barge), with certaine knights with them, and ther they saw a faire gentlewoman lying in a rich bed . . . and all was cloth of gold; and shee lay as though she had smiled. Then the queene espied the letter in the right hand; and told the king thereof. Then the king tooke it in his hand, and said, 'Now I am sure this letter will tell what she was and why shee is come hither.' . . . and so when the king was come within his chamber, he called many knights about him." Then the letter is opened and read as follows: "'Most noble knight, my lord sir Lancelot du Lake, now hath death made us two at debate for your love; I was your lover, that men called the faire maiden of Astolat; therefore unto all ladies I make my moone; yet for my soule that yee pray, and bury me at the least, and offer

yee my masse peny. This is my last request. . . . Pray for my soule, sir Lancelot, as thou art a knight pearles.'"

Here, Tennyson has at times retained the very wording of the old romance:

> . . . the King
> Came girt with knights: then turn'd the tongueless man
> From the half-face to the full eyes and rose
> And pointed to the damsel, and the doors.
> So Arthur bad the meek Sir Percivale
> And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid;
> And reverently they bore her into hall.
> Then came the fine Gawaine and wondered at her,
> And Lancelot later came and mused at her,
> And last the Queen herself, and pitied her:
> But Arthur spied the letter in her hand.
> Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all:
>
> "Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
> I, sometimes call'd the maid of Astolat,
> Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
> Hither, to take my last farewell of you.
> I loved you, and my love had no return,
> And therefore my true love has been my death.
> And therefore to our Lady Guinevere,
> And to all other ladies, I make moan:
> Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.
> Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,
> As thou art a knight peerless."

"And when sir Lancelot had heard it word by word, hee said: 'My lord king Arthur, wit you well that I am right heavy of the death of this faire damosell; God knoweth I was never causer of her death by my will. . . . Shee was both faire and good and much was I beholden unto her, but she loved me out of measure.' 'Yee might have shewed her,' said the queene, 'some bountie and gentlenesse, that ye might have preserved her life.'"

Equally beautiful is the description in Tennyson:

> Thus he read;
> And ever in the reading, lords and dames
> Wept, looking often from his face who read
> To hers which lay so silent, and at times,
> So touch'd were they, half-thinking that her lips
> Who had devised the letter, moved again.
>
> Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all:
> "My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,
> Know that for this most gentle maiden's death
> Right heavy am I; for good she was and true.
> But loved me with a love beyond all love
> In woman, whomsoever I have known.
> . . . . . .
> Then said the Queen
> . . . . . .
> "Ye might at least have done her so much grace,
> Fair lord, as would have help'd her from her death."
> He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell.

Lancelot, after showing to the satisfaction of the Queen, at least, that such was impossible, "Then said the king unto sir Lancelot, 'It will be your worship that ye oversee that shee bee buried worshipfully.' 'Sir,' said sir Lancelot, 'that shall bee done as I can best devise.' And so did the knight,

"Not knowing he should die a holy man."

THE QUEST OF THE HOLY GRAAL

Chapter V

The Graal romance has no existence in the early English versions of the legends of Arthur. It is peculiar to the Norman and is the production of Walter Map, wit, poet, scholar, priest, and theologian. We might expect that this romance would contain a great deal which only hard, patient study could unfold. And such we find to be the actual case.

Now, this adventure is not only the culminating point, but the essential feature, of the whole narrative. It permeates every part, it colors every incident, and it gives soul to every scene, from the advent of Merlin to the translation of Arthur; and the question arises, what object could Map have had in thus spiritualizing the tale; in thus changing so essentially its whole scope, motive, or aim, as to render it a distinct and independent version?

A glance at the origin of the English drama will, at once, give a clue to this apparent anomaly. It is a curious fact that the oldest English plays known to us were written during the same century in which Walter Map wrote his romances, though somewhat earlier in that century. They are what are technically known as Miracle plays; some Scripture narrative was taken from the New Testament, thrown into the form of dialogue with additional touches suggested by the fancy of the writer, and so

modernized as to suit the customs and habits of thought of an uneducated audience. On the day of the performance, the town church was turned into a temporary theatre, and the clergy into amateur actors. The slightest acquaintance with twelfth-century life renders it certain that the clergy assumed the role of playwrights and actors, not simply for the amusement of the people, but for their instruction. What audience that had ever witnessed a Miracle play could fail to carry away an indelible remembrance of the facts thus represented? What oral instruction could ever equal this pictorial teaching?

Now, what the secular clergy endeavored to accomplish on behalf of the unlettered masses, by means of Miracle plays, that did Walter Map, the University Archdeacon, attempt to accomplish on behalf of the warrior class, by means of the tales of chivalry. There was this distinction, however, that while the Miracle plays taught principally the facts of the Holy Gospel, the romance dealt chiefly with the doctrines of the Holy Church. The object of each was to familiarize the truths of religion and to instruct the people. On the one hand, the purpose was to instruct the masses in the facts of Scripture by means of plays; on the other, the purpose was to instruct the knightly class in the doctrines of Christianity by means of the romances of chivalry. It was a

shrewd, far-sighted idea of this witty priest; a grand idea for that age, and carried out with the artistic finish of genius. Little did the noble lords and ladies dream, as they followed with breathless interest the fortunes of Galahad and the questing knights, that they were listening to a sermon on the "Quest of Eternal Life." And yet, that such is the fact, will appear as we advance in the examination of the romance itself. The following account is Map's version of the events pertaining to the Sangraal.

On the vigil of the feast of Pentecost, which Arthur always celebrated with royal magnificence, there entered into the hall of the palace at Camelot a fair gentlewoman who desired to see Sir Lancelot, and when the famous knight was pointed out to her, she requested him, on king Pelles' behalf, to follow her on an adventure into a neighboring forest. Lancelot accordingly went with her, not knowing why or where he was going, till they came to an "abbey of nuns," and the two entered within the sacred enclosure. No sooner had the knight rested himself, than there entered into the room where he was awaiting them, three of the sisters, leading by the hand a young squire of noble mien and bearing, and entreated Sir Lancelot to make him a knight. The request was granted, and at the hour of prime next morning, the youth, who proves to be Galahad, received the honor of

knighthood at the hands of his own father. This is, then, the first glimpse which we get of the virgin knight, the hero of the romance. He had been committed to the care of this sisterhood upon the death of his mother Elaine (king Pelles' daughter, not her of Astolat), and having been nourished by them, suddenly appeared in the narrative at this point.

The same morning, being Whitsunday, Sir Lancelot returns to Court, arriving there while the King and Queen are at Mass. But service being ended, a strange sight is seen in Camelot. Letters of gold, as if produced by a miracle, are discovered in the seats of the Round Table, and in the "siege perillous" is an inscription stating that the siege should be filled that very day. Scarcely have King and knights recovered from their astonishment, when a squire rushes breathless into the hall, announcing that he has just seen, floating on the river nearby, a large stone and a sword fast therein by the point. The hall is immediately deserted by King and knights, who hasten to the river side, and there see the mysterious sword. Urged by the King, one after another of the company attempts to draw out the sword, but all are unsuccessful, and finally relinquish the adventure for the time being.

Shortly after this, while the knights are seated at dinner, there enters the palace "an old man and an

ancient" clothed in white, but no member of the Round Table knows his name or whence he comes. Accompanying him is a young knight in red armor but without shield or sword; only an empty scabbard dangles at his side. Then the old man addresses King Arthur: "Sir, I bring you heere a young knight, that is of kings lineage, and of the kindred of Joseph of Arimanthy, whereby the mervailes of this court and of strange realmes shall be fully accomplished." The King welcomes him, and then, at the bidding of his companion, the youth places himself in the "siege perillous," to the astonishment of the assembled knights, who fear lest his temerity be punished by sudden malady or death. No evil, however, befalling him, a whisper passes around the board, that the unknown youth is doubtless he who, Merlin had long ago foretold, should achieve the adventure of the Holy Graal and fill the long vacant seat. All doubt on this point is soon set at rest. The dinner ended, the King raises the silken covering of the "siege perillous," and there, written in letters of gold, is seen the name of "Galahad." The King then takes the youthful knight by the hand, and, accompanied by the court, leads the way to the river to show Sir Galahad the mystic sword. No sooner does the latter touch the weapon than it instantly yields to his hand, and, more wonderful yet, it is found upon trial to fit exactly the empty scabbard which dangles at his

side. The report spreads, lightning-like, over Camelot, that the hour has arrived for the adventure of the Sangraal, and that the long-expected hero, who is to achieve the adventure, has at length made his appearance. The halls of Camelot ring with excitement and merriment. The Queen, hearing the commotion, inquires the cause, and is told of the strange things that are occurring. On his return from the river, the King bids the knights of the Round Table to assemble in the meadow to joust and tourney and to see Galahad "proved." The Queen's curiosity is excited; she attends the tournament, and when the young knight has "won his spurs" by overthrowing all of the noblest warriors save two, Sir Lancelot and Sir Percival, he is summoned into the presence of Queen Guinevere to receive the guerdon of praise from her own lips.

That very night, in the banquet hall, is revealed to Arthur's Court the mystery which Galahad is come to solve. As the knights are sitting at supper, there is heard a mighty blast, and the next moment a beam of heavenly light darts athwart the hall, disclosing the presence of the Holy Graal, clothed in white samite, while delicious odors diffuse themselves on every side, and the tables are spread with the choicest of earthly gifts. It appears but for a second, then vanishes, and the hall, deserted by the supernatural light, looks

dark and drear. The King is the first to break the death-like silence which succeeds, and utters in trembling tones an ascription of praise to God.

Gawaine next speaks: "I will make heere avow," he exclaims, in ringing tones, "that tomorrow without any longer abiding, I shall labour in the quest of the sancgreall, that I shall hold me out a twelve months and a day, or more if neede bee and never shall I returne againe unto the court til I have seene it (the Graal) more openly than it hath beene seene heere; and if I may not speed, I shall returne againe as hee that may not bee against the will of our Lord Jesu Christ."

The majority of the knights present, when they hear Gawaine's resolve, join in the avow. Arthur is greatly displeased at this sudden resolve, and turning sharply upon his nephew, Gawaine, he exclaims, "Alas! yee have nigh slaine me with the vow and promise that yee have made; for though it yee have berefte mee of the fairest fellowship and the truest of knighthood that ever were seene together in any realme of the world. For when they depart from hence, I am sure that all shall never meete more in this world, for there shall many die, in the quest . . .". The whole court is thrown into a state of deepest mourning by this fatal vow. "I mervaile," cries Queen Guinevere with her accustomed impetuosity, when told of what has happened, "I mervaile my lord will

suffer them to depart from him."

On Whitmonday, the morning of their departure, "as soon as it was daylight, the king arose, for hee had taken no rest of all that night for sorrow." Then seeing Gawaine chatting with Lancelot, while biding the hour of Mass, he approaches him, and in sorrowful terms bewails the Quest. After Mass at the Minster, the King commands that those who have taken the vow be numbered, and the tale is found to amount to a hundred and fifty knights, all of the Round Table. Then follows a busy scene of arming and preparing for departure, after which the knights and attendant squires mount their horses, and the brilliant cavalcade rides through the streets of Camelot. And as they pass, elated with hope, and glorying in their strength, throngs of weeping men, women, and children mourn their departure. And so the Quest of the Holy Graal is begun.

We shall pause here, at the end of this introduction, and consider Tennyson's version of this part of the romance.

Tho form in which the poet has thrown his Idyll, that of a dialogue, is pardonable, since to have given it in narrative form of the romance, would have required dramatic power of a high order. (Tennyson's dramas seem to indicate that his dramatic power is considerably less than his power as a poet.) The parties to this dialogue

are Sir Percival, after his retirement to the monastery, and a brother monk; a most unfortunate selection. In no version with which we are acquainted, is Percival represented as returning to Arthur's Court after the termination of the Quest. On the contrary, we are distinctly told that he "yeelded him to an hermitage oute of the city" (Sarras), immediately after the Quest; whereas Tennyson depicts him as accompanying Sir Bors back to Britain, visiting the Court, and relating to the monk what had happened at that time. With regard to the monk himself we are at a loss to know where Tennyson found his prototype. This worthy, it seems, had scarcely so much as heard of the Holy Graal, and when it is mentioned by Percival he exclaims:

> "The Holy Grail! -- I trust
> We are green in Heaven's eyes; but here too much
> We moulder - as to things without I mean -
> Yet one of your own knights, a guest of ours,
> Told us of this in our refectory..
> . . . . . .
> What is it?
> The phantom of a cup that comes and goes?"

Is it not strange that a monk should be represented as hearing, for the first time, of this ecclesiastical legend from a knight? Moreover, what could Tennyson mean, when he makes the monk say respecting the Graal:

> "From our old books I know
> That Joseph came of old to Glastonbury,
> . . . . . .
> For so they say, these books of ours, but seem
> Mute of this miracle, far as I have read,"

when every abbot, monk, and hermit introduced in this romance is represented, not only as perfectly familiar with the history of the sacred Vessel, but also with all the predictions respecting it. Indeed, wherever Galahad goes, he is at once recognized by the religious Orders as the knight whose advent has been long expected, and in connection with whom the adventure of the Holy Graal is to be achieved.

Tennyson, in dealing with this section of the romance, has wandered very materially from his original. The Idyll opens with the story of the Graal, which, however, is dismissed with a few masterly touches. Then Galahad is brought forward, not by any means as a newly made knight of the Round Table, but as one whose white armor is already well known at Court. The marvel of the sword is entirely omitted, and the tournament, which, in the romance, is proclaimed to "prove" the young knight, (an indispensable custom of chivalry,) is transformed, by Tennyson, into a grand reunion of the Court previous to the Quest.

In the episode of the appearance of the Sangraal in the banquet hall, which immediately follows this tournamont, Tennyson follows the old romance:

> "And all at once, as there we sat, we heard
> A cracking and a riving of the roofs,
> And rending, and a blast, and overhead
> Thunder, and in the thunder was a cry.
> And in the blast there smote along the hall

A beam of light seven times more clear than day;
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail
All over cover'd with a luminous cloud,
And none might see who bare it, and it past.
But every knight beheld his fellow's face
As in a glory, and all the knights arose,
And staring each at other like dumb men
Stood."

In the romance it is Gawaine who first takes upon himself the avow; but in Tennyson this distinction is claimed by Percival:

"I sware a vow before them all, that I,
Because I had not seen the Grail, would ride
A twelvemonth and a day in quest of it,
Until I found and saw it, as the nun
My sister saw it; and Galahad sware the vow."

According to Tennyson, the King is absent when this vision appears; he had been called away to avenge a maiden who had been assaulted by bandits, and returns only just in time to witness the commotion caused by the vision, and to learn the sad news of the vow which the knights had taken upon themselves during his absence. As we have before observed, the moment Tennyson leaves the beaten path of the old romance, the beauty, unity, and consistency of the epic immediately suffer. It is difficult to see why Arthur, who is now represented as Emperor of the civilized world, should go in person, "to smoke the scandalous hive of those wild bees," a bandit stronghold not far from Camelot. What skilful narrator would have made the King absent, not only on a festival which Arthur always kept with regal splendor, but on that

grandest of all festivals, which was to reveal the crowning glory of his reign and to be the culminating point of knightly adventure? However, the King returns and expostulates with the knights for their discourtesy in not awaiting his return before taking the vow. After his somewhat bitter reproof, and while Sir Percival is relating very courteously all the facts connected with the vision, the King brusquely interrupts him, and with marked petulance exclaims:

> "'Yea, yea,
> Art thou so bold and hast not seen the Grail?'"
>
> "Then Galahad on the sudden, and in a voice
> Shrilling along the hall to Arthur, call'd
> 'But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail,
> I saw the Holy Grail and heard a cry -
> "O Galahad, and O Galahad, follow me."'"

In the romance, to see the Graal is tantamount to the achievement of the Quest; for as we shall subsequently find, not even Galahad is allowed to see the Graal until the Quest is virtually at an end. It was because Gawaine and the other knights had not seen it, they made the vow. It was because Galahad had not seen it that he took upon himself the vow. If Galahad had seen the Holy Graal there was no longer any need of a vow, for, to him, the Quest was achieved. Tennyson, not recognizing the fact that to see the Holy Vessel is equivalent to the achievement of the adventure, has first transferred to his pages the very words of the vow:

"to follow till they see," and then has added this exclamation of Galahad: "But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail," as a fanciful touch of his own, thus stultifying the whole story.

This romance is an allegory. It is an allegory of Justification. The Holy Graal is an image of Salvation, or Eternal Life. The appearance of the Holy Graal on Whitsunday, the baptismal day, represents the Divine Call to Salvation, and the Quest of the Holy Graal is a figure of the Quest of Salvation, or Eternal Life. With this allegory in mind, the romancer could never have represented Galahad as having seen Eternal Life, before he had so much as started on the Quest.

One remaining point we need to notice is the start from Camelot. In the romance the weeping Queen "departed to her own chamber, so that no man should perceive her great sorrowes." In Tennyson:

> "The knights and ladies wept, and rich and poor
> Wept, and the King himself could hardly speak
> For grief, and all in the middle street the Queen
> Who rode by Lancelot, wail'd and shriek'd aloud,
> 'This madness has come on us for our sins.'"

To our way of thinking, the simplicity of the romancer's "chamber scene," and a queen retiring thither alone, to hide her great sorrows, is far more moving than Tennyson's picture of a shrieking queen riding by the side of Sir Lancelot in middle street.

The next section of the romance covers the whole period, from the beginning of the Quest to the return to Arthur's Court of Gawaine and the rest of the noble knights, with the exception of Galahad, Percival, Bors, and Lancelot. To give an analysis of this part of the tale is simply impossible. Every page contains some knightly adventure, beautiful in idea; or some strange dream or fantastic vision, too ethereal to allow of its being taken out of its original setting. As the adventure proceeds, we follow noble knights over a kind of dreamland of forest and meadow, hill and valley, mountain and plain; we see them entertained at fair castles, and rich abbeys, and lonely hermitages; we watch them in brilliant tournaments or jousting in single combat in unfrequented spots; we hear of them taking up the gauntlet in defense of oppressed gentlewomen, and restoring the disinherited to their estates; we find them battling with fiends who attack them in human shapes, or allure them by blandishments from solemn vows; we see them at confession and at Mass, or listening to the advice of plain-spoken hermits; the whole so delicately interwoven, that no analysis will do justice to the romance, or give any adequate idea of its beauty.

But wherever we follow these knights, it is the achievement of the Quest which inflames their hearts and prompts them to noble actions. Their superhuman

efforts to achieve the adventure vividly image forth the strivings of the soul after Eternal Life; and the opposition which knights experience from fiends who would destroy them, or from Cyprians who would dazzle their senses, is but an idealized portrayal of the temptations which beset the Christian knight of every age.

The adventures in this romance have but one end or aim: to show in the clearest possible light the Catholic doctrine of Justification. The appearance of the Graal in the banquet hall is an image of the divine call to Salvation; the eager start on the Quest is an emblem of the feverish thirst in the heart of man for Eternal Life, and man's free will is mirrored forth in the starting of a hundred and fifty knights, while only three attain the object of the Quest.

In the second division of the romance, under a complexity of adventures, lies hidden the doctrine of Penance. In every case the knights are required to evince true contrition, to confess, and to seek absolution as a prerequisite to success, and to make satisfaction as a condition no less necessary. Then, the cure of the soul is attended to. Chastity and all Christian virtues are held forth as essential, and adventure is cumulated upon adventure only to bring out, in strong relief, the necessity of sanctification and good works that man, through the infinite satisfaction

of the Cross, may become really just in the sight of God.

This section, so distinctly marked in the romance as one of the most important stages in the Quest of Salvation, has scarcely any counterpart in Tennyson's Idyll. Tennyson either failed to recognize, or intentionally ignored, the spiritual meaning underlying the romance. Thus it would have been superfluous to reproduce adventures essential only to the perfection of the allegory. In the Idyll, the Holy Grail itself is little more than a poetic will-o'-the-wisp.

In the third section of the Quest all the knights save four grow weary of the Quest, and return to Arthur's Court to revel unchecked in their former sins; and Galahad, Percival, Bors, and Lancelot are left alone to pursue the adventure. A beautiful adventure in this section concerns Galahad, Bors, Percival, and the Holy Maid (Percival's sister, who is a nun). The Holy Maid gives her life for another and dies in her brother's arms, after assuring those three knights that as soon as they come to the city of Sarras to achieve the Holy Graal, they will find her already there awaiting them. Also in this part Lancelot and Galahad meet in mutual joy. For a full half year they remain together, serving "God daily and nightly with all their power." It was their last meeting; and when at length the war-beaten knight takes a farewell of his saintly son, each one knows that he shall not see

the other again "before the dreadful day of doome." Then at the bidding of an unknown knight in white armor, Galahad leaves the ship, to his father's great sorrow, and proceeds on the Quest.

Sir Lancelot remains on the ship, and during a month and more prays, day and night, that he may see some tidings of the Sangraal. At length his prayer is answered. One night, at midnight, he arrives before a castle, and the outer gate looking towards the sea stands open, with no warden but only two lions to keep the entry. Then he arms himself, and leaving the ship, walks towards the castle. At sight of the lions he draws his sword in self-defense, but being chided for his want of faith by a voice from heaven, he returns it to its sheath. The lions make a feint as though they would tear him, but he fears them not, and passes them unhurt. As he enters the fortress, a strange sight presents itself. The castle gates stand wide open; the doors of all the chambers are open. He ascends the grand stairway, but the castle seems deserted. At length he comes to a chamber, the door of which is closed. He attempts to open it, but it resists his strongest efforts. He listens, and hears a voice within singing so sweetly that it seems no earthly voice. Convinced that the Holy Graal must be there, he kneels down and in all humility prays that he may be granted a vision of the sacred Vessel. With that,

the chamber door flies open, and instantly a dazzling light pervades the whole castle. He is about to enter, but is warned to keep aloof. He looks in, and there sees an altar of silver, and upon the altar the Sangraal covered with red samite. Many angels are round about it, one of whom holds a golden candlestick with a burning taper, and another a crucifix. Before the altar stands a priest as though holding Mass. Then at that moment, it seems to Sir Lancelot that the holy man, overpowered by what he holds in his hands, will fall to earth. The knight involuntarily crosses the portal of the chamber to support the falling priest, and is about to approach the altar, when he is smitten by a fiery blast which fells him to the ground. On the morrow, the inmates of the castle find Sir Lancelot lying before the chamber door, as he had fallen, and bear him, more dead than alive, to a room, and there place him on a rich bed. For twenty-four days he lies in a critical state, but at length he revives, and as he opens his eyes, asks mournfully why they have aroused him from the trance. As soon as he is wholly recovered, he takes leave of the lord of the castle, and knowing well that the Quest is not for him, returns to Camelot, to Arthur's Court, and to Guinevere, the false star of his blighted life. This is Lancelot, the image of the brave, noble, sin-stained man of the world, too weak in faith to attain to com-

munion with the True Blood, proudly trusting in his own strength, wanting in true humility, and so failing in the heavenly Quest.

To show what Tennyson might have done, if only his poetic vision had taken in the full grandeur of this romance, we will now turn to the poet's rendering of the last scene in Lancelot's quest, of which we have just given the prose analysis:

> " . . . and then I came
> All in my folly to the naked shore,
> Wide flats, where nothing but coarse grasses grew;
> But such a blast, my King, began to blow,
> So loud a blast along the shore and sea,
> Ye could not hear the waters for the blast,
> Tho' heapt in mounds and ridges all the sea
> Drove like a cataract, and all the sand
> Swept like a river, and the clouded heavens
> Were shaken with the motion and the sound.
> And blackening in the sea-foam sway'd a boat,
> Half-swallow'd in it, anchor'd with a chain;
> And in my madness to myself I said,
> 'I will embark and I will lose myself,
> And in the great sea wash away my sin.'
> I burst the chain, I sprang into the boat.
> Seven days I drove along the dreary deep,
> And with me drove the moon and all the stars;
> And the wind fell, and on the seventh night
> I heard the shingle grinding in the surge,
> And felt the boat shock earth, and looking up,
> Behold, the enchanted towers of Carbonek,
> A castle like a rock upon a rock,
> With chasm-like portals open to the sea.
> And steps that met the breaker! there was none
> Stood near it but a lion on each side
> That kept the entry, and the moon was full.
> Then from the boat I leapt, and up the stairs.
> There drew my sword. With sudden-flaring manes
> Those two great beasts rose upright like a man,
> Each gript a shoulder, and I stood between;
> And, when I would have smitten them, heard a voice,
> 'Doubt not, go forward; if thou doubt, the beasts
> Will tear thee piecemeal.' Then with violence
> The sword was dash'd from out of my hand, and fell.
> And up into the sounding hall I past;

But nothing in the sounding hall I saw,
No bench nor table, painting on the wall
Or shield of knight; only the rounded moon
Thro' the tall oriel on the rolling sea.
But always in the quiet house I heard,
Clear as a lark, high o'er me as a lark,
A sweet voice singing in the topmost tower
To the eastward: up I climb'd a thousand steps
With pain: as in a dream I seem'd to climb
For ever: at the last I reach'd a door,
A light was in the crannies, and I heard,
'Glory and joy and honour to our Lord
And to the Holy Vessel of the Grail.'
Then in my madness I essay'd the door;
It gave; and thro' a stormy glare, a heat
As from a seventimes-heated furnace, I,
Blasted and burnt, and blinded as I was,
With such a fierceness that I swoon'd away-
O, yet methought I saw the Holy Grail,
All pall'd in crimson samite, and around
Great angels, awful shapes, and wings and eyes.
And but for all my madness and my sin,
And then my swooning, I had sworn I saw
That which I saw; but what I saw was veil'd
And cover'd; and this Quest was not for me."

No description could be finer than this; and the only, though fatal, drawback to the passage is that it stands alone. It is exquisitely beautiful, but in Tennyson's Idyll it is out of place. It is a solitary gem, wrenched from its setting in a royal diadem.

We now come to the last section. After the departure of Sir Lancelot for the Court, Galahad, Percival, and Bors come to the castle of Carbonek, and, while there have a vision of the Sangraal similar to that which was granted to Lancelot, not long before, in the selfsame castle.

We may imagine the same scene; the silver altar, the Holy Vessel, and the angels. But now it is a Bishop

who performs the sacred function, and as with Lancelot, the Vessel is veiled. A vision appears to these three knights, and they are told to go to Sarras "to see what ye would see." The voyage to Sarras is soon accomplished. At the end of a year, the three knights repair to the palace where the Sangraal had been enthroned, a new covenant, in an ark of gold, in an inner sanctuary. While there, the mystery of the Holy Graal is finally and fully revealed to Galahad, and in trembling accents he prays that now he may depart in peace. Having taken an affectionate farewell of Percival and Bors, suddenly his soul departs, borne by angels to Heaven, in full view of his two companions, while a mystic hand bears from their sight the object of their quest, the Holy Graal. GALAHAD HAD NOW SEEN IT, AND THE QUEST WAS ACCOMPLISHED.

Percival, as we know, becomes a hermit and soon after dies; while Bors returns to Arthur's Court, the herald of the achievement of the Quest, the ideal adventure of Arthurian Romance.

And so the legend closes, this allegory of Justification, with the Communion of Saints and Life Everlasting. And what a grand allegory it is! There is the start from Camelot; the shining light of the Graal; the straight road pointed out by the hermits; the perils and dangers of Galahad, Percival, and Bors, the Christian,

Faithful, and Hopeful of this Romance; there are enchanted grounds and lands of Beulah; there is the tempestuous sea, and finally the landing at the spiritual City of Sarras, the New Jerusalem of this mystic tale. Galahad, pure in heart, attains to full communion and sees God. Percival, faithful to his vows, attains spiritual communion, but must still pass a probation before he can change the cowl for a crown. Bors, true in his meekness of spirit, attains to holy communion, but must linger still in Arthur's Court before a heavenly kingdom is his. Lancelot, dragged down by deadly sin, catches but a glimpse of the glorious communion of the True Blood, and relapses into lifelong remorse; while Gawaine and others grow weary of shrift and penance, and return to a life of self and sin.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

Chapter VI

Next to the Idyll of Lancelot and Elaine, that of the Passing of Arthur is, without doubt, the finest of the Tennyson series. In this Idyll, Tennyson has kept closely to his original, both in the choice of incident and in the wording of many passages in the poem. But in addition to this, he seems to have caught, for the time being, the spirit of weirdness which is a marked feature in the whole of Keltic literature. We do not refer to the naked weirdness of the old bards, but to that idealized weirdness, the result of the Christianized chivalry of the age which produced it, and which throws around the simplicity of the story a charm unique in itself. In all of Map's productions this weird element is retained, and it is wonderful to notice with what consummate skill he has worked it in with his own Norman notions of knighthood, blending the two in such a delicate manner, that the weird gives pungency to the chivalric and the chivalric lends grace to the weird. It is the absence of this ethereal weirdness in his other Idylls which renders so much of Tennyson's descriptive poetry tame and insipid. His graphic description, however, of the last great battle of Camlan presents a picture of desolation most impressive.

The spectral land in which the battle is fought, the spectral shapes about it, the darkness, the confusion,

the fear, -- these things so graphically portrayed in the Idyll -- are immediately potent with those who have experienced them, who understand what a terrible conflict is intended by the poet; and they make a chord vibrate even in the hearts of those who feel but have never experienced a battle.

A comparison of Malory's rendering of the account of the removal of the wounded King from the field of battle, and the return of Excalibur to the Lady of the Lake, will show, in a very clear light, the strong points in Tennyson's version of the story.

> So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
> Among the mountains by the winter sea;
> Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,
> Had fall'n in Lyonnesse about their lord,
> King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,
> The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
> And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
> A broken chancel with a broken cross.
> That stood on a dark strait of barren land:
> On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
> Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then, as the King feels that death is upon him, he tells Sir Bedivere to take Excalibur and throw it into the water, and then to return to him with word of what has occurred. Sir Bedivere, intending to do as his King asks, goes about his task only to find that he cannot do it. The sword is so noble (the pummel and the haft are all of precious stones) that he cannot throw it into the water. He hides the sword and returns to Arthur, telling

Arthur that he has done his command. Arthur asks Bedivere what he saw, and Bedivere says, "I saw nothing but the water and the waves." This happens twice. The second time bold Sir Bedivere answered:

"I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag."

Then Sir Bedivere went the third time, his heart being melted by the touching appeal of the dying King, "for thy long tarying," said Arthur, "putteth me in great jeopardie of my life." So "sir Bedivere departed, and went to the sword, and lightly tooke it up, and went to the waters side; and there hee bound the girdell about the hilts, and then hee threw the sword into the water as farre as hee might; and there came an arme and an hand above the water, and met it and caught it, and so shooke it thrise and brandished. And then the hand vanished away with the sword in the water. So sir Bedivere came againe to the king and told him what he had seene."

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendor of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur:
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke king Arthur, drawing thicker breath:
"Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out: what is it thou has heard or seen?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under the mere."

"'Alas!' said the king, 'helpe me from hence, for I dread me I have tarried over long.' Then Sir Bedivere took king Arthur upon his backe and so went with him to the waters side. And when they were at the waters side, even fast by the banke hoved a little barge with many faire ladies in it, and among them all was a queene, and they all had blacke hoods and they wept and shriked when they saw king Arthur. 'Now, put mee into the barge,' said the king, and so hee did softly; and there received him three queenes with great mourning, and so these three queenes set them downe, and in one of their laps king Arthur laide his head. And then that queene said, 'Ah, deer brother, why have ye taried so long from me?' . . . And so they rowed from the land, and sir Bedivere beheld all those ladies goe from him; then sir Bedivere cried, 'Ah, my lord Arthur, what shall become of mee here alone among mine enemies?' 'Comfort thy selfe,' said king

Arthur, 'and do as well as thou maiest, for in mee is no trust for to trust in; for I wil into the vale of Avilion for to heale me of my grevious wound, and if thou never heere more of mee, pray for my soule.' But evermore the queenes and ladies wept and shriked, that it was pittie for to heare them. And as soone as sir Bedivere had lost the sight of the barge, hee wept and wailed and so tooke the forrest; and so he went all the night."

Here are Tennyson's last words:

> But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
> Which was an image of the mighty world,
> And I, the last, go forth companionless.

CONCLUSIONS

Chapter VII

It is not our object to enter into the merits of Tennyson except as the narrator of an epic which is national property. We are willing to grant that the early writers' style does not gratify the ear, as does the rich music of Tennyson's verse; still, the palm for consistency, unity, and simplicity rests with Map, and his work carries us back, as Tennyson's seldom does, to knightly days.

This is especially true in the delineation of the character of the King himself.

The portrait of King Arthur as it came from the hands of Walter Map is a masterpiece. The grouping of each picture in which it stands, with its accessories of regal or imperial pomp, is unapproachable. These pictures are drawn by no unskilled or unpracticed hand, and nowhere do they evince the crude touches of the tyro. You may examine the portrait of the King by itself, and it is a perfect work of art. You may take it with the group of Round Table knights, and still it harmonizes. From the delivery, to Merlin, of Arthur, as a babe wrapped in cloth of gold at the gate of the castle, until his disappearance in the sable barge with the three queens, there are no inconsistencies or breaks in the continuity of the character. His birth takes place in the palace of a king; his public advent is attended by a miracle;

his coronation is performed by the Archbishop; his prowess on the field of battle is unsurpassed; his Court of Round Table knights is celebrated in every castle of Christendom; he goes on from conquest to conquest, step by step in a logical succession of events, till at length he establishes a universal Empire and is crowned Emperor at the Pope's own hands.

But even this is not enough for the fervid imagination of the Norman romancer. The culminating point of his reign is attained only when the highest adventure of human aspiration is finally achieved: the Quest of the Holy Grail. Even the descent from Empire to desolation is clothed with appalling grandeur. The death of the monarch is kingly and his translation to Avalon is a no less regal termination to the entire legend.

As we approach the comparative study of the Arthur of the romances and the Arthur of the Idylls, we naturally recall to mind the course which Tennyson pursued with respect to other personages in these tales. We remember that Merlin is degraded from the grand and often Elijah-like being of Map to the level of the medieval magician and necromancer; that the pure and affectionate nymph of the Lake is painted by Tennyson as a "Harlot"; we cannot forget that Gawaine, the pet of the old tales, becomes the shallow fool of the Idylls; that Percival, the Christian knight, whose humility shines forth, is trans-

formed into an egotist whose vanity and conceit must be distasteful to any one of good taste; that the character of Pelleas is, to say the least, open to suspicion; and that Galahad himself, the heavenly knight, and God's knight, becomes a mere day-dreamer, who follows "wandering fires" and "who loses himself to save himself."

It would not be surprizing, therefore, if even the noble, warlike, knightly hero, King Arthur himself, should share a similar fate at the hands of the poet; and this we find to be the case. Under Tennyson, Arthur becomes a mere statue; a lifeless figurehead; brusque even to his knights, peevish to his Court, discourteous to his fallen Queen, and finishing his career with a sermon which must have been very interesting to the queens who were soothing his brow.

We have said that the portrait of King Arthur as it came from the hands of Walter Map is a masterpiece. Can we prove it? We also maintain that the portrait of King Arthur, as it appears in Tennyson's Idylls, is, by comparison, crude. Can we make good our position?

In order to form a true estimate of the subject, we must never lose sight of the fact that the Anglo-Norman romancers set themselves the task of drawing, not simply a series of separate tales, but a connected epic cyclus. Consistency and unity were to them the very soul of their labors. What Arthur was as a simple squire,

that must he be as a dying hero of Camlan, modified only by such changes as the circumstances of his life would naturally bring about. He must be drawn in accordance with twelfth-century notions, idealized, as a matter of necessity, since he was the hero of a romance, but nevertheless, a being with all the passions and failings of humanity clinging to him. He must not, in word, thought, or deed, contradict the majestic movement of the story, whether with respect to the Quest or the working out of a tragic curse. He must be true King, true knight, true warrior, true husband, true man; and yet true to the honest failings of frail humanity. If Lancelot is the ideal of earthly knighthood, Galahad of earthly purity, Merlin of worldly wisdom, Elaine of human love; so Arthur must be the ideal King, surpassing neither Lancelot in knighthood, Galahad in purity, Elaine in love, nor Merlin in wisdom; but surpassing all his knights in kingly character. And we hold that this delicate balance has been maintained in the narrative of the Norman romancers. In the Anglo-Norman version of the epic there is a curse that dogs the whole life of King Arthur, and which stands out as one of the grand projections of the picture; an idea too vast to have had its birth in the imagination of one man; a dark, overhanging shadow, doubtless cast by some national tradition of a terrible disaster. This tragic element was seized upon by the Norman romancers

and worked into the legend. Following older traditions, Map had to bring about the fall of the King, in a final battle, the utter ruin and desolation of which required the richest imagination to scheme. It was to be the finale of a knightly epoch; the closing scene of a curse; the death of King and knights at the hands of a traitorous wretch. How could the Norman romancer heighten the coloring of the picture more effectively than by adopting the story already in existence, and depicting the wretch whose hands were to be stained with the blood of his sovereign, as the natural offspring of the monarch? And if, in addition, this miscreant should be painted not only as a natural son, but as the result of a terrible sin, an incest, on the part of the King himself, what could possibly be wanting to render the ending, in the highest degree, tragic? But the deadly sin of incest must be unwittingly committed, else the King would be a villain. And all this is duly carried out by the Norman romancer. To draw Arthur as Tennyson does,

> blameless King and stainless man,

or

> selfless man and stainless gentleman,

is to eliminate the curse, the tragic element from the romance, and destroy the most appealing, and at the same time the most telling part of the narrative. A "blameless" king, whether of the sixth, twelfth, or nineteenth century, is unthinkable. Even Tennyson tells us:

> He is all fault who is no fault at all.

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