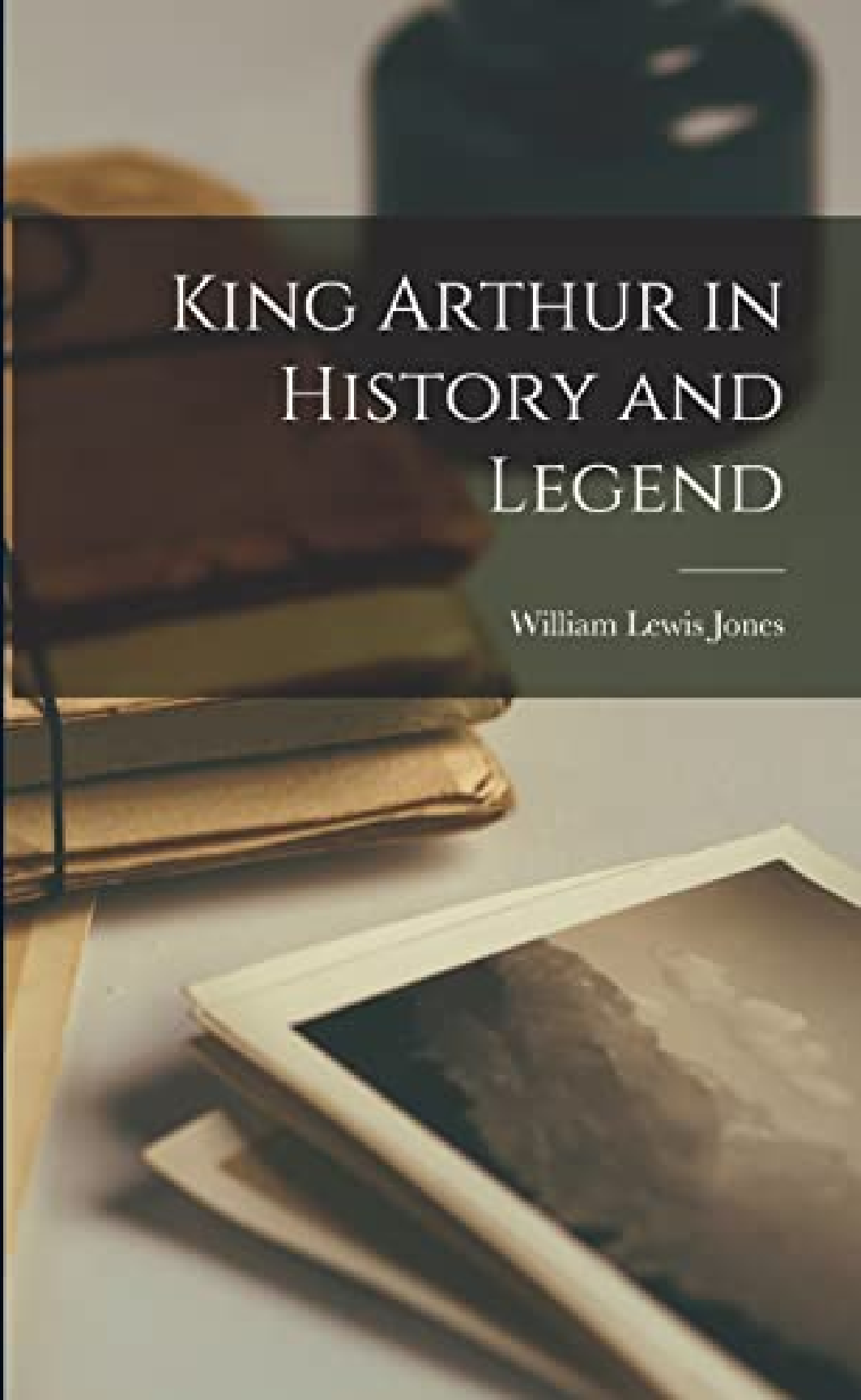


King Arthur in History and Legend

William Lewis Jones

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The Cambridge Manuals of Science and Literature

KING ARTHUR
IN HISTORY AND LEGEND

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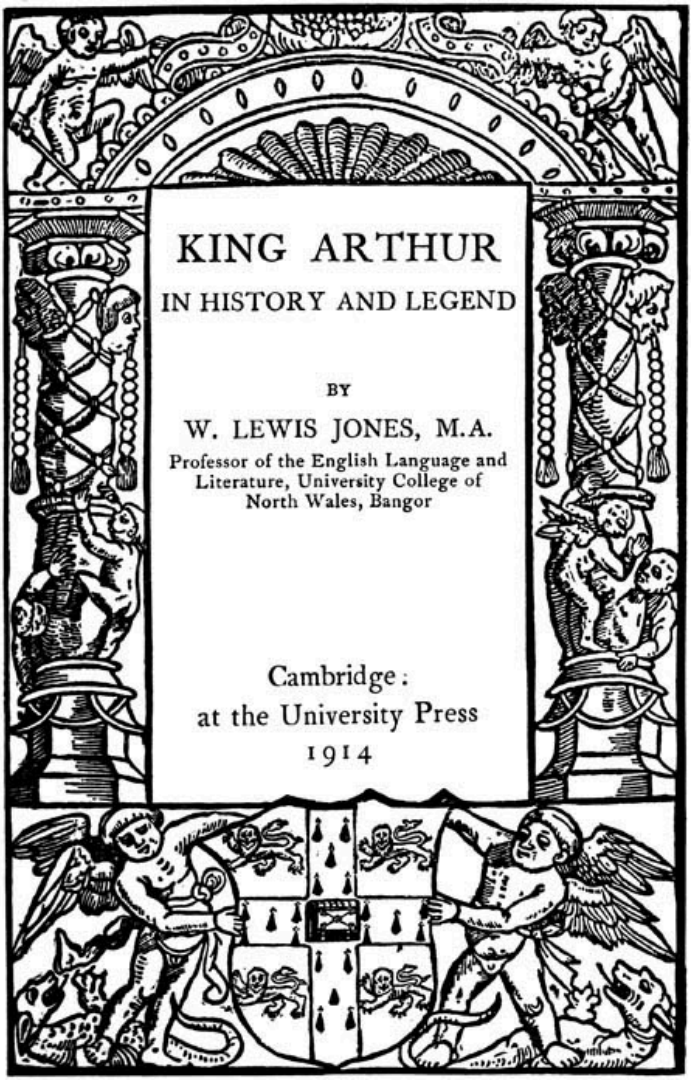
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KING ARTHUR
IN HISTORY AND LEGEND
BY
W. LEWIS JONES, M.A.
Professor of the English Language and Literature, University College of North Wales, Bangor
Cambridge:
at the University Press
1914

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First Edition, 1911

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With the exception of the coat of arms at the foot, the design on the title page is a reproduction of one used by the earliest known Cambridge printer, John Siberch, 1521

PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

THIS little book is an attempt to trace, in as clear and summary a form as possible, the origin and growth of King Arthur's historical and literary renown, and follows, largely, the lines of a chapter contributed by me to the first volume of *The Cambridge History of English Literature*. Although I have had, necessarily, to refer to much literary matter which is purely mythological, I have not sought to give any account of the speculations of those who in our own time have endeavoured to reconstruct and interpret the myths and beliefs of pre-historic Celtic heathendom. Nor have I made more than the briefest allusion to the subsidiary legends which, mainly through the agency of French romantic scribes, came to be associated with Arthur's name, and to be included in "the matter of Britain" as it emerged out of the age of high romance. The book deals, all but exclusively, with King Arthur himself, as he is known to chroniclers, romancers and poets.

My obligations to particular writers will be found recorded in the paginal notes. I must, however, express here my special indebtedness to the writings of Sir John Rhys and the late Mr Alfred Nutt. To Mr Nutt, in particular, whose tragic and untimely death last year was a grievous loss to Celtic

scholarship, I owe much private help and suggestion.

In one or two chapters of the book—the second and the third, more especially—I have reproduced, almost *verbatim*, a few short passages from articles of mine which have appeared in *The Quarterly Review*, and in the Transactions of the London Cymmrodorion Society.

W. LEWIS JONES.

BANGOR,
July 1911.

PREFATORY NOTE TO SECOND EDITION

IN this edition a few slight changes and corrections have been made in the text. The "Additional Notes" at the end of the book (pp. 138-140) supply a few omissions apparent in the first edition, some of which were pointed out to the author by his reviewers.

W. L. J.

July 1914.

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KING ARTHUR IN HISTORY AND LEGEND

INTRODUCTORY

"IT is notoriously known through the universal world," writes Caxton in his preface to Malory's *Morte Darthur*, "that there be nine worthy" kings "and the best that ever were," and that the "first and chief of the three best Christian and worthy" is King Arthur. Caxton, however, finds it a matter of reproach that so little had been done in his own country to perpetuate and honour the memory of one who "ought most to be remembered amongst us Englishmen tofore all other Christian kings." Thanks mainly to Caxton's own enterprise, and to the poets who have drawn their inspiration from Malory's book, there is no longer any cause to accuse Englishmen of indifference to Arthur's name and fame. No literary matter is more familiar to them than "what resounds in fable or romance of Uther's son." And yet nothing is more "notoriously known" than that authentic historical records of the career of this "most renowned Christian king" are distressingly scanty and indeterminate. An old Welsh bard, who sings of the graves of departed British warriors, and has no difficulty in locating most of them,[1] tells us that "unknown is the grave of Arthur."[2] Would that this were indeed the sum of our ignorance! To-day, as of old, Arthur remains but a shadowy apparition, clothed in the mists of legend and stalking athwart

the path of history to distract and mystify the sober chronicler. A Melchisedec of profane history, he has "neither beginning of days nor end of life." Neither date nor place of birth can be assigned to him any more than a place of burial, while undiscovered yet is the seat of that court where knights, only less famous than himself, sought his benison and behest. It is only romantic story-tellers, like the authors of the Welsh *Mabinogion*, who venture upon such positive statements as that "Arthur used to hold his court at Caerlleon upon Usk."[3] Geoffrey of Monmouth is, indeed, even more precise and circumstantial than the professed retailers of legend, for he actually gives the reasons why Arthur settled his court at Caerlleon, or the City of Legions—a "passing pleasant place."[4] That, of course, is only Geoffrey's way, and illustrates the genius for invention which makes his so-called *History* a work unique of its kind. The "matter of Britain" is, much more than the "matter of France," or even the heterogeneous "matter of Rome the great," the despair of the historian.[5] But it is, for that very reason, the paradise of the makers and students of romance; and, as a result, the mass of Arthurian literature of all kinds which exists to-day,—prose and verse romances, critical studies of "origins," scholarly quests along perilous paths of mythology and folk-lore,—is ponderous enough to appal the most omnivorous reader. The Arthurian legend has indeed been of late, both in Europe and in America, the subject of so much mythological, ethnological and philological speculation as to tempt the unsophisticated lover of mere literature to say, when he contemplates the mounting pile of printed critical matter, that Arthur's sepulchre, wherever his mortal remains may lie, is at last well on the way to be built

in our libraries.

There is nothing in literary history quite like the fascination which Arthurian romance has had for so many diverse types of mind. Poets, musicians, painters, religious mystics, folk-lorists, philologists—all have yielded to it. For some people the study of Arthurian nomenclature is as engrossing a pursuit as the interpretation of 'The Idylls of the King' is for others, while there are those who derive as much pleasure from investigating the symbolic meanings of the story of the Grail as lovers of music do from listening to the mighty harmonies of *Parzival* or *Tristan und Isolde*. All this only makes us wonder the more why so obscure and elusive a figure as the historical British Arthur should have become the centre of a romantic cycle which presents so many varied and persistent features of interest. Even in Caxton's time, as in our own, there were sceptics "who held opinion that there was no such Arthur, and that all books as been made of him be but feigned and fables." This is not surprising, when it is remembered that even when Geoffrey of Monmouth, some three centuries before, gave to the world his astonishing record of Arthur's achievements, a few obstinate critics had their doubts about the whole matter, and one of them—the chronicler, William of Newburgh—roundly denounced Geoffrey for having, by his "saucy and shameless lies," made "the little finger of his Arthur bigger than the back of Alexander the Great."[6] Caxton's way with the sceptics is ingenuous and short, but it is curious to note how his preface to the *Morte Darthur* succeeds, in its own quaint and crude fashion, in suggesting what are still the main problems of constructive Arthurian criticism. It will not do, he says in effect, to dismiss summarily all Arthurian traditions as so

many old wives' tales. They are too widespread and persistent not to have some basis of solid fact underlying them: besides, the people who believe them, love them, and write of them, cannot all be credulous fools. Caxton, in particular, cites the case of the "noble gentlemen" who "required him to imprint the history of the noble king and conqueror, king Arthur,"—one of whom "in special said, that in him that should say or think that there was never such a king called Arthur might well be aretted great folly and blindness." This gentleman—of whom one would gladly know more—was evidently both an antiquary and a student of letters, and could give weighty reasons for the faith that was in him. First of all, Arthur's grave, so far from being unknown, might be seen "in the monastery of Glastingbury." Again, reputable authors like Higden, Boccaccio, and "Galfridus in his British book," tell of his death and recount his life; "and in divers places of England many remembrances be yet of him, and shall remain perpetually, and also of his knights." His seal, for example, "in red wax closed in beryl," could be seen in the Abbey of Westminster; Gawaine's skull and Cradock's mantle were enshrined in Dover Castle; the Round Table was at Winchester, and "in other places Launcelot's sword and many other things." Caxton appears to speak in his own person when he goes on to re-inforce all this by mentioning the records of Arthur that remained in Wales, and "in Camelot, the great stones and the marvellous works of iron lying under the ground, and royal vaults, which divers now living have seen." Moreover, Arthur's renown was well established in all places, Christian and heathen, so much so that he was "more spoken of beyond the sea," and "more books made of his noble acts," than in England. "Then all these things

alleged," he concludes, "I could not well deny but that there was such a noble king named Arthur, and reputed one of the nine worthy, and first and chief of the Christian men." Hence he decided in all good faith, "under the favour and correction of all noble lords and gentlemen, to enprise to imprint" the Book of King Arthur and of his Noble Knights of the Round Table. And, in view of Ascham's famous denunciation of the book as containing but "open manslaughter and bold bawdrie," and of Tennyson's sensitiveness to the touch of

> "the adulterous finger of a time
> That hover'd between war and wantonness,"

it is well to remember that Caxton held that all that was in it was "written for our doctrine." "For herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue and sin. Do after the good and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renommee."

Caxton's preface to the *Morte Darthur* has here been taken as a sort of preliminary text, not only because that famous work is, by general consent, the fullest and the most fascinating presentment in English of the great congeries of tales that make up the so-called Arthurian "cycle," but also because Caxton's own words, as already hinted, serve to raise, in a peculiarly suggestive way, most of the questions with which the critical student of the Arthurian legends and their origin has to deal to-day. The *Morte Darthur* itself, it has become a commonplace to say, remains unchallenged, in spite of its inconsequences and inconsistencies, the supreme Arthurian "prose epic" in English. The work is not, of course, "epic" in any strict sense, but it was issued by Caxton to the

readers of his day as pre-eminently an English *Arthuriad*. Arthur alone of "the Nine Worthies" had not had justice done to him in his own country. The two other Christian "worthies," Charlemagne and Godfrey of Boulogne, had been adequately celebrated abroad, and Caxton himself had contributed to spread the latter's fame in England. Why should the great English "Christian king" remain unhonoured in his own land? It was, therefore, with the patriotic object of blazoning the fame of the greatest of *English* heroes that Caxton undertook the publication of Malory's book. Now, the historical Arthur, so far as we know him, is not English at all, but a "British" hero, who fought against the Saxons, and whose prowess is one of the jealously treasured memories of the Celtic peoples, and particularly of the Welsh. By what process of transformation had this British warrior become, by Caxton's time, the ideal "Christian king" of England? And why, again, should he be singled out as pre-eminently one of the three *Christian* kings of the world, and his name linked with "the noble history of the Saint Greal"? Here we come at once upon one of the disturbing influences in what ought to be a straightforward record of the doings of a fighting chieftain of early Britain. The quest of the Holy Grail had, originally, nothing to do with Arthur.[7] But, by Caxton's time, the mystic, or religious, element in Arthurian romance had become so prominent as to make it impossible to think of Arthur except in association with the "high history" of the Grail. A further complication meets us when we are told that Malory took his material for his narrative of the deeds of the paramount English, or British, hero "out of certain books of French." Why should Malory so constantly refer to "the French book" as his authority, and have so little to go upon

that had been written in English, or in Welsh? Why is it that to-day, after four centuries of diligent search in both private and public libraries, the amount of extant British literature of an indubitably ancient date dealing with Arthur's exploits is so scanty? For Caxton's statement still remains substantially true that, down to the fifteenth century, "the books that had been made about Arthur over sea," and in foreign tongues, far outnumbered those that had been made in Britain. How are we to account for the popularity which the Arthurian stories thus enjoyed on the European continent, and for the way in which they became, during the Middle Ages, practically international literary property?

These are the main questions which have to be answered to-day by those who attempt to trace the origin and growth of the Arthurian legends, and they are all suggested in Caxton's preface. This little book does not pretend to furnish a final answer to any one of them. It simply essays to present in a summary and, it is hoped, a clear form the substance of what is told about King Arthur in history and legend, together with a brief notice of the development of Arthurian literature mainly in England. No attempt will be made to trace the many ramifications of the subsidiary stories which have been grafted upon the original Arthurian stock. Characters like Perceval, or Lancelot, or Tristram, who figure so largely in the full-orbed Arthurian cycle, could each easily be made the subject of a separate volume far exceeding the dimensions of the present one. Here, attention will be concentrated, as far as possible, upon the figure and the fortunes of Arthur himself.

CHAPTER I
THE EARLIEST ARTHURIAN RECORDS

IF, in Caxton's words, "such a king called Arthur" ever lived in these islands, he must have flourished during the period between the first coming of the Saxons and the middle of the sixth century. So much, at any rate, is clearly attested by the meagre historical records which profess to recount his deeds. Nothing, however, can be found in these records to warrant the belief that he ever became "king" of any part of Britain. His achievements as a warrior alone are mentioned, and all that we can gather besides from Welsh tradition only serves to emphasise the fact that his renown among the British people rested mainly upon his warlike prowess. His admission to the so-called "Celtic pantheon," and his gradual evolution in Celtic tradition as a great mythological figure, are matters of purely speculative interest, and cannot be taken into account in an attempt to answer our first question—Who, and what, was the historical Arthur? In Welsh we read of an "emperor" Arthur,[8] but this title, as we shall see, implies nothing more than that he was a war-leader, or a commander-in-chief of a group of more or less celebrated generals. His kingship, and his state as the head of a great court, are entirely the creations of later romance.[9]

Little, if anything, of historical significance is to be deduced from the form of Arthur's name. It appears in the Latin chronicles as *Arturus*, and is probably of Roman origin, derived from the form *Artorius*.[10]

This is much more likely than that, as Rhys suggests, it was "a Celtic name belonging in the first instance to a god Arthur." For the latter explanation, as readers of Rhys's *Arthurian Legend* will know, carries us into the world of mythology, and is made the foundation of an ingenious hypothesis to account for Arthur's Celtic fame. That hypothesis, so far as it bears upon the name, is thus summarised by its author. "The Latin *Artôrius* and the god's name, which we have treated as early Brythonic *Artor*, genitive *Artôros*, would equally yield in Welsh the familiar form *Arthur*. In either case, the name would have to be regarded as an important factor in the identification or confusion of the man with the divinity. The latter, called Arthur by the Brythons, was called Airem by the Goidels, and he was probably the Artæan Mercury of the Allobroges of ancient Gaul. His rôle was that of Culture Hero, and his name allows one to suppose that he was once associated, in some special manner, with agriculture over the entire Celtic world of antiquity. On the one hand we have the man Arthur, whose position we have tried to define, and on the other a greater Arthur, a more colossal figure, of which we have, so to speak, but a *torso* rescued from the wreck of the Celtic pantheon."[11] The mythological Arthur, as he appears in Welsh literature and tradition, will claim our attention in another chapter; here, our inquiry will be confined mainly to the Latin records in which we find, or should expect to find, the earliest authentic information about "the man Arthur."

The oldest historical document in which Arthur is mentioned by name is the famous *Historia Brittonum* ascribed to Nennius. Parts of this work may have been put together as early as the seventh century,[12] but the compilation, as we now have it, was due to a

Welshman named Nennius, or (in Welsh) Nynniaw, who lived about the year 800.[13] The work may be roughly divided into two parts,—the first, of sixty-six sections or chapters, professing to give a cursory sketch of the history of Britain from the earliest times down to the eighth century; the second containing a list of the twenty-eight "cities of Britain," together with an account of certain "marvels" (*mirabilia*), or wonderful natural phenomena, of Britain, which, the compiler tells us, he "wrote as other scribes had done before him." The quasi-historical part of the work contains much the fullest notice of Arthur's military exploits to be found in any chronicle before that of Geoffrey of Monmouth, while from sundry allusions to Arthur in the section on the 'marvels of Britain,' we gather that legend was already busy with his name. The celebrated passage in which Arthur is mentioned in the *Historia* proper[14] runs as follows:—

"At that time, the Saxons increased and grew strong in Britain. After the death of Hengist, Octha his son came from the northern part of the kingdom to the men of Cantia, and from him are descended its kings. Then Arthur fought against them in those days, together with the kings of the Britons, but he himself was leader in the battles.[15] The first battle was at the mouth of the river Glein; the second, third, fourth and fifth on the river Dubglas, in the region Linnuis; the sixth on the river Bassas; the seventh in the wood of Celidon, that is, Cat Coet Celidon[16]; the eighth at the castle of Guinnion, when Arthur bore the image of the holy Virgin Mary on his shoulders, and when the pagans were put to flight and a great slaughter made of them through the might of our Lord Jesus Christ and of Holy Mary his mother. The ninth battle was fought at the city of

Legion, the tenth on the shore of the river, which is called Tribruit, and the eleventh on the mountain which is called Agned. The twelfth battle was on Mount Badon, where there fell nine hundred and sixty men before Arthur's single onset; nor had any one but himself alone a share in their downfall, and in all the battles he was the victor. But the enemy, while they were overthrown in all their battles, sought help from Germany, and continually increased in number, and they brought kings from Germany to rule over those who were in Britain up to the time of the reign of Ida, who was the first king in Beornicia."

One notes, in the very first words in which mention is here made of Arthur, that he is not called a "king," but that he fought "together with the kings" of the Britons, not, seemingly, as their auxiliary, but as their commander-in-chief—*sed ipse dux erat bellorum*. It has been suggested,[17] with much plausibility, that the term *dux bellorum* in this passage implies that Arthur held, after the departure of the Romans, a military office similar to one of those established in the island during the later years of the Roman administration. Since the time of Severus Britain had been divided, for defensive purposes, into two districts. At first, most pressure came from the Picts and the Scots in the North, and the defence of Upper Britain was entrusted to a commander called *dux Britanniarum*. Later, when the Saxons began to threaten the eastern and southern shores, a second officer—*comes littoris Saxonici*—was appointed to command the armies of Lower Britain. Finally, a third officer, the *comes Britanniæ*, was given a general supervision over the other two, and the supreme charge of the defences of the entire country. Sir John Rhys discovers in Arthur the representative

in the sixth century of this third officer of the Roman military organisation. This supposition undoubtedly helps to explain better than any other both Nennius's description of Arthur as *dux bellorum*, and the seemingly wide range of country covered by the twelve battles which he is said to have fought.

It is, however, to be noted, as Rhys points out,[18] that while the title apparently given in early Welsh literature to those who succeeded to supreme power in Britain was *gwledig*, that name is never given to Arthur. The term *gwledig*, itself, means no more than "ruler" or "prince," and is indiscriminately used in that sense in mediæval Welsh,[19] but there is good reason to believe that, as applied to certain warriors of the sixth century, the title was a Brythonic equivalent of the official military title, *comes* or *dux*. The most famous bearer of the title, Maxen Wledig, comes within the Roman period, and his renown is mainly due to romance[20]; three others who are so called, Cunedda, Ceredig and Emrys (the Ambrosius Aurelianus of Gildas), may very well have held one of the military offices in question. "Cunedda Wledig and Ceredig Wledig are connected with the north and appear to be guardians of the wall, while Emrys Wledig is the antagonist of the Saxons. Thus Cunedda and Ceredig may be regarded as Dukes of the Britains, while Emrys is a British Count of the Saxon shore."[21] Arthur, on the other hand, is in Welsh literature *yr amherawdyr Arthur*, "the emperor Arthur,"[22] and so, as Rhys suggests, "it is not impossible that, when the Roman *imperator* ceased to have anything more to say to this country, the title was given to the highest officer in the island, namely, the *Comes Britanniæ*, and that in the words *yr amherawdyr Arthur* we have a remnant of our insular history."[23]

An even more difficult problem than the determination of Arthur's rank is the identification of the twelve battlefields mentioned in Nennius's record. The twelfth century chronicler, Henry of Huntingdon, tells us that, even in his own time, "all the places were unknown"; hence it is not surprising that those who have in our day sought to trace geographically the course of Arthur's campaigns have not brought us much nearer certainty. The most plausible theory is that which would locate most, if not all, the places named by Nennius in the region of the Roman walls in the North,[24] a theory largely supported by Geoffrey of Monmouth's elaboration of Nennius's account, and by the fact that the names of several prominent characters connected with the early exploits of Arthur are localised in Lowland Scotland. On the other hand, it is contended that Mount Badon,[25] and Urbs Legionis, at least, must be in the South, and that Linnuis—which in Geoffrey appears as Lindisia (or Lindsey), "otherwise called Lindocolinum"—is in the East. The localisation of Arthur's battlefields is of no great consequence as compared with the fact that the earliest record of them, however vague and fragmentary, clearly points to a long and victorious campaign conducted under his generalship against the Saxons and other enemies of the Britons in the sixth century. Two, at least, of the victories recorded by Nennius appear to have strongly seized the imagination of later writers of Arthurian story. It mattered less to them where "the castle of Guinnion" actually was than that in the battle fought there Arthur "bore the image of the holy Virgin Mary on his shoulders," and thus established the tradition which ultimately exalted him into "the first and chief of the three best Christian kings." Nennius's brief statement is, of

course, expanded and embroidered by Geoffrey[26] and other romantic chroniclers in turn, until the tradition becomes so firmly rooted as to make a modern poet like Wordsworth single out Arthur as a champion of the early British Church, and sing,

> "Amazement runs before the towering casque
> Of Arthur, bearing through the stormy field
> The Virgin sculptured on his Christian
> shield."[27]

Hence, even Tennyson takes no very great liberty with Arthurian tradition when he converts "Arthur's knighthood" into a Christian fellowship avowing that

> "The King will follow Christ, and we the King,
> In whom high God hath breathed a secret
> thing."[28]

The other battle, of those mentioned by Nennius, that looms large in subsequent Arthurian story is that of *Mons Badonis*, or Badon Hill. This battle is of exceptional interest because it is possible to assign to it an approximately certain date. The record in the *Annales Cambriæ* of the year 516 as its precise date is of less importance than the fact that Gildas, the celebrated sixth century scribe, expressly refers to the battle as having been fought in his natal year. In his *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniæ*, amid much vehement denunciation of the British people and their degenerate leaders, Gildas gives a short sketch of the history of Britain down to his own time. Coming to the Saxon invasions, he states that they were first successfully checked under the leadership of Ambrosius Aurelianus, the last of the Romans, "a modest man, who alone of all his race chanced to survive the shocks" of that troubled time.

After this, he continues, the struggle went on with

varying fortune “until the year of the siege of Badon Hill, and of almost the last great slaughter inflicted upon the rascally crew. And this commences (a fact I know) as the forty-fourth year, with one month now elapsed; it is also the year of my birth.”[29] So far as the date goes, this seems to mean that the year of the battle of Badon and of Gildas’s own birth was the forty-fourth from that in which he wrote. As the *De Excidio* must have been written before the death of Maelgwn Gwynedd—the Maglocunus against whom Gildas directs some of his choicest invective—in or about the year 547, the date of the fight at Badon Hill cannot well have been later than 504. At any rate, Gildas’s testimony is sufficient warrant that some time during the first decade of the sixth century a battle was fought against the Saxons at a place called Badon Hill, in which the Britons were the victors.

But that battle, according to Nennius, was the one of all the twelve recorded by him in which Arthur gave the most signal evidence of his individual prowess; before his single onset “nine hundred and sixty men” fell. Now Gildas, an unimpeachable sixth century authority, makes no reference whatever to Arthur’s achievements in this, or any other, encounter with the Saxons. This silence, so far as it affects the historicity of Arthur, is less disturbing than it appears to be, when account is taken of the character and motive of Gildas’s work as a whole. The *De Excidio* is not so much a history as a homily. Gildas belonged to a “Romanist” party, and what the more or less unorganised Britons sought to do for themselves, and their independence, was to him but a decline upon savagery and selfish native pride. It did not suit his purpose to celebrate the name and virtues of any British prince, and it is significant that, apart from

Ambrosius,—by birth, apparently, no less than by his training and sympathies, a thorough-going "Roman,"—he does not mention by name a single British chieftain except as a target for his invective.

In the *mirabilia* attached to Nennius's *History* Arthur is a mythical figure as remote and as elusive as he is in early Welsh poetry and triadic lore. In them, as in the earliest Welsh poems, he is pre-eminently Arthur "the warrior," but he is known besides as the owner of a famous hound, and as the father of a son whose name had been given to one of the natural features of the country. The first "marvel," in connection with which Arthur's name occurs, is in the region of Buelt, or Builth. Here, we are told, is a mound of stones, on the top of which is one stone bearing the mark of a dog's foot. This mark was made by Cabal, "the dog of Arthur the warrior" (*Arthuri militis*), when he was hunting "the boar Troit" (*porcum Troit*). The pile of stones was put together by Arthur, and is called Carn, or the Cairn of, Cabal. The marvel lay in the fact that, though men might come and carry away the top stone "for the space of a day and a night," the stone was invariably found in its proper place the next day. Another marvel, described in immediate succession, belongs to "the region which is called Ercing," or Archenfield. There may be found a tomb close by a spring which is called the Source of the Amir,—*juxta fontem qui cognominatur Licat Amir*, after the name of the man who was buried there. This Amir was the son of "Arthur the warrior," who himself killed, and buried him, on that spot. The "marvellous" property of this tomb was that, when men came to measure it, at various times, they never found it of the same size; "and," the writer ingenuously adds, "I have made proof of this by myself" (*et ego solus probavi*). These two *miracula*, as

he calls them, are all that Nennius, or his authority, has to tell us of the mythical, as distinguished from the historical, Arthur.

These apparently casual records of Arthurian marvels are noteworthy, not only as indicating an early association of Arthurian traditions with the topography of Wales, but also as affording a connecting link between the earliest Latin documents in which Arthur's name is found and one of the very oldest of the Welsh Arthurian tales. In the Welsh romance, or rather fairy-tale, of *Kulhwch and Olwen*, —the primitive literary form of which probably dates from the tenth century,[30]—the hunting of the *Twrch Trwyth*, or the Boar Trwyth (the *porcus Troit* of Nennius), forms one of the capital features. Now, in that hunt, as described in *Kulhwch and Olwen*, Arthur's dog Cabal, or Cavall,—which is the Welsh form of the name,—takes part; he is led to the chase by Arthur's faithful henchman, Bedwyr, or Bedivere. [31] Nor was it in bringing to bay "the boar Troit" alone that Cavall took part. He was conspicuous in the capture and the slaughter of another monster, who is called an Arch- or Head-Boar, bearing the fearsome name of "Yskithyrwyn Benbaedd." "And Arthur," we read,[32] "went himself to the chase, leading his own dog Cavall. And Kaw, of North Britain, mounted Arthur's mare Llamrei, and was first in the attack. Then Kaw, of North Britain, wielded a mighty axe, and absolutely daring he came valiantly up to the boar, and clave his head in twain. And Kaw took away the tusk. Now the boar was not slain by the dogs that Yspaddaden had mentioned, but by Cavall, Arthur's own dog."[33]

The battle of Mount Badon, as we have seen, is recorded in the *Annales Cambriæ*, contained in a MS

of the tenth century. Still more interesting is another record in that document under the year 537. In that year, we read, was fought "the battle of Camlan, in which Arthur and Medraut fell." Although we hear nothing of Medraut's treachery, or of his being Arthur's nephew, here, so far as we know, is the first recorded allusion to what subsequently became one of the prime tragic features in Arthurian story. Medrod, or Modred, is the villain of the romances, and Camlan is that "dim, weird battle of the west," where Arthur fought the "traitor of his house," and

> "Striking the last stroke with Excalibur
> Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell."[34]

In Welsh prose romance we hear of Camlan both in *Kulhwch and Olwen* and in *The Dream of Rhonabwy*; it is also mentioned in the Triads, and there are two references to the place in the oldest Welsh poetry. In 'The Verses of the Graves' in *The Black Book of Carmarthen*, we are told that "the grave of the son of Osvran is in Camlan,"[35] and in a poem in *The Red Book of Hergest*, a nameless bard labouring under forebodings of coming tumult in his own day, prophesies that "Camlan will be heard again, scenes of groaning will again be seen, and dismal lamentations."[36] Apart from these meagre references, Latin chronicles and early Welsh literature are alike altogether silent about what, in later romance and poetry, stands out as the most fateful battle in Arthur's career. Geoffrey of Monmouth is the first to give us elaborate details about Arthur's encounter with Modred, and his motley army of Saxons, Picts and Scots, on the banks of "the river Cambula," or Camel. The river, according to Geoffrey, is in the west country, and the

battle is popularly supposed to have been fought near Camelford,[37] in Cornwall.

When we come to examine the remaining chronicle literature of the pre-Norman period, we find no mention of Arthur's name, and nothing but the briefest allusion to the campaigns in which he is supposed to have fought. Geoffrey of Monmouth, in the dedicatory epistle prefacing his British *History*, expresses his surprise that Bede, in his "elegant treatise," has nothing to say about Arthur. If Arthur was indeed widely known as a Christian champion, it is somewhat strange that an ecclesiastical writer of the first half of the eighth century should have passed over his deeds in silence. Moreover, Bede does mention Ambrosius as a successful leader against the Saxons, and knows of "the siege of Baddesdown-hill." Bede's silence about Arthur is not to be lightly ignored, nor easily explained away, in any critical discussion of the historicity of Arthur. Bede stands as the primary authority and the model of what Stubbs calls "the most ancient, the most fertile, the longest lived and the most widely spread" of all the "schools of English mediæval history,"[38] —the Northumbrian. The best and most trustworthy of the chroniclers who followed him—such, for example, as William of Malmesbury and William of Newburgh (Geoffrey's remorseless assailant)—pay their tributes to his industry, wisdom and integrity. His *Ecclesiastical History* is no mere desultory, or mechanical, record; it bears the impress of a great, and honest, personality. In his record of the Saxon invasions, it is true, he follows Gildas, even to the extent of largely reproducing his very words. There is no conclusive evidence that he knew anything of the documents from which Nennius compiled his *History*, although one cannot, of course, deny the probability

of his knowledge of them. The only plausible explanation of his silence about Arthur is that he drew his materials solely from Saxon tradition and from Latin records, and that he was either ignorant of, or distrusted, the Celtic, or British, traditions concerning Arthur which had their origin and home in the West and in the then "farthest North." If, on the other hand, stories of Arthur's deeds were widely current in Lowland Scotland, it is surprising that a Northumbrian writer should apparently have known nothing of them.

Again, there is no mention whatever of Arthur in the Saxon *Chronicle*. The fact that the *Chronicle* contains no record of a fight, successful or otherwise, against the Britons for a long period after 527, or 530, seems to confirm Nennius's account of the decisive check to the Saxon advance given in the battles with which he associates Arthur's name. On the other hand, the battle at Badon Hill must, as we have seen, have been fought long before the year 527. There is no question about the superior trustworthiness of the *Chronicle* to Nennius's narrative as a historical authority.[39] Here, again, the silence can only be explained on the assumption that the compilers of the Saxon *Chronicle* did not care much about recording British victories, and cared less, or knew nothing at all, about the British chieftains who won them. As against this assumption, it should be noted that the *Chronicle* does mention such British names as Vortigern and Natanleod,—the latter a "British king" slain in the year 508, just at the time when Arthur's prowess, according to tradition, was at its height.

The meagreness of the pre-Norman Arthurian records which have been here reviewed stands in significant contrast to the amplitude and the range of the

Arthurian matter which we find in the romantic productions of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The contrast is so startling as to suggest at once that the coming of the Normans to Britain had much to do with what may be called the aggrandisation of Arthur. It was Geoffrey of Monmouth, as we shall see, writing under the direct auspices of a cultured Norman potentate, who did more than any other man to spread the renown of Arthur as a presumably historical character, and to give him for centuries an assured place in the chronicle literature of Britain. But Geoffrey could not have written "to order" such a book as his *History* had he not a large stock of popular traditions to draw upon. All the evidence seems to point to the period extending from the tenth to the twelfth centuries as that of the popular growth of an Arthurian legend, on a large scale, among "the Celtic fringe." By the beginning of the twelfth century Arthurian stories were circulating freely in Brittany, Cornwall and Wales. It is only on this supposition that one can account, for example, for a tumult caused at Bodmin in the year 1113, by a certain monk from Laon who had the temerity to deny that Arthur still lived.[40] Later on in the same century, as Alanus de Insulis records,[41] belief in Arthur's "return" was so firmly held in the country districts of Brittany that a denial of it might have cost a man his life. Moreover, two chroniclers of repute who wrote before Geoffrey bear clear testimony to the widespread currency of Arthurian traditions in their day, and to the curiosity aroused in serious historians concerning the deeds of the British king.

None of the Anglo-Norman chroniclers ranks higher as a trustworthy historical authority than William of Malmesbury,—the first great successor of Bede,

whom he calls his master and exemplar. In the first chapter of his *History of the Kings of England*—the first version of which was completed in 1125—we find the following passage referring to the Saxon invasions in the sixth century:—

"When he (Vortimer) died, the British strength decayed, and all hope fled from them; and they would soon have perished altogether, had not Ambrosius, the sole survivor of the Romans, who became monarch after Vortigern, quelled the presumptuous barbarians by the powerful aid of the warlike Arthur. This is the Arthur of whom the idle tales of the Britons rave even unto this day; a man worthy to be celebrated not in the foolish dreams of deceitful fables, but in truthful histories. For he long sustained the declining fortunes of his native land, and roused the uncrushed spirit of the people to war."

Then follows a reference, based upon Nennius's narrative, to the battle of Mount Badon. This passage, although somewhat confused in its account of the relative positions of Vortigern, Ambrosius and Arthur in the events of their time, is significant as indicating not only Arthur's fame as a fabled British hero in William's day, but the historian's own regret at the absence of authentic information about a warrior so worthy of lasting commemoration. Another noteworthy reference to Arthur in William of Malmesbury's history occurs in his account of the discovery in Pembrokeshire of the grave of Gawain, "Arthur's noble nephew."[42] Gawain, we are told, "was driven from his kingdom by the brother and nephew of Hengist," and "he deservedly shared, with his uncle, the praise of retarding for many years the calamity of his falling country. The grave of Arthur is

nowhere to be seen; hence ancient songs fable that he is still to come." Here we have positive evidence that, long before Geoffrey's time, Arthur's "return" was sung of by British bards whose compositions, with the solitary exception of the stanza in 'The Songs of the Graves,' already referred to, appear to have been irretrievably lost.

Henry of Huntingdon is not so trustworthy a chronicler as William of Malmesbury, and his account of Arthur is, substantially, borrowed, with embellishments, from Nennius. Henry's place in a review of Arthurian records is due not to his *History*, but to a letter, addressed to a friend named Warinus, [43] which singularly attests the interest then felt in the history of Arthur. That letter recounts how Henry, while on a journey to Rome in the year 1139, stopped at the abbey of Bec in Normandy and was there shown by the chronicler, Robert of Torigni, a "great book," written by one "Geoffrey Arthur," containing a history of the early kings of Britain. The book in question was, almost certainly, an early draft of Geoffrey of Monmouth's famous *Historia Regum Britanniæ*. But it is curious to find that Henry's abstract of the book, as given in the letter to Warinus, differs in one important respect—and that alone concerns us at this stage—from the text of Geoffrey's *History* as given in all the MSS of that work in its final form. Geoffrey's account of the "passing" of Arthur—an incident which offered to so imaginative a writer unrivalled opportunities of romantic decoration—is singularly devoid of ornament. Henry's abstract of this part of the book which he found at Bec is, on the other hand, a highly-coloured piece of writing.

"When he (Arthur) was about to cross over the Alps,

an envoy said unto him, ‘Modred, thy nephew, hath set thy crown upon his own head with the assistance of Cheldric, king of the English, and hath taken thy wife unto himself.’ Arthur, thereupon, seething over with wondrous wrath, returning into England, conquered Modred in battle, and after pursuing him as far as unto Cornwall, with a few men fell upon him in the midst of many, and when he saw that he could not turn back said, ‘Comrades, let us sell our death dear. I, for my part, will smite off the head of my nephew and my betrayer, after which death will be a delight unto me.’ Thus spake he, and hewing a way for himself with his sword through the press, dragged Modred by the helmet into the midst of his own men and cut through his mailed neck as through a straw. Natheless, as he went, and as he did the deed, so many wounds did he receive that he fell, albeit that his kinsmen the Britons deny that he is dead, and do even yet solemnly await his coming again. He was, indeed, the very first man of his time in warlike prowess, bounty and wit.”[44]

The vivid personal details of this narrative may be due to Henry’s own imagination, for it is well known that he, like Geoffrey, exercised that faculty largely in his treatment of history; but, even so, the passage is curiously significant in its bearing upon the martial fame of Arthur, and upon the belief in his “return” cherished by “his kinsmen the Britons,” in the first half of the twelfth century.

The review given in this chapter of the earliest Arthurian records,—all of which are in Latin,—as distinguished from Celtic song or fable, points clearly to the gradual growth, around the personality of a real British warrior of the sixth century, of a legend which by the twelfth century had assumed a form

that arrested, though it might baffle, the leading historians of the day. Now, it so happened that the twelfth century was the seed-time of mediæval romance in Europe, and how effectively the legend of Arthur was thenceforth exploited for romantic purposes will be seen later on. It remains, however, for us, first, to give some account of what was known, or fabled, about Arthur among “his kinsmen the Britons” themselves, as recorded in their extant prose and poetry.

CHAPTER II
ARTHUR IN WELSH LEGEND AND LITERATURE

TO begin once more with Caxton, the preface to the *Morte Darthur* states that of the "noble volumes made of Arthur and his noble knights" there "be many in Welsh." Caxton was, here, either drawing upon his imagination or speaking with imperfect knowledge. It is true that Arthur figures largely in the *Mabinogion*, but when we come to examine closely even these tales, we find that he appears only in five out of the eleven[45] which are designated by that name in Lady Charlotte Guest's well-known translation, while in the four tales—probably the oldest of all—to which alone the title of "mabinogion" is strictly applicable, he does not appear at all. Again, in the oldest Welsh poetry Arthur is the merest shadow, and even the mediæval Welsh poets, who might have been expected to drink deep of the wells of romance, mention him only in the most casual and perfunctory way. There is, however, just enough in these old Welsh poems and prose stories to indicate that a legend of Arthur existed in Wales from a very early period—certainly from a period long before the appearance of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History* in the twelfth century. The traditions embodied in this literature are indeed vague and disconnected enough, for they are drawn from an age when the art of romantic "exploitation" had not yet been learnt; but they bear the unmistakable marks of a legendary growth

indigenous to Wales itself. As such, they are of exceptional interest, and deserve a somewhat fuller notice than their actual range and extent would seem to warrant.

The earliest Welsh literature in which we read of Arthur may be divided into three distinct and well-marked groups. First come the few poems in the oldest Welsh MSS which mention him. The allusions to Arthur in these poems represent, probably, traditions derived from an earlier period than anything contained in the second group of writings to be noticed, the prose tales,—although, as will be seen, one or two of the poems and prose stories appear to refer to the same legends. Lastly, we have the Triads, which, according to Rhys, "give us the oldest account of Arthur."[46]

The compositions attributed to the oldest Welsh bards have come down to us in MSS which date from the twelfth to the end of the fourteenth century; the best known of them are four in number, and these were edited long ago, with translations, by the late Dr W. F. Skene under the title of *The Four Ancient Books of Wales*.[47] It is unnecessary here to touch upon controversial questions affecting the antiquity and the genuineness of the poems contained in these MSS. Many of them are, plainly enough, not much older than the date of the compilation of the particular MS in which they are found. Others, however, as plainly contain what Matthew Arnold, [48] speaking of the prose *Mabinogion*, calls "a *detritus* of something far older," and it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that some of them refer to historical events and personages of the sixth and seventh centuries, while others contain mythological matter derived from a much remoter age. Here, the

references to Arthur in these poems alone concern us. They are strangely few in number, and tantalisingly brief. In *The Black Book of Carmarthen* he is mentioned five times, in *The Book of Aneirin* only once. He is the central figure in a remarkable poem in *The Book of Taliesin*, and his name occurs in one other poem in that MS; in the poetry of *The Red Book of Hergest* nothing is heard of him, except in a poem called 'Gereint, son of Erbin,' which is also found in *The Black Book*. Three of the references in *The Black Book* are of the briefest character. In one poem[49] the bard tells us that he "has been where Llacheu, the son of Arthur, was slain," and that is all; in another, evidently a late poem, we hear of "Arthur's host," or "retinue" (*teulu Arthur*)[50]; while in a stanza, already alluded to, in "The Songs of the Graves," we are told that his grave is unknown. In the solitary passage in which his name occurs in *The Book of Aneirin* he is a standard of comparison,—a certain warrior is described as being "an Arthur in the exhaustive conflict"[51]; the second of the two poems in which he is mentioned in *The Book of Taliesin* refers, without comment or description, merely to "Arthur's steed."[52]

There remain to be noticed the three poems which, alone, contain anything more than such casual allusions as those we have just cited. Two of them are in *The Black Book*, and one would seem to bring us into touch, though but remotely, with the historical "Arthur the warrior,"—the *dux bellorum* of Nennius, who may have held "the place of the *imperator* himself, when Britain ceased to be part of the dominions of Rome."[53] This latter poem is called 'Gereint *filius* Erbin,'[54]—a title identical with that of the prose romance which is the Welsh collateral of Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec*,—and,

although Gereint is its hero, Arthur is introduced as a war-leader of seemingly higher rank. “At Llongborth,” the bard sings,

> “saw I of Arthur’s
> Brave men hewing with steel,
> (Men of the) emperor, director of toil.
>
> At Llongborth there fell of Gereint’s
> Brave men from the borders of Devon,
> And, ere they were slain, they slew.”

Where “Llongborth,” or “Ship’s port,” was, we do not know, but the whole poem appears to refer to an actual battle in which Gereint’s deeds had left a profound impression upon his bardic eulogist. The association, in this poem, of Arthur with Gereint brings us, for the first time, into the company of one of the knights who, in later romance, belong to the goodly fellowship of the Round Table. In the second *Black Book* poem we are introduced to two others who figure prominently in the romances,—Kei, or “Kay the seneschal,” and Bedwyr, or Bedivere, “the latest-left of all” King Arthur’s knights. This poem is cast in the form of a dialogue between Arthur and the keeper of a castle who is called Glewlwyd of the Mighty Grasp, and who appears in the Welsh prose stories as one of Arthur’s chief “porters.” Arthur seeks entrance to the castle, and Glewlwyd, apparently, will not open the gates without satisfying himself as to the number and the credentials of his followers. Arthur, thereupon, proceeds to name them and to recount their achievements. They are a weird company, bearing strange names reaching back to the remotest regions of primitive Welsh myth. Among them are Mabon, the son of Modron, “Uther Pendragon’s man”; Manawyddan, the son of Llŷr,

"profound in counsel," who "brought home a pierced buckler from Tryvrwyd"[55]; Mabon, son of Mellt, "who stained the grass with gore"; Llwch Llawynawc, Angwas the Winged, Arthur's son Llacheu, and others.[56] But the two doughtiest among the champions Arthur has around him are Bedwyr and Kei. Bedwyr, like Manawyddan, fought at Tryvrwyd, and "by the hundred they fell" before him there; "nine hundred to watch, six hundred to attack," continues the bard, was the measure of Bedwyr's prowess. Still mightier was "the worthy Kei." "Vain were it to boast" against him in battle; "he slew as would an hundred,—unless it were God's doing, Kei's death would be unachieved." Kei, we are further told, "slew nine witches"; he went "to Mona to destroy lions," and he fought against a mysterious monster called "Palug's Cat." Capable as he was of all this, it is not surprising to hear that Kei's drinking powers were equal to those of four men. Of the deeds of Arthur himself the poem tells us nothing.

A still more remarkable poem,—the last that remains to be noticed,—in which certain strange deeds of Arthur are commemorated, is found in *The Book of Taliesin* under the name of 'Preiddeu Annwvn,' or 'The Spoils of Hades.' It refers to various expeditions made by Arthur and his men, in his ship Pridwen to certain mysterious regions oversea. Definite names enough are given to the different places visited—Caer Sidi, Caer Rigor, Caer Vandwy, and so on,—but the places themselves remain quite unidentified. "Three freights of Pridwen," sings the bard, "were they who went with Arthur" on these expeditions; "seven alone were we who returned" therefrom. One of the exploits achieved in the course of these voyages was, apparently, the rape of a cauldron belonging to the King of Hades, and the whole poem,

according to Rhys,[57] "evidently deals with expeditions conducted by Arthur by sea to the realms of twilight and darkness."

The last two poems here referred to have several features in common with what is, probably, the oldest of the Arthurian prose tales in Welsh,—the story of *Kulhwch and Olwen*. That story also tells of the rape of a cauldron, belonging not, indeed, to the King of Hades, but to one Diwrnach, who lived across the sea in Ireland; Arthur went in quest of it, with a small retinue, in his ship Pridwen, and brought it home "full of Irish money." The second of the two poems refers to "a speckled ox" (*ych brych*), and the acquisition of "a speckled ox" was one of the tasks imposed upon Kulhwch by Olwen's father as part of the price to be paid for her hand. Again, nearly all the persons mentioned in *The Black Book* dialogue between Arthur and Glewlwyd figure also in *Kulhwch and Olwen*. So, where the oldest Welsh Arthurian poetry comes into contact with the oldest Welsh prose, the Arthur that we find dimly outlined in both is a purely mythical hero.

Kulhwch and Olwen, the most fantastic of all the Welsh prose tales dealing with Arthur, palpably embodies Arthurian traditions current in Wales at a very early date. "Almost every page of this tale," writes Matthew Arnold,[58] "points to traditions and personages of the most remote antiquity, and is instinct with the very breath of the primitive world." The tale relates of the wooing of Olwen, the daughter of one bearing the formidable name of Yspaddaden Pen Kawr, by Kulhwch, so called because "he had been found in a swine's burrow," but "nevertheless a boy of gentle lineage, and cousin unto Arthur." Kulhwch, after being told by his stepmother that he

"should never have a wife until he obtained Olwen," is informed by his father that "that will be easy for him." "Arthur is thy cousin," the father says; "go, therefore, unto Arthur, to cut thy hair, and ask this of him as a boon." The winning of Olwen,—hard enough though it appears in the story, which is mainly concerned with the long series of laborious tasks imposed upon Kulhwch as conditions of gaining her hand—is made "easy" through Arthur's intervention. The hero starts by duly presenting himself at "the gate of Arthur's palace," and he there meets with the porter, Glewlwyd of the Mighty Grasp, who conveys to Arthur the news of his arrival. Arthur is introduced to us as the head of a court, keeping high state in his palace, or hall, which is called Ehangwen (Broad-White). When Kulhwch comes to ask his "boon" of him, Arthur replies, "Thou shalt receive the boon whatsoever thy tongue may name, as far as the wind dries, and the rain moistens, and the sun revolves, and the sea encircles, and the earth extends,—save only my ship; and my mantle; and Caledvwlch,[59] my sword; and Rhongomyant, my lance; and Wynebgwrthucher, my shield; and Carnwennan, my dagger; and Gwenhwyvar, my wife." Kulhwch proceeds to ask for help in his quest not only from Arthur himself, but also from his knights and retainers, of whom a long and weird list is given. Kai and Bedwyr—an apparently inseparable pair—are first mentioned; then follows a series of strange and fantastic names, of most of which no other record remains in fable or folk-lore. Characters such as Taliesin, the chief of bards; Manawyddan, son of Llŷr; Gereint, son of Erbin; Gwynn, the son of Nudd, and some others, are heard of elsewhere. But what are we to make of beings like Sugyn, the son of Sugnedydd, "who could

suck up the sea on which were three hundred ships, so as to leave nothing but a dry strand"; or, "Gilla of the Deer-Legs, the chief-leaper of Ireland," who "would clear three hundred acres at one bound"; or, Gwevyl, the son of Gwestad, who, "on the day that he was sad, would let one of his lips drop below his waist, while he turned up the other like a cap upon his head"; or, Medyr, the son of Methredydd, who could from Cornwall "unerringly shoot the wren through the two legs" as far away as Ireland; and other weird people endowed with similar superhuman attributes? Arthur himself figures in the tale as a fairy king, having all these strange beings at his service, and giving them orders in the most direct and matter-of-fact way. One of his most useful henchmen, for example, is "Menw, the son of Teirgwaedd"—corresponding to the conventional enchanter of the universal fairy world—who could "cast a charm and an illusion over them, so that none might see them while they could see every one." Other characters in the motley crowd are said to "come from the confines of Hell"; others are "attendants" and "huntsmen" of Arthur, while quite a large group figure as his "uncles" and "kindred on his father's side."

Among the many trials to which Olwen's father submits Kulhwch is that of "getting Arthur and his companions to hunt the Twrch Trwyth." "He," says Yspaddaden, "is a mighty man, and he will not come for thee, neither wilt thou be able to compel him." Kulhwch knew better, for he had already secured Arthur's promise to help him to the utmost of his own and his companions' resources. The hunting of the Boar (the *porcus Troit*) is one of the main features of the story; and, except perhaps Meleager's adventure to the quarry of the Calydonian boar,

there is no such swine-hunt in primitive literature. Many strange men and beasts and implements were required for the chase and despatch of Twrch Trwyth, and for the capture of "the comb and scissors" between his ears, which Yspaddaden wanted for the proper trimming of his unruly hair. Mabon, the son of Modron; Garselit, "the chief huntsman of Ireland"; Gwynn, the son of Nudd, "whom God has placed over the brood of devils in Annwn"; Gilhennin, "the king of France"; Drudwyn, "the whelp of Greid"; Du, "the horse of Môr of Oerveddawg"; "the sword of Gwrnach the Giant";—all these, and many more such auxiliaries, had to be secured for the Boar's capture. But Kulhwch is not dismayed; "my lord and kinsman Arthur," he tells Yspaddaden, "will obtain for me all these things, and I shall gain thy daughter, and thou shalt lose thy life."

The story of the hunt, with its many marvels, is chiefly remarkable for its minute topographical and personal detail,—the topography being indeed so precise as to make it all but possible to trace on a modern map the route taken by the hunters.[60] The Boar is finally driven into Cornwall, and thence "straight forward into the deep sea; and thenceforth it was never known whither he went." "Then," says the story-teller, "Arthur went to Gelli Wic, in Cornwall, to anoint himself, and to rest from his fatigues." He had, however, to assist Kulhwch in one further enterprise,—the obtaining of "the blood of the witch Orddu, of Pen Nant Govid (the Head of the Vale of Grief), on the confines of Hell." He did so by slaying the hag with his own hand, cleaving her in twain "with Carnwennan, his dagger." After that Kulhwch goes boldly to Yspaddaden and asks, "Is thy daughter mine now?" "She is thine," said he, "but

therefore needest thou not thank me, but Arthur, who hath accomplished this for thee."

Kulhwch and Olwen, it will be seen from this brief account of it, is in all essentials a fairy-tale, embodying a mass of fantastic, and even grotesque, folk-lore of an obviously pre-historic antiquity. It is to fairy-land, also, that we are transported in another of the Welsh tales, *The Dream of Rhonabwy*, composed probably during the latter half of the twelfth century. Both it and *Kulhwch* have much in common with the mythic tales of Ireland. "We possess a considerable number of Irish sagas, which betray the same characteristics as the two Welsh tales: fondness for enumeration, triadic grouping, *bravura* descriptive passages, and, notably in *Bricriu's Feast*, a distinct semi-parodistic tone." The *Dream*,—of which the central feature, the story of Owen and his ravens, must be very old,—is remarkable for a series of minutely detailed and richly coloured word-pictures of

> "Impresses quaint, caparisons and steeds,
> Bases and tinsel trappings."[61]

Among the marvellous objects described are Arthur's sword and mantle (called Gwenn), but the story-teller does not let his fancy play around them so freely as around most of the things he depicts. The sword was in the keeping of "Kadwr, earl of Cornwall," whose duty it was to "arm the king on the days of battle." "And the similitude of two serpents was upon the sword in gold. And when it was drawn from its scabbard, it seemed as if two flames of fire burst forth from the jaws of serpents." Gwenn, the mantle, was "of diapered satin" with "an apple of ruddy gold at each corner thereof," and "it was one of its properties that upon whomsoever it was put, he

became lost to sight though he himself could see every one." Arthur himself is, in this tale, constantly referred to as "the Emperor," and he is first met with "sitting on a flat island" below the Ford of the Cross on the Severn, "with Bedwini the Bishop on one side of him, and Gwarthegydd, the son of Kaw, on the other." Among his retainers are his "cousin" March (or Mark), the son of Meirchion, prince of "the men of Norway"; Edern, the son of Nudd, prince of "the men of Denmark"; Kai, "the fairest horseman in all Arthur's Court"; and a host of others, many of whose names appear in the long catalogue given in *Kulhwch and Olwen*. Some of these names, such as Tristan, the son of Tallwch, and Peredur of the Long Lance, bring us into touch with the later developments of Arthurian romance.

The other three *Mabinogion*, so called, in which Arthur figures,—*The Lady of the Fountain*, *Geraint*, and *Peredur*,—will be noticed in a subsequent chapter, for these stories, whether they were directly based upon French originals or not, palpably belong to a period when the Arthurian legends had been, or were being, exploited for romantic purposes by French writers. The natural transition from such stories as *Kulhwch and Olwen* is to the Welsh Triads, the oldest group of which certainly contain traditions about Arthur as archaic as anything to be found in either the poems or the prose tales already reviewed. Here, only a few of the more significant allusions to Arthur contained in them need be quoted. Arthur is first mentioned in connection with Medraut's, or Modred's, treachery, and he is described—much as in Geoffrey's Chronicle—as conducting a victorious campaign against the Romans. The final battle with the Romans, of which Geoffrey gives so elaborate an account, is said to take place "beyond Mount

Mynneu," and in it Arthur encounters, and slays with his own hand, the Roman Emperor himself.[62] Modred, who had been left in charge of Britain, hearing of the grievous slaughter of Arthur's "best men" in this battle, revolts. Arthur returns, "and then took place the battle of Camlan between Arthur and Medraut, when Arthur slew Medraut, and Arthur himself was mortally wounded; and *he was buried in a palace in the isle of Avallach*." In another Triad, Arthur is made responsible for one of "the Three Wicked Uncoverings" of the Isle of Britain, viz., the uncovering of "the head of Brân the Blessed from the White Mount" in London. The 'mabinogi' of *Branwen, daughter of Llŷr*, relates how the head of Brân had been buried, by his own command, in the White Mount, with its face towards France. While it remained undisturbed, this island would be secure from invasion,—hence the "wickedness" of Arthur's "uncovering." Another of the Triads speaks of Arthur as the husband of three wives, each called Guinivere, —"Gwenhwyfar, the daughter of Gwryd Gwent, Gwenhwyfar, the daughter of Gwythur, son of Greidawl, and Gwenhwyfar, the daughter of Ogrvan the Giant." This strange statement, as Rhys points out, appears to have its parallel in the Irish story of Echaid Airem, where we hear of three women all bearing the name of Etáin, and "the three Gwenhwyfars are the Welsh equivalents of the three Etáins, and the article in the Triads must be held to be of great antiquity."[63] One of the last records in this group of Triads has affinities both with the four 'Mabinogion,' properly so-called, and with one of the old Welsh poems cited in this chapter; it also contains a curiously interesting reference to a character who, in mediæval romance, appears as the hero of the most poetical of all the legends included

in the Arthurian cycle. This Triad refers, mainly, to certain swine legends, and is entitled *The Three Stout Swineherds of the Isle of Britain*; but it mentions, besides swine, "Palug's cat,"—hence its connection with 'Preiddeu Annwvn,' the poem from *The Book of Taliesin* already alluded to. The first of the "three swineherds" is Pryderi, the son of Pwyll, "Head of Annwn," and his story is told in full in the 'mabinogi' of *Pwyll, prince of Dyved*. It is strange, however, to find that the second of these pre-eminent swineherds is Drystan, or Tristan, son of Tallwch,—the knightly Tristram of later romance. "The second" stout swineherd, so the record runs, "was Drystan, son of Tallwch, with the swine of March (Mark), son of Meirchion, while the swineherd went on a message to Essyllt (Iseult). Arthur and March and Kai and Bedwyr came, all four to him, but obtained from Drystan not even as much as a single porker, whether by force, or fraud, or theft."

These four examples are quite sufficient to show that in the Triads, no less than in the oldest Welsh tales and poems dealing with Arthur, we come upon traditions handed down from a very remote age, which were all but incomprehensible to the mediæval scribes who garnered them, and are therefore preserved in a bewilderingly confused and disconnected form. They are the *disjecta membra* of a lost mythology, the legacy of pre-historic Celtic heathendom, which even the most learned and ingenious interpreters of primitive folk-lore and religion find it well-nigh impossible to restore into a coherent and intelligible whole.[64]

They, however, who would rob us of a historical and a chivalric King Arthur must, perforce, leave us an Arthur whose attributes as a presumed pagan deity

do not prevent the unsophisticated from recognising in him an ideal prince of fairy-land. It is as such a prince that he appears against the setting of "old," but not altogether "unhappy, far-off things, and battles long ago," in which he is presented in the early literature of Wales. It is as such a prince that one, at least, of the great English poets accepts him. To Spenser, Arthur, "taken from mother's pap" and

> "straight deliver'd to a Faery knight
> To be upbrought in gentle thewes and martiall might,"[65]

was just the potent deliverer required to bring the Red Cross Knight and the rest of that questing company out of their various difficulties, and to establish, through a series of timely interventions, his right to the hand of the Fairy Queen.

In both *Kulhwch and Olwen* and *The Dream of Rhonabwy*, as also in the Triads, we find frequent mention of Cornwall as a district with which Arthur is intimately connected. It is to Cornwall that he retires to rest after the hunting of the boar; and it is to Cornwall that Kai, at the close of *The Dream of Rhonabwy*, bids all repair who "would follow Arthur." His home, and his court, there is at a place called Kelli, or Gelli, Wic. In later Arthurian literature little, if anything, is heard of Kelli Wic; Caerleon-upon-Usk displaces it altogether as the scene of Arthur's central court. But, with Geoffrey of Monmouth, two other Cornish localities are brought into dramatic connection with Arthur's fortunes—viz., Tintagol, or Tintagel; and Dimilioc, or Damelioc. These places are unheard of in the Welsh Arthurian tales, but, according to Geoffrey, it was at Dimilioc that Uther besieged, and his men slew, Gorlois; and

it was this siege that enabled Uther, in the semblance of Gorlois, to gain access to Igerne in her retreat at the castle of Tintagel, and so to become the father of "the most renowned Arthur." It is a pity that no Cornish records have survived to throw some further light upon these momentous events. It is, however, very unlikely that Geoffrey would have incorporated them in his narrative, had there not been, in Cornwall as in Wales, traditions long current which associated the name of Arthur with some of the ancient strongholds of the country. No less significant, as indicative of the existence of a separate Cornish legend of Arthur, is that Geoffrey, with others, tells us that the last and fatal battle with Medrod took place on the river Camel in Cornwall. It is not, perhaps, easy to reconcile these traditions with the theory that Arthur's life and achievements were confined to North Britain. But that theory is no less difficult to reconcile with the abundance, and the ubiquity, of Arthurian place-names in all the districts, except Ireland, that make up "the Celtic fringe." "Only the Devil is more often mentioned in local association than Arthur."[66] The precise significance of such association is perhaps, in both cases, equally indeterminable.

Investigators of Arthurian origins talk a good deal about Brittany. Unfortunately, there is no early Breton, any more than Cornish, literature to draw upon for any further information about a pre-historic, or a pre-romantic, Arthur. The *lais* of Marie of France are supposed to embody matter borrowed from Breton minstrels who sang before the flourishing of romance; but only one of her poems, 'Lanval'—and that but remotely—has any connection with early Arthurian lore. It may be that "the Bretons" whom Wace mentions as "telling many a

fable of the Table Round"[67] were Armorican Britons. We know for certain, at any rate, that a legend of Arthur, which included a belief in his "return," had taken firm root in Brittany by the twelfth century.[68] There is, therefore, no difficulty about assuming that it was from the Bretons, rather than from the Welsh, that the Normans derived their first knowledge of Arthur, and so came to construct out of the stories connected with him the romantic cycle known as the *matière de Bretagne*. The controversy waged about the relative shares of Great and of Little Britain in supplying matter for the French romantic writers[69] is of no real consequence —everybody is agreed that that matter is to be ultimately traced to a Celtic, and a British, source. What is of more importance is the fact that before any "matter of Britain" is heard of as a great romantic theme, a writer appeared who, by means of an orderly narrative embodied in an apparently sober chronicle, aroused an interest in Arthur's life and deeds such as no mere romance could ever have succeeded in doing. He was Geoffrey of Monmouth, and it is in his *History* that we get our first full-length portrait of Arthur as a great, and actual, "king of Britain."

CHAPTER III
GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH AND THE CHRONICLERS

CHAUCER, in his *Hous of Fame*, gives a station of conspicuous honour to a group of writers whose claim to distinction is that they are all "besy for to bere up Troye." Homer, inevitably, heads the list, standing

> "Ful wonder hye on a pilere
> Of yren."

With him, however, are ranged persons of somewhat doubtful reputation; to wit, Dares, the Phrygian, and "Tytus," or Dictys, the Cretan, "Guido de Columpnis," and—significantly—"English Gaufride." "Gaufride," or Geoffrey, owes his modern renown much more to his contributions to Arthurian literature than to his modest additions to the tale of Troy. His detractors will have it that the Arthurian portions of his so-called *History* are as fabulous as his account of the descent of the British race from Brutus, the son of Æneas. He had, however, the authority of Nennius, at least, for his use of the Brutus legend. He had the brief records of Nennius, also, to work upon as a foundation for the elaborate narrative which he gives of the life and deeds of King Arthur. But that narrative came upon the world as quite a new, and a startling thing. It is, perhaps, no exaggeration to term its appearance the chief literary event of the twelfth century; at any rate, it is certain that it aroused infinitely greater interest than the

story of what Brutus and his immediate descendants achieved in Britain. Chaucer, however,—to judge, at least, by his *Tale of Sir Thopas*,—regarded the newer romantic matters with good-humoured contempt; and the tale of Troy, in its various ramifications, challenged his imagination much more insistently than such a new-fangled theme as the story of Arthur.

Notwithstanding the fact that Geoffrey's use of the Brutus legend is what constitutes the claim of his *History* to rank as the first, and the greatest, of a long series of "Bruts,"—English, French and Welsh,—his real title to literary fame rests upon his achievement, and his influence, as a contributor to Arthurian story. The Arthurian legend would, undoubtedly, have attracted the attention of European poets and romancers, had Geoffrey's *History* never been written. It was current, as we have seen, in Wales, Brittany and Cornwall long before his time. There is even evidence that Arthur, and tales concerning him, were known in the south of Europe before he took up his pen. But it is quite certain that Arthur would never have figured as he does in chronicle literature, and so have come to be regarded as an authentic historical character, were it not for Geoffrey's narrative. And it may be doubted whether English poets, at any rate,—to judge from the homage which they pay Geoffrey,—would have dallied so much over Arthurian fable had they not at their call what Wordsworth describes as that

> "British record long concealed
> In old Armorica, whose secret springs
> No Gothic conqueror ever drank."[70]

Now, it so happens that the "British record," which Wordsworth, with a poet's licence, so confidently

tells us was “long concealed in old Armorica,” has never yet been discovered, and the mystery surrounding it is the chief critical problem which still baffles every student of the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth. This problem is deliberately set us by Geoffrey himself at the very beginning of his Chronicle, for he states that he is simply translating into the Latin tongue “a certain most ancient book in the British language,” which,—as he adds in his epilogue,—“Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, brought hither from Brittany.” That he had some “book,” or books, other than Nennius, to supply him with material, is not only highly probable, but almost certain; and, if we are to believe his own statement, that book must have been in “the British language.” But the fact remains that no document, either in Welsh or in Breton, has yet been found even remotely resembling that which Walter, the archdeacon, is said to have brought over from Brittany. It is possible, however, that those who have been searching for it have attached too much importance to the “British” book, and that, even were it to be discovered, its contents would only serve to show how deftly Geoffrey manipulated his material, and how artfully he succeeded in making his story of Arthur just what his Norman patrons, and the new romantic taste of the time, required. No intelligent reader of Geoffrey’s *History* can, at any rate, escape the conclusion that the work, especially in its treatment of both the Brutus legend and the career of Arthur, was written with a motive. Besides, it is a work *sui generis* among the chronicle literature of its time, and bears clear evidence of deliberate romantic embellishment. In order to apprehend what Geoffrey’s motive may have been, and how far he is to be regarded as a conscious romancer, it is

necessary, first of all, to know something of the writer himself and of the age and the people for whom he wrote; a brief examination of the actual contents of the *History*, and more particularly of its Arthurian portions, may perhaps serve, subsequently, to clear up as much of the rest of the matter as is possible, in the absence of any knowledge of "the British book."

The amount of authentic biographical detail ascertainable concerning Geoffrey is exceedingly scanty, and it is, therefore, not surprising that what is told about him in many reputable literary histories is distressingly inaccurate. Even the name of his famous book is, often, wrongly given; it is constantly cited as *Historia Brittonum*—the title of Nennius' compilation—instead of as *Historia Regum Britanniæ*. Walter, the archdeacon of Oxford, again, has been confused with Walter Map, who could hardly have been more than about twelve years old when Geoffrey died. Geoffrey himself is loosely designated "archdeacon of Monmouth," whereas there was no archdeaconry of Monmouth in his time. He is said to have become, ultimately, bishop of Llandaff, and to have died in the year 1152,—the actual facts, however, being that he was ordained priest and, almost simultaneously, appointed bishop of St Asaph in 1152, and that he died at Llandaff in 1155. The exact dates of the beginning, and of the completion, of his *History* cannot be definitely fixed; but we know enough about the work to say that it must have existed, in some form, as early as 1139, at the latest, and that it was complete in the form in which we now have it by the year 1148.

There is no conclusive evidence that Geoffrey was of Welsh birth, or that his home, other than a monastic

domicile, was at Monmouth. The dedication of his *History*, however, proves that he claimed the patronage of a Norman prince who was lord of a tract of Welsh country, the north-west boundary of which all but extended to the town of Monmouth. Early in the twelfth century Robert, earl of Gloucester, acquired the lordship of Glamorgan by marriage with Mabel, the daughter and heiress of Robert Fitz-Hamon. Eminent as both statesman and warrior, Robert of Gloucester, like his father, Henry Beauclerc, was a student of letters and a generous friend of literary men. It is no empty compliment that Geoffrey pays Robert when he hails him as "one nurtured in the liberal arts by philosophy, and called unto the command of our armies by his own inborn prowess of knighthood," and "whom in these our days Britain haileth with heart-felt affection as though she had been vouchsafed another Henry."[71] Robert's enlightened patronage of men of letters is sufficiently attested by the fact that William of Malmesbury, the most distinguished historian of his day, dedicated to him his *History of the Kings of England*. The abbey of Margam, whose chronicle is an important authority for the history of mediæval Wales, was founded by him; another abbey in which a valuable chronicle was compiled—that of Tewkesbury—had in him one of its chief benefactors. On his estates at Torigni in Normandy was born Robert of the Mount, afterwards abbot of Mont St Michel, eminent as a chronicler and known as a lover of the legends of his own Breton race. Robert of Gloucester's close connection, as thus indicated, with both South Wales and Normandy at once suggests that he must have taken a considerable interest in Welsh and Breton legendary lore. It is even possible that it was at his instance that Walter, the

archdeacon, and Geoffrey embarked upon the quest which ultimately led to the discovery, real or alleged, of the "book in the British tongue," and to its translation into Latin. It is obvious that Geoffrey, at any rate, was at pains to produce a work which would please both his immediate patron and all courtly readers who took pride in the growth of the Norman dominion.

A plausible, and by no means improbable, explanation of Geoffrey's motive in compiling the *Historia* is that he meant it to be a kind of "national epos," blazoning the united glories of the composite Anglo-Norman "empire" which reached the zenith of its power under Henry II.[72] A book written with such a patriotic purpose would certainly commend itself to Robert of Gloucester and other Norman lords, and would appeal strongly to the imagination of less exalted readers. The *History* does, indeed, provide in Arthur a hero over whose achievements Norman and Saxon, Welshman and Breton, could all alike exult. Moreover, the common ancestry of the various constituent races of the Angevin empire is shown by an account of their descent from a branch of the great Trojan stock which founded imperial Rome. Brutus, the son of Æneas, stands to Britain in the same relation as Æneas himself stands to Rome, with the exception—and that was, of course, to the advantage of Britain—that Brutus could be claimed as the eponymous hero of this island.[73] Thus—as poets like Wace and Layamon, and certain Welsh chroniclers, who use the name, were quick to see—here was a *Brut*, which, though written in prose, had as good a right to its epic title as the *Æneid*. There is, even, some evidence that Geoffrey may, at one time, have cherished the ambition of emulating Virgil himself by telling his story in verse; for, in the

eleventh chapter of his first book, we come across certain elegiac lines which look uncommonly like fragments rescued from a projected poem. Apart, however, from its account of the coming of Brutus, there is little in Geoffrey's *Brut* that furnishes any real analogy with the *Æneid*. It is not Brutus, but Arthur, who stands out as the hero of the *Historia Regum Britanniæ*. The *Historia* covers, altogether, a period—according, of course, to the computation of its author—of some fifteen hundred years; but more than a fifth part of it is devoted to the record of Arthur's life,—more than twice the space allotted to the history of Brutus. It is upon the story of Arthur that Geoffrey seems to concentrate all his powers, and, by magnifying the continental conquests of the British king, he is able ultimately to point with triumph to the fulfilment of a prophecy that "for the third time should one of British race be born who should claim the empire of Rome."

The main objection to this theory of an Anglo-Norman "epos" is the difficulty of reconciling it, not so much with the Trojan and the Arthurian parts of the *Historia* as with the scope and character of the work as a whole. The book is called a *History of the Kings of Britain*, and would appear, *primâ facie*, to have been composed by a writer of British birth for the sole purpose of glorifying the forgotten heroes of his own race.[74] Through six books the narrative is strictly confined to the insular history of Britain and its rulers, many strange legends and marvels being interwoven with what professes to be an authentic and ordered record of actual events. Even in the first half of the *History*, dull though it is for the most part, one alights upon many passages which betray the hand of the deliberate romancer. But it is only with the introduction, in the seventh book, of the

prophecies of Merlin that Geoffrey finds his real opportunity for romantic dilatation. With Merlin he is in the very heart of the land of enchantment, and the spell of romance inevitably falls upon him. It is to Merlin's magic arts that the birth is due of "the most renowned Arthur, who was not only famous in after years, but was well worthy of all the fame he did achieve by his surpassing prowess." Then follows, in three books, the narrative which first revealed to an astonished world that Britain once had a hero whose deeds challenged comparison with those of Alexander and Charlemagne. Here, at last, was historical confirmation of what had long been fabled in "the idle tales" and "ancient songs" of the Britons. Here, also, was just what a romantic age was thirsting for, and Arthur immediately became the central figure of the most popular and the most splendid of the romantic cycles. "Alexander"—and, we may add, Charlemagne—"had been an amusement; Arthur became a passion."[75]

Geoffrey's *History*, to be properly understood, must thus be read in the light of the general literary history of its time. Romance was in demand, and Geoffrey was shrewd enough to perceive the romantic value of the story of Arthur. It is impossible to read the Arthurian chapters in his Book without feeling that the writer is conscious of having got hold of "a good thing," and that he is determined to make the most of it. So he gives his imagination free play, and palpably expands and embellishes his matter as he goes on. The *Historia* is much more of a romance than a sober chronicle, and it is quite conceivable that, in an age of literary experiment, its author enjoyed the use to which he was thus putting the time-honoured form of the chronicle. It is not, of course, suggested that Geoffrey invented all, or even

the greater part, of his matter; nor need it be believed that the reference to "the British book" is altogether a ruse. Like other chroniclers, he borrows largely from his predecessors; what he has taken from Nennius and Bede, for example, can be clearly traced in his text. But the *History* obviously contains much which Geoffrey either invented, or of which he was unwilling to disclose the secret source. It is otherwise unaccountable that he should warn orthodox and reputable chroniclers, like William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, not to pry into the romantic enclosure which was his own particular preserve. In his epilogue, Geoffrey tells these two eminent historians that they may go on writing about "the kings of the Saxons," if they choose, but he "bids them be silent as to the kings of the Britons, since they have not that book in the British speech which Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, brought over from Brittany."

Of scarcely less significance than his epilogue, as throwing a light upon the general character of the work, is Geoffrey's introductory chapter. Its apologetic tone is distinctly suspicious, and seems intended to disarm the critical by vouching an authority, both ancient and written in a strange tongue, for the marvellous narrative that was to follow and for the ornate style in which it was presented. It is worth quoting in full, for it really strikes the keynote to the entire work.

"Oftentimes in turning over in mine own mind the many themes that might be subject-matter of a book, my thoughts would fall upon the plan of writing a history of the Kings of Britain; and in my musings thereupon meseemed it a marvel that, beyond such mention as Gildas and Bede have made of them in

their luminous tractate, nought could I find as concerning the kings that had dwelt in Britain before the Incarnation of Christ, *nor nought even as concerning Arthur* and the many others that did succeed him after the Incarnation, albeit that their deeds be worthy of praise everlasting, and be as pleasantly *rehearsed from memory by word of mouth in the traditions of many peoples* as though they had been written down. Now, whilst I was thus thinking upon such matters, Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, a man learned not only in the art of eloquence, but in the histories of foreign lands, offered me a certain most ancient book in the British language that did set forth the doings of them all in due succession and order from Brute, the first king of the Britons, onward to Cadwallader, the son of Cadwallo, *all told in stories of exceeding beauty*. At his request, therefore, albeit that never have I gathered gay flowers of speech in other men's little gardens and am content with mine own rustic manner of speech and mine own writing-reeds, have I been at pains to translate this volume into the Latin tongue. For, had I besprinkled my page with high-flown phrases, I should only have engendered a weariness in my readers by compelling them to spend more time over the meaning of the words than upon understanding the drift of my story."

Then follows the dedication to Robert of Gloucester. [76] Having thus given us his authority, and having taken further shelter under the wing of Walter, Geoffrey settles down to his task with all the gravity of a pious monkish chronicler. As other chroniclers had done before him, he, in his early books at least, makes brief references—as, apparently, so many "guarantees of good faith"—to contemporaneous events in sacred and profane history. When, for

example, Gwendolen is said to have handed over the sceptre to her son Maddan, we learn that "Samuel the prophet reigned in Judæa, and Homer was held to be a famous teller of histories and poet." Carlisle, we are told, was founded at the time when "Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem." "The fortress of Mount Paladur, which is now called Shaftesbury," was built by Hudibras, when "Haggai, Amos, Joel and Azarias did prophesy." We get, in the account of the building of Shaftesbury, a characteristic example of Geoffrey's way of getting level with the sceptical reader. "There, while the wall was a-building, an eagle spake, the sayings whereof, had I believed them to be true, I would not have shrunk from committing to memory along with the rest."

It is time, however, to give some account of Geoffrey's narrative of the life of Arthur. He was, we are told, the son of Uther Pendragon[77] by Igerne, the lawful wife of Gorlois, duke of Cornwall. Uther is introduced to us as the brother of Aurelius Ambrosius, and becomes, on the death of Aurelius, king of Britain. After conquering the Saxons under Octa and Eosa, and strengthening his kingdom generally, he falls in love with Igerne and quarrels with her husband. He, thereupon, makes war upon Gorlois and besieges him in the castle of Dimilioc. Igerne had, in the meantime, been sent for safer refuge to the neighbouring castle of Tintagel, on the sea-coast. Thither Uther, transformed into the semblance of Gorlois by Merlin's magic powers, proceeds in quest of her; he gains ready admission, and so becomes the father of Arthur. Immediately afterwards Gorlois, in a sally from Dimilioc, is killed, and in due time Uther marries Igerne. Another child born unto them was a daughter, Anna, who became

the wife of “Lot of Lodonesia,” and the mother of Gawain and Modred. After another campaign against Octa and Eosa, Uther is poisoned by the Saxons, and Arthur succeeds to the throne. He is crowned by Dubricius, “archbishop of the City of Legions,”[78] and is thus portrayed as he was at the time of his coronation. “At that time Arthur was a youth of fifteen years, of a courage and generosity beyond compare, whereunto his inborn goodness did lend such grace as that he was beloved of well-nigh all the peoples of the land. After he had been invested with the ensigns of royalty, he abided by his ancient wont, and was so prodigal of his bounties as that he began to run short of wherewithal to distribute amongst the huge multitude of knights that made repair unto him. But he that hath within him a bountiful nature along with prowess, albeit that he be lacking for a time, natheless in no wise shall poverty be his bane for ever. Wherefore did Arthur, for that in him did valour keep company with largess, make resolve to harry the Saxons, to the end that with their treasure he might make rich the retainers that were of his own household.” Thus it comes about that Arthur begins his career of conquest at once. He attacks the Saxon chieftains Colgrin, Cheldric and Baldulph, and with the help of his nephew Hoel, king of Armorica, subdues them after several battles—including the twelve recorded by Nennius—of which the last is fought in “the country about Bath.” Arthur himself, carrying “on his shoulder the shield Priwen,” and armed with Ron, his spear, and “Caliburn, best of swords, that was forged within the Isle of Avalon,” performed prodigies of valour in that battle. “Whomsoever he touched, calling upon God, he slew at a single blow, nor did he once slacken in his onslaught until that he had slain four hundred and

seventy men single-handed with his sword Caliburn." Having restored the whole island to its pristine British dignity, Arthur, we read, "took unto him a wife born of a *noble Roman family*, Guenevere, who, brought up and nurtured in the household of Duke Cador (of Cornwall), did surpass in beauty all the other dames of the island."[79] His marriage only stimulated Arthur to attempt, and achieve, further conquests; and, in rapid succession, Ireland, Iceland, Gothland, and the Orkneys, are either subdued or forced to pay tribute to him. Then follow twelve years of peace, during which his court waxed in splendour, and his renown spread until "at last the fame of his bounty and his prowess was on every man's tongue, even unto the uttermost ends of the earth, and a fear fell upon the kings of the realms oversea lest he might fall upon them in arms and they might lose the nations under their dominion." Hence, one is not surprised to learn that Arthur's "heart was uplifted for that he was a terror unto them all, and he set his desire upon subduing the whole of Europe unto himself." Norway, Dacia and Gaul are invaded, and quickly reduced to submission. Lot, his sister's husband, is given what was his of ancestral right, the crown of Norway, just at the time, as we are told incidentally, when "Gawain, the son of Lot, was a youth of twelve years, and had been sent by his uncle to be brought up as a page in the service of Pope Sulpicius." Arthur's visit to Gaul led to a single combat between him and a man of giant stature, Flollo, "Tribune of Rome"; the British king was wounded in the fight, but at last "raising Caliburn aloft" he clove Flollo's head "sheer in twain." He concluded his business in Gaul by giving "Neustria, which is now called Normandy, unto Bedevere, his butler, and the province of Anjou

unto Kay, his seneschal."

Returning to Britain, Arthur holds high court at Caerleon-upon-Usk, and in the descriptions of the state that he kept there the colour and pomp of the age of chivalry, and of Norman court-life, run unchecked through Geoffrey's narrative. Even before he had embarked upon his continental conquests, Arthur had begun to "hold such courtly fashion in his household as begat rivalry amongst peoples at a distance, insomuch as the noblest in the land, fain to vie with him, would hold himself as nought, save in the cut of his clothes and the manner of his arms he followed the pattern of Arthur's knights." But, so far, nothing has been heard of "the City of Legions," except that Dubricius was "archbishop" there. Now, however, we are given a picture of the town "situate on a passing pleasant position on the river Usk in Glamorgan," which Arthur chose to be the seat of his court, and to be the scene of the "high solemnity" of his second, and seemingly imperial, coronation. The city "abounded in wealth" above all others; ships came to it from oversea; its kingly palaces challenged comparison with those of Rome itself; it was the third metropolitan see of Britain, and "had, moreover, a school of two hundred philosophers learned in astronomy and in the other arts, that did diligently observe the courses of the stars, and did by true inferences foretell the prodigies which at that time were about to befall unto King Arthur." To the coronation were bidden princes and warriors from every part of the British islands and from realms oversea, until "not a single prince of any price on this side Spain remained at home and came not upon the proclamation." The description of the splendours of the ceremonial itself, and of the banquet that followed it, taxes Geoffrey's rhetorical powers to the

full. He has, indeed, to give up in despair any attempt to give a complete account of them; "were I to go about to describe them," he writes, "I might draw out this history into an endless prolixity." "For at that time Britain was exalted unto so high a pitch of dignity as that it did surpass all other kingdoms in plenty of riches, in luxury of adornment, and in the courteous wit of them that dwelt therein. Whatsoever knight in the land was of renown for his prowess did wear his clothes and his arms all of one same colour. And the dames, no less witty, would apparel them in like manner in a single colour, nor would they deign have the love of none save he had thrice approved him in the wars. Wherefore at that time did dames wax chaste and knights the nobler for their love."

Here is a passage that must have delighted the hearts of Norman readers nurtured upon ideals of chivalry and courtly love, and seems as though designed to prepare the way for Arthur's entry into the kingdom of chivalric romance. It is no great step from Arthur's court, as here pictured, to the knightly fellowship of the Round Table, and all the other elaborate fictions of professional romantic scribes. Of a part with all this romantic presentment of the pomp and state surrounding the British king is Geoffrey's constant exaltation of his "bounty," and of his individual prowess as a warrior. Nor is the element of wonder lacking in the narrative given of Arthur's exploits. He encounters at St Michael's Mount, and slays by his own hand, a Spanish "giant of monstrous size," who had carried away and killed the niece of Hoel, duke of Armorica. This adventure leads him to tell Kay and Bedivere, who had accompanied him on the expedition, how he had once, in Wales, despatched another formidable monster, "the giant Ritho," of Mount Eryri, "who had fashioned him a furred cloak

of the beards of the kings he had slain." Again, in the last battle with the Romans, he is a truly Homeric hero. "He dashed forward upon the enemy, flung them down, smote them,—never a one did he meet, but he slew either him or his horse at a single buffet. They fled from him like sheep from a fierce lion madly famishing to devour aught that chance may throw in his way. Nought might armour avail them but that Caliburn would carve their souls from out them with their blood."

The campaign against the Romans, undertaken with an army of "eighty-three thousand two hundred, besides those on foot, who were not easy to reckon," seems to have followed close upon the festivities at Caerleon.[80] The Romans were under the command of "Lucius Hiberius, procurator of the Commonwealth," who, summoning to his aid "the kings of the East," put into the field a host numbering "four hundred thousand one hundred and sixty." It is unnecessary here to give any detailed account of the fighting, and of the final discomfiture of the Roman forces. It need only be said that the British triumph was obtained at heavy cost. Among the slain were the faithful Kay and Bedevere,—in death, as in life, not divided. Bedevere was buried at Bayeux, "his own city that was builded by Bedevere the first, his great-grandfather;" Kai was laid to rest near Chinon, "a town he himself had builded." The chief disaster to the Romans was the loss of their leader Lucius, whose body Arthur "bade bear unto the Senate with a message to say that none other tribute was due from Britain." Arthur designed to follow up this message by a march upon Rome itself, and he had actually begun to climb the passes of the Alps when news reached him that "his nephew Modred, unto whom he had committed the charge of

Britain, had tyrannously and traitorously set the crown of the kingdom upon his own head, and had linked him in unhallowed union with Guenever the Queen in despite of her former marriage."

So ends Geoffrey's tenth book. "Hereof" begins the eleventh, strangely enough,—but, of course, plainly referring to the affair of Guinevere,—"verily, most noble Earl, will Geoffrey of Monmouth say nought." He will only treat of the battles which Arthur, after his return to Britain, fought with his nephew, according to the account given "in the British discourse aforementioned," and what he "*hath heard* from Walter of Oxford, a man of passing deep lore in many histories."[81] The final, and fatal, battle did not take place all at once; it came at the end of a campaign of some length. Modred, retreating rapidly into Cornwall, is at last brought to bay on the river Camel, and is slain in a battle in which "well-nigh all the captains that were in command on both sides rushed into the press with their companies and fell." And "even the renowned King Arthur himself was wounded deadly, and was borne thence unto the island of Avalon for the healing of his wounds, where he gave up the crown of Britain unto his kinsman Constantine, son of Cador, duke of Cornwall, in the year of the incarnation of our Lord five hundred and forty-two."

"Borne unto the island of Avalon for the healing of his wounds,"—here, surely, are words never before used in a professedly historical narrative of a kingly hero wounded unto death. This touch, alone, is sufficient to attest the kinship of Geoffrey's "history" of Arthur with the waifs and strays of Celtic romance. The circumstances of Arthur's birth, as told by Geoffrey, were marvellous enough; like other

saga-heroes, such as Finn and Cormac, he was born out of wedlock, through Merlin's magical intervention. But what caught the imagination of poets and romancers even more was the fable of his "return." "Some men say yet," writes Malory, "that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu into another place. And men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say it shall not be so, but rather I will say, here in this world he changed his life. But many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse, *Hic jacet Arthurus Rex quondam Rexque futurus*." Later in the twelfth century an attempt was made, at the instance—so it is alleged—of Henry II to destroy the persistent belief in this "Celtic messiahship" by an announcement that the body of Arthur had been exhumed at Glastonbury by the monks of St Dunstan's abbey.[82] It was, however, of no avail. A poet of the next generation, Layamon, tells us that "the Britons believe yet that Arthur is alive, and dwelleth in Avalon with the fairest of all elves, and ever yet the Britons look for Arthur's coming."

The popularity of Geoffrey's *History* was immediate and immense; it is indeed difficult to find a parallel to it before the age of printed books. So much is largely attested by the number of extant MS copies of the work.[83] But the most striking evidence of the impression it made is to be found in the number of translations, adaptations and continuations of the *Historia* compiled from the moment of its first appearance down to comparatively recent times. Not long, if at all, after its author's death, Geoffrey Gaimar translated it into Anglo-Norman verse.[84] By 1155 Wace had completed his *Brut*, which in substance is almost entirely based on Geoffrey's *Historia*. Early in the next century Layamon wrote his

English *Brut*, embodying, with many interesting additions and embellishments of his own, the main features of Geoffrey's and Wace's narrative. Then follow a long line of English chroniclers, in both prose and verse, from Robert of Gloucester down to Grafton and Holinshed, who pass on Geoffrey's fables as authentic history. In the Elizabethan age, in spite of attempts made to discredit him by critics and antiquaries, like Polydore Vergil and Camden, Geoffrey continues to be drawn upon by the poets. Sackville and Spenser, Warner and Drayton, and others, give a new currency to his British legends, and Drayton even goes out of his way to defend his impugned reputation.[85] Spenser, in borrowing from his record of British kings, pays him a well-known tribute in the second book of *The Faerie Queene*. But, perhaps, the finest tribute of all to Geoffrey's *History* is that of Wordsworth in 'Artegal and Elidure,' where he sings of the "British record" in which

> "We read of Spenser's fairy themes,
> And those that Milton loved in youthful years;
> The sage enchanter Merlin's subtle schemes;
> The feats of Arthur and his knightly peers;
> Of Arthur, who, to upper light restored,
> With that terrific sword
> Which yet he brandishes for future war
> Shall lift his country's fame above the polar star!"

Although Geoffrey's book found so much acceptance in his own time and afterwards, it is significant to note that, even soon after its appearance and in the very heyday of its repute, a few shrewd critics ventured to question its authenticity. William of Newburgh, as we have seen, denounced it

unreservedly as a tissue of impudent lies. He, at any rate, had no scruple in treating the work as a deliberate experiment in fiction under the guise of a chronicle. A different attitude towards the book might have been expected from Giraldus Cambrensis, a Welshman proud of his race and of its "old and haughty" traditions, who was himself not unskilled in the art of fiction. Yet it is Gerald who, of all Geoffrey's critics, says much the unkindest thing on record of the *Historia*. He tells us of a Welshman at Caerleon named Melerius, or Meilir, who had dealings with evil spirits, and was "enabled through their assistance to foretell future events." "He knew when anyone spoke falsely in his presence, for he saw the devil as it were leaping and exulting on the tongue of the liar.... If the evil spirits oppressed him too much, the Gospel of St John was placed on his bosom, when, like birds, they immediately vanished; but when that book was removed, and the *History of the Britons* by Geoffrey Arthur was substituted in its place, they instantly reappeared in greater numbers, and remained a longer time than usual on his body and on the book."

Geoffrey, in the epilogue to his *History*, hands over the task of writing of "the kings who succeeded in Wales" from the time at which his narrative closes to "Caradoc of Llancarvan, my contemporary." Caradoc was an undoubted Welshman, but no Latin continuation by him of Geoffrey's chronicle dealing with the Welsh kings is known to exist, and it is very doubtful whether a Welsh compilation bearing his name, and bringing Geoffrey's narrative down to the year 1156, is a genuine work of his. It is, however, highly probable that he was the author of the Latin *Life of Gildas*, preserved in a twelfth century MS now in the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

This work is of peculiar interest as containing certain Arthurian traditions which were apparently unknown to Geoffrey. Gildas is represented, in this fictitious biography, as being a contemporary of Arthur, king of all Britain, whom he loved and obeyed. He had, however, twenty-three refractory brothers who refused allegiance to Arthur, and the eldest of them, Hueil,[86] or Huel, King of Scotland, fought a battle with him in "the isle of Minau" and was killed. Gildas, who was in Ireland at the time, was much distressed to hear of this, but, as became a saint, he prayed for Arthur, and, returning to Britain, granted the king the pardon which he besought. Further on in the *Life* we get a version, probably the earliest in literature,[87] of the story of the abduction of Guinevere by Melwas (the Mellyagraunce of Malory), "the wicked king of the Summer Country," or Somerset. After long seeking for a convenient opportunity, Melwas carries her violently away to Glastonia, or Glastonbury, a place chosen by him as being apparently impregnable because of the marshes around it. Arthur, discovering her retreat, besieges Glastonbury with a large army drawn from Cornwall and Devon. Before, however, he and Melwas engage in battle, the monks of the abbey, accompanied by Gildas, intervene; peace is made, and the queen is restored to her lawful husband.

Of the many chroniclers who, either in prose or in verse, repeat and embellish Geoffrey's Arthurian narrative, by far the most interesting, and the most important in their influence upon the literary development of Arthurian story, are Wace and Layamon. Both are poets, and their metrical *Bruts* mark, as it were, the transitional stage between the Arthur of history and traditional legend and the Arthur of pure romance. Wace, according to

Layamon, dedicated his poem, which was completed in 1155, to "the noble Eleanor, who was the high King Henry's queen."[88] This statement—and there is no reason to doubt its truth—affords another indication of the interest of the Angevin court in the literary exploitation of "the matter of Britain." Geoffrey had already besought royal approval for his presentment of British legends, and had done his best to clothe his account of Arthur's deeds in the highly-coloured rhetorical trappings that would commend it to courtly Norman readers. Wace went further. He took Geoffrey's matter and dressed it up in a poetical form in French, thus giving it a much more widespread currency than a Latin prose chronicle could ever have done. Arthur becomes, in his *Brut*, the flower of chivalry, and his entire narrative is decorated in a way that would appeal to the imagination of all knightly Anglo-Normans. Nor is he without thought of the courtly ladies who took so lively an interest in tales of chivalry. Like Chrétien de Troyes and other romancers, he is at some pains to elaborate his descriptions of scenes of love. He takes delight in dwelling upon the accoutrements of warriors, and upon their individual exploits in the field. But it is not alone in such embellishments—the deliberate attempts of a courtly writer to please a courtly circle of readers—that Wace differs from Geoffrey. He adds to his narrative many details which indicate that he also had at his command an independent fund of Arthurian traditions. Wace's literary celebrity is due, perhaps, most of all to the fact that he is the first Arthurian writer to mention the Round Table. "The Bretons," he says, "tell many a fable of the Table Round," but he does not explain whence such fables came, or where he heard them told.[89] He does, however, inform us that the Table

was made round because each of Arthur's knights thought himself better than his fellows, and Arthur devised this method of settling all disputes about precedence among them. The praise of the knights of the Round Table, he adds in another place, was loud throughout the world. Again, Wace adds considerably to Geoffrey's description of the passing of Arthur. The king is not only taken to Avalon "to be cured of his wounds,"—the Bretons confidently expect his recovery, and look for his return. "He is still there; the Bretons await him; they say that he will come back and live again."

Wace's metrical chronicle formed the basis of the still more elaborate, and the more poetical, metrical *Brut* of the Englishman, Layamon,—the most remarkable English contribution to Arthurian literature until we come to *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight*. Here we have a brave attempt to do what Caxton long afterwards desired,—to make Arthur the best "remembered among Englishmen before all other Christian kings." Wace's poem was a contribution to the polite literature of the Normans; Layamon's, though his matter is so largely borrowed from Wace, is a patriotic English epic. It was his aspiration, as we learn from the opening lines of his *Brut*, "to tell the noble deeds of England," and in his record of those deeds Arthur, who had been all but denationalised by the romancers, is restored to his fatherland and duly figures as the great "Christian king of England." But Layamon was a poet no less than a patriotic chronicler, and could not help listening to the blowings of "the horns of Elfland." Arthur's prowess and royal attributes were such as could not be explained except for the intervention of superhuman powers. Elves surrounded him when he came into the world; it was from them that he derived the gifts

which made him the best of knights and the mightiest of kings.[90] Again, at his passing, Arthur says that he is about to go to the splendid elf, Argante (Morgain, or Morgan, *la fée*); "she will heal me of all my wounds, and shall make me all hale; and afterwards I shall come to my kingdom and dwell among the Britons with mickle joy."[91] Arthur's byrnie was made for him by Wygar, "the elvish smith"; his spear by Griffin, of the city of the wizard Merlin (Kaermerddin); his sword, Caliburn, was wrought with magic craft in Avalon; the Round Table was constructed by a strange carpenter from oversea. Layamon's account of the Round Table is much fuller than that of Wace, and is evidently based upon popular legends of wizardry. It was in Cornwall, when there was a quarrel among his knights, that Arthur met the stranger from beyond the sea who offered to "make him a board, wondrous fair, at which sixteen hundred men and more might sit."[92] Though it was so large, and took four weeks to make, the table could, by some magic means, be carried by Arthur as he rode, and placed by him wherever he chose. Layamon had evidently heard more about the Round Table, "of which the Britons boast," than he cares to disclose in his poem; but "the Britons," he tells us at the end of his description of the Table, say "many leasings" of King Arthur and attribute to him things "that never happened in the kingdom of this world."

No more spirited, or more romantic, passage is to be found in Layamon's poem than that in which he describes Arthur's last battle. It was fought at Camelford, "a name that will last for ever." The stream, hard by, "was flooded with blood unmeasured." The combatants were pressed so close that they could not distinguish friend from foe; "each

slew downright were he swain, were he knight." Modred, and all his knights, were slain, as were also "all the brave ones, Arthur's warriors, high and low, and all the Britons of Arthur's board." None remained alive at the end of the battle,—and they were two hundred thousand men who fought there,—save Arthur and two of his knights. Arthur, grievously wounded, bequeaths his kingdom to Constantine, Cador's son, and says that he himself will go unto Avalon to be healed by Argante,[93] "the fairest of all maidens." And "even with the words there came from the sea a short boat, borne on the waves, and two women therein, wondrously arrayed; and they took Arthur anon, and bare him quickly, and softly laid him down, and fared forth away. Then was brought to pass that which Merlin whilom said, that there should be sorrow untold at Arthur's forthfaring. The Britons believe yet that he is alive, and dwelleth in Avalon, with the fairest of all elves, and ever yet the Britons look for Arthur's coming. Was never the man born, nor ever of woman chosen, that knoweth the sooth, to say more of Arthur. But whilom there was a seer hight Merlin; he said with words—and his sayings were sooth—that an Arthur should yet come to help the Britons."

CHAPTER IV
ROMANCE

BEFORE the close of the twelfth century the Arthur of popular legend, and of the chronicles, had been transformed into a purely romantic hero. The British king, soon after the appearance of Geoffrey's *History*, becomes the centre of the most profitably worked of the cycles of mediæval romance. Much of his individuality is, inevitably, lost in the process; and that loss implies, no less inevitably, a gradual obscuration of the primitive British environment which originally surrounded him. The paramount chief of early Britain, whose prowess and conquests form the prime epic theme of Geoffrey and of Layamon, appears as the king of no known realm, numbering among his retainers heroic figures drawn from the uttermost limits of the mythical world. Exalted, as a world conqueror, to a level with Alexander and Charlemagne, he becomes, like them, largely lost to sight among the crowd of fabulous characters called up around him by the professional romancers. The Arthur of the romances is no more than a *primus inter pares*. He does, indeed, stand above his knights by virtue of his royal dignity,—he is still "King Arthur," and the head of a great Court. But our interest in his own personality diminishes with the increasing accumulation of exploits attributed to his knightly retinue. The glory of the king is dimmed by the general brilliance of his Court. It is as though the Round Table, originally founded to put an end to all claims of precedence among his

knights, had had the result of bringing Arthur himself into the unvalued "file." Knightly heroes, of whom little, or nothing, had been heard before, enter the Arthurian circle, and perform feats which interest us far more than anything done by the king. In early Welsh tradition, and in Geoffrey's chronicle, Kay and Bedivere and, later, Gawain, alone figure as warriors whose deeds are at all worth mentioning by the side of Arthur's. In the romances, Kay and Bedivere play quite subordinate parts, while Gawain becomes much more prominent, only, however, to find his high station challenged, and frequently usurped, by newcomers such as Tristram and Perceval and Lancelot.

The cause of all this change is obvious. The age of Chivalry had come, and the Arthurian stories provided "the raw material" exactly suited to its romantic literary requirements. The original Celtic legends concerning Arthur and his few primitive "knights" lent themselves, at once, to adaptation and embellishment by writers whose main concern was with knight-errantry and courtly love; while the conception of an Arthurian "court," with its fellowship of questing knights, invited the importation into it of any and every legendary hero whose story could in any plausible way be connected with Arthur. They had another advantage which contributed to their supreme popularity in the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. They had about them an element of mystery, of magic, of indefiniteness, coming as they did from the Celtic wonderland in the West. The Arthurian kingdom had no geography,—it was a "no man's land," which defied all cartography, and the bounds of which could be extended by each romantic writer at his will. It is true that British tradition, and the bards

and chroniclers who had sought to give it literary form, associated Arthur's name with well-known localities in Great Britain; but, even there, the "champion of Britain" had no settled capital or court. London, the chief city of the Norman kings, claimed him as her own; but so did Winchester, Lincoln, York, Chester and Carlisle. Then there was Caerleon-upon-Usk, the delectable "metropolitan city" where Geoffrey of Monmouth had definitely located his court in Wales. Moreover places in Britain with mysterious legendary associations came to be connected with Arthur's name. Glastonbury, whither Joseph of Arimathea was fabled to have brought the Holy Grail, was reputed to be his burial-place, and the district around it was identified with the mythical Avalon. The grim old western castle of Tintagel was fixed upon as his birthplace, and the tale of the battle on the Camel led to the building, in poetic imagination,[94] of a new Arthurian court at "tower'd Camelot." The name of Camelot at once suggests such purely romantic regions as "the wild woods of Broceliande" and "the sad sea-sounding wastes of Lyonesse."[95] Astolat, Cameliard, Sarras, Carbonek, Joyous Gard, and other places, belong to the same romantic class, and lie quite beyond geographical identification. Stories, in which the characters thus roamed indifferently among places well known to Norman England and in regions which belonged entirely to "the land of phantasy and illusion," lay open to the incursion of fabulous matter drawn from many varied sources. In a word, the unrivalled possibilities of "the matter of Britain" for all kinds of romantic exploitation established for it an easy supremacy over the other romantic themes, and the literary uses to which it was put by writers of romance throughout Western Europe all

but robbed it, ultimately, of its distinctive features as a native British growth.

The various stages in the romantic use and adaptation of the Arthurian legends, mainly by French writers, are not difficult to trace. First of all, we get the metrical chronicles,—attempts to put Geoffrey's quasi-historical record into a poetical form which much better suited its heroic theme than the sober garb of Latin prose. Wace's *Brut*, completed in the year of Geoffrey's death, is our earliest extant example of this poetical treatment of Arthurian story, and his work, as we have seen, was written with a much more deliberate purpose of pleasing courtly readers than Geoffrey's. The tastes and requirements of such readers, regarded solely from the standpoint of their interest in knight-errantry and romantic love, determine the character of the second and the third phase which Arthurian literature assumes. The metrical, and the prose, French romances began to be written about the same time, and from the same motive. It is generally held, however, that the poetical romancers were in the field before the prose writers: at any rate, the most famous of the metrical romances—those of Chrétien de Troyes—are earlier than any prose romances which have come down to us. Chrétien, in whom his admirers find the greatest mediæval poet before Chaucer, wrote for the Norman aristocracy, and especially for ladies, what were practically the fashionable novels of the day. He dedicates his *Chevalier de la Charrette* to the countess Marie of Champagne, whose interest in everything appertaining to the French cult of *l'amour courtois* is well known; and all his poetical 'novels' are largely designed for the entertainment of women eager for literature of a more sentimental appeal than sagas of monster-slayers and warriors. The sudden

appearance of the immortal love-stories of Tristan and Iseult, and of Lancelot and Guinevere, shows how triumphantly the French romancers responded to the demands made of them.

Chrétien de Troyes' share in the literary flotation of both these stories entitles him to a place in the history of pure Arthurian romance even above that of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Geoffrey can claim, beyond any question, to be the literary father of King Arthur himself as a romantic hero. But the Arthurian legend, as it emerged from mediæval romance and as we know it in its modern presentment by the poets, contains so much more than the story of Arthur that the French romantic scribes who brought Tristan and Lancelot and Perceval into Arthur's court must be regarded as the first artistic fashioners of a purely poetic "matter of Britain." Among them Chrétien, and—if we are to take him as the unquestioned author of the great prose *Lancelot* romance—Walter Map, stand pre-eminent. As to Chrétien's signal share in the work there is, at any rate, no controversy, and his name is associated with the poetical treatment of the stories of each of the three celebrated heroes just mentioned. He is believed[96] to have been the author of a lost Tristan poem—probably his first work, composed about 1160,—which is surmised to have been the foundation of the long prose *Tristan* romance, whence Malory drew much of his material. It is in his *Chevalier de la Charrette* that we first hear of Lancelot as a lover of Guinevere. His unfinished *Conte del Graal* is one of the first literary presentations of the story of Perceval.

Two other poems of Chrétien are, with the *Conte del Graal*, of exceptional interest as bearing a close relationship to three Welsh prose romances included

in *The Red Book of Hergest*, and translated by Lady Charlotte Guest. The Welsh analogue of the *Conte del Graal* is the so-called 'mabinogi' of *Peredur, son of Evrawc*; while the Welsh tales called *Geraint, son of Erbin*, and *The Lady of the Fountain* resemble, in their main features, Chrétien's two poems entitled *Erec* and *Le chevalier au lion*. The Welsh romances, as we have them, are undoubtedly of later date than Chrétien's poems, and bear such clear traces of Norman-French influence as to have led many critics to deny altogether their Celtic origin. But they are neither translations, nor adaptations of Chrétien's works.[97] The only explanation that meets all the facts is that the French poems and the Welsh tales follow an older and a simpler Celtic form of the stories embodied in them, which was accessible both to Chrétien and the Welsh writers.

Although by no means the best, the *Chevalier de la Charrette* is perhaps the most interesting of Chrétien's extant works, for the reason that we obtain in it our first literary introduction to the story of Lancelot of the Lake. It treats, indeed, of only an episode in that famous knight's career, but that episode reveals him to us as the lover of Arthur's queen, and so marks an important stage in the evolution of Arthurian romance. In Chrétien's poem, Guinevere is abducted by Meleaguant,[98] the son of the king of a land whence no man returns. Her rescue is accomplished by Lancelot, who, in order to achieve his object, has to ride in a cart used as a tumbril to convey prisoners to execution; hence the name given to him and to the poem, 'The Knight of the Cart.' Welsh tradition knows nothing whatever of the loves of Lancelot and Guinevere, although, as we have seen, Guinevere did come to have in Welsh folk-lore a doubtful reputation that somewhat debased her name. It is in

his Lancelot poem alone that Chrétien suggests that Guinevere was anything but a gracious and loving wife. Whence, then, did he derive the story of her illicit relations with Lancelot? Some see in it the influence of the Tristram legend, in which passionate love breaks every bond. Others attribute the invention of Lancelot as Guinevere's lover to the personal suggestion of Marie of Champagne, who, according to Chrétien's own account, furnished him with the material for his poem. Whatever may be the truth about its origin, the story of Lancelot is an obvious, indeed the most signal, example of the way in which the Arthurian legends were adapted to suit the conceptions of chivalry. We have in it a capital instance of what was implied in the cult of "courtly love," and hence it is not surprising that among mediæval tales women, as Chaucer informs us, held "in ful gret reverence the boke of Lancelot de Lake."[99] That book was not Chrétien's poem, but, much more probably, the prose romance of *Lancelot*, usually assigned to Walter Map. The same prose story, or one of its adaptations, was presumably the book in which Paolo and Francesca read, as related by Dante in the Fifth Canto of his *Inferno*.

The prose *Lancelot* is a vast compilation embracing what is really a series of romances, including a version of the Grail story, and is attributed, on good MS. authority, to the courtier Walter Map. If he be indeed its author, he is entitled to as high a pedestal in the Arthurian House of Fame as either Geoffrey or Chrétien. The difficulty of accepting his authorship of the work is not so much that he was a very active public man, as that the one book of which he is the indubitable author, the *De Nugis Curialium*,—a sort of commonplace book in which contemporary history finds a place side by side with fairy tales, and much

other odd lore,—does not afford the slightest trace of interest in Arthurian story. Map's name was used to give a literary passport to the notorious Goliardic poems gathered from many cryptic sources in the thirteenth century, and it may very well be that the ascription to him of so wholly laudable a work as the *Lancelot* was dictated by some too modest scribe's desire for high credentials.

The other great love-story of Arthurian romance, that of Tristram and Iseult, is the most poetical and the most poignant in tragic interest of all the tales that came to be included in "the matter of Britain." The story of Lancelot, with all its charm and pathos, betrays only too obviously its origin in the artificial conventions of "courtly love." The story of Tristram, on the other hand, is one of sheer, over-mastering, natural passion,—the first really great story of passionate romantic love in modern literature. It is also, in its scene, its characters, its colouring, a distinctively Celtic tale. Tristram[100] is known to early Welsh tradition under the name of Drystan, the son of Tallwch, as a purely mythical hero; so also is Mark, or March ab Meirchion, who, in the first literary versions of the story, appears as King of Cornwall. The "proud, first Iseult, Cornwall's queen,"

> "She who, as they voyaged, quaff'd
> With Tristram that spiced magic draught,"

came from Ireland; while the other Iseult,

> "the patient flower,
> Who possess'd his darker hour,
> Iseult of the Snow-White hand,"[101]

had her home in Brittany. The entire atmosphere of the story is that of the western Celtic seaboard, where lay the mystic land of Lyonesse, then

"unswallowed of the tides," and

> "the wind-hollowed heights and gusty bays
> Of sheer Tintagel, fair with famous
> days."[102]

Whence the French romancers derived the story it is impossible to say; but it is probable that it existed in the form of scattered popular lays long before the middle of the twelfth century. Fragments of two *Tristan* poems by the Anglo-Normans, Béroul and Thomas, otherwise known as Thomas de Bretagne, have come down to us.[103] These two poems were the foundations, respectively, of the German metrical versions of the story by Eilhart von Oberge and Gottfried von Strassburg.

The most intricate, though not the least fascinating, problem connected with the Arthurian legends is that of accounting for the origin, and for the attachment to the original Arthurian stock, of the story of the Grail and its quest. Here, at any rate, we have presented to us, in Tennyson's words, "Soul at war with Sense"; and it is clear enough that the gradual manipulation of the Grail stories marks a deliberate effort by ecclesiastical writers to neutralise the influence of the dangerous ideals of chivalry upon Arthurian romance. Celibacy had to be shown to be compatible with true knighthood; there was no reason why a knight-errant should make love, and, all too often, illicit love, the sole motive of his quest for adventure. So, we have ultimately created for us the character of Galahad, who

> "never felt the kiss of love
> Nor maiden's hand in his,"

and who alone, by virtue of his purity, is allowed to "find the Holy Grail." The earlier forms of the Grail

legend know nothing of Galahad, nor is there any reason for supposing that they had any religious significance. Gawain, apparently,—he who, in his progress through the romances, degenerates so much as to be finally described as "light in life and light in death,"[104]—was the original hero of the Grail quest. It is Perceval, however, who is the central figure of the best-known versions of the story—as, for example, the *Conte del Graal*, the Welsh *Peredur*, and Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. But Perceval was not immaculate, and so had to be superseded by one who "exemplified, in a yet more uncompromising, yet more inhuman, spirit, the ideal of militant asceticism,"[105]—the virginal and youngest knight of the Round Table, Galahad. And, in order to establish Galahad's right to a place in the Arthurian fellowship, he is introduced as the son of Lancelot. Here is an artistic touch deserving much more appreciation than it has yet generally received. The sin of Lancelot is largely expiated by the unsullied purity of his son. Truly, the "militant ascetics" knew their romantic business as well as the best of the secular scribes.[106]

It is unnecessary, here, to outline the various ramifications of the Grail legend, or to summarise the conflicting theories advanced as to its origin and meaning. It comes to be connected with Arthur's court mainly through the knightly Perceval, who, though ultimately deposed as the Grail hero by Galahad, remains to the end the real protagonist of the story. The Grail romances are usually divided into two classes,—one dealing with the "Quest" proper, and the other with the "Early History" of the Holy Grail. In the "Quest" group of stories—three of which have been named above—the main interest lies in the personality of Perceval, and in his

adventures in search of certain talismans, which include a sword, a bleeding lance and a "grail," the latter, in Chrétien's poem, a magic vessel, in Wolfram's, a stone. The "Early History" group—of which the chief representatives are the *Joseph of Arimathea* and the *Merlin* of Robert de Borron, and the *Quête del St Graal* attributed to Map,—dwell chiefly upon the origin and nature of these talismans. The Grail legends, as given in these and other romances, and so far as they can be put into a coherent whole, are undoubtedly a compound of remote mythical and pagan elements, probably Celtic,[107] and of later accretions due to monastic writers deliberately bent upon edification. A flagrant example of the way in which the legends were turned to ecclesiastical uses is furnished by the identification of the Grail with the cup of the Last Supper, which Pilate gave to Joseph of Arimathea, and in which Joseph treasured the blood that flowed from the Saviour's wounds on the Cross. Joseph brought this cup to Britain, and thus the Grail came to be connected with the mythical story which attributed to Joseph the first evangelisation of these islands.

It has been said that Gawain was, in all probability, the original hero of the Grail quest.[108] Whatever the truth may be about that matter, there can be no doubt that Gawain is the most famous of all the knights grouped around Arthur in pre-romantic tradition. He figures largely in the Welsh Triads and in the *Mabinogion* under the name of Gwalchmei, and in the story of Arthur's wars as told by Geoffrey he is the king's most powerful lieutenant. Originally a mythical hero, he was probably the centre of a cycle of traditional stories as old as, if not older than, anything fabled or sung of Arthur.[109] No other

knight of the Arthurian court is the hero of so many episodic romances and poems, while there is no more prominent figure in Arthurian literature generally. No other knight, however, is subjected to such churlish treatment at the hands of the romancers as he. In the earlier stages of Arthurian story—in the *Mabinogion*, especially,—Gawain appears as the very flower of chivalrous knighthood, no less courteous and gracious than brave. His degradation is due largely to the later manipulators of the Grail legends, who could not brook the importance attached to so worldly a character. Malory and Tennyson follow in their footsteps, until for modern readers Gawain is branded with the words put into the mouth of Bedivere in *The Passing of Arthur*,—of Bedivere, who, as one of Gawain's oldest associates in Arthur's service, ought to have been spared the indignity of having attributed to him so mean an aspersion upon a comrade in arms:

> "Light was Gawain in life, and light in death
> Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man."

Gawain, however, was the favourite Arthurian hero in England up to Malory's time,[110] and the finest contribution to English Arthurian romance in the Middle Ages,—*Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight*,—dealing, apparently, with an incident borrowed from the earlier traditions about Gawain, does full justice to him as a knight *sans peur et sans reproche*.

The most marvellous feature of Geoffrey of Monmouth's story of Arthur is the part played by the wizard Merlin in the events that led to Arthur's birth. It is in Geoffrey's *History* that we get, so far as is known, the first definite association of Merlin with the Arthurian legends. In subsequent romance Merlin stands in the first file of Arthurian characters, and his

name is given to a group of romances as important as any of those dealing with the adventures of the great knights mentioned in the last few pages. In Welsh tradition Merlin, or Myrddin, was famous as both a bard and a magician, but the poetical compositions which bear his name may safely be taken as spurious. Geoffrey exalts him as a prophet as well, and the 'Prophecies of Merlin' contributed largely to the renown of the *History of the Kings of Britain*. Geoffrey's authorship is sometimes claimed for a Latin poem called the *Vita Merlini*, and composed about 1148, which tells much about the enchanter that is not always easy to reconcile with the account of him given in the *History*. The chief French romantic works dealing with the Merlin legend are a fragmentary poem, dating from the end of the twelfth century, and supposed to be by Robert de Borron, and the prose romance of *Merlin*, which exists in two forms known as the "ordinary" *Merlin* and the *Suite de Merlin*, of the latter of which Malory's first four books are an abridgment. In these romances we first read of the enchanter's own enchantment, how he was, in Malory's words, "assotted and doted" on a "damosel of the lake,"—Ninien, or Nimue, a name that in the latest forms of the story comes to be Vivien. In these early French versions of the Merlin legend, also, appears the first suggestion that Modred was Arthur's son. When the wife of King Lot,—the daughter of Igerne by her first husband,—came to King Arthur's court soon after his coronation, Arthur fell in love with her, with the result that Modred was born. Modred's rebellion, and the tragic end of Arthur himself, were thus represented as a just retribution for the king's misconduct.

For English readers Malory's *Morte Darthur* is the

book in which the various strands of romantic matter reviewed in this chapter are woven into a connected, though not always a coherently artistic, texture. From a literary point of view, the relative values of the various constituents of 'The French book' whence Malory derived most of his material are of little consequence. What really matter are the style, the tone, the atmosphere of his own book; and these are charged to the full with the subtle magic of the enchanted land in which his borrowed characters live and move. It is here that we reap the harvest of mediæval romance, and catch, in the beautifully quaint style of the narrative, something of the fresh odour and mellow colouring of the ripened corn. Of equally small importance with the question of the precise identification and the value of his sources is that of Malory's general motive, or plan. It may, indeed, be possible to find in the book an epic in which "may be traced a thread of destiny and providence, leading either to a happy triumph over circumstance, or to a tragic doom."[111] But it is for no such reason that the *Morte Darthur* is valued by the modern reader. We read Malory now both for "his style and his love,"—his love of "King Arthur and his noble knights of the Round Table," attested so signally by his painful zeal in garnering, and sifting, such a bewildering crop, both rich and rank, of manuscript material. His "style" is sufficiently near to the English of to-day, but at the same time retains so much in both vocabulary and grammar which the invention of printing forced the language to reject, as to be an almost ideal medium for the presentment to modern English readers of what was storied in the verse and prose of the age of high romance. Space does not allow of our giving any extended specimens of it here; but the reader may be

referred, first, to a passage where Malory appropriately embroiders his narrative by expatiating upon "How true love is likened to summer,"[112] and, secondly, to the noble and pathetic chapter which tells of the passing of Arthur.[113] Incidental felicities of style could be quoted from almost every page of his book. Bedivere, when returning from his pretended attempt to "fling Excalibur," tells Arthur that he saw "nothing but the waters wap and the waves wan." Tristan, in a general fight, "fared among those knights like a greyhound among the conies"; while, of another fight we read that "the best of us all had been full cold at the heart-root had not Sir Launcelot been better than we." What, again, could be in better chime with its theme than this sentence from the account of Gawain's fight with Launcelot —"then Sir Gawaine deliberately avoided his horse, and put his shield afore him, and eagerly drew his sword, and bad Sir Launcelot, Alight, traitor knight, for if this mare's son hath failed me, wit thou well a king's son and a queen's son shall not fail thee"? Or, what more pathetic than Guinevere's words when Lancelot found her in the nunnery at Almesbury —"Sir Launcelot, wit thou well I am set in such a plight to get my soul's health; and yet I trust, through God's grace, that after my death to have a sight of the blessed face of Christ, and at doomsday to sit on his right side, for as sinful as ever I was are saints in heaven"? But the entire work is studded with such gems, and he who would know and revel in the richest treasures of Arthurian romance should devote his days and his nights to the reading of what is ingenuously, and truly, styled in its epilogue, "this noble and joyous book."[114]

CHAPTER V
ARTHUR IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

ENGLISH Arthurian romance before Malory, with the conspicuous exception of *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight*—an alliterative poem composed in the fourteenth century by an unknown author to whom three other poems, *The Pearl*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience*, are ascribed,—possesses little literary charm or distinction. The wearisome monotony and the generally jejune character of the common metrical romances of his day, with their stereotyped phraseology and futile rhymes, had probably as much to do as anything with Chaucer's attitude towards the newer romantic matters. His *Tale of Sir Thopas* is so openly contemptuous a burlesque of the methods of the romantic rhymers of the time that we may safely assume that the poet had little more respect for their themes.

> "Into his sadel he clamb anon,
> And priketh over stile and stoon
> An Elf-queene for tespye;
> Til he so longe hadde riden and goon
> That he foond in a pryvë woon
> The contree of Fairye," etc.

It was scarcely possible for one who could write so irreverently as this of Elfland and its denizens to attune himself to the mood required for grave poetical treatment of Arthurian story. An Arthurian setting of a sort is indeed given to *The Wife of Bath's Tale*; but the facetious tone of the opening lines only

too plainly reveals Chaucer's sense of the unreality of it all.

"In tholdë dayes of the Kyng Arthour,"

he writes,

"Al was this land fulfild of faërie.
The elf-queene with hir joly compaignye
Danced ful ofte in many a grenë mede."

But, he adds, there are no fairies now; "lymytours and other holy freres" have effectually driven them away.

"For ther as wont to walken was an elf,
Ther walketh now the lymytour hymself."

With the elves had gone the knights-errant, and Chaucer's poetical genius was not of the kind to restore either to their original pride of place in imaginative literature.

It was Malory who gave new life to the Arthurian legends, and to him, more than to any other writer, is due the fascination which Arthurian story has had for so many modern English poets. Malory's book, as we know from Ascham's testimony, was exceedingly popular in the Elizabethan age; but there were other causes of the interest then so widely felt in ancient British legends. Throughout the sixteenth century chroniclers were busy in recording, and antiquaries in investigating, the early annals of Britain; and, in the reign of Elizabeth herself, the heightened patriotic feeling of the day was a potent stimulus to all who sought to discover material for, and to reconstruct from it, the history of their country. Hence Geoffrey of Monmouth's Latin chronicle in its first printed forms comes to be one of the most eagerly studied books of the time. And it is, perhaps,

not fanciful to find in the new interest aroused in the annals and legends of early Britain the influence of the reigning Tudor dynasty. On what other grounds are we to account, for example, for Spenser going out of his way to remind Elizabeth that she can boast of a genuine British ancestry, and that among her forebears is no less a person than the great King Arthur himself?

> "Thy name, O soveraine Queene, thy realme and race
> From this renowned Prince derived arre,
> Who mightily upheld that royall mace
> Which now thou bear'st, to thee descended farre
> From mighty kings and conquerours in warre,
> Thy fathers and great Grandfathers of old,
> Whose noble deeds above the Northern starre
> Immortall fame for ever hath enrold;
> As in that old man's booke they were in order told."

Here is a compliment of which Geoffrey, could he have foreseen it, would have been as proud as of his inclusion in Chaucer's 'Hous of Fame.' To have been singled out for honour as one "besy for to bere up Troy" was much; it was more to be quoted, by a poet no less illustrious, as an authority for the Arthurian descent of the greatest of British queens. The glorification of the House of Tudor, and of Elizabeth's Welsh descent, is obvious enough in the lines in *The Faerie Queene* which refer to the "sparke of fire" that shall

> "Bee freshly kindled in the fruitfull Ile
> Of Mona, where it lurked in exile:
> Which shall breake forth into bright burning

flame
And reach into the house that bears the stile
Of roiall majesty and soveraine name:
So shall the Briton blood their crowne agayn
reclame.

Thenceforth eternal union shall be made
Betweene the nations different afore."[115]

In the second book of *The Faerie Queene* Spenser, following Geoffrey's "auncient booke hight Briton moniments," gives a versified

"chronicle of Briton kings
From Brute to Uther's rayne,"

thus further emphasising the newly-discovered importance of early British history. The same patriotic fervour accounts for the production of such poems as William Warner's *Albion's England* and Michael Drayton's *Polyolbion*. Warner is eminently practical, and, in his reproduction of Geoffrey's Arthurian narrative, leaves out its more romantic incidents. Arthur's

"Scottish, Irish, Almaine, French and Saxone
battelles got
Yeeld fame sufficient: these seeme true, the
reste I credite not."

Drayton is inclined to trust Geoffrey more implicitly, and even takes up the cudgels on his behalf against the critics who were then seeking to disparage him. The "adversary says," writes Drayton, that "Geoffrey Monmouth first our Brutus did devise," whereas the fact is that

"pregnantly we prove, ere that
historian's days,

A thousand-ling'ring years, our prophets
clearly sung
The Britain-founding Brute."[116]

Drayton's poem, so largely topographical as it is in its character, affords him many opportunities of making effective use of Arthurian traditions. When he comes, for example, to the river Camel, he remembers that Arthur was born as well as slain in that tract of western country,

"As though no other place on Britain's
spacious earth
Were worthy of his end, but where he had
his birth."[117]

Again, referring to the songs of the ancient Britons, he tells us—much in Geoffrey's manner—of Caerleon with

"her temples and her groves,
Her palaces and walls, baths, theatres, and
stoves."

With all his garrulous "asides" and prosaic disquisitions, Drayton's *Polyolbion* is a well-intentioned poem, and its sympathetic treatment of the legends entitles it to an honoured place in the Arthurian library. Like Caxton, Drayton bewails the indifference of British poets to the wealth of native tradition which lay ready for their use, and regrets that a British Homer had not been found to rise to "the height of its great argument";

"For some abundant brain, oh, there had been
a story,
Beyond the blind man's might to have
enhanced our glory."

Although Elizabethan poets, from patriotic and

courtly motives, were so much interested in the early British legends as presented to them by the English chroniclers of their time, it is somewhat strange that these legends, and Arthurian story in particular, did not appeal strongly to the imagination of the playwrights of our greatest dramatic period. The only Arthurian drama of any consequence written during the Elizabethan period was *The Misfortunes of Arthur* by Thomas Hughes, which was acted before the Queen in February 1588; and the plot of that play is derived, in the main, not from Malory, but from Geoffrey. In one important detail, however, Hughes departs from Geoffrey's narrative, and, like many of the later romancers, represents Modred as Arthur's son; and he is in touch with Malory in making the tragedy of Arthur's doom the nemesis that comes upon him for his sin. The drama, as a whole, is a standard example of the Senecan type of tragedy, so much in vogue at the time of its production, and action and characterisation are altogether subordinated in it to narration. Some life, however, is given to the characters of the two protagonists, Arthur and Modred; and the introduction of the ghost of Gorlois at the beginning and at the end of the play adds not a little to its general dramatic effect. In his final speech the Ghost, exulting over the ruin of the sinful house of Uther, is made to pay an adroit compliment to Queen Elizabeth,

> "That virtuous Virgo, born for Britain's bliss,
> That peerless branch of Brute,"

and gives utterance to the hope that she

> "Shall of all wars compound eternal peace."

We are still without a great English drama based upon a theme drawn from Arthurian story; but what the Elizabethan dramatists, and most of their

successors, rejected as either too unreal or too intractable for their purposes, continued even down to the Victorian age to haunt and challenge the imagination of the poets.

> "The mightiest chiefs of British song
> Scorn'd not such legends to prolong"[118];

and yet we possess no great Arthurian epic in English verse any more than a drama. Milton and Dryden both cherished the ambition of writing one, but both, in different ways, found the pressure of circumstances too strong for the accomplishment of their design. When Milton, after the turmoil of the Civil Wars and his entanglement in public controversy, once more turned his attention to poetry, he had need of higher argument for his long-projected 'heroic poem' than

> "to dissect
> With long and tedious havoc fabl'd knights
> In battles feign'd."[119]

Arthurian memories, however, lingered with him to the last, for even in *Paradise Regained* he cannot help referring to what once charmed him in stories

> "Of fairy damsels met in forest wide
> By knights of Logres, or of Lyones,
> Lancelot, or Pelleas, or Pellenore."

Dryden, again, who had aspired to write an Arthuriad, as he tells us, "for the honour of his native country," found himself obliged to turn to more immediately profitable forms of literature,—"being encouraged only with fair words by Charles II., my little salary ill-paid, and no prospect of a future subsistence."[120] But it is doubtful whether he was quite the kind of poet who, in Scott's words, could

"in immortal strain
Have raised the Table Round again,
But that a ribald King and Court
Bade him toil on to make them sport."

Scott's assumption, at any rate, is scarcely justified by the character of the "dramatic opera" called *King Arthur, or the British Worthy*, which Dryden composed shortly before Charles II.'s death. This "opera" was written with a courtly, if not exactly a patriotic, motive; it was meant to be a glorification of King Charles's public policy, but, unfortunately, Charles died before any performance of it could be given. It was produced on the stage, ultimately, in 1691, to music by Purcell; but, at that time, William and Mary were the reigning sovereigns, so that the original point of the play was lost, and it had to be "improved" to suit the changed conditions of the day. Thus, what Scott calls an "ingenious political drama" was turned into "a mere fairy-tale" without "any meaning beyond extravagant adventure."[121] The story of Arthur, also, is in many of its main features turned in this play into something very different from its familiar forms up to Dryden's time. Several new characters are introduced into it, the most notable being a blind girl, Emmeline,—a creature of Dryden's own invention,—who, in defiance of all tradition and of Guinevere's well-attested rights, becomes the wife of "the British Worthy."

The Restoration age, despite its literary pre-occupation with 'heroic' plays and 'heroic' poetry, was unpropitious for the production of a romantic epic worthy of the Arthurian, or any other similar theme. A brave attempt, however, to achieve the impossible was made by "the City Bard or Knight

Physician,"[122] Sir Richard Blackmore, who in 1695 published *Prince Arthur, an Heroick Poem in Ten Books*, and followed it up in 1697 with another 'epic,' in twelve books, called *King Arthur*. These ponderous poems, written in heroic couplets, are really political allegories, in which Arthur stands for the Prince of Orange, and his Saxon enemy, Octa, for James the Second. But they aim at being 'epics' as well. Supernatural 'machinery,' evidently suggested in many of its details by *Paradise Lost*, is introduced, and just as the gods used to intervene in the struggles of the epic heroes of antiquity, so angels like Uriel and Raphael watch over the fortunes of Arthur. Indeed, the whole heavenly host befriends him, while Lucifer and the rebel angels are the patrons of his foes. Blackmore, whatever else may be said on his behalf, can claim to be at least faithful to the tradition which represents Arthur as "the chief and best of the three Christian kings," for he makes him the supreme champion of Christendom in his day:—

> "This great deliverer shall Europa save,
> Which haughty monarchs labour to enslave;
> Then shall Religion rear her starry head,
> And light divine through all the nations spread."[123]

But, alas, who now reads Blackmore? The world generally is quite content not to know him, and ready to echo Dryden's pious wish—"peace be to the *Manes* of his Arthurs."

Blackmore, grotesque and even ludicrous though his methods are of allegorising the Arthurian stories, could, of course, claim high poetical sanction for this particular use of them. Spenser had, long before, "laboured to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was

king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall virtues, as Aristotle hath devised,"[124] and had also, though somewhat obscurely, sought to "shadow forth" in him "a modern gentleman" of the Elizabethan court,—the Earl of Leicester. There is not much to choose between Leicester and William of Orange as "modern" types of Arthur, but Spenser has, at least, succeeded in giving a romantic glamour to his poem which helps us to forget its allegorical intent and takes us back to the legendary Arthur's native "land of faerie." So, in *The Faerie Queene*, Arthur appears in a rôle somewhat similar to that which he plays in the romances as the helper and deliverer of sorely-beset knights; and what the poet tells us about his person, his prowess, and his accoutrements is, in spirit though not always in the letter, quite in accord with romantic tradition. Delivered at birth to a faery knight, "to be upbrought in gentle thewes and martiall might," he was put under the tutelage of Timon,[125]

> "Old Timon, who in youthly yeares had beene
> In warlike feates th' expertest man alive,"

and who dwelt

> "Under the foot of Rauran mossy hore,"

—the Merionethshire mountain, Yr Aran, where the river Dee has its source. "Thither," so Prince Arthur's tale of his own history runs,—[126]

> "Thither the great magician Merlin came,
> As was his use, oft-times to visit me;
> For he had charge my discipline to frame
> And Tutors nouriture to oversee."

It was Merlin

"which whylome did excell
All living wightes in might of magick spell,"

who forged for Arthur his shield and sword and armour. Spenser, however, departs from the romancers in calling Arthur's sword "Morddure,"[127] and in stating, what is nowhere told of Excalibur, that it could not be

"forst his rightful owner to offend."

Nor do we hear in the romances of such marvellous details about the prince's shield as those which Spenser gives; it was made of "diamond perfect, pure and cleene," and when Arthur chose to uncover it,

"Men into stones therewith he could
transmew,
And stones to dust, and dust to nought at all;
And when him list the prouder lookes
subdew,
He would them gazing blind, or turne to
other hew."[128]

Spenser, again, finds none of the knights of the Round Table suitable for the main purposes of his allegory—the only prominent one who is brought into the poem is Tristram, and he is introduced only as quite a subordinate character. As the poet expressly tells us in his prefatory letter that his purpose is to "pourtraict" Arthur "before he was king," *The Faerie Queene*, even had it been completed, could hardly have contained any reference to the later, and more especially the tragic, features of Arthurian story. Neither did Spenser's general design admit of any treatment of them. There could be no Guinevere in his poem, as Arthur was destined at the end to marry Gloriana, the Fairy Queen, in whom "I mean Glory in my generall

intention, but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and glorious person of our soveraine the Queene, and her kingdom in Faery land." There is indeed some excuse even for Blackmore's "particular intentions" in his egregious epics when we remember that a really great poet was capable of thus imagining Arthur, even in allegory, as the husband of Queen Elizabeth.

The uses to which Spenser and Blackmore, each in his own way, put the Arthurian legends are not, after all, so dissimilar to those which underlie the most popular, and on the whole the most successful, poetical treatment of them in the nineteenth century.[129] *The Idylls of the King* have a palpably symbolical, not to say an allegorical, meaning, and "a message for the times." It may be that in no other way could any new life be infused into stories of which Swinburne says that "their day is done,"—

> "Their records written of the winds, in foam
> Fly down the wind, and darkness takes them home."[130]

At any rate, Tennyson frankly confesses that what he presents in his 'Idylls' is a

> "tale
> New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul";

and the new element in it is a didactic purpose suited to the moral and sentimental temper of the Victorian era, and embodying what a severe critic calls "the ethics of the rectory parlour."[131] Tennyson himself is responsible for revealing the "particular intention" which equates the Arthur of the 'Idylls' with the Prince Consort; for he dedicates the poems to his memory,

> "since he held them dear,
> Perchance as finding there unconsciously
> Some image of himself."

It is hardly likely, however, that Tennyson, when he first thought of the Arthurian stories as a poetic theme, had any very definite idea of putting them into the form of an allegory such as most of his interpreters now discover in them; but that he, from the first, intended a "modern meaning" is plain from the lines appended to the *Morte D'Arthur* at the time of its original publication,—

> "To me, methought, who waited in a crowd,
> There came a bark that, blowing forward,
> bore
> King Arthur, like a modern gentleman
> Of stateliest port; and all the people cried
> 'Arthur is come again: he cannot die.'"

That the 'Idylls,' when finally completed and put into their present order, had "an allegorical or perhaps a parabolic drift," in them, is certain, for the words quoted are Tennyson's own.[132] Tennyson, however, complains that critics had "taken his hobby and ridden it too hard, and have explained some things too allegorically." "The general drift of the 'Idylls,'" he continues, "is clear enough. 'The whole ... is the dream of man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin. Birth is a mystery and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the tableland of life.'" Modern though this "drift" may be, it is perennial and universal enough in its appeal to save the 'Idylls'—notwithstanding the references to the "modern gentleman" and the Prince Consort—from being a merely Victorian poem, or series of poems. They do not, together, constitute an Arthuriad: they are not meant to represent "the epic, some twelve books"

with “faint Homeric echoes” which Tennyson may have been meditating in his earlier years when he published his *Morte D’Arthur*. “He produced no epic, only a series of epic idyllia. He had a spiritual conception, ‘an allegory in the distance,’ an allegory not to be insisted upon, though its presence was to be felt. No longer, as in youth, did Tennyson intend Merlin to symbolise ‘the sceptical understanding,’ or poor Guinevere to stand for the Blessed Reformation, or the Table Round for Liberal Institutions. Mercifully Tennyson never actually allegorised Arthur in that fashion.”[133]

Tennyson’s King Arthur is certainly modern enough in sentiment and speech, but the position which he holds in the ‘Idylls’ is, in many ways, in harmony with that which he occupies in history and romantic legend. Tennyson himself warns his readers that they must not expect to find in the ‘Idylls’

> “that gray king whose name, a ghost,
> Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,
> And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still; or him
> Of Geoffrey’s book, or him of Malleor’s.”

Rather they ought to discern in him

> “Ideal manhood closed in real man.”

All the same, Tennyson’s pre-occupation with “ideal manhood” did not prevent him from bestowing painful labour upon knowing the “real man,” so far as the records, historical and romantic, reveal him; and one of the outstanding features of *The Idylls of the King* is their remarkable fidelity to the details of Arthurian story as given in its time-honoured literary sources. “Geoffrey’s book,” and “Malleor’s,” had been

carefully studied by the poet, and he had even been at pains to garner all he could from early Welsh poetry and from the *Mabinogion*, as presented in Lady Charlotte Guest's charming translation. While Malory is their main source, the 'Idylls' contain much that shows how familiar Tennyson was with Arthurian lore generally in its most primitive forms. The story of Geraint, for example, as told by him, follows closely the Welsh version of it given by Lady Charlotte Guest.[134] Again, the description of Britain in the opening lines of *The Coming of Arthur* as a country where each "petty king" was ever waging war upon some other, and where the children "grew up to wolf-like men, worse than the wolves," until

> "King Leodogran
> Groan'd for the Roman legions here again,"

recalls vividly the bitter lamentations of Gildas over the degeneracy of his countrymen. The account which Lancelot gives of Arthur's wars in *Lancelot and Elaine* is an expansion of the record in Nennius of the twelve Arthurian battles. And Tennyson's general conception of Arthur as the flower of kings who

> "Drew all the petty princedoms under him,"

and "made a realm" in Britain, is far more in keeping with that of the early chroniclers than with the picture given of him in the later romances.

But it is not in such incidental features alone that the 'Idylls' are true to the older Arthurian tradition. Modern in their sentiment and ethics though they may be, Tennyson's main purpose in them of "shadowing Sense at war with Soul" is not altogether unjustified by the general literary history of the legends. Malory, at any rate, had some such purpose, for Caxton assures us that the *Morte Darthur* was

"written for our doctrine, and for to beware that we fall not to vice nor sin, but to exercise and follow virtue." "In Malory's compilation, and in later mediæval romance, the fate of Arthur means the fate of the chivalrous ideal, whose irreconcilable elements were incorporated in him. In the romantic historians the fate of Arthur is the fate of the Christian Britons in conflict with heathenism from without and treason from within. Even in the old myths, his fate, if we may trust Professor Rhys, is the fate of the culture-hero combined with Father Sky, in conflict with the powers of Darkness and the Nether-world. It was by a true inspiration that Tennyson was drawn to the old legends, and reading into them his secret found it to be their own. Accordingly, this identity of feeling with his predecessors kept Tennyson on the track of the story.... Thus the 'Idylls' are both truer to the authorities and nearer our own feelings than any other of the adaptations of Arthurian story. Though the adventures are now regarded from a modern point of view, this point of view is in the same spiritual watch-tower from which the framers of the legend looked: but it is the platform at the top, not a loop-hole on the winding stair."[135]

After all, however much the 'Idylls' may be cavilled at on the score of their modern sentiment and occasional homiletic strain, their general setting and atmosphere are genuinely romantic and in thorough keeping with the far-off things of which they sing. Tennyson is true enough to his sources in his descriptions of scenery and in his entire survey of the traditional Arthurian country. "It is no land dwelt in by bold bad men we see, when Arthur rides through the mountains and finds the diamonds; when Geraint and Enid go through the green gloom of the wood;

when Galahad rides over the black swamp, leaping from bridge to bridge till he sail to the spiritual city; when Lancelot drives through the storm to the enchanted towers of Carbonek seven days across the sea."[136] In none of the 'Idylls' do we perhaps breathe more of the atmosphere of pure romance than in the first and the last. Mystery and magic surround both the coming and the passing of the King;

"From the great deep to the great deep he goes."

This "weird rhyme" of Merlin's comes into Bedivere's memory as he sees the barge with the three dark Queens bearing Arthur away into the distance

"till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn."

And the last scene closes with the faithful Bedivere left wondering whether Arthur will "come again," and whether, "if he come no more," the three Queens who bore him away be "friends of Arthur, who should help him at his need?" So, Tennyson, like Malory and the romancers, leaves Arthur's "return" an open question; but Bedivere goes away comforted by what seemed an assurance that "all was well" with Arthur whither he had gone.

"Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars."

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Note A, p. 9.—The Grail and the Round Table, as originally drawn into Arthurian story, were in all probability survivals of features in old Celtic nature-worship.

Note B, p. 26.—Cavall, it may be noted, is referred to in the Welsh romance *Geraint, Son of Erbin*, as taking part in a stag-hunt under the leadership of Arthur, and is there called "Arthur's darling dog" (*annwylgi Arthur*).

Note C, p. 94.—Argante—afterwards known as Morgain, or Morgan, *la fée* or *le fay*—is first heard of, in literature, in the poem called *Vita Merlini*, commonly dated 1148 and ascribed to Geoffrey of Monmouth (see p. 112). She there appears as a maiden, possessed of magic powers, who heals Arthur's wounds after the battle of Camlan. Although she is usually spoken of by the romancers as being Arthur's sister, she is also represented as one who hates, and is involved in certain malign schemes against, him. Her place in Arthurian story is one of the many points at which the records and popular legends of "the British King" touch the borders of fairy-land. The fairy element in Arthurian romance is a fascinating, albeit intricate, subject of study, but the scope and purpose of this little book allow only the briefest references to it. Those who are interested in the subject will find a very full, and suggestive, treatment of it in *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance*, by Lucy A. Paton (Radcliffe

College Monographs, Boston, U.S.A., 1903).

Note D, p. 101.—Chrétien himself, in the opening lines of *Cligés*, states that he had written of "*le roi Marc et Iseut la blonde*."

Note E, p. 105.—Tristram, or Tristan, is the most accomplished of all the heroes who are associated with Arthur. In the romances he is pre-eminent as hunter, horseman, linguist, musician, harp-player. He is also a liar of infinite resource.

Note F, p. 115.—Malory, it should be said, is indebted for some of his most picturesque touches in his account of the passing of Arthur and of other incidents to an unknown English poet who, probably in the fourteenth century, composed a metrical *Le Morte Arthure*. As the first edition of the present book has been accused of having done "grave injustice to our vernacular Arthurian literature before Malory" through failure to recognise the merits of "the unknown but most true poet whose rightful laurels have so long been worn by the prose writer," an extract from the poem may be given in order to enable the reader to judge to which of the two, from a purely literary point of view, the "rightful laurels" ought to belong. Here is the poet's account of the flinging of Excalibur:—

"The knyght was bothe hende and free;
To save that swerd he was fulle glad,
And thought, whethyr it better bee
Yif neuyr man it after had;
An I it caste in to the see,
Off mold was neuyr man so mad.
The swerd he hyd undyr a tree,
And sayd, 'syr, I ded as ye me bad.'
'What saw thow there?' than sayd the kynge,

‘Telle me now, yiff thow can;’
‘Sertes, syr,’ he said, ‘nothynge
But watres depe, and waives wanne,’
‘A, now thou haste broke my byddynge!
Why hast thou do so, thow false man?
Another bode thou muste me brynge,’” etc.

Note G, p. 130.—It would be impossible, within the limits of such a book as this, to pass in review all the English Arthurian literature of the nineteenth century. William Morris’s *Defence of Guinevere*, *King Arthur’s Tomb*, and other Arthurian poems doubtless breathe much more of the primitive romantic spirit of the legends than Tennyson’s *Idylls*, but they are but slight experiments in comparison with Tennyson’s elaborate design. Then there are other works like Heber’s *Morte Arthur*, Lytton’s *King Arthur*, and Hawker of Morwenstow’s *Quest of the Sangreal*, which claim a place in any full survey of modern Arthurian literature, but are hardly of sufficient importance to have required notice in so brief a chapter as the last had, necessarily, to be.

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FOOTNOTES:

[1] 'The Songs of the Graves,' in the twelfth century *Black Book of Carmarthen*. "A grave there is for March (or Mark),"—so the lines run,—"a grave for Gwythur, a grave for Gwgawn of the Ruddy Sword; a mystery is the grave of Arthur": or, as Sir John Rhys translates, "not wise the thought—a grave for Arthur."

[2] William of Malmesbury (*Gesta Reg. Angl.*, Bk. III.), referring to the discovery in Wales of the grave of Gawain, Arthur's nephew, speaks of the grave of Arthur himself as being unknown—hence, he says, ancient songs (*antiquitas nœniarum*) prophesy his return.

[3] The opening words of the Welsh romance, 'Gereint, Son of Erbin.' *Cf.* also the first sentences of 'The Lady of the Fountain,' as given in Lady C. Guest's *Mabinogion*.

[4] See Geoffrey's *History*, Bk. IX. Ch. 12, in the excellent translation by the late Dr Sebastian Evans (Temple Classics).

[5] The three great romantic "matters" are thus categorised in a well-known passage in the *Chanson de Saisnes* by the twelfth century writer, Jean Bodel,—

> "Ne sont que trois matières à nul home attendant,
> De France et de Bretaigne et de Rome la grant."

[6] *Hist. Rerum Anglic.* Proemium (Chronicles of Stephen, etc., Rolls Series, 1884-85).

[7] See note *A* on p. 138.

[8] See a poem entitled ‘Gereint, Son of Erbin,’ in *The Black Book of Carmarthen*, and several passages in the *Mabinogion*,—especially in ‘The Dream of Rhonabwy,’—which are referred to later on.

[9] It is worth noting, by the way, that the “Saeson,” or Saxons, against whom he is presumed to have fought most of his battles, are not even mentioned in the Welsh Arthurian romances.

[10] The name *Artoria* occurs is Tacitus, *Annals*, xv. 71; *Artorius* in Juvenal, *Sat.*, iii. 29. It was common enough in Rome.

[11] Rhys, *Arthurian Legend*, p. 48. In Chap. I. of the same work Rhys puts and answers the main question suggested in these pages as follows: “How did Arthur become famous above other (Welsh, or British) heroes, and how came he to be the subject of so much story and romance? The answer, in short, which one has to give to this hard question must be to the effect, that besides a historic Arthur there was a Brythonic divinity named Arthur, after whom the man may have been called, or with whose name his, in case it was of a different origin, may have become identical in sound owing to an accident of speech” (*A. L.*, p. 8).

[12] The chief authorities on Nennius are Mommsen (see his edition of the *Historia*, and of Gildas, in *Mon. Germ. Hist.*, Berlin, 1898), and Zimmer (*Nennius Vindicatus*, Berlin, 1893). See, also, Fletcher (*The Arthurian Matter in the Chronicles*, Boston, 1906) and M. R. James (*Camb. Hist. of Eng. Lit.*, Vol. I. Ch. 5). Thurneysen (*Zeitschr. f. Deutsche Philologie*, 1897) fixes 827 as the date of the completion of the *History*.

[13] This date must be accepted if we are to believe Nennius's statement that he was a disciple of Elbodugus, or Elfodd, bishop of Gwynedd.

[14] Chap. 56.

[15] *ipse dux erat bellorum.*

[16] This is simply the Welsh (modern, *cad coed*) for "the battle of Celidon Wood."

[17] Rhys, *Arthurian Legend*, p. 7.

[18] *Arthurian Legend*, p. 7.

[19] A number of chieftains are styled *gwledig* in the *Mabinogion* (see index to edition of Welsh *Red Book*, text by Rhys and Evans, p. 342). Among them is one Amlawdd, or Amlodd, who in *Kulhwch and Olwen* is the father of Goleuddydd, the mother of Kulhwch, "a boy of gentle birth and cousin unto Arthur." In a poem ascribed to Taliesin the deity even is called *gwledig*—"gwledig nef a phob tud," "ruler of heaven and of every land."

[20] Viz., to the tale, included in Lady C. Guest's *Mabinogion*, called 'The Dream of Maxen Wledig.' The glorification of Maxen, or Maximus, in Welsh tradition suggests many points of analogy with the story of Arthur.

[21] Lloyd, *Hist. of Wales*, Vol. I. p. 100.

[22] See the opening words of 'The Lady of the Fountain,' "Yr amherawdyr Arthur oedd yng Kaer Llion ar Wysc." See also *The Dream of Rhonabwy*, *passim*.

[23] *Arthurian Legend*, p. 7. See also *The Welsh People* (Rhys and Jones), pp. 105 *sqq.*

[24] The most elaborate and ingenious expositions of this theory will be found in Skene's *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, Vol. I. Chap. 4, and Stuart-Glennie's *Arthurian*

Localities in 'Merlin' (Early Eng. Text Soc., 1869).

[25] "Mons Badonicus" is still unidentified. Guest, in his *Origines Celticæ* (ii. 187-189) makes a brave attempt to prove that it was Badbury in Dorset.

[26] *Hist. Reg. Brit.*, Bk. IX. Ch. 4.

[27] *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, i. 10.

[28] *Coming of Arthur.*

[29] The translation is that of Dr H. Williams in his edition of Gildas (Cymmrodorion Record Series, London, 1901), p. 63.

[30] Such, at any rate, is Rhys's opinion. See Preface to Dent's *Malory*, p. xxxv.

[31] See p. 142 in Nutt's reprint of Lady C. Guest's *Mabinogion*.

[32] *Op. cit.*, p. 139.

[33] See note *B* on p. 138.

[34] Tennyson, *The Passing of Arthur*.

[35] Skene's *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, Vol. I. p. 311.

[36] *Op. cit.*, p. 291.

[37] Layamon, in his *Brut* (l. 28,533), is the first to locate the battle definitely at this place.

[38] Preface to Rolls Edition of Roger of Hoveden's *Chronicle*.

[39] For an interesting comparison between the *Chronicle* and Nennius in respect to the Arthurian period, see Fletcher, *Arthurian Matter in the Chronicles*, pp. 21-23.

[40] The account of this incident is given in Migne's *Patrologia*, 156, col. 983.

[41] *Prophetia Anglicana*, etc. (Frankfort,

1603), Bk. I. p. 17.

[42] *Hist. Reg. Angl.*, Bk. III.

[43] Published in Rolls Series, *Chronicles of Stephen*, etc., iv. p. 65.

[44] Quoted from the Epilogue to the late Dr Sebastian Evans's translation of Geoffrey's *History* (Temple Classics, 1904).

[45] Lady Charlotte Guest's translation contains twelve tales, but one of these, the *History of Taliesin*, is from a late sixteenth century MS. and has no claim to rank with the rest as a genuine mediæval production.

[46] *Arthurian Legend*, p. 6. "The Triads give us the oldest account of Arthur, and this now and then in a form which the story-tellers and romance-writers found thoroughly untractable and best ignored."

[47] There are, of course, more than four "ancient books" in the Welsh language—for example, the MS. of what is known as the Venedotian code of the laws of Wales, and *The White Book of Rhydderch*, the contents of which have recently been made accessible to Welsh readers in Dr Gwenogvryn Evans's fine edition. But Skene's "four books" contain all the oldest Welsh poetry that is of any account. These four, named in chronological order, are known as *The Black Book of Carmarthen* (twelfth century), *The Book of Aneirin*, *The Book of Taliesin*, and *The Red Book of Hergest*.

[48] *The Study of Celtic Literature.*

[49] See Skene, *Four Ancient Books*, Vol. I. p. 295.

[50] See Gwenogvryn Ewans's edition of *The Black Book*, p. 103.

[51] Skene, *Four Ancient Books*, I. p. 426.

[52] Skene, *Four Ancient Books*, I. p. 308.

[53] Rhys, Preface to Dent's edition of *Malory*, p. xxv, where a full account of these three poems is given.

[54] Skene, *Four Ancient Books*, I. p. 266.

[55] Tryvrwyd, in the form *Tribruit*, is one of the twelve battles recorded by Nennius. See *ante*, Chap. I.

[56] All the names here cited are found also in the prose story of *Kulhwch and Olwen*. The connection of the poem with *Kulhwch* is referred to later on.

[57] See Preface to Dent's *Malory*, where a translation of the whole poem is given, and its correspondences with *Kulhwch and Olwen* are pointed out.

[58] *The Study of Celtic Literature.* Rhys's opinion that the primitive form, and substance, of this tale date from the tenth century has been already referred to. Dr Gwenogvryn Evans, in the Preface to his edition of *The White Book* '*Mabinogion*,' without assigning to it so definite a date, holds that *Kulhwch and Olwen* "is the oldest in language, in matter, in simplicity of narrative, in primitive atmosphere," of all the tales to which the general name 'mabinogion' is given. Mr Alfred Nutt, while holding that portions of *Kulhwch and Olwen* are of "pre-historic antiquity, far transcending in age any historic Arthur," assigns the story in the form we have it to the twelfth century, on the strength, mainly, of its affinities to eleventh century Irish sagas.

[59] The Welsh name for "Excalibur."

[60] Sir John Rhys does this in his *Celtic Folklore* (Vol. II. pp. 512 *sqq.*). See the whole of Chap. IX. in that work for a learned discussion

of the significance of the names, both local and personal, in *Kulhwch*.

[61] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ix. The prominence given to these descriptions in the tale is emphasised by its brief epilogue. “And this tale is called the *Dream of Rhonabwy*. And this is the reason that no one knows the dream without a book, neither bard nor gifted seer; because of the various colours that were upon the horses, and the many wondrous colours of the arms and of the panoply, and of the precious mantles and virtuous stones.”

[62] The Emperor (Lucius Hiberius, called in the Welsh narratives Llês) is said by Geoffrey (*Hist. Reg. Brit.*, X. xi) to have been killed by “an unknown hand.”

[63] Rhys, *Arthurian Legend*, Ch. II.

[64] The most brilliant of these re-builders of “the Celtic Pantheon” is Sir John Rhys. See, especially, his *Arthurian Legend* and *Celtic Heathendom*.

[65] Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, Bk. I. Canto 9.

[66] Dickinson, *King Arthur in Cornwall* (Longmans), p. vi, where an interesting account is given of Arthur’s Cornish associations.

[67] *Roman de Brut*, 1. 9994

[68] See above, p. 31.

[69] See the final chapter, on “Great Britain and Little Britain,” in Rhys’s *Arthurian Legend*.

[70] *Ariegal and Elidure.*

[71] *Hist. Reg. Brit.*, Chap. I. (Dr Sebastian Evans’s translation). I have used this translation for nearly all the extracts from Geoffrey given in this chapter.

[72] This hypothesis is ingeniously elaborated by the late Dr Sebastian Evans in the epilogue to his translation of Geoffrey (Temple Classics, 1903).

[73] This explanation of the name "Britain" is not, as has been pointed out (pp. 60, 61), original to Geoffrey. It is his elaboration of the Brutus legend that is significant.

[74] William of Newburgh, the severest of all Geoffrey's critics, writing about 1190, suggests that either this, or his own "love of lying," was the motive of the work. "It is manifest that everything which this person wrote about Arthur and his successors, and his predecessors after Vortigern, was made up partly by himself and partly by others, whether from an inordinate love of lying or for the sake of pleasing the Britons." William also held that Geoffrey's account of events before the time of Julius Cæsar was either invented by himself, or "adopted after it had been invented by others."

[75] Jusserand, *Lit. Hist. of the English People*, Vol. I. p. 131.

[76] One MS of the *History*, preserved at Bern, contains a double dedication addressed to both Robert, and King Stephen. I have given some account of this MS, and of its bearing upon the date and character of the *History*, in a paper on Geoffrey published in the *Transactions of the Cymmrodorion Society* (London, 1899).

[77] Where, apart from "the British book," Geoffrey derived the name and history of Uther, still remains an unsolved problem. It is worth noting, however, that "Uther Pendragon" is mentioned in a poem in *The Black Book of Carmarthen* noticed in the previous chapter (see p. 42).

[78] Dubricius, or Dyfrig, is a well-known

early Welsh saint, but the archbishopric of the City of Legions is entirely a creation of Geoffrey's fancy.

[79] I have italicised the words "noble Roman family" here, because this "Roman" descent of Guinevere would seem not to have been derived from a Welsh source. In the Triads we read of a Guinevere who is described as "the daughter of Ogrvan the Giant" (see *ante*, p. 53). She is, apparently, the one among "the three Guineveres" who is best known to Welsh tradition as the wife of Arthur. She is mentioned both in a poem by the famous Welsh poet of the fourteenth century, Dafydd ap Gwilym—referring to her adventure with Melwas—and in an old Welsh rhyme, which gives her a somewhat disreputable character (see Rhys, *Arthurian Legend*, Chap. III.).

[80] It is interesting to note, incidentally, that after the "solemnity" at Caerleon, Dubricius is reported to have resigned his archbishopric, and "David, *the King's uncle*, was consecrated in his place, whose life was an ensample of all goodness unto them whom he had instructed in his doctrine."

[81] This statement appears to indicate quite explicitly that Geoffrey was indebted to Walter for oral information as well as for the British book.

[82] The best-known account of the affair is given by Giraldus Cambrensis (*De Principis Instructione*, viii. 126-9).

[83] There are, for example, thirty-five in the British Museum and sixteen in the Bodleian.

[84] No copies of Gaimar's version are known to exist, but his rhymed chronicle of Anglo-Saxon and Norman kings has been edited and translated by Duffus Hardy in the Rolls Series.

[85] *Polyolbion*, Song x.

[86] Hueil, and the cause of his quarrel with Arthur, are incidentally mentioned in *Kulhwch and Olwen*. Hueil, we there read, had stabbed his sister's son Gwydre, "and hatred was between Hueil and Arthur because of the wound."

[87] Rhys, who doubts Caradoc's authorship of the *Life of Gildas*, is "certain that the story" of Melwas "is ancient, for Chrétien de Troyes in his *Erec* speaks of Maheloas as the Lord of the Glass Island—'Li sire de l'isle de voirre.'" *Arthurian Legend*, p. 52.

[88] Layamon's *Brut*, ll. 42, 43.

[89] The question of the mythological origin of the Round Table is one of the many indeterminate problems of Arthurian "criticism." For a suggestive study of the question see Brown, *The Round Table before Wace* (*Harvard Studies and Notes*, Vol. VII., 1900), where he confidently states that "the Round Table was a very early Pan-Celtic institution."

[90] *Brut*, ll. 19,254 *sqq.* (Madden's edition).

[91] ll. 28,610 *sqq.*

[92] ll. 22,910 *sqq.*

[93] See note *C* on p. 138.

[94] Camelot is, apparently, first heard of in Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier de la Charrette*.

[95] Tennyson, *Merlin and Vivien*.

[96] See note *D* on p. 138.

[97] So much has been clearly proved in the case of *Peredur*, for instance, in a French essay on the composition of that romance recently published from Paris by Dr Mary Williams,

formerly Fellow of the University of Wales.

[98] This, of course, is an obvious variant of the story told in the *Life of Gildas*, already mentioned, of Guinevere's abduction by Melwas.

[99] *Nonne Prestes Tale*, l. 392.

[100] See note *E* on p. 139.

[101] Matthew Arnold, *Tristram and Iseult*.

[102] Swinburne, *Tristram of Lyonesse*.

[103] M. Bédier, in his edition of Thomas's *Tristan*, maintains that the original of all the various versions of the story was a single poem composed in England. This is a disputed point among scholars, but it is generally agreed that the story is of British origin.

[104] See Tennyson, *The Passing of Arthur*.

[105] A. Nutt, *The Legends of the Holy Grail* (Popular Studies in Mythology and Folklore), p. 72.

[106] For a learned and suggestive study of the various versions of the Grail legend, see Miss J. L. Weston's *The Legend of Sir Perceval* (2 vols.) in the Grimm Library (Nutt). Miss Weston there distinguishes three stages in the growth of the legend as "the Folklore, the Literary and the Mystical." In the Mystical, an element which she holds to be "entirely foreign to the original tale," viz., the Grail quest, "modified and finally transformed it." The folk-tale "assumed an ecclesiastical and mystical character. The hero became a champion of Christianity and Holy Church, and as such displayed the qualities most approved by the religious views of the time: he became not merely chaste, but an ascetic celibate, and any connection with women was dropped

altogether" (Vol. I. p. 117).

[107] This, of course, raises a vexed question,—two schools of critics, one German, and the other English, French and American, being at feud upon it. In connection with the alleged Welsh origin of some of these traditions, it may be mentioned that the suggestion has been recently made that the first collection of them for "romantic" purposes was due to a Welshman variously known as Bledri, Bleheris, or Bledhericus, who lived probably in the eleventh century, and is spoken of by Giraldus Cambrensis as a '*famosus fabulator, qui tempora nostra paulo prævenit.*' See Weston, *Legend of Sir Perceval*, Vol. I. Ch. 12.

[108] He is made the actual achiever of the quest in the German poem *Diu Krône*, by Heinrich von dem Türlin.

[109] See *The Legend of Sir Gawain*, by Miss J. L. Weston (Grimm Library).

[110] See the *Sir Gawayne* romances edited by Sir F. Madden for the Bannatyne Club (London, 1839).

[111] Strachey, Introduction to Globe Edition of *Le Morte Darthur*.

[112] *Morte Darthur*, Book XVIII. Chap. 25.

[113] Book XXI. Chap. 5.

[114] See note *F* on p. 139.

[115] *Faerie Queene*, Bk. III. Canto iii.

[116] *Polyolbion*, Song X.

[117] *Polyolbion*, I.

[118] Scott, *Marmion*, Introduction to Canto I.

[119] *Paradise Lost*, Book IX.

[120] *Discourse on Satire.*

[121] Scott's edition of Dryden, Introduction to the play.

[122] Dryden so designates him in his *Preface to the Fables*.

[123] *King Arthur*, Book I.

[124] Introductory Letter to the *Faerie Queene*.

[125] The Sir Ector of Malory.

[126] *Faerie Queene*, Book I. ix.

[127] *Faerie Queene*, II. viii. 21.

[128] *Faerie Queene*, I. vii. 35.

[129] See note *G* on p. 139.

[130] Dedication to his tragedy, "Locrine."

[131] Lord Morley, *Studies in Literature* ("On 'The Ring and the Book'").

[132] *Lord Tennyson, A Memoir*, by his Son, Vol. II. v. 127.

[133] Andrew Lang, *Tennyson* (Blackwood's "Modern English Writers"), p. 103.

[134] How closely it does follow the Welsh tale has well been pointed out by Mr A. Lang in the work just quoted, from pp. 119 *sqq*.

[135] M. W. Maccallum, *Tennyson's Idylls and Arthurian Story*.

[136] Stopford Brooke, *Tennyson*, Chap. 10.

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