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## The origin and development of the Arthurian story in English literature to the nineteenth century

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THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARTHURIAN STORY  
IN ENGLISH LITERATURE TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

BY

NADINE MATLOCK SEASE

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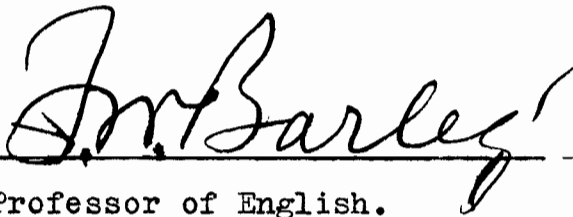
THESIS

submitted to the faculty of the  
SCHOOL OF MINES AND METALLURGY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI  
in partial fulfillment of the work required for the  
Degree Of  
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APPROVED BY

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Professor of English.

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARTHURIAN STORY  
IN ENGLISH LITERATURE TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

In the literature written in the English language there is probably no subject which has been more popular than that of Arthur and his court. This popularity has lasted probably a longer time, has covered a wider territory, and has had a wider range among the arts than has any other literary subject of British origin. The story is at home in Great Britain, France, and Germany, and is popular among the writers of America. It is a subject for romance, the lyric, the drama, and the novel; for painting, sculpture, and music; for history, philology, and folk-lore. The range of time is equally notable. Since the fifth or sixth century into the present time—a duration of nearly fourteen hundred years—, Arthur has been alive in fact or in fiction. If the actions of Arthur have been borrowed in part from traditional history and his character has been made in part from memories of half-forgotten gods, as is thought by some scholars, his origin loses itself in the mists of Celtic history and Celtic mythology. In the variety of interests, in the range of time and of space, Arthur's popularity among the arts is without a rival among the subjects native to the British soil and languages.

It is the purpose of this paper to trace the story of the Arthurian romance from its origin to the

nineteenth century with especial reference to the literature of the English language.

In the beginning, it will be necessary to distinguish between several Arthurs. There is the mythical Arthur - a Celtic god with a name similar to Arthur; the historical Arthur - an Arthur who is supposed to have been a leader of the Celtic forces of Great Britain in the fifth or the sixth century; the legendary Arthur - the historical Arthur who has grown in the folk imagination of his people; and finally the literary Arthur - an Arthur who may be said to have been evoked by Geoffrey of Monmouth in 1139 and who has been called to life again and again by artists of different countries and professions and ages for the eight centuries following. Back of the historical Arthur, if a human Arthur existed, is the real Arthur known only to Omniscience. Behind the historical Arthur lies a great mass of material reaching into the mists of the Celtic past. Scholars of an earlier school, such as Professor Rhys, have accounted for the rapid spread of the Arthur story to the existence of a wide-spread familiarity with other Arthur stories which related to a Celtic god by a name similar to that of Arthur. Later scholars are disposed to discredit this type of reasoning. One interpretation given by E. W. B. Nicholson "identifies with Arthur the personage referred to by Gildas --- as 'Ursus',

and regards Arthur as made up of two old Celtic words artos (bear) and viros (man). Hence the name would mean Bear-male or He-bear.<sup>1</sup> J. Pinkerton had anticipated Nicholson's etymology, but had interpreted the combination as meaning simply "the great man". As a matter of fact, Celtic proper names with artos (bear) in composition are numerous. A Holder suggests a probable connection of Arthur with the Irish art (stone)"<sup>2</sup>. It is not the purpose of this paper to evaluate theories of folklore interpretation nor to follow the latest fashion in interpretations. This myth material lay behind the real Arthur; and this material is here very briefly suggested for whatever it may be worth. In the centuries just antedating Arthur there was a great deal in floating folk-tales which eventually may have centered around him. To Nennius he is "the warrior", but he is also connected with "marvels" as those concerning the "Cairn of Cabal", and with "the region which is called Ercing"<sup>3</sup>. Such connection may be responsible for some of his Celtic characteristics. Professor Rhys believes, "That besides a historic Arthur there was a Brythonic divinity

1 Barbour's Bruce I, 26.

2 James Douglas Bruce; "The Evolution of Arthurian Romance" p.4-5

3 Edward Maynadier: "The Arthur of the English Poets" p.34

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 been identical in sound owing to an accident of speech..."<sup>1</sup> He also considers Arthur at times as a culture hero who invaded Hades. The account of Arthur's death by his nephew is contradictory to the story that he was carried to Avalon, "the hope of Britain". The Britons believed that Arthur would return. In 1113 some monks from Laon in Brittany made a journey to England. While in a Cornish Church, one of their servants dared question a statement of a Cornish man that Arthur lived. This Cornish cripple was ready to fight for his belief that Arthur would return some day from Avalon.<sup>2</sup> The affair drew together a mob and there would have been bloodshed, if a local ecclesiastic had not intervened... ... the man who started this brawl was punished for doing so - for he had a withered hand and had come there to be cured by the relics which the visiting monks had brought with them. The Holy Virgin, however, was evidently displeased with him for the relics would not work a miracle on him that day.<sup>3</sup> Later on in the same century

1 Rhys: "Arthurian Legend" Chapters I and II; also Charles Squire: "The Mythology of Ancient Britain and Ireland, Chapter VIII; also p.47

2 Introduction to "Geoffrey of Monmouth" p.12-Lucy Allen Paton.

3 James Douglas Bruce: "The Evolution of Arthurian Romance" p.10

..... 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.<sup>1</sup> Rhys, after summarizing the historical Arthur continues concerning the mythical Arthur: His name Arthur was either the Latin Artorius, or else a Celtic name belonging in the first instance to a god Arthur. The Latin Artorius and the god's name, which we have treated as early Brythonic Artor, genitive Artoros, would equally yield in Welsh the familiar form 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 Artaeon Mercury of the Allobroges of ancient Gaul. His role 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, 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.<sup>2</sup>

1. W.L. Jones: "King Arthur in History and Legend". p.31

2. Rhys: "Arthurian Legend" pp.47-48

But there can be little question as to other personages who surround Arthur both in the earlier and later legends. Myrddin as Merlin; March as King Mark; Gwlchaved as Sir Galahad; Kai as Sir Kay; and Gwenhwyvar as Guinevere have obviously been directly taken over from Welsh story. And here we can clearly trace the direct evolution of the Arthurian legend from the myths of the Celts.<sup>1</sup> Professor Rhys and Mr. Alfred Nutt seem to join in this opinion.<sup>2</sup> Let us assume, then, that there was a mass of mythological stories among the Celts; that these stories are more or less nearly parallel to the Arthurian stories; that the name of Arthur and of other characters of Arthurian stories are, apparently, philologically or phonetically related to the names of Celtic deities; and that finally the coherence of this mass of material was disrupted by the skepticism which came with the advent of a higher civilization bringing a hostile religion;- assuming this, it is not difficult to believe that some of its Arthurian stories are either the older myths modernized and humanized, or that the Arthurian stories at least follow the plot or story pattern already fixed in the minds of the Celts by their waning myths;

1 Charles Squire : "The Mythology of Ancient Britain and Ireland" pp 71-72

2 Charles Squire : "The Mythology of Ancient Britain and Ireland" p 72



and hence that the debt of Arthurian romance to the now little known Celtic myths is incalculably great.

Against this assumption must be placed the chilling note of Professor Bruce's recent work - 1922: "With his customary weakness for the fanciful mythological interpretations of Max Muller and his school - once so popular, but now generally discredited - he (Rhys) endeavors to connect the name with the Aryan root, ar = (plough) and hence conjectures that Arthur was by origin a culture-divinity".<sup>1</sup>

The uncertainties of Celtic mythology and of Celtic philology may be followed by a consideration of the Celtic historical back-ground only a few shades less shadowy.

The earliest Celts (Goidels) reached Britain about 1000-500 B.C.<sup>2</sup> In the second and third centuries B.C. the Brythons and Belgae supplanted the Goidels to a great extent. Time was when no Indo-European race was more powerful than the Celts. Spread over Europe in the days of Herodotus (sixth century B.C.), from the upper Danube to the Straits of Gibraltar, these Celts, for some reason or other, came to be filled with the

1 J.D.Bruce: "The Evolution of the Arthurian Romance".  
p.4. note 4.

2 Squire: "Mythology of Ancient Britain and Ireland".  
p.77

same spirit of unrest which later sent the Germanic tribes pouring over the Roman Empire.<sup>1</sup> Good soldiers but bad citizens, they have shaken all states and founded none.<sup>2</sup> The Celts invaded and conquered Italy, captured Rome in 390 B. C., and swept on into Graecian states, locating in Asia Minor at a place which was called after them Galatia. The Celts extended now from Asia Minor to Ireland. In 225 B. C. and in 223 B. C. they were defeated by the Romans in Etruria. The persistent failure of the Celts has been preserved in the sad comment of Ossian: "They went forth to the war, but they always fell."<sup>3</sup> By the opening of the sixth century B. C., the Celts of France had become most powerful. They had overrun the central part of Spain and the greater part of Asia Minor, and had laid under tribute all West of the Taurus. But the loosely knit Celtic empire stretching from Great Britain to the Black Sea having crumbled before the advance of Rome, the legions of Caesar occupied Britain in the \_\_\_\_ . Centuries later the Roman empire in turn lost its virility, and the Roman outposts in Britain were withdrawn.

1 Mayanadier: "Arthur of the English Poets" p.6-7

2 Theodore Mommsen: "History of Rome" bk.II., Chapter 4  
Quoted by Mayanadier, Id. p.6-7

3 Arnold: "Essay on the Study of Celtic Literature",  
quoted from Ossian.

Maximus, in or about the year 383 A. D. left Britain with an army, went into Italy, established himself there, but he was later killed by Theodosius. After Maximus' departure, the Romans were few in number and had difficulty in suppressing uprisings. The year 410 saw the complete separation of Britain from the Roman Empire. At this time, Rome was overrun by the Goths. The Britons may have made the most of the opportunity by expelling the remaining Roman soldiers or it may have been that King Honorius called the Roman troops to Rome to oppose them to the incoming Goths. At any rate, it is quite obvious that the year 410 was the date of Roman evacuation from Britain. The Britons were left to defend themselves against the incoming Picts and Scots until the settlement of the Anglo Saxons. For centuries such defense having been left to the Romans, the Celts had lost the art and habit of warfare and even of self-defense. The historical source of Arthurian romance is in the Saxon conquest of Britain which ended the brief days of Celtic independence. The Saxons were invited to help the southern Celts oppose the alien Celts from Ireland and Scotland. Later the Saxons chose to remain and rule, and so became another source of war. According to traditions, the Britons were triumphant about the

year 500 in several battles under the leadership of a man called Arthur. The most important battle was Mount Badon. Welsh literature does not call Arthur a "gwledig" (prince) but "emperor". It is thought that his historical position was the important office of Comes Britanniae after the withdrawal of the Romans. Such an office would call him to any or all parts of the province to protect its interest. Professor Rhys thinks there is the possibility of the death of a real man Arthur by a real live nephew. He concludes that there was a historical Arthur, who may have held the office.. .. known as that of Comes Britanniae; that he may ..... have been partly of Roman descent; that Maelgwn was his nephew, whom Gildas accuses of slaying his uncle; that his name Arthur was either the Latin Artorius, or else a Celtic name belonging in the first instance to a god Arthur.<sup>1</sup>

In brief, the coming of Julius Caesar challenged successfully the rule of the Celts in both France and England. The Celtic culture was swept away almost completely from the Continent, but all the myths, legends, ideals, disappointments, and hopes were preserved in the Gaelic and Cymbric languages of the Celtic Fringe.

1 Rhys: "Arthurian Legend" p.7-8

Language, it is well known, is the greatest preservative of ideals and nationalism. That is why the suppressed nations' have clung to their languages. What was lost in France with the loss of the native languages has been preserved with the Celtic languages of the Celtic Fringe. The arms which had challenged Greece and Rome and Asia had been subdued, but the memories and hopes lived in Wales and Brittany and Ireland. It may be surmised that Arthur became the legatee of those memories. After five centuries of Roman rule, Rome withdrew and left the Celts to defend themselves. Their most successful leader was, it seems, Arthur. Arthur later is represented not as a leader struggling with bare success, but as a Continental emperor threatening the Roman empire. Did the bards add to their dux bellorum all the glories of an earlier age? This interpretation is another conjecture, but one that is quite plausible. This was not an immediate process. The Saxons who came to aid in repulsing the enemies of the Celts of south England remained to conquer, and the Celtic rule was over-thrown forever. The poets and story tellers, however, continued to speak of their last successful leader, Arthur; and so the story of Arthur lived and grew.

The first author to mention the events in which Arthur is supposed to have taken part is Gildas. The Romans having withdrawn in 410, the alien Celts of Ireland and of Scotland poured down. The Saxons were invited to help repulse these eneimes; they succeeded and remained. Then came the struggle against these Saxons. Gildas, who favored the Roman rule, wrote to show that the evil days came as a result of the loss of Roman rule. "It appears surprising, at first sight, that Gildas, the British historian, who is our earliest authority on the Anglo-Saxon conquest of Britain, in his De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae - written about 540, A. D. should not mention Arthur, although he refers ----- to the battle of Badon Hill with which later chroniclers connected that hero's fame."<sup>1</sup> This may be explained by the fact that Gildas' 'Epistle' or 'Homily' was not inspired or written as a history. He himself called it epistola, and, admonituncula, a warning to the nobles and clergy of Britain.<sup>2</sup> His chief topic is the arraignment of the Britons whom he believes to have hurled misfortune upon themselves by their own sins.

1 Bruce: "The Evolution of Arthurian Romance" p.5

2 Maynadier: "The Arthur of the English Poets" p.26-27

He opens his narrative by a brief historical sketch, giving cursory glimpses of people and events. As Gildas was an ecclesiastic, it is probable and plausible that he was taking sides in an ecclesiastical controversey and as he was probably the son of a petty British king - entirely Romanized - it was only natural that he should laud the deeds of a Roman general, Ambrosius Aurelianus, who fought the German pirates, the latter having been invited over by a British king to fight the Scots and Picts. Later the chroniclers recount that Arthur was the victor of Badon Hill, an event of the very early part of the sixth century. It appears quite authenic that Arthur was a Romanized Celt or a person of Roman descent who became the leader of the Britons in time of their military extremity on the withdrawal of the Romans.<sup>2</sup> Gildas says that the battle of Mons Badonis, or Badon Hill, was fought in the year 516, the year of his own birth. At the outset one has to form an estimate of Gildas' authenticity before accepting to a full degree his book, De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae. His saying that this event took place the year of his birth is as much as to say that his life was not contemporaneous with the

1 Fletcher: "The Arthurian Romance". p.5

2 Bruce: "The Evolution of Arthurian Romance". p.4

historical events of his history. He is sincere enough to give as his authority the oral tradition which had originated on the continent.<sup>1</sup> It is very plain to see that his sympathies were with the Roman faction which existed at that period among the Britons. He says that the Romans were the generous protectors of the Britons and omits no opportunity to laud the actions of the Britons but scant in his praise of Ambrosius, the only outstanding British leader whom he speaks of in a complimentary way. Arthur is in no way mentioned in the entire survey of Gildas. According to Professor Zimmer: "He is not writing of the brave deeds of the Britons but of their shortcomings; and therefore he makes little as possible everything which reflects credit on them. Moreover, he is vague in his statements and exceedingly chary of proper names. In speaking of the Romans' first coming to the island, he does not call Caesar by name.....Nor does he name Vortigern, or Hengist, or Horsa. His failure to mention Arthur, then, means nothing".<sup>2</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis writes: "With regard to Gildas, who inveighs so bitterly against his own nation, the Britons affirm that, highly irritated at

1 Fletcher: "Arthurian Material in Chronicles" p.6.

2 Maynadier: "The Arthur of the English Poets". p.27



the death of his brother, the Prince of Albania, whom King Arthur had slain, he wrote these invectives, and upon the same occasion threw into the sea many excellent books, in which he had described the actions of Arthur, and the celebrated deeds of his countrymen; from which cause it arises that no authentic account of so great a prince is anywhere to be found."<sup>1</sup> This, doubtless, is another invention of the fertile Celt's muse of history. No doubt Gildas thought it was entirely unnecessary to mention the hero of Mount Badon, as the citation of him would have been superfluous. However, it was against Gildas' avowed purpose to praise any British hero as that would have decreased the value of his denunciation of them. "As to whether or not there was an historical Arthur, then, Gildas affords absolutely no evidence, and his whole record of the period of the Arthurian story may be summed up as follows. He tells of the calling in of the Germans by a tyrant whom he does not name, very briefly indicates the general course of events during the entire period, and supplies the figure of Ambrosius Aurelianus ( his most important contribution) and the fact of the victory at Mount Badon."<sup>2</sup>

1 Maynadier: "The Arthur of the English Poets" p. 28

2 Fletcher: "Arthurian Material in Chronicles".p.8

Nennius discredits the episode of a British tyrant calling in the Germans as he says their coming was entirely accidental.

Nearly two centuries after Gildas, Bede wrote his Ecclesiastical History in a Northumbrian Monastery about 731 A. D. Gildas is the chief source of his account of the Saxon invasion. In the genealogy of the Saxon kings where he differs from Gildas, he agrees with Nennius, unless it be that he used an early edition of the Historia Britonum. He calls the Briton king, who enlisted the aid of the Germans, Vurtigermus. He continues by saying that the Saxon leaders were brothers, Hengist and Horsa, and that the latter was killed by the Britons. Bede does not mention Arthur, much to the surprise of Geoffrey of Monmouth, who thinks it inconsistent that an ecclesiastical writer of this period should ignore a Christian champion and hero. However, Bede recognizes Ambrosius as triumphant leader against Saxons and mentions the battle of Mount Badon. To explain this omission, one may surmise that Bede got his information largely from the tradition of the Saxons and perhaps from the Latin records. No doubt he didn't believe the Celtic or British stories of Arthur's valor. Stubbs says he is of "the most ancient, the most fertile,

the longest lived and the most widely spread" of the "schools of English and mediaeval history", - the Northumbrian. On the contrary, were Arthurian stories extant in Lowland Scotland, it is rather unexplainable why he didn't make mention of them. William of Malmesbury and William of Newburgh pay ardent homage to this sincere and honest authority.<sup>1</sup>

Nennius, who wrote in the first quarter of the ninth century almost certainly was not composing an original work, but was remaking an historical account written about 679. This early historical sketch inspired Nennius' Historia to which he added "Saxon Genealogies", a list of twenty-eight cities of Britain, and the Mirabilia Britannias". This seventh-century history, which appears to be Nennius' authority, seems to have given about the same account of Arthur and his twelve battles as does Nennius. The Historia Britonum gives us the oldest record of Arthur, but the geography of his twelve battles is just as difficult to locate as the solution of his rank. Henry of Huntingdon says that "all the places were unknown in his own day" - the twelfth century. Nennius locates most of them in the vicinity

1 W. L. Jones: "King Arthur in History and Legend".p.28

of the Roman walls of the North as does Geoffrey of Monmouth. There are two theories for locating Arthur's campaigns. One is that they were fought mostly in the South, though he may have gone to other sections of the country; the other theory is that his battles were nearly all in the North, near the Roman walls.<sup>1</sup> The names of Guinever and Modred are associated in Scotland; and places named in Welsh Arthurian poetry also belong to the North. However, they may have been borrowed.<sup>2</sup> Many of the celebrated characters woven about Arthur are those of Scotland, while it is thought that Mount Badon and Legionis are in the South and Linnius in the East.<sup>3</sup>

"The statement of Nennius that "the Saxons conquered only by the will of God" corresponds to Gildas' prevailing idea that the invasion was a punishment for the sins of the Britons. Mommsen says from resemblances in phraseology" that some of the early authors of the Historia Britonum used some of Gildas' material."

Nennius refers to Ambrosius but slightly, while Guorthemis becomes all important in his account.

1. W. L. Jones: "King Arthur in History and Legend"  
p.19 and 27

2. Fletcher: "Arthurian Material in Chronicles".p.27

3. W. L. Jones: "King Arthur in History and Legend".p.18

Nennius' account is the story of the "British faction in the island as opposed to the Roman faction of Gildas." This explains Guorthemir's position in the Historia, over that of Ambrosius because the former was the hero of the British faction. Nennius was heir to traditions which made up an early version of the Historia. In the historical part he recounts Arthur's feats of militarism more fully than any other chronicler before Geoffrey's quasi-history. Even at this date, legend and glamour were beginning to encircle Arthur. The Historia gives an account of the twelve battles in which Arthur took part. "Then Arthur fought against them in those days, together with the kings of the Britons, but he himself was leader in the battles" - ipse dux erat bellorum. The Vatican manuscript of about 946 adds "although many were nobler by birth than he". His rank as general was due to his own ability, rather than to his birth. In the eighth battle at the castle of Guinnion, "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". In the twelfth battle - Mount Badon - Arthur alone slew nine hundred and sixty men. Anscombe ...."interprets this

nine hundred and sixty as due to some scribal blunder. The figure was originally four hundred and seventy, he says, and indicated, really, the date of the battle of Mons Hagonis ( the name he gives to the great British victory over the Saxons which in our text of Gildas is called, in the genitive, "Badonici montis").

Geoffrey of Monmouth ....., as Anscombe contends, preserves the correct figure, viz.470, only Geoffrey, too, uses it of the number of men that Arthur killed in the battle of Mount Badon. The speculation, however is anything but convincing."<sup>1</sup> These figures as to Arthur's prowess are in the Celtic convention of exaggeration; the confusion as to dates and numbers killed as an explanation is not convincing. This statement that Arthur was the victor in every instance shows that he was becoming legendary. Nennius on the whole is more of a historian and less imaginative than Gildas. From the former's account we are convinced that Arthur was the hero at Mount Badon. His record of Arthur's battles is not that of a series of campaigns systematically planned, but that he went from one place to another, wherever he was most needed for the help of his people. The Saxons on invading Briton landed their soldiers in

1 Bruce: "Evolution of Arthurian Romance" footnote p.7-8

the most accessible points for the offensive. This representation of Arthur is totally unlike that of romance and modern literature. It presents Arthur as a determined warrior, an able chieftan, and leader to whom all others inevitably bowed. William of Malmesbury observes that he stood "firm in the midst of a period of distress and danger, for a long time sustained the failing fortunes of his country." <sup>1</sup> Probably more important than these historical accounts is the note which Nennius records containing some old Welsh triads which were either of folk origin or folk currency. These triads represent Arthur not as merely a name in monkish chronicles but as a figure which was alive in the imaginations of the Celtic peoples. Arthur here is a historical figure who has taken on more or less mythical characteristics. Nennius in his Mirabilia depicts Arthur as a stern warrior, but he also invests him with mythical elements. Here he owns the dog Cabal and is father of Amir. The first mythical element in connection with Arthur is described as in the land of Buelt. Here we are told of a heap of stones, one of which bears the dog Cabal's footprint. This stone had the power of return-to its position though carried away "for the space of a day and a night". Arthur killed and interred his

1 Fletcher: "Arthurian Material in Chronicles" p.15-30

own son in the land of Archenfield. The tomb had the unusual quality of varying in measurement. Geoffrey of Monmouth has utilized Nennius' history and fables impartially in his chronicles. The latter may be regarded as the origin of Arthurian stories.<sup>1</sup> Here might follow the stories of Arthur in The Mabinogion. These stories were written in the 14 century, but they are records of a culture closer to that which produced the triads than to that culture from which sprang the Arthurian stories, written earlier than the 14 century, by the French and English writers. The Mabinogion, however, will be considered as of the later date.

The Chronicle, though probably not recorded before the eighth or ninth century, no doubt gives traditions of a very early date. They agree with Gildas with the exception of mentioning Ambrosius, but are contradictory to Nennius. The Chronicle authors were probably unduly influenced by legends and made no mention of many British heroes and their triumphs.<sup>2</sup> The Saxon Chronicle makes no reference to Arthur or any conflict with the Britons for a considerable period following the year 527, which agrees with Nennius when he says

1 W.L.Jones: "King Arthur in History and Legend" p.30-31  
 2 W.L.Jones: "King Arthur in History and Legend" p. 30-31



that Saxons made no advance in battles when Arthur fought. However, the Chronicle agrees with the most significant of Nennius' accounts. Authorities agree that the final Saxon victories were retarded by British successes. Nennius tells us that Arthur's last victory was that of Mount Badon, which must have antedated 527. The Chronicles are much more reliable than Nennius. It must be remembered that the Saxons are not called on to perpetuate the name of a leader who gave them trouble, especially if that leader was only a dux and not a rex.

The Arthurian legend seems to have made a greater expansion from the tenth to the twelfth centuries, especially in the Celtic fringe". Early in the twelfth century Arthurian stories were familiar to Brittany, Cornwall, and Wales.<sup>1</sup>

The Annales Cambriae in Latin by an anonymous Welsh author in the second part of the tenth century are the sole record for two or three hundred years after Nennius. There are only two brief notations concerning Arthur. They are:

"516 Battle of Badon, in which Arthur carried  
the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ for

1 W. L. Jones: "King Arthur in History and Legend".p.30-31

for three days and nights on his soulders,  
and the Britons were victors.

537 Battle of Camlann, in which Arthur  
and Medraut fell".

Nennius and Geoffrey of Monmouth say that in eighth battle Arthur bore the image of the Virgin Mary upon his shoulders. The latter represents the image as on the shield of Arthur, the confusion, no doubt, arising from similiarity of the word for 'shield', ysgwydd and the word for 'shoulder', ysgwyd. William of Malmesbury says that Arthur sewed the image on his arms. It is very probable that the original story was written in Welsh, thus accounting for the possible error. The differences between Nennius and the Annales are:

In the Annales the word "cross" appears instead of image of the Virgin; duration of three days and nights; and the change of this event from battle at Castle of Guinnion to battle of Mount Badon.

The Cambridge Manuscript of Nennius gives an additional legend which has been assimilated by other manuscripts; "For Arthur went to Jerusalem, and there made a cross, and there it was consecrated, and for three whole days

he fasted, watched, and prayed before the cross of the Lord that the Lord would give him victory over the pagans through this rood: which was granted. And he took away with him the image of the Holy Mary, whose fragments are still kept at Wedel in great veneration". The Cambridge manuscript belongs to the thirteenth century. The compiler of the Annales finding in his source the data that Arthur bore the image of the Virgin on his shoulders and that he was victorious in the struggle against the invaders, due to symbol of the Holy cross. The addition of the three-days-and-nights element probably slipped in with the rest of the Jerusalem story. The exchange of the image from the eighth battle to the twelfth battle is due to the fact that smaller events are attracted to those of more importance. It is the natural conclusion that the Annales is a more copious expression of Nennius of the above mentioned items. The first entry shows that Arthur was a significant legendary hero in the tenth century. The second entry does not intimate Arthur's and Medraut's relation, whether they fought mutually or whether the latter was traitorous to his leader.<sup>1</sup>

The author of the Chronicle of St. Michael's

1 Fletcher: "Arthurian Material in the Chronicles" p.30-34

Mount was a Briton or one of Breton inclinations.

It closes 1056. Its first entry alone concerns us;

Natus est S. Gildas. His diebus fuit  
Artus Rex Britannorum fortis, & facetus.

There is a possibility that this preceded Geoffrey; and, if so, it only emphasises Arthur's popularity before the former's time.<sup>1</sup>

Another chronicler is Aethelward, who adds nothing to the Arthurian story, but serves as a link between Bede and William of Malmesbury.<sup>2</sup>

The recurrence in these chronicles of the image of Mary on the shield or arm or shoulder of Arthur presents Arthur as a Christian soldier and prepares him for his position as the first of the three Christian worthies of the world and also makes him a fitting center around which to locate the romantic Christian stories of The Holy Grail.

Half a century later William of Malmesbury wrote calling himself the first trustworthy chronicler after Bede. He was one of two chroniclers who just preceded Geoffrey of Monmouth and was one of the intermediate steps in removing the Arthurian story from history to romance. William was born about 1095 in southern

1 Fletcher: "Arthurian Material in the Chronicles" p.30-34

2 Fletcher: "Arthurian Material in the Chronicles" p.37

part of England, and was reared in Malmesbury Abbey. His Gesta Regum Anglorum was finished in 1125 and bears no later changes in the Arthurian matter. He uses as his source Bede, the Saxon Chronicle, and Nennius, and perhaps Gildas.<sup>1</sup> A very significant quotation from his history is here given: "This is the Arthur, concerning whom the idle tales of the Britons rave wildly even to-day,- a man certainly worthy to be celebrated, not in the foolish dreams of deceitful fables, but in truthful histories; since for a long time he sustained the declining fortunes of his native lands and roused the uncrushed spirit of the people to war". Here, it seems, is the very soul of the Arthurian story in the hearts of his Welsh country-men: Arthur defended them last from racial and national submergence and helped keep forever the spirits of the people uncrushed and bouyant. Then follows a passage, with Nennius as source, relating to Vortigern, Ambrosius, and Arthur in episodes of their day, proving that Arthur was a dramatic hero even in William's day. The latter regrets the scant amount of reliable material of such a valiant hero.<sup>2</sup> He does not add anything definite to the Arthurian story, endeavoring

1 Fletcher: "Arthurian Material in the Chronicles" p.34

2 W.L.Jones: "King Arthur in History and Legend" p.32.

only to give a consecutive account from incoherent data of Bede and Nennius. William's importance seems to be in the way he used the Arthurian data in the Chronicles and his change of events as narrated in his sources. "He represents Ambrosius and Arthur as fighting in conjunction during the reign of Vortigern and before the massacre of the chiefs, and he says that Ambrosius was king after Vortigern's death".<sup>1</sup>

With William comes his contemporary, Henry of Huntingdon. The second of Geoffrey's more immediate predecessors, Henry of Huntingdon, was probably born about 1084 in Cambridgeshire or Huntingdon. His father was a Norman ecclesiastic, and Henry seems to have been reared in a Bishop's household. He was archdeacon of Huntingdon from 1109 until the time of his death in 1155. He wrote the Historia Anglorum, and later made some recensions but never made any changes in his Arthurian stories. He did not include Geoffrey in his own Historia, but added it as an appendix. His work is not so reliable as William's work. "He had good ability, but was too much of a worlding, too indolent and too careless, to be thoroughly well-informed or trustworthy, and he often involved himself in contradictions.

<sup>1</sup> Fletcher: "Arthurian Materials in the Chronicles" p39-40

He doubtless thought that his lack of scholarly method ( if he was conscious of it ) was compensated for by the rhetorical moralizing in which he indulges."<sup>1</sup>

Henry's account is longer than William's as he takes much more from his sources and expands them to suit his own ingenuity, but his method is very similar to William's. The first edition of Henry's Historia Anglorum appeared before 1133.<sup>2</sup> Henry greatly embellishes the incident "the passing of Arthur" while Geoffrey's is entirely lacking in ornamentation and literary coloring. The vivid recounting of the "passing of Arthur" by Henry is due to his own imagination similar to that of Geoffrey, who usually so treated his chronicles. Henry uses his imagination as freely as though he had personally attended the battle which he describes, unless he got some of his material from ancient English war songs. He uses Nennius as source almost word for word, but calls him "dux militum et regum Britanniae". Henry here was probably following tradition and in doing so indicates the growth of the Arthurian conception. No longer merely dux bellorum, Arthur now is head of the military forces and of the kings of Britain.

1 Fletcher: "Arthurian Materials in the Chronicles"p.41  
 2 Fletcher: "Arthurian Materials in the Chronicles"p.41

Arthur makes only a veiled appearance in the oldest Welsh poems, and those of mediaeval times mention him only incidentally. However, they show that an Arthurian legend lived long before Geoffrey of Monmouth's History. They are vague because these precursors of Geoffrey were not accomplished in the art of exploitation. The oldest Welsh Mss. date from the twelfth century to the end of the fourteenth century. Dr. W. F. Skene edited them long ago as "The Four Ancient Books of Wales". In The Black Book of Carmarthen, Arthur is mentioned five times in "The Book of Taliesin". In The Red Book of Hergest, he is mentioned in a poem called "Gereint, son of Erbin". The allusions in The Black Book are of the slightest. In one poem, the bard tells us that he "has been where Llacheu, the son of Arthur, was slain", and nothing more. In "the Songs of the Graves", we learn that Arthur's grave is unknown. The single reference to him in The Book of Aneirin is in comparison of a warrior as being "an Arthur in the exhaustive conflict".<sup>1</sup> Three important references to Arthur are made in The Black Book, which seems to bring us in distant contact with

1 W.L.Jones:"King Arthur in History and Legend" p.40 Quoted from Skene "Four Ancient Books, Vol.I.pp.295 also 426



"Arthur the warrior", the dux bellorum, as Nennius calls him. It is called "Gereint filius Erbin" - a title identical with a Welsh prose romance, collateral of Chretien de Troyes' "Erec" Gereint is its hero, but Arthur is portrayed as of greater rank. In the second Black Book poem, we meet two prominent characters in the romances - Kay and Bedivere -, but there is little of Arthur himself. It is a dialogue between Arthur and Glewlwyd of the Mighty Grasp. The most unusual poem is seen in the The Book of Taliesin by the title of "Preiddeu Annwvn" ( The Spoils of Hades), in which it alludes to Arthur's expeditions in his ship Pridwen to unknown lands across the sea. On one of his voyages, he succeeded in the rape of a cauldron belonging to the King of Hades. Probably the oldest Welsh prose story is the Mabigionian story "Kulhwch and Olwen", which also relates the rape of a cauldron belonging to Diwrnach living oversea in Ireland. Arthur and a few of his men went in quest of it, returning home with his good ship Predweu "full of Irish money". Another Taliesin poem refers to "A speckled ox". Owen's father required of Kulhwch " a speckled ox" as part of the task to pay for Olwen's hand. Olwen implores help of Arthur, his cousin. 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 Calecvwlch, my sword; and Rhongomyant, my lance; and Wynebwrthucher, my shield; and Carnwennan, my dagger; and Gwenhwyvar, my wife".<sup>1</sup> Again the persons mentioned in The Black Book dialogue between Arthur and Glewlwyd are also prominent in "Kulhwch and Olwen". So Arthur is a mythical hero, both in ancient Welsh poetry and prose. These traditions were prevalent in Wales at a very early date.<sup>2</sup> According to Matthew Arnold, "Almost every page of this tale points to traditions and personages of the most remote antiquity and is instinct with the very breath of the primitive world".<sup>3</sup> W. L. Jones states that the natural transition from such stories as "Kulhwch and Olwen" is to the Welsh Triads, the oldest of which are as archaic as anything in Welsh prose or poetry. Arthur is first alluded to in connection with Modred's treachery - similar to Geoffrey's description

1.W.L. Jones:"King Arthur in History and Legend" p.46

2. W.L.Jones:"King Arthur in History and Legend" pp.37-45

3. Matthew Arnold: "The Study of Celtic Literature".p.37

in chronicle -, and Arthur's slaying of the Roman emperor. However, Geoffrey says the latter was done by an unknown hand, Arthur returns when he slew Modred, was himself mortally injured, and "he was buried in a palace in the isle of Avallach".<sup>1</sup> In another Triad, Arthur is blamed for one of "The Three Wicked Uncoverings" of the Isle of Britain, known as the exposing of "the head of Bran the Blessed from the White Mount" in London. The 'mabinogi' of Branwen tells us that the head of Bran ( by his own request ) was buried facing France. As long as it remained unmolested, the Island would be peaceful. Hence the blame and sin of Arthur's "uncovering".<sup>2</sup> Another Triad refers to Arthur as having three wives - each names Guinivere. Rhys gives an example of such a parallel in the Irish story of Echaid Airem - of three women all by the name of Etain, and "the three Gwenhwyfars are the Welsh equivalents of the three Etains, and the article in Triads must be held to be of great antiquity".<sup>3</sup> Another Triad is chiefly of swine legends and is called "The Three Stout Swineherds of the Isle of Britain". It also mentions "Palug's cat" connected with 'Preiddeu Annwvn' the poem

1 W.L.Jones: "King Arthur in History and Legend" p.53

2 W.L.Jones: "King Arthur in History and Legend" p.53

3 John Rhys: "Arthurian Legend" Chapter II; also Gods and Fighting Men, by Lady Gregory.

of The Book of Taliesin referred to above. These are fragments of an almost lost mythology of prehistoric Celts of mythology which was not fully understood by the mediaeval scribes who collected them. Thus the difficulty that students of folklore have to establish a consecutive story. Despite all that has been said of Arthur, he was little known to the larger world of European culture until Geoffrey discovered him or created him as a dominant literary figure. Geoffrey's relation to Arthur is similar to Shakespeare's part in the story of Lear, another old Celtic character. But Shakespeare said the first and last word as to this greater Lear, while Geoffrey only inducted Arthur into international literature, where he has continued his career into our own times.

At the time of the founding of Osney Abbey about 1129, the names of witnesses began with Archdeacon Walter of Oxford ( of whom Geoffrey makes frequent mention as to his own indebtedness for material of his Historia), and ended with Geoffrey's Arthur. It has been supposed that this second name "Arthur" was Geoffrey's father's name, and he was known as Geoffrey Arthur to his contemporaries, Henry of Huntingdon and Robert of Torigni. However, it is quite

incredible that a writer named Arthur should create a literary hero of his own name unless the existing circumstances were somehow related. Geoffrey began work on Arthur by 1129, which date may be called the beginning of the Arthur of literary fame.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Evans in Geoffrey of Monmouth says, "It is incredible that a writer named Arthur should create a literary hero also named Arthur unless the two circumstances were in some way connected". There is no need of assuming further connection than the fact that Arthur was a name in his own family quickened Geoffrey's interest in the legendary history of the British hero.<sup>2</sup>

Ten years later we find mention of Geoffrey by Robert of Torigni, historian, abbot, and chronicler of high type, who prefixes to his own chronicle a letter from Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, to a friend.<sup>3</sup> From this letter, it is inferred that there was an earlier version of Geoffrey in which Merlin does not appear in the Arthurian epic. This is interesting

1 "The Translator's Epiloge" to Geoffrey of Monmouth  
p.224 (Everyman ed.)

2 Edward Maynadier: "The Arthur of the English Poets"  
p.36

3 Everyman Edition, p. 225

if true for Merlin later becomes intricately interwoven into the inner plot.<sup>1</sup> Concerning Geoffrey's revised Historia, William of Newburgh appears horrified at Geoffrey's utter indifference to historic facts and denounces him as a prevaricator without conscience. Merlin wrote lies, and Geoffrey for augmenting the collection. Why should Geoffrey pretend to be a historian and publish these stories as History? William places his accusation of Geoffrey in front of his own history which shows that he recognizes its vital power, notwithstanding the falsehoods contained therein. Though Geoffrey's work was popular, many students of his time doubted him. Their sentiment is illustrated by a story of Giraldus Cambrensis in his Journey Through Wales. He says: "In the City of Legions there lived at his time a Welshman, Meilyr, who had a peculiar power of knowing when one spoke falsely in his presence, for he saw a little devil exulting on the tongue of the liar. If he looked on a book containing anything false, he could point out the passage with his finger. Sometimes, in the presence of such a book, evil spirits would swarm on his person. If they oppressed him too much, the Gospel of St. John

1. Histories of the Kings of Britain, by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Everyman Edition, p. 229

was placed on his bosom, when they immediately vanished; but when on one occasion that book was removed, and the history of Geoffrey placed there, the devils reappeared in greater numbers and remained a longer time than ever before, both on his body and on the book".<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey wished to make his Histories of British Kings a national epic, but of what nation? King Arthur was to have been the traditional and national hero of the Anglo-Welsh-Norman-Breton nucleus of empire and of all the possessions which they might acquire thereafter. But he was left without an empire. "He became a national hero unattached, a literary wonder and enigma to ages which had forgotten the existence of the composite and short-lived empire which was the justification of his own existence".<sup>2</sup> It is believed that the portrait of Arthur is drawn from King Henry I., and the treachery of Modred was suggested by the treachery of Stephen. Geoffrey speaks of Britain's hailing Robert, son of Henry, with joy as if in him she might realize a second Henry as sounding like a prediction that Arthur would return. The recensions of the Histories translated differ from the

1 Edward Maynadier: "The Arthur of the English Poets"  
p. 39-20

2 Translator's Epilogue" Geoffrey of Monmouth p.242

original, in that they omit any reference to the possible return of Arthur.<sup>1</sup>

After the death of the wicked and imprudent Vortigern, Arthur, together with the kings of the Britons, fought against them in those days, but he himself was leader of the battles.<sup>2</sup> He took part in twelve battles. "The eighth he was at the fortress Guinnion, when Arthur bore the image of the ever-blessed Virgin Mary on his shoulders, and on that day the pagans were put to flight and the slaughter of them was great by virtue of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by virtue of the Holy Virgin Mary, his Mother....The twelfth battle was at Mount Badon, when Arthur in one day slew nine hundred and sixty men in one onslaught; no one laid them low save he alone, and in all the battles he was victor" Even before the ninth century, the people were enamoured of the heroic name Arthur. This is shown by the extravagance of the story of Arthur's valour at Mount Badon, for a sober-minded historian would not recount that he ( Arthur)

1 Lucy Allen Paton: "Introduction to Geoffrey of Monmouth pp.244-45

2 Lucy Allen Paton: "Introduction to Geoffrey of Monmouth pp.244-45



slew nine hundred and sixty men in a single day.

Geoffrey was a skillful combiner of existing materials and bent them to his own ends. He begins the Arthurian Romance by telling of Arthur's birth. He is the son of King Uther Pendragon and lovely Igera ( wife of the Duke of Cronwall ). Arthur becomes king of Britain at fifteen and hastens to war against the Saxons, Picts, and Scots, Iceland, Gothic, and the Orkneys. After twelve years of peace, he conquers Britain; Rome demands tribute of him. He "demands of them what they had judically decreed to demand of him". Just about the time he was to cross the Alps, a messenger brings the news of Modred's breach of trust and fidelity in usurping Arthur's throne and marrying Guinevere. Arthur returns to Britain, slays Modred, is himself mortally wounded, and is carried from the battlefield to the Isle of Avalon ( Celtic otherworld ) to be healed.<sup>1</sup>

Geoffrey created a new Arthur ( using Nennius only as a basis ). "In his hands his hero becomes more than a valiant champion of his people; he is imperial conqueror, a performer of daring exploits, and the splendid king of a Norman court. The Saxon

1 Introduction: "Geoffrey of Monmouth's History"  
pp.20-21

victories of Nennius' dux bellorum fade beside the extensive foreign campaignings of Geoffrey's Arthur, who with the true lust for imperialism gloats over the awe that he inspires in other kings, and feeding his soul on their terror forms designs for the conquest of all Europe.<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey surrounds Arthur with noble knights of a most picturesque court. He had been associated with knightly prowess but never had courtly life been so closely associated with him in England until the second half of the twelfth century. When he ascended the throne, he was a mere boy of fifteen years, beginning his career as an adventurous knight and it is said of him that he was a youth 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 in the land".<sup>2</sup> The sum of Geoffrey's contribution is stated by Lucy Allen Paton as follows: "Although the later romances depend only very indirectly upon Geoffrey, there are nevertheless some elements in his story that he permanently introduced into the cycle. He established Arthur's place in the British royal line, and gave him

1 Introduction "Geoffrey of Monmouth's History"p.21

2 Introduction to Geoffrey of Monmouth History"PatonP.XXI

a heroic birth-story. He first drew a clear picture of the enchanter Merlin, one of the most important, and certainly the most mysterious of Arthurian personages, our dim knowledge of whose origin must rest chiefly upon what we can detect behind the words of Geoffrey, the archdisguiser of sources. In Geoffrey's pages, too, we first find the stories of Modred's treachery, and of the abduction of Guinever, the latter of which there is excellent reason to believe, is a rationalized remnant of an early mythological tale.

"We are to turn to the Historia, then, feeling that we are to read not a chronicle, but a romance of early British history, the work of a most skilful combiner, who handled his material with interest and ingenuity. What he had done for Arthurian romance is absolutely clear. He raised a national hero, already the entry of legend and myth, to the rank of an imperial monarch; he substituted for an uncouth a polished entourage, for early British customs those of Norman England; he established certain permanent elements of Arthurian romance ; he clothed myth in the garb of history. Above all he gave a dignified place in literature to popular national story. He determined definitely the form in which Arthurian

history appeared in the chronicles, a form that substantially does not vary for many centuries".<sup>1</sup>

Geoffrey is the father of the Arthur of literature and of the other arts.

Wace's Brut is really a reproduction in verse of Geoffrey's Historia which falls in a conspicuous place in our Arthurian sources, not only from his own personality and method of treatment but for his composition, the French octosyllabic couplet, which is very different from Geoffrey's stiff prose.<sup>2</sup> The metrical romances were for and of the court circles whose inclination was toward the chivalric narrative. Nothing could have supplied a better theme than the Arthurian heroes. Wace worshipped clarity of form, simplicity, and elegance, and hoped to be always truthful, although he permitted his imagination to soar in details. His manner as a narrator is habitually loquacious and wearisomely long and verbose,- a habit quite common among mediaeval poets. He tells us that the stories of prowess of Arthur are now fables because of countless repetition. "Not all lies, not all true, all foolishness, nor all sense; so much have the story tellers

1 Histories of the Kings of Britain, Everyman's Edition; p.XXIII.and XXIV by Lucy Allen Paton

2 Introduction to Geoffrey of Monmouth History.  
Paton p. XXI

told, and so much have the makers of fables fabled to embellish their stories that they have made all seem fable." He neglects the prophecies of Merlin because he cannot interpret them and is more truthful in intent than the inventive Geoffrey.<sup>1</sup>

Other vital deviations ( other than style ) which Wace made from Geoffrey are those of emphasized chivalric material, due, no doubt in part, to a desire to please Queen Eleanor, to whom the work is dedicated. He speaks much of love, which is lacking in Geoffrey. For instance, "Gawain, 'who is valiant and of very great moderation', declares that jesting and the delights of love are good, and that for the sake of his lady a young knight performs deeds of chivalry".<sup>2</sup> No doubt these changes were due to his environment and his personal inclination, yet he wishes us to know that he was familiar with other stories of Arthur than those of the "Historia".<sup>3</sup> To these he adds the first literary record of the famous Round Table and the first precise reference in a literary way to Arthur as the Messianic 'hope of Britain'.<sup>4</sup>

1 Introduction "Wace's Romance" p. 10 Everyman Edition

2 " " " p.11 " "

3 Fletcher "Arthurian Material in Chronicles" p.137

4 " " " " " p.138

He refrains from committing himself to its probability. It cannot be said that Wace added any great definite knowledge to the Arthurian legend but without a familiarity with his work other French romance cannot be duly understood and fully esteemed.

Layamon, an imaginative priest in a secluded parish, is more interested in the battles of a Saxon warrior and his outdoor life than he is in the courtly life dear to Wace and Geoffrey. He relies almost wholly on Wace, he makes few changes, and yet he succeeds about 1204 in doubling the volume by flights of his own, for to him "Arthur is no knight-errant, but a grim, stern, ferocious Saxon warrior, loved by his subjects, yet dreaded by them as well as by his foes. 'Was never ere such king, so doughty through all things'. He stands in the cold glare of monarchy and conquest, and save in the story of his birth and of his final battle he is seldom, if ever, seen through the softer light of romance".<sup>1</sup> Layamon is entirely responsible for the Teutonic story of the elves that hovered over Arthur's crib, bestowing rare gifts upon him - that he is "to be the best of knights, a rich king, long

1 Introduction Laymans Brut (Everyman's Edition)p.XIV

lived, abounding in 'virtues good'.<sup>1</sup> He also gives us the Celtic view of the 'hope of Britain'. "'After the king had commended his realm and people to his kinsman, Constantine, he said to him:- "And I myself will go to Avalon, to the most beauteous women, to the queen Argante, an elf wondrous fair; and she will heal me of my wounds, and make me quite well with a healing drink. Afterwards I will come again to my kingdom, and dwell among the Britons in great bliss'. While he was saying this, a little boat came, borne by the waves. There were two women therein, of marvellous beauty. They took Arthur and laid him in the boat, and sailed away. Then was fulfilled what Merlin had said of yore, that there should be mighty grief at Arthur's forthfaring. And the Britons believe yet that he is alive, and dwells in Avalon with the fairest of elves; and the Britons still look for his coming again". This literary statement recalls the riot in the Welsh church in 1133 when a crippled Welshman attacked a skeptical doubter of the return of Arthur. What is now only imaginative literature was in 1133 a burning racial hope. Arthur was then the Celtic Messiah. "And the Britons even yet expect when

1 Introduction Laymans Brut ( Everyman's Edition)p.XV

when Arthur shall return." <sup>1</sup> Layamon's environment - the Welsh border - brought him in close touch with the Welsh tradition and lore. He also recounts and develops the story of the Round Table in detail more than did Wace. These Celtic versions prove to us that the Arthurian stories had an independent insular growth.

Layamon did not add much to our information about Arthurian legends as he embellished his original by his own imagination - 'poetic rather than legendary'. His Brut has never been as popular as perhaps it should be owing to its Saxon tendency. But he is one of the greatest writers of Arthurian material of all time.<sup>2</sup> His chief distinction is that he found Arthur a Celtic hero; he made him an English king, and as such he still reigns in English fiction.

One of the earliest Romance poets, Marie de France, demonstrates "that the whole body of romance presents an elaborated literary form, transcribed by clerks, meant for reading rather than recitation, though retaining many characteristics from the days, not so very remote, of oral transmission".<sup>3</sup> She wrote the best extant lais, and was a woman of education and

1 Arthurian Chronicles represented by Layamon, Everyman's ed.

2 " " " " " " p. 15 " p.15-16

3 Scudder: Le Morte D'Arthur of Malory p.37.



evidently fond of literature as she wrote fables as well as the Purgatory of St. Patrick in verse. She intimates in her Prologue to the Lais that she knew some English, Breton, and Welsh.<sup>1</sup> Every now and then an English word creeps into her pretty French".<sup>2</sup>

There are several facts that point to her as a lady of high birth: she knew Latin; she was at ease in high society; she was familiar with the castles and palaces of her poems; and she dedicates her lais to "noble king, chivalrous and courteous", no doubt King Henry II of England.

Marie's stories are usually folk-tales and probably have their origin from folk material existing among the Bretons. If such folk tales were current among the Bretons, an interesting speculation arises as to their origin and date. One may conjecture that the memory of Arthur continued among the emigrant Celts in their French exile and that this memory served as a charm to rouse their racial self-respect and hopes. This folk material Marie has changed into courtly and literary form. With the exception of two of her lais, there is no mention of Arthur, but they are significant

1 Maynadier: The Arthur of the English Poets p. 38

2 Scudder: Le Morte D'Arthur of Malory p. 38

in the development of the Arthurian stories.

Marie, herself, in her lai, Lanval, ..... makes the hero a knight of Arthur's court ..... The original folk lais, therefore, more than anything else, probably spread the stories of Arthur before they took literary form.<sup>1</sup> Miss Scudder says, "These poems are little tales from Breton Lays. They are the closest representatives extant of true minstrel song, translucent and perfectly shaped as dewdrops ..... Marie's romances derive farther back than any Breton or Celtic dream. They were so old that they had blown like thistle down around the four quarters of the world, and the motifs they embody were to persist through the most intricate developments of romance, to the very end of the Middle Ages".<sup>2</sup> Her lais antedate the metrical romance and pseudo-histories but did not assume definite literary shape until the time of Geoffrey's and Wace's chronicles and the time of Chretien de Troyes' fame through his Tristan and Erec. These lais have the same interest and value as have the older parts of the Mabinogion. "They show us, probably, the nature of the stories told by the Celtic minstrels - Breton, Welsh,

1 Maynadier: The Arthur of the English Poets p.66

2 Scudder: Le Morte D'Arthur of Malory p. 38-39

or Irish - who wandered about England and France in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, harp in hand, chanting and reciting their tales of wonder." <sup>1</sup>

She is only slightly earlier than Chretien.<sup>2</sup>

Like Marie of France, Chretien was also a French writer for French nobility, and received his inspiration from French sources. While Marie was conversant with Britain and British materials, Chretien is wholly French in his cultural environment. Marie wrote under the patronage of Henry II of England, husband to Eleanor of Aquitaine; Chretien wrote at the court of the daughter of Eleanor by a French father, the Countess Marie de Champagne. Chretien, however, was known in both England and Wales. His stories are fine old ones that have the flavor of ancient things which the Middle Ages adored. His "best poem, Yvain, was excellently translated in the north of England; and his stories had become part of the heritage and the capital of English poets".<sup>3</sup>

Chretien de Troyes, the most gifted and the most famous among French writers of the Round Table romances, is the earliest whose work has survived in

1 Maynadier: The Arthur of the English Poets p.66

2 Scudder: Le Morte D'Arthur of Malory p.41

3 Scudder: Le Morte D'Arthur of Malory p.42

anything but fragmentary form ..... He must have been a man of good education for he imitated in French parts of Ovid.<sup>1</sup>

Miss Scudder summarizes her comment as follows:

"It is not hard to understand his popularity, for there has rarely been a better story-teller than Chretien..... He makes us free of a whole untried world of gay adventure, wherein anything may happen and most things do. Here at last is the full stage for mediaeval action, which is to persist through the time of Spenser and Tennyson. Here are satisfactory forests, (ect.), so open in growth that knights following no road in particular can ride two abreast with ease. Here are castles, hermitages, chapels, towns none too frequent but pleasantly walled and turreted; a country sparsely settled, where occasional varlets may be seen tilling the land in the distance, but where as a rule knights errant and forlorn damosels have things all their own way. Here are enchanted bridges and magic basins, dappled pal-freys, splendid armor, dungeons, potions,-- in short, all delightful trappings of romance which bewitched fancy down the generations: fresh, unhackneyed, for Chretien's pages are the first in which their advent

1 Maynadier: The Arthur of the English Poets p.68

may be hailed. Let no one try to draw a map of this country, or to locate his scenes. His is no geography of earth.

" Chretien's manner fits his subject admirably. Garrulous at times, always leisurely, it is often salted by the slightest possible flavor of Gallic irony, so that the sentiment does not cloy. The poet is keen and subtlesimple, as the French always are at their best; he is occupied chiefly, despite his good stories, with the feelings of his people; he is addicted in such an astonishing degree to analyzing the finer shades of sentiment that he has been claimed as a precursor of the seventeenth-century novelists.

One need not go so far as this, but it is true that in Chretien one strikes the modern literature of sentiment at its source. He possesses to the full the especially French gift of touching emotion without slipping into hysteria; he can present a fairly wide range of passion, yet never violate the social code of restrained good-breeding..... Courtesy is the leading word; it is more stressed than passion, and the poems in consequence, with all their deftness in dissecting emotion, rarely pretend to sound the depths of life. One sighs but does not choke in reading of his lovers'

sorrows; one smiles but does not exult when all goes well.'

"The style, like the treatment, is pleasantly unemphatic..... Grace is the chief characteristic; it is the style of the miniaturist, abounding minute touches of soft clear color; images are vivid as the tints on a contemporary missal page. A better comparison is to the marvelous stained glass of Chretien's period, -- the transition period from the massive solemnity of the Romanesque to the restrained simplicity of the earlier Gothic".<sup>1</sup>

Robert de Boron's name is usually thought of in connection with the Holy Grail Romances. He comes to us in the thirteenth century and is author of the trilogy - Joseph of Arimathea, Merlin, and Perceval. There is extant only about five-hundred lines of de Boron's work and these are probably, in part, a redaction. But his scheme and spirit are shown in prose romances based on him. de Boron is an illusive figure as no one seems to know who he was or where he lived, though some make him an Englishman, perhaps "a pious trouvère, the friend of ascetics"; but the soul of the contemplative breathes through his invention,

1 Scudder: Le Morte D'Arthur of Malory pp.43-47

and the idea is hard to avoid that he reflects the cloister rather than the world. His keen interest in stories that smack more of saint legend than of chivalry, the liturgical strain that pervades him, above all his free use of esoteric suggestion, lead into a new region, remote from ordinary romance.<sup>1</sup> Critics unappreciative of his ascetic sentiments of mediaeval feeling do not grant him justice.

From ancient times, legends concerning rites around a Holy vessel, "symbol of the source of life, and around a hero who had gained initiation into its mysteries were growing. For a very long time these were independent of Arthur. At an early stage Gawain was likely the Grail-winner. Perceval was the hero of de Borron's trilogy. However, by the time of later redactions of de Borron, Lancelot's son, Galahad, became the Winner of the Grail. The Grand San Graal "stands as ....." a prologue to the events of Arthur's reign as given in Malory".<sup>2</sup> It is no doubt the latest among prose romances and is quite a long story. The rejection of Gawain as the winner of the Grail for Perceval and the later rejection of Perceval for

1 Scudder : Le Morte D'Arthur of Malory p.59

2 Scudder: Le Morte D'Arthur of Malory p.80-81

Galahad is attributed to the influence of the celebrate clergy. Chastity is demanded for the highest purity, and chastity is interpreted as being innocence of all carnal knowledge. In this connection it may be said that there will be no attempt here to enter into the questions as to the origin and development of the Grail story.<sup>1</sup>

The German poets Gottfried von Strassburg and Wolfram von Eschenbach also carry us into the thirteenth century. Their "work is the crowning glory of mediaeval literature before Dante ..... Each gives a color all his own to the Arthurian material he handles. To Gottfried, it was given to enshrine the tale of Tristan and Iseult for all time in a jeweled sanctuary. It was the part of Wolfram to create the most searching, spiritual and at the same time human version of the Grail-Quest; for his Parzival, while not integrated with the whole Arthurian development as are the Grail-poems of de Borron, is itself a noble achievement. Neither of these poets, however, was original in the sense of presenting new material; and so far as can be told, neither was known in England".<sup>2</sup>

1 For full account, see Bruce, id. Part II.

2 Scudder: Le Morte D'Arthur of Malory p. 60



Frequently the mediaeval poets failed to complete their work, which is the case with Gottfried and his masterpiece, the "Tristan and Iseult".<sup>1</sup>

From the time of these French and German authors until the time of Sir Thomas Malory, 1485, is about two centuries. During this period a mass of Arthurian literature was produced, all of which is relatively of less importance than that which we have considered. A great deal of this consisted of recensions and redactions in different languages and of varied values.

1 Scudder: Le Morte D'Arthur of Malory p. 61

Malory's misfortune was perhaps posterity's good fortune. For while denied Edward IV's pardon and while he lay in prison he undertook the authorship of the Arthurian stories.<sup>1</sup> If the Morte Darthur was really written while he was confined in prison and restrained by mental and physical anguish, there was never a more noble inspiration to pass a monotonous existence. Just at this time - the fifteenth century - these stories were very popular. There was at that time no English historical account of Arthur and his Round Table other than the Chronicles, which omitted much of the romance and adventure of them. No doubt Malory knew many of the English and French accounts. He used as his chief sources the French Merlin, Tristram, and Lancelot romances in prose.<sup>2</sup> The stories of the Grail, Elaine of Astolat and Arthur's death are included in the Lancelot Romances. He also used the English Morte Arthure and Le Morte Arthur, in octosyllabic verse. However, in the thirteenth century an attempt was made to assemble the Arthurian stories in the prose Lancelot and Tristram. Later in the

1 Morte D'Arthur Biographical Note p. VII- Malory

2 Maynadier: p. 226

thirteenth century Rustician da Pisa had made a stupid collection of the Round Table stories in French and Italian which had some literary significance until the time of Malory's work.

Malory's compilation of the Arthurian stories were quite original and unique as he makes Arthur the important character of his theme. He narrates the Merlin legend , followed directly by the legend of Uther Pendragon, King of England, and his meeting with the lovely Igraine, wife of the Duke of Cornwall, whom he loved on first acquaintance. King Uther's insatiable love for Igraine was met by the magic of Merlin who transformed the King into the likeness of the Duke who as such gained access to Lady Igraine's bedchamber. The son of this union was the mighty Arthur of Malory's Morte Darthur. The author concludes his story by narrating the death of Queen Guinever at Almesbury where she had become a nun and her interment by the side of the king and the death of Lancelot in the monastery at Glastonbury and his interment at his old home, Joyous Gard, on the bare rocks, overlooking a barren country and chilly northern seas.

Malory displayed originality in the selection of his stories, though perhaps he didn't always

select the best ones nor adapt the best versions of the ones he did select. His narratives become fairly monotonous, in relating knights' combats, too many jousting matches and superfluous tournaments. He lived sufficiently near our own time to wish to Anglicise his Celtic French characters. Quite exemplary of modern times is Guinevere's postponement of her marriage with Modred until she can go to London shopping, as it were, when she says "to buy all manner of things that longed unto the wedding". After getting to London she fortifies herself in a tower and resisted Modred's siege.

Malory's Morte Darthur is interesting to-day after a lapse of over four and a quarter centuries because of "his style and his love" - his love of "King Arthur and his noble knights of the Round Table".<sup>1</sup> His style is very similar to present day English, but the invention of the printing-press caused much to be rejected in vocabulary and grammar. Much credit is due him for the new life he gave the Arthurian legends and the interest he inspired in modern English poets. His work was very popular to Elizabeth and her English readers for patriotic reasons. Throughout the 16th

1 W. L. Jones: "King Arthur in History and Legend" p.114

century historians and chroniclers were busy delving into the past for early history concerning their country. For the Tudors liked to think they descended from genuine British ancestry and from the real King Arthur. The Morte Darthur is also read to-day for its "picturesque and mediaeval vividness".<sup>1</sup> It is full of small, quaint, realistic pictures, small pictures. The characters, like the places, are of a romantic nowhere, proving real or historical only occasionally as if by chance. "And often these knights and ladies speak as well as move like real people, though never with marked individuality".<sup>2</sup> Malory took his characters as he found them, never breathing into them any bit of personal individuality. His characters are somewhat contradictory and scarcely distinct, one from the other. Yet at the close of Morte Darthur, Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere are individualized. Arthur, however, was the least so. Arthur is the conventional king, reigning as one with little activity excepting in his youthful years in his struggle for and maintaining his father's throne. Lancelot is of a more renowned individuality than Arthur. He is a true knight in

1 Maynadier: The Arthur of the English Poets p.231

2 Maynadier: The Arthur of the English Poets p.233

word and deed with the exception of his relation with Queen Guinevere for whom he is false to his best friend. Lancelot's forbearance and understanding of the Queen's capriciousness was rather noble, for no doubt he felt responsible for them in his own doubtful relations with her. Malory's Morte Darthur makes Guinevere one of the great epic queens of the entire world. The tragedy of Guinevere's life might have been averted had Arthur not been so busy making wars and conquering the world. She was tempermental, and passionate, and yearned for his love, attention, and little flatteries. When the King was so long away, the power and influence of the realm fell to the Queen. And perhaps she was only true to human nature under such circumstances, when she became unfaithful to her absent husband. It might have been mutual infidelity, but Arthur tells Guinevere that he was ever faithful to her. She was of such personality that many knights were willing to risk their lives to fight in her behalf. But when the great test came Guinevere showed a courageous heart in resisting Modred and in her refusal to go to Joyous Gard, Lancelot's castle, to spend the remainder of her life with the man she really loved. She knew herself to have been the cause of wars and much

loss of life. She took refuge in a nunnery at Almesbury where she hoped to be "set in such a plight to get my sould's health". If she had never known peace and contentment in her own palaces, she realized it now in this sequestered nunnery in Wiltshire Avon Valley after she had sent Lancelot from her with these words: "Sir Lancelot, I require thee and beseech thee heartily, for all the love that ever was betwixt us, that thou never see me more in the visage; and I command thee on God's behalf, that thou forsake my company, and to thy kingdom thou turn again and keep well thy realm from war and wrack. For as well as I have loved thee, mine heart will not serve me to see thee; for through thee and me is the flower of kings and knights destroyed ....."

Lancelot answered: "And therefore, lady, sithen ye have taken you to perfection, I must needs take me to perfection of right. For I take record of God, in you I have had my earthly joy. And if I had found you now so disposed, I had cast me to have had you into mine own realm .... But sithen I find you thus disposed, I insure you faithfully I will ever take me to penance, and pray while my life lasteth, if that I may find any hermit either grey or white that will receive me.

Wherefore, Madam, I pray you kiss me, and never do more.

Nay, said the queen, that shall I never do, but abstain you from such works. And they departed. But there was never so hard an hearted man, but he would have wept to see the dolour that they made".<sup>1</sup>

Malory's Morte Darthur lacks plot. When he was selecting his material from the French and translating it, there was much material to be omitted and the collection lacks unity and coherence. He has too much to relate and makes too many short stories of them, and follows one after another, sometimes continuing, "Yet another of the same battle". No story runs in a continuous tale throughout a book. Yet Arthur is usually connected in some way with each episode. The swiftness of the action and the air of unreality both of characters and place charms a great many people. Malory's sentence construction is poor but allowing for the condition under which his stories were written and the great mass of material from which he had to select, the result is successful and Malory proves to be a great epic author. He has the three epic traits which Matthew Arnold justly ascribes to Homer - "swiftness, simplicity, nobility".<sup>2</sup>

1 Malory: Book XXI, Chapters 9-10

2 Maynadier: "The Arthur of the English Poets" p.245



Caxton was a merchant but such a profession did not afford him sufficient leisure for his literary inclinations. He lived for several years in the Netherlands where he became a favorite of the English Princess who became the wife of the Duke of Burgundy. He also became a member of her household. About this time the Renaissance was having its effect on Bruges. Caxton was so successful that he decided to leave his Burgundian post and take his fame and knowledge and return to his native land, thereby benefiting his own country. Here he printed about seventy-one books, Malory's Morte Darthur being the fifty-second.

It was probably very fortunate for posterity that Caxton did not edit the Arthurian stories, since his own work is forgotten to-day. However, he did translate and make changes in the French versions. His work was equally important, as Malory's work would have no doubt perished had not Caxton published it.

Caxton stumbled upon this great popular work in this way. He wished to publish books of different kinds in order to interest all classes of people.

Personally he felt the Arthurian stories unworthy of his time and attention to make translations from the French as he felt they were exaggerations of martial heroes and that they had lost their national interest. He makes the following statement in his preface to Morte Darthur: "After that I had accomplished and finished divers histories ..... of great conquerors and princes, ..... many noble and divers gentlemen of this realm of England came and demanded me many and oftentimes, wherefore that I have not made and imprint the noble history of the Saint Greal, and of the three best Christian, and worthy, king Arthur, which ought most to be remembered amongst us Englishmen tofore all other Christian kings..... To whom I answered that divers men hold opinion that there was never such a king called Arthur, might well be aretted great folly and blindness. For he said that there were many evidences of the contrary. First ye may see his sepulchre in the Monastery of Glastingbury. And also in Policronicon, in the fifth book the sixth chapter, and in the seventh book the twenty-third chapter, where his body was buried, and after found, and translated into the said monastery ..... Also Galfridus in his British book recounteth his life; and in divers places of England many remembrances be

yet of him, and shall remain perpetually, and also of his knights. First in the Abbey of Westminster, at St. Edward's shrine, remaineth the print of his seal in red wax closed in beryl, in which is written, Patricius Arthurus Britannie, Gallie, Germanie, Dacie, Imperator. Item in the Castle of Dover ye may see Gawaine's scull, and Cradok's mantle: at Winchester the Round Table: in other places Laundelot's sword and many other things. Then all these things considered, there was a king of this land named Arthur. For in all places, Christian and heathen, he is reputed and taken for one of the nine worthy, and the first of the three Christian men. And also, he is more spoken of beyond the sea, more books made of his noble acts, than there be in England, as well in Dutch, Italian, Spanish, and Greekish, as in French. And yet of record remain in witness of him in Wales, in the town of Camelot, the great stones and the marvellous works of iron lying under the ground, and royal vaults, which divers now living have seen.... Wherefore.... I have after the simple conning that God hath sent to me... enprised to imprint a book of the noble histories of the said King Arthur, and of certain of his knights, after a copy unto me delivered, which copy Sir Thomas Malorye did

take out of certain books of French, and reduced it into English. And I, according to my copy, have down set it in print, to the intent that noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knights used in those days .... For therein 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. And for to pass the time this book shall be pleasant to read in, but for to give faith and belief that all is true that is contained herein, ye be at your liberty .....

"And for to understand briefly the content fo this volume, I have divided it into XXI Books, and every book chaptered, as hereafter shall by God's grace follow....."

Thus Caxton was persuaded to publish the Morte Darthur. He influenced it to some extent in that he divided it into books and chapters. Sometimes two or three chapters are wearisomely devoted to the same battle. Some of the books are very short, some are very long. The division of the chapters is most confusing at times when they occasionally stop right in

in the middle of a sentence.

Caxton was the first English printer to print Malory who was the last mediaeval English writer to express the mediaeval spirit and with him closes the Middle Ages. Caxton says in his preface that the day of greatest interest in the Arthurian stories was passing. So Malory wrote just in time before the coming influence of the Renaissance.

The history of the Arthurian tradition in the chronicles, as has been given in the preceding pages, is summarized below: -

About the middle of the sixth century, Gildas, a British ecclesiastic, fled to Armorica where he composed a short history of Britain which was an introduction to a derogatory epistle. Though it is short, incidental, and extremely prejudiced, yet it gives the only nearly contemporary account of Arthur. The account relates the arrival, devastations, and conquests of the Saxons, the initial terror and inability of the English, their recovery and armed resistance which finally checked the incomers and their continuance in civil wars.

After Gildas, the Historia Britonum was gradually put together by several British authors, of whom Nennius was the last important one at the close of the eighth century. It includes in a general way the facts of the Arthurian period as noted by Gildas but in addition supplies the name Vortigern for the unfortunate prince whom Gildas showed as ruling when the Saxons invaded, and the names of Vortimer, Hengist, Horsa, and Oetha. Bede and the Chronicle give some corroborative testimony of these last names. In other respects they vary with Nennius. Most of the Historia Britonum is made up of extravagant tales concerning Hengist's treachery, his marriage of his daughter to Vortigern and the tale of Vortigern's tower and Ambrosius, the supernatural boy. Much more credulous and plausible is his summary of the twelve victories of Arthur - dux bellorum - of which the twelfth victory is identified with Mount Badon. In his two mirabilia are some brief legendary stories of Arthur.

During the next three hundred years, among the few Saxon chronicles, Aethelweard retold Bede's story with instances from Nennius and some from his own imagination. William of Malmesbury and Henry of

Huntingdon in the first quarter of the twelfth century worked similarly to Aethelweard, but with more freedom and license, using not only Bede and Nennius, but also Gildas and the Chronicle. These chroniclers are important because they inspired Geoffrey of Monmouth to write his Historia.

Geoffrey was a great literary artist who created the romance which passed for centuries as the History of the Kings of Britain and which determined the form of the Arthurian story as seen in the chronicles. Geoffrey based his work on Nennius and to a small extent upon Bede and Gildas; but he made use of his whole store of reading and knowledge as he thought best. He especially drew from Celtic myths and traditions taking in those concerning Arthur, and which as connected with Arthur had been previously referred to Annales Cambriae at the close of the tenth century and by William of Malmesbury. He also procured information from the Celtic lay and ecclesiastical records; he also drew material from his own knowledge of history, from the life, customs and romantic literature of contemporary Norman England and France. He showed his art in assembling all these various parts

into consecutive narrative. He borrowed the Roman Constantinus and Constans from Bede and made them the founders of royalty in which he placed Aurelius and Arthur. Nennius was his authority for his account of Vortigern's reign and he added Merlin and his prophecies. He invented the history of Aurelius and Uther, whom he made brothers. The latter he made father of Arthur. He added to Arthur's victories at home, his foreign conquests, colored him and his knights' deeds with the glamour of contemporary chivalrous and courtly romance. He emphasizes Modred's treason against Arthur as husband and as king, and Arthur's revenge which is fatal to himself.

The national epic material of a very romantic people was preserved by Geoffrey's work, was made popular and current by story tellers, and swept over mediaeval Europe almost instantaneously, making Arthur and his knights not only English heroes but Christian heroes. The material continued to enjoy unsurpassed place in romantic literature for centuries. It is not known whether Geoffrey intended his book to be taken seriously by historians or not. Nevertheless, the French, English, and Latin chroniclers paraphrased



his story for the next two centuries. The Latinists of the monasteries read it carefully, distrusted it and only used extracts from it, while others used it almost exclusively in their compilations. With such usage made by the chronicles, they became quite modified in detail. This was due to careless or indifferent writers or to the desire to create a good romantic story or to reconcile other historical authorities or to reconcile them to their own ideas. Geoffrey's narrative gathered incidents from deeds of contemporary heroes and after the passing of two centuries from the prose romances which in their conception had been inspired by it. Finally it reached the English historians of the sixteenth century. These men working under the influence of the Renaissance, wished to write a genuine history of their country. As the mediaeval spirit passed, the importance of the story to history passed also and by the opening of the seventeenth century, it was insignificant in history. This narrative with so few elements of truth had for four hundred years superseded fact, but that time had passed and fact was bound to come into its own.

Malory is the last English romancer of the mediaeval spirit. He, then, may be considered the

Bible of the Arthurian story. In his work he gathers together the works of the Welsh Geoffrey, of the Norman Wace, of the English Layamon, and of the French Cretien de Troyes and Marie de France. In addition, he knows other works of less prominence and possibly some of the folk tradition. If Geoffrey was the Columbus who discovered the Arthurian realm, Malory was the Washington who made it a definite, distinct territory for future literary exploitation. Time has added little and changed little. Classic modernizations, such as those of Tennyson and of John Erskine, leave the figure of Arthur and his group essentially unchanged, the modernization always being recognized as conscious deviations from the norm. This norm is always the Arthur of Malory, nor do these works constitute a New Testament to the story. Sir Thomas Malory's Morte Darthur remains alone the orthodox scripture in the literary world of the story of Arthur. Geoffrey is the Arthurian Homer from whom later literary men have borrowed freely.

Spenser's Faerie Queen is an allegory but the author was able to impart to it a romantic glamour that dims the allegorical predilection and gives a happy glimpse of Arthur's "Land of faerie". On the whole Spenser portrays Arthur very much as he is in the romances - a knight of much prowess, and a friend and deliverer of knights in distress. He also gives him the same romantic body, personality, knightly ability and knightly equipment as do the romances. There are some differences, however Spenser says that Arthur was given over at birth to Timon by Merlin for instruction,

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

We recall that Malory called Arthur's foster father Sir Ector. Spenser differs again from the romancers in the nomenclature of Arthur's sword, calling it Morddure instead of the well known Excalibur which never "forst his rightful owner to offend". Spenser is also original in endowing Prince Arthur's shield with so wondrous ability that Arthur could

"Men into stones transmew,  
And stones to dust, and dust to nought at all;  
And when him list the prouder lookes subdew,  
He would then gazing blind, or turne to other  
hew".<sup>1</sup>

1 Faerie Queene, I. VII. 35.

In his great allegorical poem, Spenser showed that interest in the Arthurian romance still lived but he was quite original in that he wrote of Prince Arthur and not King Arthur. Having sojourned the greater part of his mature life in Ireland, he met there Sir Walter Raleigh to whom he wrote an introductory letter on publishing the first three books of The Faerie Queene. This work was unfinished, it would not be understood had Spenser not left this letter of explanation.

"Knowing how doubtfully all Allegories may be construed, and this booke of mine, which I have entitled "The Faery Queene, being a continued Allegorie... I have thought good... to discover unto you the generall intention and meaning.... The generall end... is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline. Which for that I conceived shoulde be most plausible and pleasing, beeing coloured with an historical fiction..... I chose the historie of King Arthure, as most fit for the excellencie of his person, beeing made famous by many mens former workes, and also furthest from the danger of envie, and suspicion of present time. In which I have followed all the antique poets historicall: first Homer,.... then Virgil,.... after him Ariosto..... and lately Tasso .... By ensample of

which excellent Poets, I labor to pourtract in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall vertues, as Aristotle hath devised; the which is the purpose of these first twelve bookes: which if I find to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encoraged to frame the other part of pollitike vertues in his person, after he came to bee king.

" .....Arthure..... I conceive, after his long education by Timon ( to whom he was by Merlin delivered to be brought up, so soone as he was borne of the Lady Igrayne ) to have seene in a dreame or vision the Faerie Queene, with whose excellent beautie ravished, hee awaking, resolved to seeke her out: and so, being by Merlin armed, and by Timon thoroughly instructed, he went to seeke her forth in Faery land. In the Faery Queene I meane Clory in my generall intention: but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and glorious person of our soveraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery land. And yet, in some places else, I doe otherwise shadow her. For considering shee beareth two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Empress, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull lady, this latter part in some places I doe expresse in Belphoebe.....

So in the person of Prince Arthure I settle forth Magnificence in particular, which vertue, for that ( according to Aristotle and the rest ) it is the perfection of all the rest, and containeth in it them all, therefore in the whole course I mention the deeds of Arthure appliable to that vertue, which I write of in that booke. But of the twelve other vertues I make XII other knights and patrons, for the more varietie of the historie: Of which these three bookes containe three. The first of the Knight of the Redcrosse, in whom I express Holinesse: the seconde of Sir Guyon, in whom I set foorth Temperance: the third of Britomartis, a Lady knight in whom I picture Chastitie. But because the beginning of the whole worke seemeth abrupt and as depending upon other antecedents, it needs that yee know the occasion of these three knights severall adventures ..... The beginning therefore of my historie, if it were to be told by an Historiographer, should be the twelfth booke, which is the last; where I devise that the Faery Queene kept her annual feast daies; upon which twelve severall dayes, the occasions of the twelve severall adventures hapned, which being undertaken by XII severall knights, are in these twelve books severally handled and discoursed.

"The first was this. In the beginning of the feast, there presented him selfe a tall clownish younge man, who falling before the Queene of Faeries desired a boone ( as the manner then was ) which during that feast she might not refuse: which was that hee might have the atchievement of any adventure, which during that feast should happen; that being granted, he rested him selfe on the floore, unfit through his rusticitie for a better place. Soone after entred a faire Ladie in mourning weedes, riding on a white Asse, with a dwarfe behind her leading a warlike steed, that bore the Armes of a knight, and his speare in the dwarfes hand. She falling before the Queene of Faeries, complained that her father and mother, and ancient King and Queene, had bene by an huge dragon many years shut up in a brazen Castle, who thence suffered them not to issew: and therefore besought the Faery Queene to assigne her some one of her knights to take on him that employt. Presently that clownish person upstarting, desired that adventure; whereat the Queene much wondering, and the Lady much gainesaying, yet he earnestly importuned his desire. In the end the Lady told him, that unlesse the armour which she brought would serve him ( that is, the armour of a Christian man specified

by St. Paul, v Ephes.) that he could not succeed in that enterprise: which being forthwith put upon him with due furnitures thereunto, he seemed the goodliest man in al that company, and was well liked of the Lady. And eftsoones taking on him knighthood, and mounting on that straunge Courser, he went forth with her on that adventure; where beginneth the first booke, viz.

"A gentle Knight was pricking on the playne", etc.

"The second day there came in a Palmer bearing an Infant with bloody hands, whose Parents he complained to have bene slaine by an enchauntresse called Acrasia: and therefore craved of the Faery Queene, to appoint him some knight to performe that adventure, which being assigned to Sir Guyon, he presently went foorth with that same Palmer: which is the beginning of the second booke and the whole subject thereof. The third day there came in a Groome, who complained before the Faery Queene, that a vile Enchaunter, called Busirane, had in hand a most fair Lady called Amaretta. Whom he kept in most grievous torment. Whereupon Sir Scudamour, the lover of that Lady, presently tooke on him that adventure. But beeing unable to performe it by reason of the hard Enchauntments, after long sorrow, in the end met with Britomartis, who succoured him, and reskewed his love.



"But by occasion hereof, many other adventures are intermedled; but rather as accidents then intendments. As the love of Britomart..... the vertuousnesse of Belphoebe; and many the like.

" Thus much, Sir, I have briefly over-run to direct your understanding to the wel-head of the History, that from thence gathering the whole intention of the conceit, ye may as in a handfull gripe all the discourse, which otherwise may happely seem tedious and confused. So humbly craving the continuance of your honorable favour towards me, and th' eternall establishment of your happiness, I humbly take leave.

Yours most humbly affectionate,  
 23 Ianuarie, 1589 Edmund Spenser. "

Spenser's spirit in handling the Arthurian stories is quite different from Malory's. Malory is the last English romancer of the Mediaeval spirit. Spenser on the other hand is modern. His spirit is Renaissance. His age was much as ours is, it could keep the Arthurian stories alive but it could not inspire or create new ones. They are no longer significant for new incidents but they are significant for the different ways in which each generation reacts to the old stories.

Spenser, though sharing the modern spirit,

did not seem to realize that the day for changing the ancient legends had passed. He thought that in his allegory he could dethrone the traditional Guinevere and crown in her stead, 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 souveraine the Queen, and her kingdom in Faery land".<sup>1</sup> This differentiates itself from Malory. Thus Spenser took a bold step in changing the main incidents of the old stories, because the masses believed them to be history. Even before Spenser there had been skeptics and even Caxton had thought the stories exaggerations and untruths but upon being urged he had published Malory's Morte Darthur. Chretien de Troyes had treated the stories so freely and independently that present day criticism would call them historical novels. However, this was not Spenser's way of dealing with them. He had no intention of retelling the old Arthurian stories but it was his intention to create a new story for which he could draw on his own fertile mind for incidents from the classics, the Bible, and from the French and Italian culture. This

1. W. L. Jones: The King Arthur of the English Poets.p.130

explains his neglect of Arthur and his Round Table stories. The only knight he used in his poem is Tristram who was a subordinate character. Spenser "..... regarded them merely as a rich storehouse from which he might select at will ornaments for his new poem, the magnificent Renaissance palace, which he, Prince of Poets, was building, whose wide taste and great wealth rendered accessible to him all the artistic material - Gothic, Renaissance, Italian, Moorish, Hebraic, Roman, Greek - known to European civilization".<sup>1</sup>

Spenser reveals the new spirit, as he develops into a more conscious artist than any of his predecessors. Chretien filled the stories with deep-wrought meanings of life. Spenser attempted to teach moral lessons by allegory, a device common to Mediaeval writers. It is often dangerous to art to teach morals but Arthurian romances have been used by Tennyson in his Idylls of the King to express the moral principles of the Victorian era. Spenser manifests a combined interest of Bible, of the everyday problems of life, of classical antiquity as well as of the Arthurian

1. Maynadier: The Arthur of the English Poets. p.275

stories in his allegory. In that the author blends England, France, Britain, Palestine, Greece, and Rome in his stories, he belongs to his successors and not his predecessors in the contributions to the Arthurian romances.

During the Elizabethan period, Arthur apparently was not popular with dramatists. They often alluded to him, his knights and his Round Table, but he was not a popular subject with them. Yet Thomas Hughes has shown in his tragedy that the Arthurian stories contain dramatic material. It seems quite strange that there was not more interest manifested in this material as it was a romantic period and the old stories were very well known. The Tudors liked to be connected with the older British Kings and were impressed favorably with the poets who thus referred to them. In fact, Henry VII named his eldest son Arthur because of his own interest in the Arthurian legends. Nevertheless, Hughes' play remains the one dramatic presentation in this period of Arthurian story.

There seems to have been seven collaborators with Thomas Hughes in the production of The Misfortunes of Arthur, among whom was Francis Bacon. This play,

the oldest Arthurian drama in the English language, was acted before Queen Elizabeth February 8, 1588. Little is known of the life of the author. The story of the play may be briefly summarized as follows: At a banquet given by Uther Pendragon to celebrate his victory against the Saxons, Uther fell in love with the beautiful Igera, wife of Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall. Igera did not welcome this attention and straightway told her husband of the king's advances. The angry duke departed with his wife at once without taking leave of his host. Arriving in his own kingdom, he prepared for war, having already placed Igera in Tintagil castle for safety. The king also levied a great army to sustain himself against Gorlois, but, becoming impatient in his desire for Igera, procured the assistance of Merlin who transformed him into the likeness of the Duke. Thus he was accepted by Igera and became the father of twins, Arthur and Anne. A few years later, Uther was poisoned by Vortigern, a Saxon who aspired to the British throne. Some seventeen years later Lucius Tiberius of Rome demanded hostages of Britain. Arthur assembled his powers, left his Queen, Guinivere, and his kingdom in the charge of Modred, arrived in France, slew Tiberius, and sent the

slain body to Rome as the tribute asked for. In his father's absence, Modred became ambitious, and made love to Guinivere, who entertained his suit. His usurpation was maintained by the Saxons, Irish, Picts, and Normans. Guinivere, hearing that Arthur was embarked to return, alternately vowed to kill her husband and then to kill herself, but was dissuaded from both deeds by her lady-in-waiting, Fronia, and her sister, Angharad, both councilors to her. Finally she resolved to become a nun. Arthur was resisted at his landing at Dover but succeeded in routing Modred. His last great battle and success was in Cornwall at the expense of one hundred and twenty thousand lives on each side. Modred received his death, and Arthur his mortal wound.

Hughes' play follows very closely Malory's Morte Darthur and Geoffrey Chronicles. He makes Modred the son of Arthur and of Arthur's sister, Anne. Hughes and Geoffrey call her Anne, while in the Morte Darthur she is called Morgawse. Most of the characters are those that we meet in the chronicles and romances with the exception of Queen Guinivere's sister, Angharad, and the Queen's confidante and attendant, Fronia,

who seem to have been characters of Hughes's imagination. Nearly all of the characters, and surely Arthur and Modred, are depicted with much clearness and color. The heedless and over-towering ambition of Modred is brilliantly contrasted with the quiet determination and fatherly fondness of Arthur.

The Misfortunes of Arthur is a "Senecan" tragedy and has most of the ear marks of the species. It has little action and much narration; it depicts character vividly, as instanced by Arthur and Modred; the chief characters are prone to didactic utterances; it abounds in precarious positions for all of the important personages and has much horror and bloodshed, animated by revengeful motives. Though a good example of the "Senecan" tragedy, the play is typically Elizabethan in its choice of words, its dumb show, its chorus, its cajolery of the Queen, and its blank verse. A dumb show precedes and a chorus follows each act, the former being symbolical of the action and the latter teaching a moral. The women characters are only three in number. Queen Guinivere is the same alluring personage of the chronicles and romances, but her appearance, together with her attendant, Fronia, is limited to the

first act. Arthur is the most interesting character in the entire play and with him the author was fairly successful. As much cannot be said for dumb shows and chorus, although, as has been said, a celebrity, Francis Bacon, assisted in their composition.

It has already been said that Thomas Hughes' Misfortunes of Arthur, so far as is known, is the only attempt in the sixteenth century to make use of Arthur or his court in dramatic production, a fact all the more surprising when one considers that drama was the norm expressing the Elizabethan spirit. But this is not all, the Elizabethan writers all but neglected him entirely. That they knew him and the legendary and historical material connected with him is certain; but his celebration in the literature of the day was confined to such unimportant writers as Warner and Drayton and then used by them only largely for the sake of rendering the specific work in hand complete.

In 1586 William Warner wrote a metrical history to which he attached the inclusive and fearsome title: Albion's England: A Continued Historie of the same Kingdome, from the Originals of the First Inhabitants Thereof: and Most the Chiefe Alterations and



Accidents there Hapning: unto and in, the Happie  
Raigne of our now most Gracious Sovereaigne Queene  
Elizabeth. With Varietie of Inventive and Historical  
Intermixtures. First Penned and Published by William  
Warner: and now Revised, and Newly Inlarged by the  
same Author. From the standpoint of literature,

Warner's work is of small importance. His was a pedestrian tread. That he had a prosaic mind is shown by the fact that he was interested only in that part of the Arthurian story that seemed to him to be based on historical fact. Unlike Spenser he was not at all interested in the romantic incidents which cluster in such profusion around the court of Camelot, but dismisses the whole Arthurian cycle after a brief condensation of Geoffrey's history with the statement that

"His (i.e.Arthur's) Scottish, Irish, Almaine,  
 French and Saxone battelles gat,  
 Yeeld fame sufficient; these seeme true, the  
 rest I credite not".

Michael Drayton also had something to say about Arthur in a work usually called Polyolbion for short but which in its full length reads: "A chorographicall Description of all the Tracts, Rivers, Mountains, Forests, and other Parts of this Renowned Isle

of Great Britain, with intermixture of the most Remarkable Stories, Antiquities, Wonders, Rarities, Pleasures, and Commodities of the same .....Digested into a Poem by Michael Drayton, Esq. With a Table added, for Direction to those Occurrences of the Story and Antiquitie, whereunto the Course of the Volume easily leads not. London.....1622". Drayton was a much better poet than Warner, even if Goldsmith's Citizen did exclaim upon seeing a monument in Westminster Abbey commemorative of Drayton: "Drayton:- I never heard of him before"<sup>1</sup>; a statement emanating more from the spirit of the eighteenth century than from any inherent insignificance of Drayton. The author of the fine sonnet-sequence, Idea's Mirror, and of the poems, The Virginia Voyage, and Agincourt, shows himself to be not only a poet, but in his Polyolbion an antiquarian also. That he had much more feeling for the romantic and therefore the poetic aspects of Arthurian story is shown in his "Chorographicall Description" where he never loses an opportunity to regale the reader with an identification of a particular legendary locality in which an Arthurian episode had a locus. Drayton's

1 Citizen of World, Letter 13.

main interest in the Polyolbion, however, was anti-quarian and only incidentally Arthurian.

But two other literary efforts in this period are concerned with Arthur and they will call for only brief mention. These are the Life of Merlin, by Thomas Heywood, a dramatist, and the Percy Folio Manuscript presumably made about 1650. The former, according to Maynadier,<sup>1</sup> purports to be history and is brought down to the end of the reign of James I; the latter, again according to Maynadier, is interesting in that it shows an understanding of the archaisms of the old ballads and romances in which Arthur figured and testifies also to a continuous interest in them. This manuscript contained about a dozen Arthurian selections. Its chief worth lies in its use made later by Bishop Percy of Ancient Reliques fame.

When one reads the passage in Paradise Lost<sup>2</sup>

..... what resounds  
In fable or romance of Uther's son,  
Begirt with British and Armoric knights,

and again in Paradise Regained<sup>3</sup>

Of faery damsels met in forest wide  
By knights of Logres, or Lyons,  
Lancelot, or Pelleas, or Pelenore,

1 Maynadier: The Arthur of the English Poets, p.290

2 Book I, 579

3 Book II, 359

and wishes heartily that Milton had carried out the hope expressed in his letter to his friend, Manso, of "breaking the Saxon forces against the martial valor of the Bretons", and endorses the opinion of Sir Walter Scott, who, expressing his own regret said: "What we have lost in his abandoning the theme can only be estimated by the enthusiastic tone into which he always swells when he touches upon the ' shores of old romance.' The sublime glow of his imagination, which delighted in painting what was beyond the reach of human experience; the dignity of his language, formed to express the sentiments of heroes and of immortals; his powers of describing alike the beautiful and terrible; above all, the justice with which he conceived and assigned to each supernatural agent a character as decidedly peculiar as lesser poets have given to their human actors, would have sent him forth to encounter such a subject with gigantic might. ....What would he not have made of the adventure of the Ruinous Chapel, the Perilous Manor, the Forbidden Seat, the Dolorous Wound, and many others susceptible of being described in the most sublime poetry:" Whether Milton could have written an epic about Arthur equal to the one he wrote about Satan is of course purely speculative; but one is inclined to

doubt that he could have done so after he was caught in the vortex of the grim Puritan struggle.

In the discussion of Hughes' Misfortunes of Arthur, surprise was expressed that the playwrights of that romantic period seemed unattracted to the dramatic material of the Arthurian story. But equal surprise may be manifested that in the unromantic period of the late seventeenth century Dryden should have produced a drama about Arthur. This period, on the whole, was blind to mediaeval beauty with all its exuberance and extravagance. It was given over to rationalization, order and method. Unlike the Elizabethan period, man was looked on from the coldly intellectual side. Satire and didacticism ruled the literary thought of the day. Yet in the midst of this, and somewhat in spite of it, we find Dryden going back to the old Arthurian material for dramatic expression. That Dryden by natural predilection was not insensible to the charm of these old stories, nor of their possibilities for the exercise of poetic imagination, is clearly seen in his drama, King Arthur or a British Worthy. Briefly, the plot of the play is as follows;

Oswald, the Saxon Heathen King, hopes to change the state of Brittany from the rule

of Britons under King Arthur to his own rule. This desire being greatly reinforced at the loss of his suit for the beautiful, blind Emmeline, Daughter of Conon, Duke of Cornwall, to Arthur; he declares war on Arthur. In the struggle Arthur has, on his side, Conon, Duke of Cornwall, Albanact, Captain of his Guards, Aurelius, Merlin, and Philidel, an airy Spirit who is a fallen angel from Heaven. On the opposing side are the Saxon King, Oswald; his magician, Osmond; a friend, Guillamar; and a wicked Earthy Spirit, Grimbald. Oswald seeks revenge upon Arthur by stealing Emmeline whom he loves and in whom he expects to bouy up his own fortunes. Arthur and his soldiers with the hearts of trueborn Britons plan to seige Oswald's castle. Before they execute their plans, Oswald challenges Arthur to a single combat for the possession of Emmeline and Arthur's kingdom. The latter defends his kingdom and proves his strength in his victory on which he had waghered so much. Oswald, who is the

loser of empire, liberty, and love is sent back with his Saxons to their ancient Elbe, Philidel restores Emmeline's sight by sprinkling her eyes with some of the contents of the vial which Merlin had prepared. Osmond, the Heathen Magician, charms Emmeline from her peaceful bower and encloses her in a tree to stand exposed to all kinds of weather and storms, A crime for which he is plunged into a loathsome dungeon by Merlin. Arthur frees Britain, expels the foreign force, and acquires great future fame.

It is at once apparent that Dryden departed widely from the orthodox Arthurian story. His method was much like that of Spenser; that is, he used as much of the old material as suited his purpose, changed and remade much of it, and added material of his own as needed. He introduces new characters unknown to his predecessors; he creates a new Queen, the beautiful, blind Emmeline, daughter of a powerful Duke, for King Arthur; and his Merlin is an entirely different personage from the Merlin of mediaeval times. Other new characters, offsprings of his own imagination, are Oswald, the Saxon Heathen King, and the two conflicting

spirits, Grimbald and Philidel. Thus in an age so unlike Spenser's, Dryden dared to utilize bits of Arthurian matter that he found here and there and combined them with foreign elements to augment his own story. He probably would have written an epic, had he been financially, politically, morally, and socially free to devote his mind and heart to the task. Under such handicaps, he wrote instead what he called a "dramatic opera", not because his genius was particularly adapted to dramatic writing, but because he was in need of immediate remuneration and felt that plays would be more fruitful than epics. Although he lived in this unromantic period, he did not overlook a most attractive subject to himself when he produced King Arthur. It was originally written for the conclusion of the reign of Charles II in recognition of his political triumphs. It is easy to conjecture that the piece as first written had a strong political tendency and doubtless abounded in ingenious parallels. But the Revolution of 1688 (which drove Charles II's successor into exile), while it ruined our author's prospects, caused him to be more cautious in his play. After seven years had elapsed, he felt compelled to change it in order ~~not~~ to offend a government which had protected him. Thus he changed



what perhaps had been a highly poetical drama into a fairy tale, vested only with extravagant adventure.

Despite such disadvantages, Dryden succeeded with King Arthur, as it was received with great applause at its first appearance, was often repeated, and continues to be represented occasionally as few of his plays are.

If the drama of Dryden and the epic of Blackmore<sup>1</sup> attest to an interest, though feeble, of the late seventeenth century in Arthurian material, even that interest all but completely subsided in the first half of the eighteenth century, the most unromantic period in the entire scope of English literature from Beowulf to the present day. Addison's statement in reference to Spenser's Faerie Queene--

"But now the mystic tale that pleased of yore  
Can charm an understanding age no more"--

not only sums up the attitude of his age toward the old romances but unconsciously on his part states the cardinal fault of his age, which in a word, may be termed

<sup>1</sup> I regret that my inability to secure a copy of Blackmore's works prevents a detailed consideration of his connection with Arthurian story. Blackmore in 1695 published Prince Arthur, an Heroick Poem in Ten Books and later date, King Arthur, an Heroick Poem in Twelve Books. Both are political allegories and both are written in heroic couplets.

sophistication, though much of this sophistication was assumed. The age was an understanding one. It eschewed emotion of all kinds and rested whatever imagination it had on the basis of common sense and fact. It was an age of standardization, of compliance with convention. Its interest lay in interpreting its own spirit. It was wholly academic and unimaginative.

Small wonder then that we find the period not only indifferent but contemptuous to ancient legend and mediaeval tale. It could accept and no doubt even relish a Gulliver but largely because of its author's wit and satire, qualities that the age loved and shared. But as for an Arthur, Merlin and other characters of the Round Table galaxy, it was perfectly content to lower them to the level of chapbooks, nursery tales and almanacs. Arthur became associated and identified with various heroes of the nursery, while Merlin descended from the mystical seer of old to the vulgar enchanter whose head adorned the entrance of fortune-tellers booths and astrologers' doors.

Among the catch-penny pamphlets and chap books in which Merlin became the central figure may be mentioned England's Prophetical Merline Foretelling to all nations

of Europe, brought out in the reign of Charles I.

In 1642 appeared A Prophecy concerning Hull in York-shire. In 1651 came the prognosticative and pretentious title, The Lord Merlin's Prophecy concerning the King of the Scots; foretelling the strange and wonderful things that shall befall him in England. The most famous and best known, however, was Merlinus Liberatus, whose author fell foul of the terrible irony and sarcasm of Dean Swift, an episode in literature familiar even to-day to nearly every school boy.

The association of Merlin with seventeenth and eighteenth century astrology is easily explained; it is, however, not only odd but exceeding bizarre that Arthur should descend from the throne of Camelot to reign in the hearts of childhood. Early in the seventeenth century he had appeared in chap-book literature. Here he still held court, but his chief knight now is no longer the redoubtable Lancelot but the diminutive Tom Thumb whose adventures are remarkable, even if grossly imitative of his mediaeval prototype. Later he added another famous figure to his retinue in the person of Jack the Giant Killer.

The chief outcome, and certainly the most merry, of Arthur's association with popular ballad and

nursery fiction is Fielding's Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great or The Tragedy of Tragedies. The author intended it for a burlesque on contemporary drama. It hit the writers from Dryden to Fielding's own contemporaries, Young and Thomson, who were eighteenth century Romanticists. Though the play purports to be Elizabethan, Fielding's did not travesty the dramatists of that period either because he had too much respect for them or because his eighteenth century audience would have failed to understand the point of attack. No doubt Fielding intended to satirize contemporary tragedy and not the Arthurian stories. This is the more probable as he was born in Somerset County, the vicinity of Arthurian traditions and association.

Fielding first gave this work to the public as a one-act farce in 1730, but later, on account of its popularity, revised it to three acts in 1731. Tom Thumb, the hero of the play, is analogous to Sir Lancelot, the invincible in arms. At the opening of the play, he is the victorious general of a battle against the giants from whom he brings as captive their princess Glumdalca, beloved by King Arthur but who loved Tom Thumb. The little general asks for the hand of the King and

Queen's daughter, Huncamunca, as compensation for his services. Queen Dollalolla does not favor this marriage as she herself is in love with Tom Thumb. Nevertheless, Arthur, although he stands a little in fear of his queen says, "It is resolv's - the princess is your own".

Huncamunca marries Thumb but tells her other lover, Lord Grizzle, that "My ample heart for more than one has room: A maid like me Heaven form'd at least for two. I married him, and now I'll marry you." This displeases Grizzle who raises an army against the King and his followers. Arthur and his family retire to safety while Tom Thumb quells the insurrection by killing the giant. While on his triumphal march, a cow "..... in a moment swallow's up Tom Thumb". The play ends in a bloody tragedy of murders until the King falls last by his own hand.

The gradual return to a harmonization with the true spirit and genius of English thought and feeling is a matter of literary history familiar to all students and need detain us only briefly. There was a constant development away from the objective to the subjective, from the artificial to the natural, from the impersonal to the personal. Even during the reign of

Pope and Classicism, there were protests, conscious and unconscious, against the prevailing order. These slowly gathered head under the revival of the Spenserian and Miltonic traditions and reached back into a revived interest in the Middle Ages until, with gathering force, literature burst into the high-tide of Mediaevalism in the nineteenth century. This romantic spirit was fostered by many writers, chief among whom of course were Gray, Chatterton, Horace Walpole, Macpherson and others, whose interest in things antiquarian naturally included the old Arthurian legends. Even from the very heart of the Queen Anne age the poet Parnell referred to Arthur. In 1725 Ambrose Phillips made a collection of "Old Ballads" which includes one entitled King Arthur. Gray in The Bard makes more than a casual mention of Arthur, while Thomas Warton wrote a poem of considerable length entitled The Grave of King Arthur.

It was Percy, however, who perhaps more than any one else was responsible for the renewed interest in Arthurian legend. He was born of a middle class family in Shropshire in 1729, and was educated at Oxford. He held the vicarage of Northamptonshire for twenty-nine years. Here he married into a family superior to his

own. Later he was Bishop of Dromore, Ireland, where he resided until his death in 1811.

To the awakened interest in Norse mythology Percy contributed Northern Antiquities which was a translation of the introduction to L'Histoire de Dannemarc of Henri Mallet. Gray had also been interested in this subject. Of interest, too, as showing Percy's curiosity, is a translation of a Chinese novel from a Portuguese manuscript(1761). His best known work, however, is Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765), a collection of ballads, which has been called the Bible of the Romantic movement.<sup>1</sup> It marks the first decisive return in English to the measure afterward to be so beautifully employed by Coleridge. The publication exerted, too, great interest in Germany. He dedicated these poems to Baroness Percy, Elizabeth, Countess of Northumberland. He liked the picturesque and the romantic and felt that such literature could be commercialized in an age weary of pseudo-classicism. Through his works Percy won high recognition and was claimed by the noble Percys as one of their line, receiving advancement through their influence. His portrait was painted by Sir Joshua

1 International Encyclopaedia.

Reynolds, and he was honored by a group of scholars who gave his name to the Percy Society ( 1840-52 ), founded for the publication of old ballads.

The Reliques was inspired by an old folio manuscript collection of ballads and songs, possibly written by a rough old country gentleman about 1645-50. Percy first saw the old collection while visiting a friend, Humphrey Pitt, where he found the manuscript torn and soiled under the parlor bureau. Some of the pages were gone, as the house-maid had used them for kindling fires. When Percy displayed his interest in the old manuscript, his friends assisted him in finding such old ballads as they could procure. Finally Percy had a sufficient number to publish the Reliques which he said was the fruit of those found in Humphrey Pitt's home. Later this statement was found untrue as only forty-five of the one hundred and seventy-six poems in the Reliques were from the original manuscript. The remainder came from old songs of the time and other ballad collections. Percy showed himself to be versatile and wise and of poetic taste, as he remade many of the stories and added some beautiful lyrics to them.

Of Percy's forty-five pieces from the old folio only five are concerning King Arthur or his



knights and only two of these, The Boy and the Mantle and the Marriage of Sir Gawaine" ..... are of the better Arthurian pieces in the manuscript".<sup>1</sup>

There were many stories in the manuscript which were not included in the Reliqués but which were known to Percy and his most intimate friends. In this way they had some influence on literature.

Among them is Sir Lambwell which is from Marie de France's Lanval. Libius Disconius is concerning Gawain's son who, by daring to kiss a dragon, sets her free from a horrid enchantment inflicted on her by two wizards. Another story is of the Turke and Gowin in which the Turke accomplished great feats among the giants in the Isle of Man by Gowin's assistance. These over, the Turke implores Gowin to chop off his head. When Gowin had done this, he beholds a tall knight, who had been the victim of an enchantment. Gawain is the hero of another of the old stories in The Carle of Carlile. He with two companions lose their way in the forest and seek refuge at the dwelling of a fierce giant. He shows Gawain the bones of fifteen hundred men whom he had killed during the last forty

1 Maynadier: The Arthur of the English Poets p.324

years. By this deed Gawain freed the Carle from a spell which made him kill every guest who did not obey him. Hereafter they were friends and Gawain married his daughter, The Carle extended an invitation to his former enemy, King Arthur, who accepted and made him Earl of Carlisle.

The real Arthurian stories in the Reliques are The Boy and the Mantle and The Marriage of Sir Gawaine. The Boy and the Mantle is a chastity test administered by a small boy who arrived at King Arthur's court on the third of May. He says:

"It shall never become that wiffe,  
That hath once done amisse".

Queen Guinevere and other ladies try the mantle but it crinkles and falls from them. Sir Craddock's wife finds that the mantle fits her perfectly. Then the boy gives the chastity test of the Horne when he says to the knights,

".....there was noe cuckold  
Shall drinke of my horne;  
But he shold it sheede  
Either behind or beforne".

Craddock won both the horn and the boar's head. The test of the Horne as given in Morte Arthur differs from that in The Boy and the Mantle in that it is administered to King Mark's queen instead of to the knights of Arthur's court. The stories differ widely in other respects

also. It is thought that Percy wrote this ballad before the romance was translated into English.

Guinevere is depicted in the same way as in the old histories and romances; as Holinshed says "she was evil reported of, as noted incontinence and breach of faith to hir husbane".

The Marriage of Sir Gawaine is the same story as the fifteenth century romance called The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell. Arthur and a boore had long been enemies. When he challenged Arthur on his own magic grounds, Arthur lost his courage and strength. The carlish knight freed him on the promise that Arthur would return in one year with the answer to his question, 'What thing it is that women desire most'. After much vain seeking, Arthur met the most hideous woman in the forest who told him the secret he desired on the king's promise to bring a courtly knight to marry her. Her information proved correct when Arthur returned to the proud baron with the reply that "Women desire most the mastery of men". One of Arthur's knights, Sir Gawaine, married the horrid looking woman, but when he kissed her the dreadful enchantment was broken and she became the fairest of women. She and her brother, the boore, had been placed under a spell by their step-mother;

the one doomed to a wretched shape to live in the forest and the other to the life of a boore who lived by slaying all who would not accede to his every demand. It is thought that the original ballad is very old and that it inspired Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Tale.

While Percy's Reliques contained only a few Arthurian stories, yet they contributed much more material, true in spirit and theme, than had been done since the last edition of Malory in 1634. Their greatest contribution was familiarising the public with the old stories. Another contribution to the interest of the Arthurian stories was that of creating an interest in mediaevalism which not only inspired Scott with a love for mediaeval tales but which also prepared the way for the reinstatement of the Round Table stories in the literature of the following century.

Percy was not always faithful to the ancient manuscripts in his pieces which make up the Reliques and consequently fell foul of that indomitable old antiquarian, Joseph Ritson, who inspired scholarship to follow more closely original texts in theme and spirit than Percy and Spenser had deemed necessary. Ritson challenged Percy's assertion that the greater part of the Reliques were taken from the ancient

manuscript. Though Ritson might have been more manly and tactful in his accusation, however, he was correct as Percy had taken about forty-five of his stories from the one hundred and seventy-six stories of the folio manuscript. Percy answered the attack and displayed the ancient manuscript in a glass case in Pall Mall for a period of six months. Ritson was compelled to acknowledge the existence of such a manuscript but did not cease his attacks. Though a narrow-minded man and easily provoked by slight inaccuracies, he did a valuable service to the Arthurian stories by demanding more faithful adherence to original texts than Percy or Dryden had done. Very likely it is Ritson who is responsible for the fidelity to subject matter and spirit so noticeable in the treatment of Arthurian story by the poets of the nineteenth century.

The end of the period allotted to this paper in the treatment of the Arthurian story has now been reached. Attempt has been made to trace the more important phases of this story as exemplified in English letters. It can readily be seen that the period ending with Malory was the most prolific in quantity and perhaps the best in quality. After Malory, full liberty was taken with the license given by the Renaissance to treat Arthur and his wonderful story in such manner as seemed best to fit the purpose of the particular author. Thus we have seen Arthur divested of much of his romantic glamor and made to accommodate himself to the whimsicalities of each succeeding period. It can be safely said that from Malory to the beginning of the nineteenth century there is no literature concerning Arthur of more than mediocre merit. Under the influence of Percy and Ritson, however, the nineteenth century has witnessed a revival of interest in Arthur and has given us what are perhaps the crowning achievements of literature which deal with his name.