PRINTED BY A. P. BREWIN AT THE BOMBAY CHRONICLE PRESS,
MEDOWS STREET, FORT, BOMBAY, FOR THE PUBLISHERS
THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, HORNBY ROAD,
FORT, BOMBAY.

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MORTE D'ARTHUR

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INTRODUCTION

I. ALLEGORY IN ENGLISH LITERATURE BEFORE TENNYSON

The word Allegory is almost synonymous with Poetry. For both clothe abstract ideas in concrete form. Just as a parable is an expanded simile, so an Allegory is an expanded metaphor. It brings the author's meaning, argument or teaching nearer to the reader by putting it into human or some other sensuous form, and the mental effort involved in deciphering the meaning, in extracting what was meant from what was said, is both pleasing and stimulating. In an Allegory [Greek, *allegoria* (*allos* other,—*agoria*, speaking, from *agora*, an assembly)] the story and the indirect or implied meaning run parallel, and it is seldom or never that the parallel is complete at all points. Hence in a sustained and consistent allegory, the allegory generally spoils the story. The story therefore should be the first consideration, and the allegory should not be allowed to interfere with its artistic truth and development. It should not, that is to say, be obtruded upon the reader at all points, but should be occasional and suggestive, rather than detailed and persistent. The story should resemble the firm-set earth, and the allegory the shifting phases of the sky.

Allegory has existed from the earliest times. Plato's *Phaedrus* represents the soul as a chariot drawn by two horses, one white and one black, the former representing the good, and the latter the evil tendencies of the heart.

Beast-tales, told with a purpose and moralised into fables, from Indian, Greek and Roman sources are collectively known as *Aesop's Fables* (a name ascribed to all Greek and Latin fables much in the

same way as all the Psalms are attributed to David). Some of the Greek myths are beautiful allegories. Keats has told us in *Hyperion* how the *Titanomachia* illustrates the truth that the "first in beauty must be first in might," and enforces the principle of progress and the law of change. Stevenson in his *Virginibus Puerisque* shows us the appropriateness of the Greek conception of Pan as the God of nature, smiling when the birds sing in the grove and the sun shines on the summer sea, and stamping his foot in anger when the tempests rage and oceans roar.

Another instance is the story of Demeter and Persephone, wherein Persephone, carried away to the underworld by Pluto, represents the seed-corn lying concealed in the ground, and Persephone, restored to her mother Demeter, its reappearance above the soil. But we must not linger over these.

The Christian Bible was a fertile source of allegory in Europe. The Parables of the New Testament are of course obvious allegories, but the doctrine of verbal inspiration caused priests and monks to attach a mystical and allegorical meaning to the most unpoetical and matter of fact portions of Holy Writ. Some of the examples of medieval exegesis are rather amusing. Take for instance the iron pan mentioned in Ezekiel, Ch. IV, verse 3: "Moreover take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel." The passage is thus commented upon in Alfred the Great's translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*. "It is very rightly said to the prophet: 'take thee an iron frying-pan and set it for an iron wall between thee and Jerusalem!' By the pan is indicated the *fervour of the mind*, and by the iron *the power of the rebukings*. What is more bitter in the teacher's mind, or *can fry and irritate it more* than the indignation which is aroused for righteousness' sake? With the frying of this pan was Paul burnt, when he said: 'Who is sick that I am

not also sick for his sake? Or who is ashamed that it may not shame me therefore?' " This mystical and allegorical element was bound to pass into the more general and secular literature of a period when the monasteries were the sole repositories of learning. Bestiaries (books on the fabulous natures and qualities of animals with an allegorical interpretation used for the purpose of Christian teaching) were common in England and on the continent from early times. They all originated in a religious document, the *Physiologus*, first current among the Christians of Alexandria, but afterwards translated from the original Greek into Latin and thence into the languages of Western Europe. We may take as an example a 'nature' of the lion from the Middle English Bestiary, an anonymous work of the early 13th Century. "The lion stands on a hill, and if he hear a man hunt, or by his nose-smell scent his approach, by whatever way he descends to the dale he fills all his footsteps after him, draws dust with his tail wherever he steps, either dust or dew, so that the hunter cannot find. Another 'nature' he has, when he is born: the lion lies still and stirs not from sleep till the sun has shone about him thrice; then his father rouses him with his roaring. The third custom the lion has, when he tries to sleep, he is said never to close the lids of his eyes.

"Signification: Very high is that hill that is the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord is the lion who liveth thereabove. Yet when it pleased Him to alight here on earth, the devil might never know, though he hunted Him secretly as he came down, nor how he dwelt in that mild maiden, Mary by name, who bore Him to the profit of men. When our Lord was dead and buried, as His will was, He lay still in a stone till the third day. His Father aided Him, so that He rose thus from the dead to keep us alive. According to His pleasure, He watches as a shepherd for his flock. He is shepherd: we are sheep. He will shield us if we obey His word, so that we go nowhere astray."

These Bestiaries exerted a considerable influence on subsequent allegorical works, especially in the 13th and 14th Centuries, and they survive in Spenser's *Faery Queene* (e.g. Una's lamb, ass and lion, and the dragon in Book I). They must be distinguished from the beast fables of the middle ages, lineal descendants of the fables of Aesop and Phaedrus, adapted or translated by English writers from the French *Ysopets* of Marie de France and other authors, and from the Latin collection of fables known as the *Romulus*, which first appeared in England in the 11th Century.

Religious and moral allegory held the field for a long time in medieval England before a new turn was given to allegory by the effect of the translation into English of the French *Roman de la Rose*. Thus early in the 13th Century we have the *Ancien Riwle* or *Rule of Nuns* which contains much elaborate allegorical interpretation of the Bible after the manner of the early homilists and the *Sawles Ward*, an allegorical homily on Matthew, Ch. XXIV, v. 43. "But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up."

The personification of certain abstract qualities in the guise of human beings or animals, which perform no action not strictly in harmony with the quality they represent, began in England with the allegory of *Philosophia and Philocosmia* by Athelard of Bath about 1116. Such personification is common throughout the middle ages and is the chief feature of the Morality Plays, a 15th Century development from the Miracle Plays, which continued in popular favour for more than a century. It is to be found also in the Seven Deadly Sins, the notion of which is said to have originated from a passage in Proverbs, "Six things doth the Lord hate; yea seven are an abomination unto Him." The

theme of the Seven Deadly Sins is one of the commonest in our old authors. They appear in the *Ayenbite of Inwit* (1340), and in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*; they are the 'thieves seven' of Chaucer's *A. B. C.*; they occur in Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (1385), in a tract by Wycliff, in Langland's *Piers Plowman* (1362-77), in Dunbar's *Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins*, in Skelton's *The Bowge of Court*, in the Miracle and Morality Plays, in Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and in Dekker's *Seven Deadly Sins of London* (1606).

Secular allegory in England as elsewhere owes much to the Romance of the Rose (13th century). It is an enormous poem of over 22,000 lines written in two parts, the first by Guillaume de Lorris, and the second by Jean Clopinel de Meung. These two parts are so different that it is necessary to treat them separately. The first part is an allegorical and medieval *Art of Love* founded on Ovid, Macrobius, Chrétien de Troyes, André de Chapelain and the 'théologie galante' which had been evolved by a kind of false analogy, the gospel of the worship of women being the counterpart of the gospel of Christ. According to this gospel Love had his 'allegories, his litanies, not to speak of his paradise, his hell, and his ten commandments.' He had a whole court of personified abstractions, and it is with these abstractions that Guillaume de Lorris deals in the 4,000 odd lines which compose the first part of the *Roman*. He describes how the Lover falls asleep on a May morning and dreams of a beautiful garden, the gate of which is opened by the maiden Idleness. The lover, undeterred by the frowning figures on the walls, enters and is received by the owner of the garden, Sir Mirth, accompanied by the Lady Gladness and the God of Love himself, whose vassal he becomes and receives his commandments. He sees a beautiful bud on a rose tree and essays to pluck it, a task in which he is assisted by Venus, Bon Accueil, Franchise and Pity, but

opposed by Slander, Danger (guardianship), Shame and Fear. Reason tries to argue him out of his passion but in vain. He tries to kiss the rose and is repulsed. He breaks thereupon into a lament, in the course of which the poem abruptly breaks off. The allegory is of course clear enough, and involved, one would suppose, no great strain on the intellect even of the middle ages. A young man falls in love with a young woman. Politely received he expresses his desire and tries to kiss her. But pride, shame and fear come to her aid, and she banishes him from her presence. Then, pitying his grief, she is willing to atone for her former unkindness. But her guardians keep a watch over her, their suspicions being aroused, and the young lover is in despair.

At the beginning of the 14th century, some forty years after the death of Guillaume de Lorris, the completion of the *Roman de la Rose* was taken in hand by Jean Clopinel de Meung. The contrast between the two parts of the *Roman* is sharp. Whereas the former is aristocratic and makes fun of the 'vilain', the latter is 'bourgeois' and satirises the three estates. While the former exhibits the spirit of feudal chivalry—fear God, honour the king, love one maiden only and win her affection by heroic deeds of arms—the latter regards kings as robbers, favours a communistic division of property, satirises woman and regards love as nothing more than nature's provision for the continuance of the race. The two parts fitly represent two aspects of medievalism: the former corresponds to the tall figures of the saints set in the niches on the walls of a church; the latter to the gargoyles which from pillar and roof grin down upon the saints: the former aristocratic, calm, beautiful, noble, serious (at any rate in idea); the latter plebeian, restless, greedy of knowledge, impudent, and with a strong vein of sceptical common sense.

The second part of the *Roman* is an encyclopaedia of such knowledge as the times afforded. It

popularised Boethius, and was full of lengthy moral, philosophical, pseudo scientific disquisitions. In it, Nature confesses to 'Genius' the high priest of Venus, and under cover of 'confession' unfolds Jean Clopinel's theory of the universe.

The love allegory, it is true, continues; but the author of the second part of the *Roman* is not so much a poet as a moralist and satirist. He quickly grants the lover's wish, and is then free to expatiate at will over the whole field of medieval thought.

No work of the middle ages has exerted a greater influence than the *Roman de la Rose*, but great as that influence is, it has been exaggerated. It is too much to say that medieval allegory is due to the *Roman*. Moral and religious allegory had, as we have shown, existed long before. Besides, allegory was 'in the air' in those days as much as the novel is in these. Following the example set long before by Gregory the Great, priests exercised their ingenuity in giving moral and religious meanings to the commonest objects mentioned in the Bible. Old Testament sayings were regarded as prophetic of events in the New, and thus a mystery and a meaning were attached to those old words, and allegory was invested with Divine authority. Moreover in those simple times abstractions could best be taught to men, as to little children, by sign and symbol, by allegory and personification.

But if the *Roman de la Rose* did not initiate medieval allegory it gave to it form and direction. The dream on the May morning, the song of the birds, the garden, became part of the stock allegorical machinery of the times and were repeated *ad infinitum* in the works of the countless allegorists of the day.

In Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, *Parliament of Fowls* and *House of Fame* the dream machinery recurs. In the *Parliament of Fowls* too the goddess Nature occupies a prominent position, as she does in

the *Roman*. In the first of the three periods of Chaucer's authorship, when he served his apprenticeship to poetry and was chiefly occupied with love themes, the influence of the First Part of the *Roman de la Rose* was paramount. In the third period, the period of the *Canterbury Tales*, the influence of the Second Part of the *Roman* is seen in the satirical portions of his poems.

The *Roman de la Rose* and Robert Grosseteste's *Chastel d'Amour*, a theological application of it, exercised some influence upon Langland's *Piers Plowman*, which like the *Roman* begins with a dream 'in a somer season when softe was the sunne.'

Allegorical machinery similar in part to that of the *Roman* is to be found in 'moral' Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (1385), when the Lover, wounded by Cupid, makes his moan to Venus, who sends him to be shriven by Genius, her priest. In the *Pearl* (14th century) the West-midland poet dreams his *dream* and sees his lost daughter no longer as the *rose* he had lost, but as a pearl of great price.

Lydgate, in so far as his work is allegorical, shows the influence of the *Roman de la Rose*, e.g. the strife between Reason and Sensuality and in the 'Temple of Glas.'

The same allegorical machinery recurs in James I of Scotland's *King's Quair* (1423), where the king reads Boethius, tells his love story, makes his 'plaint,' falls asleep, and visits in dreamland Venus, Minerva and Fortune.

Dunbar's *Golden Targe* (1508) and *Thistle and Rose* carry on the same tradition—the same dream on a May morning, the same allegorical and mythological figures—Dissimulation (Faux Semblant), Nature, Reason, Venus and Cupid. Douglas' *Palace of Honour* (1500) and Lyndesay's *Dreme* tread the same path, which leads to an abyss of dulness in Stephen Hawes' *History of Graund Amour and La Bel Pucell, called the Pastime of Pleasure* (1506).

The classical Renaissance, appearing in the works of Wyatt and Surrey, who were influenced by Marot in France and Petrarch in Italy, swept away the cumbersome machinery of medieval allegory, but traces of it survive in many of the works printed by Caxton, and it was revived with some measures of success by Spenser.

In the *Faerie Queene* the Renaissance, the Reformation, and Medieval Chivalry and Allegory meet, and we are presented with a series of dream pictures unrivalled in beauty and gorgeous colouring. Spenser's intention —an intention not clearly and fully carried out— was to present twelve knights embodying twelve moral virtues, who were to relate their several adventures on successive days before the Faerie Queene when she kept her annual feast of twelve days, King Arthur as *Magnificence* containing the sum of all the virtues in their perfect form.

The Allegory however is political and religious as well as moral. The Red Cross Knight for example stands for Holiness, England and Protestantism; Duessa for Falsehood, Mary Queen of Scots and the Catholic Church. As a whole it is confusing, a collection of separate tales and allegories into which Spenser fitted whatever interested him. But we need not read it as a whole.

Spenser was imitated by Phineas Fletcher, who in 1633, wrote an allegorical poem, entitled *The Purple Island*, dealing with the body and soul of man, and by his brother Giles Fletcher in *Christ's Victory and Triumph* (1610), while his influence is apparent, but less strongly, in William Browne's *Britannia's Pastorals* (1614). But it was not till after the Civil War and the restoration of Charles II in 1660 that allegory was again utilised by a great figure in English literature. Dryden took occasion from the analogy between Jewish history in the reign of David and the state of England in 1681 (vide

Samuel II, Ch. XIV, v. 25 to end of Ch. XVIII) in his *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), the famous satire against Shaftesbury and the Whigs, to give his characters Biblical names, Charles II, Monmouth and Shaftesbury being represented as David, Absalom, and Achitophel respectively. His *Hind and Panther* (1686-7) is under the form of the old beast-fable, or allegory, a defence of the Roman Catholic Religion, in which the milk-white hind represents the Roman Catholic Church, the panther the Church of England, the bloody boar the Independents, the quaking hare the Quakers, the buffoon ape the atheists and deists, and so on. Milton's *Paradise Lost* contains the fine allegory of Sin and Death, where Sin is described as:

> "Woman to the waist, and fair,
> But ending foul in many a scaly fold
> Voluminous and vast, a serpent armed
> With mortal sting."

There is too an allegorical and autobiographical element in his *Samson Agonistes* (1671). In the Biblical Samson, his glorious youth, his defeat of the Philistines by God's help, his final overthrow owing to his own weakness and disobedience, the jubilation of the Philistines over his fall, and the prospective day of vengeance, when the triumph of the wicked ends in their despair and destruction, we see plainly indicated the growth of the Puritan party of freedom and godliness, their triumph over the forces of tyranny and irreligion, their final defeat by the Royalist party, their humiliation under the rule of Charles II, and the destruction which Milton believed would one day overtake the Royalists in their sins. Samson, blind and the sport of his enemies, is of course Milton after the restoration, when, blind and friendless, he sang of righteousness and judgment, alone, in a fallen world.

The greatest master of Allegory in English literature is John Bunyan, the tinker, whose *Pil-*

grim's Progress appeared in 1678, and *Holy War* in 1682. It was the Bible that inspired him, gave strength, simplicity and harmony to his style, elevated his soul, and stimulated his emotion and imagination, letting him see behind the veil of the visible and temporal the beauty of the unseen and eternal.

To him as to the early Christians, the medieval monks and the Puritan divines, with whom he was familiar, it was natural to attribute to every word of the Bible a mystical and allegorical significance. The alchemy of the Book transformed for him earth's dross into gold. He thought habitually in allegory. To himself he appeared merely a stranger and a sojourner travelling through a world beset with sin and danger to the promised land. His *Holy War*, though less full of human interest, is more imaginative than the *Pilgrim's Progress*. It describes allegorically the defence of *Mansoul* against the assaults of the Powers of Evil.

With Swift's *Battle of the Books* and *Tale of a Tub*, both of which, though published at different dates, were written about 1697, we descend again into the arena of Satirical Allegory, the fashion of which had first been set centuries before by the second part of the *Roman de la Rose*.

In the former, Swift defends the cause of Temple and the Ancients against Bentley and the Moderns, the satire concluding with a mock epic description of a battle after the manner of Homer, in which the opponents of the Ancients, led by Bentley, are slain. The latter is a brilliant satire upon the various divisions in the Christian Church. Just as sailors were supposed to throw a tub overboard to frighten a whale away from their ship, so the story is represented as a tub thrown to the various disputants to prevent their interfering with the true church. The tale describes the religious disputes between Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Dissenters under the allegory of the three sons of a

certain man, and how they carried out their father's will, more especially the way they treated their coats, which he had instructed them to keep clean.

In Swift's greatest work, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726-7), the author makes use of his unrivalled powers of invention, description and irony to express his passionate loathing for his fellow men, and his contempt for the then existing organization of Government, Religion and Society. The story relates how Gulliver, a ship's surgeon, is wrecked among the Lilliputians, a diminutive people whose behaviour is an amusing parody upon the court life, factions, religious disputes and wars of England. He then escapes to Brobdingnag, a country of giants, whose king, enquiring from Gulliver about his country and having exposed its defects in cross-examination, remarks, "I cannot but conclude the people of your nation to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever permitted to crawl upon the surface of the Earth." The third book, Laputa, ridicules the scientific 'research' of the time, which is represented as trying to extract sunbeams from cucumbers; and in the horrible fourth book he describes the contempt which a noble race of horses (Houyhnhnms) feel and express for their degraded subjects, the Yahoos (mankind).

Of a very different kind is Addison's serious and beautiful *Vision of Mirza* (1711), which represents life as a stream losing itself in the mists of eternity, and crossed by the bridge of life, through trap-doors in which travellers are constantly falling.

Thomson's *Castle of Indolence* (1748) is an attempt at a Spenserian revival, representing allegorically the sleepy delights of indolence as contrasted with the feats of the 'Knights of Art and Industry.' Other Spenserian revivals are Byron's *Childe Harold* and Shelley's *Revolt of Islam.*

Formal allegory gives place to mystical and spiritual teaching of a high order in parts of the

works of Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth and Tennyson, to all of whom the material universe is but the time vesture of the eternal, revealing to the wise and concealing from the foolish the indwelling spirit, which to Shelley appears as love, to Keats as beauty, to Wordsworth as thought, and to Tennyson as law, while Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus*, under the simile of man and his worn out and constantly renewed garments, preaches the presence of the Great Reality under the changing garments of time and space, appearances and events.

II. LIFE OF TENNYSON

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, son of the rector of Somersby, a Lincolnshire village, was born on August 6th, 1809. He was instructed in the rudiments of knowledge at the Louth Grammar School and was then educated with his brother Charles by his father. In 1827 the two brothers published a small volume of poetry entitled *Poems by two Brothers*. In 1828 they went to Trinity College, Cambridge, where Alfred was one of a society of clever young men known as the Apostles. The Society included, besides Tennyson and his brothers, Frederick and Charles, R. C. Trench, John Sterling, Maurice, Spedding, Merivale, Monckton Milnes, and Julius Hare, all of whom subsequently attained distinction. Hallam, in some respects the most promising of all the Apostles, died young. He was Tennyson's greatest friend and his memory is immortalized in 'In Memoriam.' In 1829 Tennyson gained the Chancellor's gold medal for his poem *Timbuctoo*. In 1830 he published his *Poems, chiefly Lyrical*. Two years later *Poems by Alfred Tennyson* appeared. It excited considerable adverse criticism, especially from Lockhart in the 'Quarterly Review.' Tennyson, though sensitive to outside criticism, was an unsparing critic of himself. He devoted himself to the improvement of his art and published practically nothing more until 1842, when he put forth two volumes of poems in which most of the pieces and passages, with which

Lockhart had found fault were omitted or altered, and some new poems were added. His reputation as a poet was now established. The remainder of his life was uneventful and contains little beyond the record of his published works. Among these are *The Princess* (1847), *In Memoriam* (1850)—the year of his marriage—*Maud* (1855), *Idylls of the King* (1859-1889) and *Enoch Arden* (1864). In 1875 *Queen Mary*, his first drama, was published, to be followed by *Harold* (1876), *The Promise of May* (1882) and *The Cup, The Falcon* and *Becket* (1884.) On the death of Wordsworth in 1850, Tennyson was appointed Poet Laureate, and in 1884 he was made a peer. He died on October 6th, 1892.

III. CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY OF TENNYSON.

Tennyson was a man of noble proportions mentally, morally and physically. Of tall stature, strong and well-made, his body was a fit temple for his knightly soul. Speaking of him as a young man a friend said: "What struck me most about him was the union of strength with refinement." Carlyle's description is: "One of the finest looking men in the world. A great shock of rough, dusky hair; bright, laughing, hazel eyes; massive, aquiline face, most massive yet most delicate; of sallow brown complexion, almost Indian looking, clothes cynically loose, free-and-easy, smokes infinite tobacco."

A high bred Englishman he despised fashion and convention, and was reserved and shy with strangers, yet a most pleasant companion among friends and in congenial society. He was a great reader of science, philosophy, and general literature, and took great interest in politics, loving nothing better than a frank and friendly talk among friends. Combining strength and refinement, a true friend, and faithful husband, he presented in all the relations of life the noble frankness and simplicity of one who is true to himself and has nothing to conceal. He loved the

atmosphere of home. He was fortunate in his marriage. With his wife, as he said, the peace of God entered into his life. He loved his children and was never happier than when sharing in their games and amusements. To women he was courteous and chivalrous. He would say, "I would pluck my hand from a man, even if he were my greatest hero or dearest friend, if he wronged a woman, or told her a lie." He was kind to animals and careful and considerate towards servants.

Although short-sighted, he was a most close and careful observer of nature, as well as an intense sympathiser with her moods.

His devotion to his art, and his shyness of strangers, which made him appear brusque and affected in their presence, gained him a reputation for churlishness which he ill deserved. Like most great authors and thinkers he was subject to occasional fits of depression. Carlyle says of him: "A true human soul, to whom your soul can say 'Brother!'", and yet "a man solitary and sad, as certain men are, dwelling in an element of gloom, carrying a bit of chaos about him in short, which he is manufacturing into Cosmos." Yet even when most retired Tennyson never lost touch with the world around him, and with contemporary thought in all its manifestations.

The combination in him of strength with gentleness, nobility with delicacy of feeling, together with the hatred of the mean, common and common-place, recalls to us the knightly figures of ideal chivalry, while it explains his fondness for them, and reminds us of Chaucer's 'veray parfit gentil knight,' and the 'magnificence' of the Arthur of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and of the hero of his own *Idylls*, 'highest and most human too.' Of him it may be said with truth, that he did justice, loved mercy and walked humbly with God. In spite of all detractions, and of the superficial cynicism of those who would place his works in handsomely bound volumes in the drawing-room for the young ladies to read, he remains the greatest

figure in Victorian literature, a lover of his art and a lover of his country, to whose thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears, he has given noble and lasting expression.

IV. TENNYSON THE THINKER: VIEWS AND OPINIONS.

Tennyson shared in the early 19th century reaction against the materialistic, sceptical spirit of the 18th century. In this reaction the influence of Cambridge men was conspicuous, and among them that band of able and earnest thinkers known as the 'Apostles' of whom Tennyson was one.

Founded by Sterling this small but brilliant company was much influenced by the views of Frederick Maurice, about whom Arthur Hallam, writing to Gladstone, said: "The effect which he has produced on the minds of many at Cambridge by the single creation of that society of 'Apostles' (for the spirit though not the form was created by him) is far greater than I can dare to calculate, and will be felt, both directly and indirectly, in the age that is upon us." Among the subjects most keenly debated among the 'Apostles' were such questions as the Origin of Evil, the Derivation of the Moral Sentiments, Prayer and the Personality of God. In studying such questions there was a strong desire, nurtured by the reading of the Romantic Poets (Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley) to seek and find some expression of the religious principle, which while not contradicting the teaching of science and the dictates of reason should yet preserve for mankind a belief in God and good, and the greatness of human destiny. Now for the realisation of such aspirations the door had been opened by the German Philosophers—Kant, Fichte and Hegel—filtered through the minds of the poets Coleridge and Carlyle; for Carlyle was a prose-poet, 'simple, sensuous and impassioned.' This German teaching may be summarised under two headings,

Idealism and *Transcendentalism*, the former contending that *"we are conscious only of *ideas*, the *world* existing only as we mentally conceive of it, and having, outside the mind of the individual or the race, no real or actual existence"; the latter maintaining the power of the mind to pierce beyond the veil and "to transcend or pass beyond the merely objective things presented to us by the senses." Understanding teaches us practical and material knowledge and proceeds by way of logic and argument. Reason gives us intuitive or instinctive knowledge on such subjects as the existence of God, the meaning of Virtue, the Beauty of Poetry and the End and Meaning of Man. But while Coleridge made use of this distinction to make Reason bring back what Understanding had conclusively disproved, and attempted thus to re-establish the old faith by a process of intellectual jugglery, "Carlyle used it to build up a new faith out of the ruins of the old." That Tennyson leaned rather to Frederick Maurice's explanation of Coleridge's interpretation of German philosophy is probable enough. Also it must be remembered that Poetry is the record of moods and that Tennyson's moods varied, sometimes being depressed and sometimes exalted. Nevertheless the parallel between his religious belief and experiences and those of Carlyle is interesting and instructive. In both, the human spirit revolted after a terrible conflict with doubt and despair, against that negation of all faith which the difficulty of reconciling Christian dogma with the progress of science and the developments of modern thought involves. Both found in work a respite from sorrow. Both believed in the spirit of true religion cannot rest always in the same forms. Compare Carlyle's "destruction of old forms is not destruction of everlasting substances" with Tennyson's "the old order changeth yielding place to new." Both believed that the Finite is

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* See Keith Leask's Introduction to *Readings from Carlyle*, p. 13.

incapable of receiving and understanding the full revelation of the Infinite. As Tennyson said:—

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

And in the same spirit Carlyle thus apostrophises Voltaire: "Cease, my much respected Herr von Voltaire, shut thy sweet voice; for the task appointed thee seems finished. Sufficiently hast thou demonstrated this proposition, considerable or otherwise: that the Mythus of the Christian Religion looks not in the 18th century as it did in the 8th. . . But what next? Wilt thou help us to embody the divine spirit of that Religion in a new Mythus, in a new vehicle and vesture, that our Souls, otherwise too like perishing, may live? What? Thou hast no faculty in that kind. Take our thanks, then, and — thyself away." Both believed in the existence of the Soul after death, "when that which drew from out the boundless deep turns again home." Tennyson's views sometimes hesitated between individual immortality and the ultimate absorption of the soul into the one spirit. Carlyle believed that nothing that has really existed, that is, nothing genuine and good, will ever perish. For evil to him was as chaff to be blown away by the wind. "Is the white tomb of our loved one," he says, "who died from our arms and had to be left behind us there . . . but a pale spectral illusion!. . . . Know of a truth that only the time shadows have perished, or are perishable; that the real Being of whatever was, and whatever is, and whatever will be, *is* even now and for ever."

Both saw in Nature the cloak of God. "For myself," Tennyson said, "the world is the shadow of God." And Carlyle's view is thus expressed by the Earth-Spirit in *Faust*:—

"It is thus at the roaring loom of time I ply,
And weave for God the Garment thou see'st Him by."

We need not push the comparison further. Enough has been said to show that often what Carlyle said in prose Tennyson said in poetry, and that both were influenced, though Carlyle was the more original thinker, by the German transcendental philosophy.

Tennyson, if not original, was sincere, caring more for the true than the new, and if as a thinker he could only claim to have moved with the times, he has so gathered up and put before us the thought of those times that the Victorian Age and the Age of Tennyson may almost be described as synonymous.

In Memoriam (1850) is an elegy on the death of his friend Hallam, but it also represents Tennyson's best claim to be considered a thinker in verse. More than any other of his works it reveals his religious opinions, dealing as it does with the problems that the death of a dear one inevitably suggests—the mystery of birth and death, the object of life and the destiny of man. Tennyson does not solve these problems. If they could be solved in a manner satisfactory to the logical faculty there would be no room for doubt, and therefore none for faith. He opposed intuitive belief to the counsels of despair, and 'like a man in wrath,' his heart stood up and answered 'I have felt' to the voice that told him to believe no more.

As Dr. Hugh Walker in his *Literature of the Victorian Era* says, "*In Memoriam* contained something that appealed to all: to the man of science who was pleased to find himself understood, to the man oppressed with doubts who found many of his own difficulties powerfully and beautifully expressed by the poet, and to the orthodox believer who was gratified by the final victory of faith."

In Locksley Hall (1842) and *Locksley Hall: Sixty Years After* (1886) the hopes and aspirations of early Victorian Liberalism are contrasted with the

doubt and disillusion of the Conservatism of a later date. They also show how the impatience and scepticism of youth often change to a stronger faith in God and human goodness in old age, in spite of the despondent moods occasioned by decreased energy and vitality in the latter period. *The Princess* (1847) heralds the higher education of women. Tennyson held that in order to take her true part in the progress of the race woman must be more than the minister to man's creature comforts and the means of the maintenance of the race. She must be educated not merely in social accomplishments but in all that elevates the understanding, nourishes spirituality and promotes sympathy with the pure, noble and beautiful.

The Palace of Art shows that cultured and educated people should hold out helping hands to their less fortunate brethren instead of withdrawing themselves in artistic or literary seclusion. This is the voice of the feeling that finds practical expression in Museums, Picture Galleries, Free Libraries, Extension Lectures and other attempts to educate the masses. The poem illustrates the truth that

> "Beauty, Good and Knowledge are three sisters .....
> That never can be sundered without tears.
> And he that shuts out Love, in turn shall be
> Shut out from Love, and on her threshold lie,
> Howling in outer darkness."

In *St. Simeon Stylites*, religious asceticism, which thinks only of self and disregards life's daily duties, is condemned.

The Vision of Sin pictures the ruin wrought by the passion of sensual pleasure.

The Two Voices answers the question, "Is life worth living?" in the affirmative, and its lesson is confirmed when the statement, "not to have been born is best", is answered in the words of Ulysses: "Life piled on life were all too little."

The pains of disappointed love are described in *Maud* (1855), where the hero is a smaller Hamlet tilting against the Mammon-worship of the age, for which he suggests war as a remedy. The poem was misunderstood by many, who confused the hero with the author, whom they accused of advocating war and slandering John Bright. The truth is that Tennyson, though he advocated the war of defence and of liberty, hated war in itself, and looked forward to the "Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World." But he was nevertheless an Imperialist and a patriot, proud of his country's glories, and anxious to see her in a position still to hold her own. Nothing in contemporary history or politics escaped his notice. He stood for the unity of the Empire, and for the preservation unimpaired of the ancient constitution, which he looked upon as the guardian of England's liberties. His name will go down to posterity as that of the most complete and comprehensive representative of his age. Only the universal poet, who was not for an age but for all time, can confidently be reckoned his superior.

V. TENNYSON THE ARTIST

There is a dignified self-restraint, a statuesque pose about Tennyson's verse, which while not adapted to the expression of fierce passion or fiery movement, make it an unequalled medium for the rendering of ideas of sublimity, beauty and strength. This effect is produced partly by the conscious imitation of the style of Homer and Virgil, and partly by the avoidance of the commonplace. He clothed the ideas of the romantic age in the calmness and self-restraint of the classical writers. Perfect felicity of phrase, the choice of the inevitable word which alone will do, are also characteristic of his style, which is further distinguished by literary suggestiveness, echoing at times the words, and showing acquaintance with the work of the greatest English and classical writers. As a minute observer and faithful painter of nature, Tennyson knows no rival, and his acute-

ness of observation was combined with a scientific knowledge of natural phenomena, which renders his descriptions and similes drawn from nature doubly impressive. Add to this the wonderful harmony and sweetness of his verse, and his power of making the sound echo the sense, and the secret of its charm will begin to be understood.

That he possessed the dramatic gift is evident from his plays *Harold* and *Becket*, but with these there is no time to deal.

VI. THE IDYLLS.

(A) King Arthur in History.

Many mountains, hills and cairns throughout Great Britain are named after the legendary Arthur, but little is known of him in authentic history. All that we can learn with any certainty is that there was a warrior leader in Western Britain in the 6th century, who led the tribes of Cumbria and Strathclyde against the Picts and Scots from the North, and the Saxons from the East, after the departure of the Romans. As early as the 12th century he is referred to by Joseph of Exeter as "Arthur, the flower of kings. The old world knows not his peer, nor will the future show us his equal: he alone towers over all other Kings, better than the past ones, and greater than all those that are to be." Caxton, in his preface to Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* (1485) says of him: "In all places, Christian and heathen, he is taken for one of the nine worthy, and the first of the three Christian, men."

(B) Arthur in English literature.

The Arthurian legends were of Celtic origin and were first collected by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his history of the Britons written between 1130-1147. This history, while preserving Arthur's character as the national Welsh hero, victorious over the Saxon invaders, is characterized also by marvellous details and descriptions, which in their lack of human verisimilitude, remind one of Hindoo or Norwegian mythology. In it the taste for war and the marvellous is gratified.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's history was extremely popular and was translated with many additions into French by Gaimar and Wace, while a lengthy English version was contributed by Layamon in his Brut, 1205. By this time the Norman-French had learned to look upon England, their adopted country, as their fatherland, rather than France from which they were separated by racial and dynastic rivalry as well as by the sea. The defeat of the Saxons had revived the Celtic spirit and given a new impetus to the popularity of the legends regarding the Welsh national hero. The practical Norman spirit reduced to human dimensions the uncouth marvels of Geoffrey of Monmouth's history, and Arthur, while remaining the Welsh national hero, took on, in the reign of Henry II, the form given to him by Marie de France and Walter Mapes, that of a hero of English chivalry. In the first half of the 13th century Arthur became one of the most popular figures of medieval romance, and legends of knights and heroes became associated with his order by a process of natural attraction as the lesser mass naturally gravitates to the greater. Into the question of the origin of these accretions this is not the place to enter. They spread through England, France and Europe, first as metrical and afterwards as prose romances, and the medium of the dissemination was mainly French. To Robert de Boron has been assigned the introduction of the story of Merlin and of the romance of the Holy Grail, and to Walter Mapes the Quest of the Holy Grail, the story of Lancelot of the Lake and the Morte d'Arthur. Tristran was a later development. In the 13th and 14th centuries these prose romances flourished and multiplied exceedingly. And in 1469 Sir Thomas Malory compiled from them the materials for his *Book of King Arthur and of his Noble Knights of the Round Table*, which was printed by Caxton in 1485. The addition to the Arthurian Legends of the Quest of the Grail prepared the way for the use of the story for spiritual and allegorical purposes.

In Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Arthur stands for 'magnificence', the sum of all the human virtues, ready to help each in turn at the time of greatest need. Milton, until satisfied of the fabulous character of the legend, intended to make Arthur and his Round Table the theme of his great epic. Blackmore wrote two epics on Prince Arthur and King Arthur in ten and twelve books respectively. Dryden felt the fascination of the theme, which however the exigencies of the time reduced in his hands to nothing more than a dramatic opera representing allegorically the events of the reign of Charles II. Lady Charlotte Guest in 1838—1849 published the *Mabinogion*, a translation into English of Welsh legends of various dates between 1080 and 1260 compiled by an anonymous author and preserved under the title of *The red book of Hergerst* in the library of Jesus College, Oxford. In 1848 Bulwer Lytton wrote an epic entitled *King Arthur*. Tennyson was indebted for the raw material of his Idylls to Malory and the *Mabinogion*.

(C) The spiritual and allegorical significance of the Idylls.

The Idylls must be read first for the sake of the story and not of the allegory. Allegory pushed too far would ruin the story as a work of art. The poem is much more than a mere allegory. Arthur and his knights are men and women endowed with human feelings and thoughts, and not the mere embodiments of certain virtues and vices. Tennyson himself has protested against this forcing of the allegorical intention in the interpretation of the poem. He says: "I hate to be tied down to say '*this* means *that*', because the thought within the image is much more than any one interpretation." "They have taken my hobby and ridden it too hard and have explained some things too allegorically, although there is an allegorical or perhaps rather a parabolic drift in the poem." And again, "Poetry is like shot silk with many glowing colours. Every reader must find his own interpretation according to his ability and according to his sympathy with the poet." "Yet,"

he said, "there is no single fact or incident in the Idylls which cannot be explained as without any mystery or allegory whatever." Nevertheless Tennyson has himself given the reader warrant for particular interpretations of the allegory, although leaving him free to follow any line of thought which the poem suggests. He tells us, for example, that "Camelot, 'a city of shadowy palaces', is everywhere symbolic of the gradual growth of human beliefs and institutions and of the spiritual development of man." "The whole," he says, "is the dream of man coming into practical life and ruined by sin. Birth is a mystery, and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the tableland of life and its struggles and performances." In *Guinevere* Arthur himself tells us how, when the order of the Round Table was created, his knights swore "to reverence the king as if he were their conscience, and their conscience as their king." And later in the same Idyll the repentant Guinevere, perceiving at last the true beauty of Arthur's character, cries,

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

Tennyson too, in his Epilogue to the Queen, describes the work as an

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

Certain figures and visions like those occurring in the *Coming of Arthur* and in the *Holy Grail* have more of symbolism than reality. The Lady of the Lake personifies Religion, the three Queens represent the virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. Excalibur is the sword of the Spirit. But these purely allegorical figures and visions stand out distinctly from the more human interest of the poem. People will interpret the allegory differently according to the character of their individual sympathies and beliefs. To some, the mysterious birth and death of Arthur and his coming again typify the mysteri-

ous birth and death and future coming of Christ. Others will see in these events the mysterious origin of conscience and its ceaseless war against the wrong within us. But whatever particular view be taken, the general drift of the allegory seems sufficiently clear. It represents the struggle in the race and in the heart of every man between Good and Evil. So long as freedom from sin is preserved all goes well, but when once sin is permitted, the spreading taint of evil grows until the whole kingdom of man's soul reels back into the beast. But the spirit of religion, though in different forms, lives on from age to age. True, "the old order changeth yielding place to new"; but Arthur will come again, and the spirit of religion will equip new knights in ages yet unborn with the sword of the spirit to carry on the ceaseless struggle against evil and sensuality until the coming of that "one far-off, divine event, to which the whole creation moves." Guinevere, the repentant human soul, learns at last that "We needs must love the highest when we see it, not Lancelot nor another," meaning thereby that the soul finds its true haven of rest not in the pleasures of sense, nor in asceticism, but in Him who is "highest and most human too."

(D) The Idylls anachronistic.

As the primitive Arthur and his rude followers are transformed in the pages of Malory into pictures of chivalrous knighthood with its courtly rules of love and war, so in Tennyson's *Idylls* it has been truly stated that we see men and women of the 19th century masquerading in the armour and costumes of medieval knights and ladies. However much as an artist Tennyson may have sympathised with the medievalism of Keats, Rosetti and Morris, however much the reader might wish his edition of the *Idylls* to be illustrated by Burne-Jones or Watts, the fact remains that Tennyson, as a thinker and a moralist was opposed on the one hand to the Pre-Raphaelite doctrine that the aesthetic world is superior to and apart from the intellectual world, and on the other hand to the ascetic teaching of Newman and the

Tractarians, who, like those in quest of the Holy Grail sought an ideal holiness and purity removed from the actual conditions of this work-a-day world. To quote Dr. Hugh Walker, "Arthur is a statesman, not a visionary, and though he is too faultless, his perfection is not the pale perfection of Sir Galahad. The medieval mind, whatever it might have felt in secret, must have made obeisance to the ideal of saintliness: Tennyson is thoroughly modern in his refusal to do so. When at last Guinevere recognises the highest, it is 'not Lancelot nor another' but the King. Not Galahad any more than Lancelot, but the man who lives in the world and best does the work of the world." This is the King Arthur of the *Idylls*,

> "Rather than that gray king, whose name, a ghost,
> Streams like a cloud, man-shaped from mountain peak,
> And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still; or him
> Of Geoffrey's book, or him of Malleor's, one
> Touched by the adulterous finger of a time
> That hovered between war and wantonness,
> And crownings and dethronements."

(E) Lack of unity in the Idylls.

Tennyson was not a great constructive poet. Much ingenuity has been spent in seeking to establish a unity in the Idylls. Some find an epic unity in their allegorical purpose, "the world-wide war of Sense and Soul, typified in individuals, with the subtle interaction of character upon character, the central dominant character being the pure, generous, tender, brave, human-hearted Arthur." Others point out that unity of design appears in the gradually developed story of one great sin and its spreading taint; and in the fact of the different Idylls following the seasons of the year, Arthur being born on the night of the New Year, married amid the flowers of May, and fighting the last weird battle

in the West, when "the great light of Heaven burned at his lowest in the rolling year." But although this is unity of a sort, it is not the unity we find in a great work of art. The Idylls as a whole lose nothing when read disconnectedly and in any order, and if any one of them had not been written the work as a whole would not greatly suffer. They were written at different times, at long intervals, and in a different order from that in which they now appear. Thus the *Morte d' Arthur* was published in 1842, the *Coming of Arthur* in 1869 and *Balin and Balan* in 1885. How can any one imagine that there is epic unity in "a form which begins at the end, reaches the beginning in mid-course and the middle at the close?" The term Idylls is therefore well chosen as representing a series of separate little pictures. It comes from the Greek *eidyllion*, a diminutive of *eidos*, a form or shape.

VII. THE MORTE D'ARTHUR.

This poem was written in 1835 and first published in 1842. With the addition of 169 lines at the beginning and 29 lines at the close, it forms the *Passing of Arthur*, which concludes the *Idylls*.

The *Morte d' Arthur* is preceded by some introductory lines called *The Epic*, which are continued in a few lines at the close of the poem. *The Epic* represents a parson, a poet, the host and the author sitting together and talking on Christmas Eve. The poet is persuaded to read aloud a portion of an Epic of which all but the eleventh book has been burnt as being "faint Homeric echoes nothing worth," in reply to the pessimism of the parson, who has been talking about "the general decay of faith right through the world."

This leads us to the general drift of the poem, which teaches that though good men in various times, striving to raise the age in which they live, may seem to be overborne by the tide of sensuality and selfishness, superstition and infidelity surging round them, the end is not yet. The preacher, prophet or

poet passes to his rest handing on the sword of the spirit to equip the great teachers of the future. For though "our little systems have their day" the spirit of true religion will continue to animate the faiths of the future until the close, when as Tennyson believed "good will be the final goal of ill." Nevertheless *Morte d'Arthur* has less symbolism than some of the later Idylls, and is written with more of Homeric force and simplicity.

The guilty love of the Queen and Lancelot had been discovered by the traitor Modred, who, taking advantage of the King's absence in the north, where he had gone to attack Lancelot, raised the standard of revolt in the west, and caused himself to be crowned king. Arthur marched south in pursuit of Modred, with whom he came up on the extreme south-west coast. Then ensued the "last weird battle in the west", in which Arthur slew Modred with his own hand, but received himself a mortal wound in the encounter. At this point the poem commences.

VIII. TENNYSON'S USE OF HIS MATERIALS IN THE MORTE D'ARTHUR.

Tennyson found in Malory not only the raw material for this poem, but language so simple and beautiful that he has not hesitated to use in some places the very words and phrases of his original. In this respect the use he makes of Malory in the *Morte d'Arthur* resembles Shakespeare's dependence upon Plutarch in *Julius Cæsar*. The following extract from Wright's edition of Malory, Vol. III, Chapter 168 will make this clear. The italicised portions should be compared with the text of Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*.—"But my time hieth fast," said King Arthur unto Sir Bedivere, "*therefore take thou Excalibur my good sword*, and goe with it unto yonder water side, and, when thou commest there, I charge thee throw my sword into that water and come again and tell me what thou shalt see there." "My lord," said Sir Bedivere, "your commande shall be done, and *lightly bring you word* againe." And so Sir Bedivere departed; and by the way he

beheld that noble sword where the *pummel* and *the haft* were all of precious stones, and then hee said to himselfe, "*If I throw this rich sword into the water, therof shall never come good but harme and losse.*" And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree and as soone as hee might hee came againe unto King Arthur and said hee had been at the water, and had throwen the sword into the water." "*What sawest thou there?*" said the King. "Sir," said he, "*I saw nothing but waves and wind.*" "That is untruly said of thee," said King Arthur, "therefore goe thou *lightly* and doe my command, as thou art to mee *lefe and deere;* spare not, but throw it in." Then Sir Bedivere returned againe and tooke the sword in his hand and then him thought it sinne and shame to throw away that noble sword, and so eft hee hid the sword and returned againe and told to the King that hee had been at the water and done his command. "*What saw yee there?*" *said the King.* "*Sir,*" *said hee,* "*I saw nothing but the water wap and waves wanne.*" "*Ah traitour untrue!*" said King Arthur, "now hast thou betraied me two times, who would have wend that thou hast beene unto mee so *lefe* and dere, and thou art named a noble knight, and *wouldest betray mee for the rich sword?* But now goe againe lightly, for thy long tarying putteth me in great jeopardie of my life, for I have taken cold; and but if thou doe as I command thee, and if ever I may see thee, *I shall sley thee with my owne hands,* for thou wouldst for my rich sword see me dead." Then Sir Bedivere departed and went to the sword, and *lightly* tooke it up and went to the water's side; and there hee bound the girdele about the hilts, and then he threw the sword into the water as farre as hee might; *and there came an arme and an hand above the water and met it and caught it, and so shooke it thrice and brandished.*

And then the hand vanished away with the sword in the water. So Sir Bedivere came againe to the King and told him what he had seene. "Alas!" said

the King, "helpe me from hence, for I dread me I have taried over long." Then Sir Bedivere took King Arthur upon his back and so went with him to the water's side. And when they were at the water's side even fast by the banke *hoved a little barge* with many faire ladies in it, and among them all was a queene, and all they had *black hoods*, and they wept, and shriked when they saw King Arthur. "*Now put me into the barge*," said the King; and so hee did softly; and so there received him three queenes with great mourning, and so three queenes set them down *and in one of their laps King Arthur laide his head.* And then that queene said, "Ah deer brother, why have ye taried so long from me? Alas this wound on your head hath taken over much cold." And so then they rowed from the land and Sir Bedivere beheld all those ladies goe from him; then Sir Bedivere cried "*Ah my lord Arthur what shall become of mee now ye goe from me, and leave me here alone among mine enemies?*" "*Comfort thyselfe*," said King Arthur, "and do as well as thou maiest for in mee is no trust for to trust in; for I wil into *the vale of Avilion for to heale me of my grievous wound; and if thou never heere more of me, pray for my soul.*" But evermore the queenes and the ladies wept and shriked that it was pittie for to heare them. And as soone as Sir Bedivere had lost the sight of the barge hee wept and wailed, and so tooke the forrest; and so he went all the night, and in the morning he was ware betweene two hills of a chappel and an hermitage.

IX. THE BLANK VERSE OF THE MORTE D'ARTHUR.

Care must be exercised in scanning Tennyson's blank verse to notice (i) *accent*, the mode of recurrence of stressed syllables, and (ii) *syllabism*, the division of a line into ten verse units or metrical (as distinguished from grammatical) syllables.

(1) With regard to the former, the normal line in English blank verse contains five iambic feet, thus:

But ere | he dipt | the sun | face rose | an ar

But in practice Tennyson varied the number of stressed syllables in the line from three to seven; thus, with three stresses :—

And Balin by the bánneret of his hélm

With four stresses—

For hate and loathing would have passed him by

With five stresses—

In which he scarce could spy the Christ for saints

With six stresses—

What, wear ye still the same crown scandalous

With seven stresses—

The two-celled heart beating with one full stroke.

It follows that one can only divide all his lines in feet by the inclusion of some spondees and pyrrhics, and the question arises whether, in view of this, and of the tendency it has to become mechanical and to distract the attention from the rhythm of the line as a whole, foot-scansion had not better be avoided altogether. Into this, however, we cannot enter here.

(2) *Syllabism*—Variety in the number and mode of recurrence of stressed syllables in a line of blank verse is rendered possible by the occurrence of *ten time units* or metrical syllables in the line, so that the ear is satisfied by the uniform length of the lines, even when there is the widest variation from the normal beat in the arra gements of the accents. It must be carefully noted in this connection that the expression *ten metrical syllables*, or ten time units to the bar or line, means something quite distinct from ten grammatical syllables. For by the principle of *equivalence* two short syllables may be equivalent to (that is, pronounced in the same time as) one normal or metrical syllable, and one long syllable *may*, (though this does not occur so often),

be equivalent to two normal or metrical syllables. Thus each of the above examples of Tennyson's blank verse as used in the *Idylls* has ten metrical syllables to the line, but in the first—

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

And Bal—in by the ban—*neret* of his helm—

the two syllables *neret* in the word *banneret* are equivalent to one time unit or metrical syllable, so that the whole line has ten metrical syllables. Other examples of equivalence are given in the following lines:—

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Watch what thou *seest* and light-ly bring me word.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Were it well to o-bey them if a king de-mand,

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

An act un-pro-fit-*able* a-gainst him-self.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

So might some old man speak *in the* aft-er time.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Val-*uing* the gid-dy plea-sure of the eyes.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Mut-*tering* and mur-*muring* at his ear quick quick.

(Notice the accentuation of this line:—

Múttering and múrmuring at his eár, 'Quíck, quíck!')

It has been said that in the *Morte d'Arthur*, Tennyson's first essay in blank verse in connection with the Arthurian legends, he has attained a standard of excellence never surpassed in the subsequent Idylls. This is a matter of individual taste. But it must be admitted that the formal simplicity of the *Morte d'Arthur* follows a more regular type of blank verse than the other Idylls. There are no double endings like:—

That Guinevere had sinned against the highest.

nor lines like this (*Lancelot and Elaine*):—

Down the long town stairs hesitating.

Nevertheless by varying the position of the accents and of the caesura, and by frequently placing

the full stop anywhere in the line except at the end, as well as by hurrying or dragging the pace, and suiting the vowel and consonantal sounds to the nature of the subject, Tennyson contrived to soothe the ear with an under-current of verse, while delighting the imagination, understanding and emotions by the varied interest of the story.

Take the following:—

But ere he dipt the surface, | rose an arm

Clothed in white samite, | mystic, wonderful,

And caught him by the hilt, | and brandished him

Three times, | and drew him under in the mere.

The following line may be studied as an example of Tennyson's knowledge of, and skill in, verse effects:—

And so strode back slow | to the wounded King.

Here the four stressed syllables, *so strode back slow*, indicate the lagging gait of Bedivere. The lines next following are often quoted as a perfect example of *onomatopoeia*, or the accommodation of sound to sense:—

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

In the first of these two lines the hard sound of the *pp* in *lapping* suggests the sound of the waves striking upon the rock, while the soft *sh* in *washing* recalls to the reader the sound of water sucking among the rushes.

In the line—

Shot | like a streamer of the northern morn

the initial, long, strongly stressed monosyllable, followed after a pause by the hurrying words of the remainder of the line, suggests the rapid flight through the air of the sword Excalibur after it had been thrown by Bedivere.

The perfect adaptation of sound to sense in passages such as ll. 185-192 of *Morte d'Arthur* should be noticed by the student.

MORTE D'ARTHUR

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's table, man by man,
Had fall'n in Lyonness about their Lord,
King Arthur: then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land.
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.
Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'The sequel of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made,—
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more—but let what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword—and how I row'd across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king:

And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known:
But now delay not: take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere:
Watch what thou seëst, and lightly bring me word.'

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:
'It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm.
A little thing may harm a wounded man.
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.'

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zig-zag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt:
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled, as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw: but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd
There in the many-knotted waterflags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave?
What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag.'
To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:
Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd
Thy fëalty, nor like a noble knight:
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
I bad thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.'
Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud.
And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done?
What harm, undone? deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.
What record, or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumours of a doubt? but were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying, 'King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps

Upon the hidden bases of the hills.
So might some old man speak in the aftertime
To all the people, winning reverence.
But now much honour and much fame were lost.'
So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded King.
Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily:
'What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'
And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.'
To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:
'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'
Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush-beds, and clutch'd the sword,
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock

By night, with noises of the northern sea.
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur:
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King,
Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:
'Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?'
And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.'
And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard:
'My end draws nigh; 'tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.'
So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words,
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.
But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,

Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, 'Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die.'
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.
Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold—and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind, that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.
Then murmur'd Arthur, 'Place me in the barge.'
And to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all

And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against his brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colourless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls—
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the däis-throne—were parch'd with dust;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.
Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere,
Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole ROUND TABLE is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world;
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'
And slowly answered Arthur from the barge:
The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,

Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within Himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seëst—if indeed I go—
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'
So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

*

NOTES

Title. *Morte* is old French for 'death.' The *d'* in *d'Arthur* stands for the French 'de'—of.

1. *So*, in this way, in the manner above described.

rolled, echoing rose and fell.

3. *King Arthur's table*, the Knights of the order of the Round Table established by King Arthur.

Legend relates that the table was made in imitation of the shape of the round world, that it was presented by Merlin, the enchanter, to Uther, Arthur's father, and by him given to Leodogran, who gave it to Arthur as a wedding present. There were 150 seats round this table. One of them, the *Siege* (i.e. seat) *Perilous*, swallowed up any unchaste person who attempted to sit in it. No one dared sit in it except Sir Galahad.

man by man, one after another.

4. *Lyonness*, an imaginary district supposed to be situated between Cornwall and the Scilly Isles.

6. *The bold Sir Bedivere.* 'Bold' is an example of the 'permanent epithet,' common in classical epic poetry, and so called because it is nearly always repeated in connection with the same subject; Cf. 'rosy-fingered dawn' in Homer, 'pious Aeneas' in Vergil.

8. *nigh the field*, near the field of battle.

By a singular grammatical confusion the word '*near*', which was originally the comparative of '*nigh*', came to be regarded as a positive, and a new comparative 'nearer' was evolved from it.

9. *A broken chancel with a broken cross.* 'Chancel' is in apposition with 'chapel.' The chancel and cross were all that remained of the chapel. The chancel (Latin, cancelli, lattice work) was the eastern end of the church, so called from the screen of lattice work that separated it from the main part of the building.

10. *strait*, here means 'a narrow strip.'

11. *On one side*, that is on one side of the narrow strip of land.

12. *a great water,* a large expanse of water.

14—16. *The sequel of to-day . . . holds record,* 'the result of to-day's battle will be the breaking up of the noblest band of glorious knights in the history of the world.'

16—17. *Such a sleep they sleep,* 'the men whom I loved are now sleeping the sleep of death.' The verb 'to sleep' governs a cognate object, or accusative of kindred meaning. Cf. to dream a dream; to fight a fight.

20. *walking,* refers to *we* above.

21. *Camelot,* now *Queen Camel* in Somerset, which still preserves the name of Arthur, in 'Arthur's Bridge, and 'Arthur's Well.' Camelot was the city where Arthur held his court.

as in the days that were, as in former days.

22. *I perish . . . made.* This may mean either (a) 'My life is destroyed by those whom I was the first to form into a separate nation', or (b) 'I die through the order of Knights which I founded.' The latter seems more correct.

23. *Merlin,* the magician and court physician who aided Vortigern to set up the great stones on Salisbury plain, stated in *Merlin and Vivien* to have been the son of a demon, and said by Bleys to have taken the infant Arthur from the waves on the sea-shore, when the child was washed up to his feet during the storm on the night of Uther's death. Merlin in the allegory stands for Intellect, the utmost that human Science and Philosophy can achieve, which in answer to the eternal desire of the human heart 'Oh! that I knew where I might find him' can only reply 'Where is he who knows? From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

In *Merlin and Vivien* his 'vast wit and hundred winters cannot save him from yielding to the temptation of fleshly lusts. The human intellect, however great and powerful, cannot teach us Faith, cannot ensure protection against Temptation. Only the Lady of the Lake (Religion) who knows a 'subtler music' than Merlin can do that.

23—24. *that I should come again to rule once more,* vide *'Coming of Arthur'* ll. 418-421. The ideals of great religious teachers are often shattered by their professed followers (l. 22). But the spirit of true religion, though it may be obscured for a time, constantly revives in the history of the race.

'And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.'

24. *let what will be, be,* let what is to happen, happen.

26. *Last,* live.

27. *Excalibur,* the magic sword given to Arthur by the Lady of the Lake. In the allegory it stands for the 'sword of the spirit,' to be used against sin, superstition and falsehood.

30. *the bosom,* the middle.

31. *samite,* silk woven with gold and silver thread. The word comes from the Greek *hexamiton,* woven with six threads.

There is 'epic repetition' in the recurrence of this line which recalls the 'permanent epithets' referred to in line 6.

34. *wheresoever I am sung or told,* wherever in future days poets shall sing or chroniclers relate my story.

35. *this,* i.e. the story of Excalibur.

37. *him,* Excalibur personified.

the middle mere, the middle of the lake.

38. *lightly,* quickly.

40. *meet,* fitting.

43. Yet I will fully carry out your order.

45. *the ruin'd shrine.* See lines 8, 9.

46. *in the moon . . . . . tombs,* in the moonlight across the burial ground.

47. *ancient men,* men of former days.

48. *Old knights,* knights of old, knights of long ago.

49. *Shrill . . . . . foam,* piercing, cold and bearing along with it particles of foam blown from the surface of the sea.

49—51. *He stepping down . . . lake,* descending by crooked paths and sharp projecting pieces of rock he reached the smooth moonlight surface of the lake.

52. *brand,* sword.

53—55. *And o'er him . . . . . hilt,* and over him, as he drew the sword, the wintry moon, which had been illuminating the edge of a trailing cloud, behind which it was hidden, emerged, and shone clear in the frosty air upon the hilt of Excalibur.

56. *haft,* handle.

twinkled . . . sparks, glittered with sparkling diamonds.

57. *jacinth*, an orange-coloured gem.

58. *subtlest jewellery*, most cunning workmanship.

60. *This way . . . mind*, swiftly vacillating between the intention to throw and the desire to keep the sword. (Vide Vergil, Aeneid VIII. 20).

63. *many-knotted waterflags*, reeds with many joints.

64. *That whistled . . . marge*, that rustled frozen and sapless round the edge of the lake.

70—71. *I heard . . . crag*, I heard the gentle murmur of the water of the lake in the rushes, and the harsher sound of the wild sea waves striking on the rock.

It will be remembered that King Arthur and Bedivere were on a narrow neck of land separating the sea from a great lake.

73. *Thou . . . name*, you have been false to the traditions of knighthood and untrue to your better self.

74—75. *as beseem'd Thy fealty*, as befitted your loyalty or fidelity to your lord.

76. *For surer sign had follow'd*, for if you had obeyed my command and thrown Excalibur into the lake, a more definite sign would have followed than the mere sound of the waters you have described.

76—77. *either hand . . . mere*, either a hand would have appeared above the surface of the lake, or a voice would have been heard, or the water would have been troubled.

79—80. *I charge thee . . . As thou art lief and dear*, I order you by the love I bear you.

81. *lightly*. See l. 38, above.

83. *the ridge*, the high ground separating the great water' from the sea.

84. *dewy*, moist, wet.

fix'd in thought, absorbed in his own reflections.

86. *chased*, engraved.

89. *worthy note*, worthy of note; a remarkable thing.

93. *undone*, (if it were) undone.

94. *Seeing . . . rule*, since obedience is that which unites the ruler to the ruled, and makes government possible.

96. A useless act, injurious to himself and opposed to his own interest.

98. Supply the words 'If I were to obey the King's order' before the words 'what record,' etc. *relic*, memorial.

99. *Should be to aftertime*, would remain to posterity.

99—100. *empty breath And rumours of a doubt*, mere words and legends of doubtful authority.

100. *were this kept*, if this sword were kept.

102. *Jousts of arms*, tournament.

105—106. *in the deeps . . hills*, in the depths of the lake at the bottom of the hills which rose from the lake, and whose base was concealed by its waters.

107. *aftertime*, future.

108. *winning reverence*, gaining a respectful hearing.

109. *were lost*, would be lost, if I were to throw away the sword.

110. *clouded . . . . . conceit*, his sense of duty obscured by his own foolish notion.

112. Notice how the long monosyllables preceding the pause after the word 'slow' make the verse echo, the sense, suggesting the slow heavy steps of Bedivere returning to the wounded King. For another example of the sound echoing the sense see lines 116, 117, where the sound of the waters striking upon the rocks and soaking into the rushes is represented by the words 'lapping' and 'washing' respectively.

113. *breathing heavily*, breathing with difficulty.

118. *much in wrath*, in great anger.

120. *Unknightly, traitor-hearted*, false to the oaths and ideals of knighthood and unfaithful to your King.

121—123. *Authority . . . . . will*. 'A dying king loses his authority, when deprived of the commanding look which compelled obedience' The bold personification and confusion of metaphor suggest Shakespeare.

123. *I see thee what thou art*. The verb 'see' here governs both the pronoun 'thee' and the subordinate clause 'what thou art.' The meaning is 'I now understand your true character.'

124. *the latest-left of all my knights*, my only surviving knight.

125. Who should combine in your own person the duties of them all.

126. You would deceive and disobey me for the sake of the precious stones on the handle of Excalibur.

127. *lust of*, desire for.

128. Delighting in an object that dazzles the eyes.

129. *for*, because.

130. *may prosper*, may succeed (in doing his duty).

134—135. *plunged . . . . . beds*, dashed into the rushes that grew by the water side.

135. *clutch'd*, seized.

136. *strongly . . . . . threw it*, threw it overhead with a powerful swing.

136—141. *The great brand . . . . . northern sea*. The huge sword flashed repeatedly like lightning in the bright moonlight, and revolving in glittering circles, described a circuit like the streaming light of the Aurora Borealis, seen at night, when the floating icebergs collide, with a noise like thunder, in the winter in the arctic regions.

The above suggests the typical classical simile used by Homer and Vergil, and imitated by Milton, Tennyson, Matthew Arnold and other English writers of the classical school. The features of such a simile are its formal introduction—generally commencing with the words 'As when'— and the elaborateness with which it is worked out, so that the reader almost loses sight of the original object of the poet's thought in the figure used to illustrate it.

This clear formal detailed illustration is characteristic of the classical simile as opposed to the confused sequence of similes and mixed metaphors that come hurrying upon one another's heels in Romantic poetry.

143. *ere . . . . . surface*, before it sank beneath the surface of the lake. *He* refers to Excalibur.

144. See l. 31.

145. *him* means *it* here. See l. 143, note.

146. *and . . . . . mere*, and drew it beneath the surface of the lake.

147. *lightly*, quickly.

148. *drawing thicker breath*, breathing more heavily and with greater difficulty.

152—153. *lest the gems . . . . . purpose*, lest the sight of the precious stones should dazzle my eyes, and prevent me from carrying out my purpose.

157. *wheeling him*, brandishing it (Excalibur).

164. *Make broad thy shoulders . . . . weight*, bend down and prepare your shoulders to support the burden of my body.

165. *margin*, the edge (of the lake).

168. *reclining*, leaning.

169—170. *And looking wistfully . . . picture*. 'With a piteous look in his blue eyes, which remained wide open and fixed as if painted in a picture.' Cf. Aeschylus, Agamemnon, l. 240.

170—172. *Him . . . . . words*, Sir Bedivere looked at him with swimming eyes, expressive of grief and regret, and sorrow prevented him from uttering the words he would have spoken.

173—175. *Then took . . . tombs*, then kneeling on one knee, he carefully took the feeble hands of the King and drew them over his shoulders, and rising again to his feet, carried him through the graveyard.

176. *panted hard*, drew quick and laboured breath.

177. *nightmare*, horrible dream.

178. *mute*, silent.

181. *the other*, Sir Bedivere.

182. *Clothed with his breath*, cloaked in the mist caused by his own breath congealing in the frosty air around him.

183. *Larger than human*, looking supernaturally tall and big as he loomed through the fog. Objects seen through a mist always look larger than their natural size.

184. *He heard the deep*. He heard the roar of the ocean.

a cry. See line 199.

185. *His own thought . . . . . goad*, remorse and anxiety urged him on as a goad urges oxen.

186—192. His armour rang harshly in the frozen caves and bare ravines, and on either side the dark naked rocks echoed around him as he placed his feet upon projecting pieces of slippery stone, that gave out a shrill sound under his iron-shod heels—till suddenly he came upon the smooth lake reflecting from its surface the bright rays of the winter moon.

193. *hove*, was lying. M. E. houen, hoven, to abide. Compare *hovel* and the frequentative *hover*.

a dusky barge, a dark boat or vessel.

194. *Dark . . . . stern*, black as a strip of mourning cloth or crape from end to end.

195. *ware*, aware.

195—203. *and descending . . . . . world*, and as they stepped down to the water's edge, they perceived that the decks were all crowded with tall and dignified forms, like figures in a dream, with long black robes and black hoods—and with them were three queens with golden crowns—and from them rose a cry that thrilled to the trembling stars, a united expression of sorrow and pain, like the voice of the wind that shrieks all night in a desolate country, which has remained unoccupied and uninhabited from the creation of the world.

198. *Three Queens*. Some say they represent the three virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity.

On this point Tennyson, being interrogated by the Bishop of Ripon (Boyd Carpenter), who asked him whether they were right who interpreted the three Queens as Faith, Hope and Charity, said:—"They are right, and they are not right. They mean that and they do not. They are three of the noblest of women. They are also those three Graces, but they are much more. I hate to be tied down to say, '*This* means *that*,' because the thought within the image is much more than any one interpretation."

209. *shatter'd casque*, broken helmet.

chafed, rubbed.

212. *Striped . . . . . blood*, stained with black clots of blood.

213. *wither'd*, faded.

214. *Smote . . . . . east*, struck by the first rays of the rising sun.

215—216. *And all . . . . . onset*, and all the armour of his legs and thighs splashed with drops of blood from the battle.

216—220. *and the light . . . . . lips*, and the fair shining curls—which used to cluster round his forehead and make it look like the sun at dawn—were dry and dusty; or matted with blood into sharp shreds, and hanging down, mingled with his beard and moustache.

222. *rest*, a socket holding the butt of a medieval knight's spear when couched for charging.

223. *plume*, ornamental bunch of feathers attached to the helmet of a knight.

'From head to foot a glory of the pageant.'

224. *Shot . . . . . Camelot*, flashed like a falling star or meteor through the tilting-ground.

228. *my forehead and my eyes*, i.e. my head. This giving of specific details instead of a general descriptive term is borrowed from Homer.

230. *chance*, opportunity.

231. *brought out, etc.*, called forth, produced, a noble knight ready to take advantage of it.

232—233. Such times have not occurred since the Star in the East led the wise men of old to the birth place of the child Jesus, where they offered gifts of myrrh. See Matthew ii, 11.

234. *But . . . dissolved.* But now the whole order of the Knights of the Round Table is broken up, and the Knights are scattered.

235. *an image of the mighty world*, cf. Malory. 'Also Merlin made the Round Table in tokening of the roundness of the world, for by the Round Table is the world signified by right. For all the world, Christian and heathen, repair unto the Round Table.'

237. *And the days darken round me, and the years*, my life has become dreary and gloomy, and the future too seems likely to be sad.

238. *other minds*, unsympathetic minds, different from those with which I have been acquainted.

240—242. *The old order . . . world.* Old forms pass away and give place to new, and God has many ways of accomplishing his purposes, lest men should embrace the letter and the form rather than the spirit of old institutions, and so the world should become degenerate. This is a poetic statement of Carlyle's dictum, "Destruction of old forms is not destruction of everlasting substances." Progress towards the "one divine far-off event, to which the whole creation moves" is the law of the universe. This world with its forms and colours, its customs and institutions, is but the 'Time vesture of the Eternal': "Time like a dome of many coloured glass stains the bright radiance of eternity." Or as Tennyson himself says in 'In Memoriam'—

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

243. *what comfort is in me?* Cf. Malory. 'Comfort thyself, said the King, and do as well as thou mayest, for in me is no trust to trust in.'

244. *that which I have done . . . pure,* may God take my work, and cleanse it from all evil, absorbing it into Himself.

247—248. *More things . . . dreams of,* prayer accomplishes more than people think.

248—249. *let thy voice . . . day,* lift your voice in prayer for my soul day and night.

251. *That nourish . . . . . brain,* that live by brutal instinct without reason or reflection.

252. *they lift . . . prayer,* they do not raise their hands in prayer.

254—255. Tennyson here makes use of the notion which goes back as far as Homer and Plato, and which is echoed in English Literature by such poets as Spenser, Milton and Dryden, viz., that the earth is suspended from Heaven by a golden chain. The idea finds a place in the Ptolemaic conception of the starry universe as a series of hollow transparent spheres, one contained with the other, the whole being enclosed within the outer shell or 'Primum mobile,' and suspended from the floor of Heaven, or the Empyrean, by a golden chain. Tennyson means that prayer is the precious link between man and God.

He did not regard prayer as a method of asking the unchangeable One to change His mind, and revoke His laws for the benefit of the individual, but rather as a means of putting the soul in communication with the divine spirit. "Prayer," he said, "is, to take a mundane simile, like opening a sluice between the great ocean and our little channels when the great sea gathers itself together and flows in at full tide." Cf. 'Speak to Him for He hears, and spirit with spirit can meet. Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.'

259. *the island-valley of Avilion.* Avilion is said to have been the name of a valley near Glastonbury in Somerset where Joseph of Arimathea first landed in his boat with the Holy Grail—the cup said to have received some of the blood of Jesus at the time of the crucifixion. Compare with this the 'Islands of the Blest,' the Paradise or Happy Land of the Greek poets.

261—263. *but it lies . . . . . sea,* but it (the valley) is situated among rich meadows, smiling, beautiful with fields planted with fruit trees and wooded vales encircled with the calm warm sea.

266—269. *like some . . . webs,* like some swan which with swelling breast and uttering clear, sweet, shrill notes of irregular cadence before her death, shakes out her cool, white feathers, and strikes the water with black-webbed feet.

270. *Revolving many memories,* a Latin construction—recalling many things to mind.

270—271. *till the hull . . . dawn,* till the boat appeared a dark spot on the eastern horizon.

272. *And on the mere . . . . . away,* and the sound of weeping faded from the lake.