

THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND IN FORMATION

BY

JOHN. J. H. SMALLER, B. A. 1930.

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Preface

The Arthurian legend has left its impression upon the literature of the world in varying degree and at varying intervals. Throughout the ages, from the date of its inception to the present day, it has served as a fountain-head into which poets and dramatists have dipped in their search for material.

From the French Wace to the American Edwin Arlington Robinson, the stories that have attached themselves to Arthur have been considered suitable matter for poetic composition. From the Welsh Nennius to the American John Erskine, Arthur and his adherents have found their way into pages of Latin histories and pages of delightfully humorous parody.

A scholarly and detailed study alone was delayed until the rise of the Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century. But, since scholars have turned their attention to the study of this great body of work, little has been omitted, and, within the last few decades, every phase of the subject has undergone minute and embracing investigation. The most interesting, and, of course, the most important topic for this investigation has been the study of the sources of the separate romances which make up the legend in its formative period.

Part I.

ARTHUR

Chapter I.

Historical.

The first direct mention of Arthur, the great sovereign of romance, occurs in the account of his exploits in the "Historia Brittonum" (ch.56), a brief Latin treatise, of which the authorship and date still remain highly problematic. This treatise, however, is usually ascribed to Nennius, a native of South Wales, who is believed to have amplified and redacted, about the year 826, a compilation of the seventh or eighth century.

The sections that concern us here give an account of the British king, Vertigern, under whom the Britons lived in continual fear from the incursions of the Picts and Scots, the Romans, and finally the Saxons, who effected a landing in Britain, and being received as friends by Vertigern succeeded in making a settlement. After the death of Vertigern, Nennius continues, the Saxons grew in strength and multiplied in numbers. "Then Arthur, together with the kings of the Britons, fought against them in those days, but he himself was leader of the battles. (cum regibus Brittonum, sed ipse dux erat bellorum).^I - that is to say, that he was not himself one of the British kings, although he commanded their forces in battle. Then follows the names of the twelve battles. "The eighth was at the fortress Guinnien, when Arthur bore the image of the ever-blessed Virgin Mary on his shoulders, and on that day the pagans were put to flight and the slaughter of them was great by virtue of the Lord Jesus Christ, I. "Historia Brittonum". trans. by Giles, "Six Old English Chronicles" ch.56.

and by virtue of the Holy Virgin Mary, his Mother... The twelfth battle was at Mount Badon, when Arthur in one day slew nine hundred and sixty men in one onslaught; no one laid them low save he alone, and in all the battles he was victor."²

Although the concluding battle of Badon Hill we know from Gildas to be historical, here, in Nennius, the narrative is already colored with legend. For, not only does Arthur slay nine hundred and sixty of the enemy in single attack, but, in addition, in the so-called 'mirabilia', a list of natural phenomena of Britain, appended to the "Historia" by Nennius or some earlier redactor, one of the wonders is said to be a stone in the province of Buelit, on which the hound of Arthur, the warrior, had left the print of his foot, when Arthur was hunting the bear Troynt; and if it were removed from the pile of stones which Arthur had heaped up beneath it, on the next day it would reappear in its place. Another of the wonders is the tomb of Anir in Ercing. Anir was the son of Arthur, the warrior, who killed and buried him there, and his tomb never twice measure the same length.³

The researches of Professors Zimmer and Thurneysen in Germany, and Duchesne in France, confirm that Nennius - whose existence like Arthur's, has been doubted - did exist; that Nennius, who wrote in the first quarter of the ninth century, almost certainly was not composing an original work, but was making over an historical account that dated back to 679, or, perhaps, in part, to an even earlier period in the seventh century. Therefore, to determine the sources of Nennius' "Historia" we must go back to the chroniclers who deal with the Saxon invasion of Britain.

2. Ibid. ch.56

3. Ibid. ch.73

The first of these was Gildas, a Welsh monk, who gives us the earliest account of the Saxon Conquest in his "De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae", an historical sketch in Latin written shortly before 547 - that is, a little more than a hundred years after the beginning of the Saxon invasion. Gildas got his historical material, which is meager, either from earlier writers or from oral tradition. The fact that he makes no mention of Arthur, who, if he lived at all, was at the height of his fame about 500 - the year in which Gildas was born - and might conceivably have been alive when Gildas was writing, has, more than any other circumstance, made people doubt the famous Briton's existence. Thus, though we may - basing our supposition upon Nennius - place the mention of Arthur a little more than a century after his own lifetime, still there is the fact confronting us that Gildas, writing possibly while Arthur was yet alive, makes no mention of him. Gildas' failure to mention Arthur must be disposed of, therefore, before we can accept the notice of him in Nennius as proving his existence.

This attempt to account for the omission of Arthur's name in Gildas has given rise to many theories and dissertations which range from new discoveries to criticisms on views already advanced.

"Professor Zimmer has shown why the omission of Arthur's name in Gildas is unimportant. Gildas wrote not a history, but a jeremiad, a warning to the nobles and clergy of Britain. He himself called it 'epistola' and 'admonitiuncula' - and epistle and admonition. The second part of his work was the main part. He prefaced it with his historical sketch only to make clear his point, that the Britons were more inclined to vice and civil strife than to making war against foreign enemies. He is not writing of

the brave deeds of the Britons but of their shortcomings; and therefore he makes as unimportant as possible everything which reflects credit on them. Moreover, he is vague in his statements and exceedingly chary of proper names. His failure to mention Arthur then means nothing.⁴ Maynadier then postulates a theory of his own. "There was yet another reason for Gildas to omit any account of Arthur. Gildas continually shows a Roman bias; he manifestly belonged to a party in Britain who still cherished the memory of Roman dominion. Now the feeling between those who had not ceased to long for Roman connection and those who rejoiced that it had terminated was perhaps still bitter. We have seen that Nennius makes the one successful British leader before Arthur a man with the Celtic name of Vortimer rather than Ambrosius Aurelianus, and that he mentions civil strife in the first half of the fifth century, apparently between the pro-Roman party and the anti-Roman. And, it is possible that Arthur belonged to the party opposed to Gildas... In the "Life of Gildas" (Vita Gildae) attributed to a Welsh priest, Caradoc of Lancarvan, about 1150, we learn that Gildas' brother was at feud with Arthur and was slain by him."⁵ These reasons, says Maynadier, are sufficiently logical as explanation for the omission in Gildas of any account of Arthur and his famous deeds. On the whole, therefore, we may believe in a real Arthur, "but an Arthur very different, of course, from the king of medieval romances or the ideal monarch of Tennyson."

A theory, much later than either that of Zimmer or Maynadier, is advanced by Kemp Malone,⁶ who attacks the problem from another angle. He first challenges J.D. Bruce's claim⁷ that 'Arthur' comes from 'Artorius' and therefore Roman. "It will be noted that Bruce regards

4. H. Maynadier "The Arthur of the English Poets" P.26

5. Ibid. P.27

6. Kemp Malone "Artorius" M.Ph. 22:367-74. May 1925

the etymology in question not as a theory but as a fact. He thus goes much farther than Zimmer, who contented himself with calling it a 'Gedanke... nicht leicht abzuweisen.' But Bruce, although he derives 'Arthur' from 'Arterius' in the most unqualified fashion, offers no evidence to fortify his position. The passages in Juvenal and Tacitus which he cites testify to the existence of the name 'Arterius' but since the persons to whom Juvenal and Tacitus refer had no connection with Britain, their names do not help us in determining whether 'Arterius' is a name which was actually in use in Britain. Bruce's certainty, then, is based on faith rather than on works.⁸

Malone then proves that 'Arthur' may be derived from 'Arterius'. This does not solve the problem, however. It is clear that the derivation of 'Arthur' from 'Arterius' is phonetically possible, but actually the name may have arisen in an altogether different fashion. He now asks whether there is any evidence that the name 'Arterius' was known in Britain; then shows that it was an extremely rare name. "We cannot simply assume, then, that it might have been current in Britain. We must seek an actual British Arterius, or at any rate an Arterius who lived in Britain. And such a name, in fact, appears in the records of history... I refer to the Roman general Lucius Arterius Castus."⁹ Our information about this Arterius comes from two inscriptions; Mommsen, in the "Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum" and Dessau in his "Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae." The dates of these two inscriptions cannot be

7. J.D.Bruce The Evolution of Arthurian Romance. Vol.I, P.3
 8. Kemp Malone Op. cit., P.367-8.
 9. Ibid., P.370.

determined with any great precision, but the epigraphic form is such that the inscriptions can hardly be set later than the second century.

One of the inscriptions amounts to an autobiographical sketch. We learn from it, in chronological order, the main facts in the career of Arterius. On the basis of the two inscriptions Malone has worked out the following brief biography. L. Arterius Castus was a Roman citizen of the Equestrian order, a soldier who graduated through the various steps to general. He was finally appointed general of the VI Victrix, a legion stationed at York in the province of Britannia. While he was serving there an insurrection seems to have broken out in Armorica (now Brittany) and Arterius was appointed 'dux' (i.e. general-in-command) of a punitive expedition sent against the rebels.

"Was L. Arterius Castus the historical prototype of Arthur? It is of course impossible to be sure; the evidence is insufficient to confirm or to refute the hypothesis. But the two men certainly have things in common. Their names may be equated without phonological difficulty; both were defenders of Britain against barbarian invaders; both led a British army overseas to conquests in Gaul... Both 'Arterius' and 'Arthur' are names unique in British use. We know only one British Arterius and we know only one Arthur. It calls for no great exercise of the fancy, then, to identify the two. Again, an important function of Arterius as commander of the VI Victrix was to defend the northern border against the incursions of the wild tribes across the wall. Now if in later centuries a legend actually developed about Arterius, it is easy to see how the

wild Saxons, the enemies par excellence during the fifth century, might take the place of the wild tribes of the second century, enemies too remote to interest the legend-makers of the day. Again, the parallel between the expeditions of Arterius and Arthur to Gaul is very striking. Geoffrey's story of the Gallic conquests of Arthur is generally thought to have been entirely the invention of his own mind, since nothing that corresponds to it occurs in Nennius. But certainly there was an old tradition about an overseas expedition of Arthur's. Geoffrey remade the whole to suit his purpose, no doubt, but presumably he had some traditional basis upon which to build.

"In general, the pseudo-historical Arthur (as distinguished from the Arthur of romance) corresponds with astonishing accuracy to the Arterius of our inscriptions. The birth-story, however, and the story of the rape of Guinevere, obviously have a different origin, as do the romantic trappings of the final scene. If the above contentions be true, the silence of Gildas, Bede, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles on the subject of Arthur become thoroughly explicable. They mention no sixth century Arthur because no sixth century Arthur existed. As matters stand, the only historical character with whom Arthur can with any plausibility be connected is the second century L. Arterius Castus."¹⁰

While we are on the subject of the omission of Arthurian information in Gildas, Bede, and the other Angle-Saxon chroniclers before the advent of Nennius, we may add another theory, although here we include mythical elements which are intended for a succeeding chapter.

10. Ibid., P.373-4

II

Malone, in an earlier article, shows, by means of a mass of detailed and technically involved philological equations, that the names 'Uther' and 'Arthur' are equivalent. Then he notes that Uther is generally looked upon as mythical: "indeed, Rhys, with his theory of Uther as a 'dark divinity', seems to hold the field. Arthur, on the other hand, is generally regarded as historical, although everyone admits that mythological material was early attached to his name; even Rhys felt it necessary to postulate, alongside his mythical Culture Hero, an historical Arthur with whom the Hero was fused (Rhys, Studies, P.260, P.9)."¹²

In the earliest reference to Arthur - the passage from the "Historia Brittonum" - Malone takes 'dux bellorum' as the Latin equivalent of 'Pendragon', which, he thinks, probably means 'the terrible chief', or an epithet designating Uther as over-god, as supreme ruler set above the common run of kings. If so, he accounts for the whole passage as a reference to the still undifferentiated hero, here called Arthur and represented as landing supernatural aid to the kings of the Britons. It is noteworthy, too, that the author of the "Historia Brittonum" does not represent Arthur as a king. "The author did not, of course, conceive of Arthur as a god; the euhemeristic teaching which set in with Christianity must long since have reduced him to a hero. But the hero had the dimension of a mythical being; he still possessed supernatural powers, and he could not yet be lowered to the level of a mere king. Hence he is represented a 'dux bellorum'."¹³

II. Kemp Malone "Historicity of Arthur", J.E.&G.Ph. 23:463-91, Oct. (1924).

12. Ibid., P.467.

13. Ibid., P.474.

Next, Malone treats of the question of date, not so much of the Nennian or pseudo-Nennian compilation, as of the Arthurian tradition which this compilation incorporates. Here we must begin with the twelfth battle assigned to Arthur, since this is the only event mentioned which we know to have an historical basis. "Gildas speaks of it as the 'obsessio Badonici Montis'. Now Lot's researches have made it clear that Gildas was born and Badon fought 500 A.D. The "De Excidio", however, gives us no information as to the leader of the Britons on this occasion. Nor have we any reason to suppose that this leader was an historical Arthur. Indeed, so far as we have any evidence at all, it points to the conclusion that the British leader was a person otherwise of little consequence, or at any rate of an importance insufficient to effect the preservation of his name. For when we come to the next account of these events, that of Bede, we find the narrative supplied with the leaders' names so oddly missing in Gildas. Bede knows not only the names of the English leaders, Hengest and Horsa, but also the name of their British opponent, Vortigern. Evidently he had good sources of information independent of Gildas. Now if there had really existed a British leader identifiable in name and fame with the Arthur of Nennius, and if this Arthur had actually won so decisive a victory as that of Badon, one would expect Bede to supply us with his name even as he supplies us with the names of Hengist, Horsa and Vortigern. The failure of Arthur to appear in Bede indicates that Arthur's association with Badon was not original and, as late as Bede's day, was not generally (if at all) made."

I4

This brings us well into the eighth century. When now we come to Nennius, we find the story of Badon radically transformed. "Instead of 'obsessio' we have 'bellum'. Instead of a victory won through 'unexpected help' we have a victory won through the

unaided and supernatural efforts of a single person, and he a person not so much as mentioned either in Gildas or in Bede. Even the names do not quite agree: for 'Badonicus mons' we have 'Mons Badonis'.¹⁵ Evidently, Malone concludes, the author of the "Historia Brittonum" got his information, not primarily from Gildas or Bede, but from a popular tradition which had transformed the struggle into a mythical event. Now it takes time to effect such a tradition. Furthermore, no trace of the legend appears in Bede. "I should therefore be inclined to set the beginning of the ninth century as the earliest possible date for the tradition recorded in the "Historia Brittonum."

Malone then points out the fact that the historical germ out of which the mythical tradition grew is nevertheless to be found preserved in Gildas. According to Gildas' account, the battle was won through 'unexpected help' of a type unspecified. This unexpected help, as time elapsed, could naturally be enhanced by supernatural elements in the oral tradition, and would grow at the expense of the other details until nothing was left of these. In such a manner we may, with some confidence, presume the demi-god or hero Arthur effected an entrance into the story of the battle and finally came to possess it altogether. And the manuscript evidence that we do possess points unmistakably to an historical seize of Mount Badon, at first unassociated with Arthur but later made into an Arthurian victory. At the same time the very limited amount of Arthurian material in Nennius would indicate that the legend was then still in the early stages of its development. "From this point of view we may date the 'Arthuriana' of the "Historia Brittonum" as of the ninth or tenth century."

14. Ibid., P.478.

15. Ibid., P.480-3.

And now, bringing before us still another reason for the omission of the 'Arthuriana' in the chronicles previous to Nennius, Malone refers us to the Caradocan "Vita Gildas", in which we have the story of Arthur's killing a brother of St. Gildas, with the explanation as follows: Gildas was a Pict, and the hostility between Arthur and the brother of Gildas clearly goes back to the historical raids which the Picts made into British territory. The British Woden, euhemerized or no, would naturally be called upon for help under these conditions, and in later story would be thought of as the defender of Britain against these attacks. The hostility of Caradoc to Arthur may be explained by the fact that Caradoc reflects the last stages of the Church's hostility to Arthur, and such hostility is intelligible only on the assumption that the hero-worship recorded from the twelfth century on had been preceded by a worship of a rather different kind. And, furthermore, we have versions of the hostility of the Church to Arthur in many other manuscripts. The obvious conclusion is that a hero looked at askance by the Church would get short shrift at the hands of the average clerk.

Having given a few of the many explanations for the acceptance by Nennius of the 'Arthuriana', and the rejection of it by his predecessors, we may now proceed to an examination of the available evidence showing the gradual growth and nutrition of the legends in England before their final and definite establishment by Geoffrey of Monmouth.

For a hundred and fifty years after Nennius, the chronicles contribute nothing to our knowledge of Arthur. But in the latter

part of the tenth century, a Welsh anonymous writer compiled a series of brief Latin records, the "Annales Cambriae" in which, under the year 516, he made the following entry: "Battle of Badon, in which Arthur carried the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ for three days and three nights on his shoulders, and the Britons were victorious." There is a further note for the year 537: "Gueith Camlann (battle of Camlann) in qua Arthur et Medraut ceciderunt; et mortalitas in Britania et in Hibernia fuit."¹⁶

The next note of importance concerning Arthur is preserved in the treatise of Hermann of Tournai, written about 1146, describing an expedition which took place in 1133, when certain monks of Laon in Brittany were sent to England to beg money for the rebuilding of their cathedral which had recently been destroyed by fire. From this account it appears that a servant of the monks got into trouble with a Cornishman as to whether Arthur was still alive.

Still further, in the life of the Cornish saint, St. Garanteo, also dating from about the beginning of the twelfth century, we find Arthur reigning in Cornwall and hunting a dragon which had devastated his dominions.

The first indisputable indication that the fame which Arthur enjoyed among the Celts had spread to other peoples is supplied by the "Gesta Regum Anglorum" of William of Malmesbury, which was completed in 1125. Besides the information concerning the British chieftain which he derived from Nennius, this writer condemns the idle tales which the Britons circulate about their hero as detracting from, rather than adding to, his real glory, and explains the belief

16. J.D.Bruce Op. cit., P.12.

that this here will return from the fact that no one has seen his tomb, adding at the same time an account of the death and supposed tomb of his nephew, Gawain, in Wales.¹⁷

Again, in regard to the diffusion of Arthurian stories before Geoffrey of Monmouth, there is the interesting evidence brought to light by the Italian scholar Pio Rajna in 1888. Rajna collected numerous examples of the names 'Artusius' and 'Galvanus' - that is, 'Arthur' and 'Gawain', as he interpreted them - from the historical records of Northern Italy in the twelfth century. 'Artusius' is found as early as 1090, and 'Galvanus' as early as 1136. Here, then, in the closing years of the eleventh century the tales concerning Arthur were so widespread and popular as to affect the nomenclature of Italy. Bruce, however, is hesitant about the unqualified acceptance of Rajna's interpretation. "It is to be observed, however, that even if Rajna's identifications of those names are correct, it does not follow necessarily that his inferences are equally so, for Arthur was a Breton name and may have been brought to Italy by actual Bretons or inhabitants of French districts contiguous to Brittany, independently of any specifically Arthurian tradition. The correctness of the identification in question, however, is not entirely assured, and the forms 'Artusius' and 'Galvanus', respectively, may be variants of other names than those proposed by the Italian scholar."¹⁸

Lastly, there are the Arthurian names which are attached to certain bas-reliefs over the northeast portal of the Cathedral of Modena, representing the siege of a castle by Arthur and his followers,

17. Ibid. P.12.

18. Ibid. P.15.

with knights issuing therefrom to attack the besiegers. These bas-reliefs have been generally dated early in the twelfth century and they include labeled images of Arthur, Kay, Caradoc, etc., which prove, if the above dating is correct, that stories concerning Arthur and the characters associated with him were current in Norther Italy in that period.¹⁹

19. Ibid. P.15.

Chapter 2.

Mythical.

The stories of Arthur, as we know them, and of his Knights of the Round Table, have two main sources. The source which is most easily traced, about which scholars are virtually agreed, is that which we have already discussed - the historical. The other, which we may call the popular or mythical source, is less easily traced, for it carries us back to Celtic antiquity, and at times, even to the Classical myths, and upon which controversial disputes prevail to this day.

Professor John Rhys, chief exponent of the mythical source of the Arthurian legend, postulates this theory: When it is suggested that the full development of the Arthurian legend was the work of a comparatively late period, no such remark is meant to apply to the materials of it. They must have always been there from time immemorial, wherever there was a Celt who spoke a Brythonic language, whether in Great Britain or in the Lesser Britain on the other side of the channel.^I"

Now, the problem brought forward is that concerning Arthur's fame being so much the more widespread than that of his fellow Brythonic princes from the first mention of him in Nennius, where he is placed in the position of leader of the British forces; and how he came to be the subject of so much story and romance. The answer to this, Rhys thinks, must be to the effect that besides an historical Arthur there was a Brythonic divinity named Arthur,

I. John Rhys "Studies in the Arthurian Legend" P.6.

after whom the man may have been called, or with whose name his, in case it was of a different origin, may have become identical in sound owing to an accident in speech.

Assuming, then, the existence of a god with the name of Arthur, or one whose name was similar to that of Arthur, mythologically speaking he would probably have to be regarded as a Culture Hero. And, working on this basis, Rhys then proceeds to relate all the personages, stories, myths, in fact the entire machinery of the Arthurian legend to, what are to him, indisputable parallels in Celtic mythology. Thus, to him the significance of the term Round Table is made clear when it is considered as an attribute of Arthur in the character of Culture Hero; for here the Table may be said to imply plenty or abundance, and might even be compared with the Table of the Ethiopians, at which Zeus and the other gods of Greek mythology used to feast from time to time.²

Again, it would appear, on the whole, that Arthur's subjugation of the west of Europe, as related by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his "Historia Regum Britanniae" was directly or indirectly founded on the mythic invasion of Hades by him in the character of Culture Hero.³

In the various Culture Hero myths we usually have in close contiguity the Solar Hero Myth; and, in accordance with this, Rhys points out in Gawain such characteristics. Thus the name itself, which in its Welsh form is 'Gwalchmei', analyzes itself into 'gwalch' a hawk or falcon, and 'mei' the month of May; so that on the whole it would seem to have meant the hawk or falcon of May, and the reason for being so called is that the reference to the month of May suits

2. Ibid. P.9.

3. Ibid. P.10-11.

the Solar Hero well enough as the summer sun. Thus, in Malory,⁴ Gawain had the solar peculiarity that when engaged in battle his strength grew apace till mid-day, when it would begin to wane as rapidly. Again, the Solar Hero has not infrequently a brother by whose hand he falls, and this, too, is exemplified by Gawain's death at the hand of Medred, his brother. This, says Rhys, is a conflict between light and darkness, and Medred represents the latter. As a further example of the close adherence of the entire legend to the Culture myth, we have in Geoffrey, the story of Arthur, the Culture Hero, the protector and guardian of Gawain, the Solar Hero, surviving to conquer the representative of darkness, Medred, and then himself being carried off mortally wounded to Avalon where⁵ being healed of his wounds he was to return to reign again.

Furthermore, the story of the birth of Medred, the offspring of Arthur's incestuous love for his sister, the wife of Lot, king of Orkeney, may be readily paralleled to the fable of Zeus of Greek mythology marrying his sister Here. And, going back even still further to the birth of Arthur himself, the story in Geoffrey of the intrigue of Uther Pendragon who, with the help of Merlin, assumed the guise of Gerlois, duke of Cornwall and begot on his wife Igerne, Arthur, is but a close following of the mythological birth of Heracles of the two fathers, Amphitryon and Zeus. Here Zeus taking on the form of Amphitryon, visited Alcmene in her husband's absence, and⁶ begot on her Heracles.

Rhys next notes the parallel of the seizure of Arthur's queen by Medred with the similar episode of Mider and Airem's queen

4. Malory "Mort Darthur" XVIII, iii; IV. xviii; XX. xxi.
5. Rhys Op. cit. P. 13-18.
6. Malone "Historicity of Arthur" Ref. cit., P. 484.

7
 Etain of Irish mythology. "Provided due allowance is made for the difference between the social settings of the respective stories, 8 the similarity becomes more unmistakable the more it is scanned." Furthermore, in evidence of this similarity, Rhys cites one of the Triads which speaks of Arthur as the husband not of one wife called 'Gwenhwyvar', but of three wives bearing each that one and the same name. This, he says, has sometimes been regarded as too absurd to deserve serious consideration; but in the light of the Etain story it is readily seen to have had a meaning. The three Gwenhwyvars are the Welsh equivalents of the three Etains. Again, we are referred to the story of Tristram and the two Iseults. Rhys says that the key to the enigma of the double Iseult is, doubtless, the same as to the triple Gwenhwyvar, that supplied by the story of the Irish Airem and the three Etains. As proof of his Etain theory, Rhys shows the philological significance of the names 'Gwenhwyvar' and 'Medred', and points out the relation of the latter to the Mider of the Etain story.

"Gwenhwyvar analyzes itself into 'gwenn' or 'gwen' white, and 'hwyvar' a word which, while it has no explanation in Welsh, is doubtless cognate with the Irish 'siabur' a ghost or phantom, and 'siabrae' a ghost, specter, or goblin. So there can be little doubt that 'Gwenhwyvar' originally meant the white phantom or white apparition, which reminds one of the Irish 'Be Find' as a name of one of the Etains, and of the conjectured signification of the latter name itself.

*Another name to be noticed here is that of Medrawt or

7. Rhys Op. cit., P.25-31.

8. Ibid. P.35.

Medred, made in English into Mordred or Medred: this would seem to be of the same origin as the Welsh verb 'medr-u' to hit with a missile, also metaphorically with the intellect in the sense of knowing and understanding; Irish 'midiur' I judge. But the proper name is synonymous with, and derived from, a simpler one - 'Medr', written 'Medyr' in the story of "Kulhwch", where it is given to a wonderful marksman, ... It is even more to the point to notice that Airem's rival's name was closely related to that of Medred and identified with that of 'Medr': we allude to 'Mider', genitive 'Mider'.⁹

And now, having brought together the names 'Gwenhwyvar' and 'Etain', and 'Medred' and 'Mider', Rhys then proceeds to show us that the names 'Arthur' and 'Airem' come from a common root and are synonymous.¹⁰

Finally, summing up his previous argument, Rhys takes his stand on the following: "It may be quoted that there was an historical Arthur, who may have held the office, which under the Roman administration was known as that of 'Comes Britanniae'; that he may, like Aurelius Ambrosius, have been partly of Roman descent; that Maelgwn was his nephew, whom Gildas accuses of slaying his uncle; that his name 'Arthur' was either the Latin 'Arterius', or else a Celtic name belonging in the first instance to a god Arthur; for the Latin 'Arterius' and the god's name, which we have treated as early Brythonic 'Arter', genitive 'Arteros', would equally yield in Welsh the familiar form of 'Arthur'. In either case the name would have to be regarded as an important factor in the identification

9. Ibid. P.38-39.

10. Ibid. P.39-43.

or confusion of the man with the divinity. The latter called Arthur by the Brythons, was called Airem by the Goidels, and he was probably the Artacan Mercury of the Allobroges of ancient Gaul. His role was that of Culture Hero, and his name allows one to suppose that he was once associated, in some special manner, with agriculture over the entire Celtic world of antiquity. On the one hand we have the man Arthur, whose position we have tried to define, and on the other a greater Arthur, a more colossal figure, of which we have, so to speak, but a terse rescued from the wreck of the Celtic pantheon.^{II}

This theory of Rhys' has taken root even among present day scholars. Thus Kemp Malone,^{I2} in his attempt to identify Arthur and Uther as one and the same person, also shows the close parallel between Guinevere's abduction story and the Irish myth of Etain. "The concentration which the Galfridian account in particular shows is most strikingly exemplified in the story of the rape of Guinevere. The "Vital Gildae" attributed to Caradoc and the French romances, taken together, give us a version of the rape quite similar to that found in the Irish marchen. In both the hero recovers his wife. Geoffrey, however, combines this story with the 'passing of Arthur' story, which originally was doubtless a kind of sequel to the rape much as is the Conaire story in the Irish version. Yet Geoffrey does hold the two tales separate, after a fashion. Mordred is defeated and loses Guinevere in his first battle with Arthur, and the second battle, that of Camlann, has no immediate connection with the rape ... The existence of a foster-father myth in connection with Arthur is amply attested in the French romances, of course. The

II. Ibid. P.47-48.

I2. Malone "Historicity of Arthur" Ref. cit., P. 476.

original form of the myth can be determined by comparison of the extant versions with the Irish parallel, the marchen of Stain. This marchen corresponds to Arthurian legend, as we have seen, not only in the birth-myth but also in the rape of Guinevere story. In fact, it gives us the mythical (as distinguished from the pseudo-historical) framework for the Arthur legend. It would thus appear that the prototype of the marchen was common Celtic property, that it was pre-Arthurian, and that it got attached to Arthur by virtue of the fact that it offered a solution for the problem of the two fathers of the hero.¹³

In like manner, to each of the Arthurian themes, a Celtic parallel is advanced which, although by no means final - as evinced by their repudiation at the hands of various scholars - are yet of sufficient interest and importance to be considered seriously.

13. Ibid. P. 490-91.

Chapter 3.

Geoffrey of Monmouth.

The 'matter of Britain' unquestionably entered upon a new phase of influence with the publication of Geoffrey of Monmouth's "Historia Regum Britanniae" about the year 1137. "To few works in the history of literature," says Professor J.D. Bruce,¹ "can the much-abused term epoch-making, be so justly applied as to Geoffrey's "Historia". Under any supposition it was indubitably the most notable production in the Arthurian field that had appeared up to that date, and, in all probability, it was owing to this influence of this book, direct and indirect, that the Arthurian stories leaped into general literary popularity just at this time."²

Again, E.K. Chambers: "No work of the imagination, save the 'Aeneid', has done more to shape the legend of a people than the "Historia Regum Britanniae" of a writer who describes himself as Gaufridus Monumetensis." These statements, from Arthurian scholars of such consistency, intimate to some extent the importance of Geoffrey of Monmouth's work in its own special field of literary achievement.

Although Geoffrey of Monmouth, in his literary remains, has become a vivid personality, of his life we have scanty information. Of his birth we know nothing save that he was born about the end of the eleventh century in or around Monmouthshire. He gave himself the title of 'Monumetensis', but whether because Monmouth was his birthplace, or because he was educated in the Benedictine monastery

1. J.D. Bruce Op.cit., P. 20.

2. E.K. Chambers "Arthur of Britain" P.20.

there, we cannot determine. Most of the external records which we have of Geoffrey's earlier career as an ecclesiastic relate him to the neighborhood of Oxford in the diocese of Lincoln. Here he appears as a witness to some seven charters, ranging from 1129 to 1151, and concerned with the monastic houses of Osney, Godstow and Thame, and the canonical house of St George in Oxford castle. He is described as Galfridus Arthur, sometimes with the academic prefix 'magister', and among his fellow witnesses are Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford and a certain Ralph of Monmouth. That he was known not only as Geoffrey of Monmouth, but as Geoffrey Arthur, is confirmed by references of his contemporaries, as well as by the "Gwentian Brut", a compilation of the fifteenth or sixteenth century.

We must think then of Geoffrey as probably rather of Breton than of Welsh blood, as brought up in a Norman environment, on the Welsh marches, but far back from any active Welsh life, and as connected by origin with the political domination of Robert of Gloucester, and by profession with the ecclesiastical circle of Oxford and Lincoln. In 1152 Geoffrey was ordained priest and made Bishop of St Asaph's in Wales. In 1155 he died, and beyond these bare facts nothing definite is known of his life.

Nevertheless, through a knowledge of the history of the time added to this skeleton outline of his life, we may readily build up a set of conditions and circumstances which undoubtedly influenced him and under which his great work was evolved. Geoffrey lived at a period when England was once more reawakening to an intellectual stimulus, this time one that had come with the Norman

conquest. And now, her literary life which had long been lying dormant, once again began to blossom afresh under the influence of the scholars, the chroniclers and the minstrels brought by the Normans across the Channel. Again, the Normans, after a half-century's occupation of England were beginning to take a keen interest in the past history of their newly-acquired domain, and to turn eagerly to the traditions of early Britain. The taste of the Norman nobles, however, engendered through generations of their own culture, demanded something less bizarre, less fantastic, and less remote from their own world than the Celtic myth afforded them; and, again, something more polished and entertaining than the stilted and stereotyped chronicles at their disposal. G

Geoffrey, being possessed of a peculiarly facile nature, an eager intelligence, and a distinctively inventive turn of mind; being, furthermore, a student, an accomplished Latin scholar, and the master of a finished Latin style - for Latin was still the recognized vehicle for serious literary productions, and ecclesiastics as well as nobles were the patrons of letters - quickly perceived the trend of men's thoughts, and saw an opportunity of winning distinction for himself, while catering to the taste of the time.

About the year 1135, probably with the scheme of a greater work already in mind he completed a brief Latin tract known as the "Libellus Merlini", in which he introduced to his readers a mysterious youth, the son of a princess of South Wales and her other-world lover, gifted with prophetic power, and called Merlinus. Geoffrey's book purported to be a translation from the 'British tongue' into Latin, and contained a series of prophecies relating chiefly to the

Saxon wars, delivered to Vortigern by Merlin. The prophecies are long and obscurely wrapped up in symbolical imagery from the animal world. Oracular utterances are always more precise in dealing with the past than with the future, and in the earlier passages of Merlin's harangue it is possible to trace allusions to historical events as known to or conceived by Geoffrey. To these Geoffrey prefixed as introduction the story of a supernatural boy, Ambrosius,³ and his experiences with Vortigern which he found in Nennius, but which he expanded and transferred bodily from its original here, Ambrosius, to Merlin.

We have no independent tract from Geoffrey containing the "Prophecies", but they occupy the seventh book of the "Historia", which soon afterwards, about 1137, was released. It is evident, however, that the "Prophecies" must originally have become known in a form independent from the "Historia", as we now know it.⁴ The entire work he dedicated to Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, in a letter sufficiently eulogistic to be a high bid for the prelate's favor.⁵

Some time before Geoffrey published the "Libellus Merlini" he had begun to write the "Historia Regum Britanniae" which, as we have noted, was published about 1137. This latter achievement was dedicated to one of the most distinguished literary patrons of the time, Robert, Earl of Gloucester. In the dedication to this work, the author remarks that he had often marvelled at the little that had been recorded of the kings that had lived in Britain before the Incarnation of Christ and even concerning Arthur and his successors

3. Nennius Op. cit., ch. 40ff.

4. E.K. Chambers Op. cit., P.26-29.

5. Geoffrey of Monmouth "Histories of the Kings of Britain" P.I.

who lived after the Incarnation. "Now, whilst I was thus thinking upon such matters, Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, a man learned not only in the art of eloquence, but in the histories of foreign lands, offered me a certain most ancient book in the British language that did set forth the doings of them all in due succession and order from Brute, the first King of the Britons, onward to Cadwallader, the son of Cadwallo, all told in stories of exceeding beauty."⁶

In the "Historia", Geoffrey undertook to relate the history of the Britons from the time of their founder, Brutus, the grandson of Ascanius, to the death of Cadwallader, the last British king. It is divided into twelve books, of which Book VII is the earlier work, the "Libellus Merlini". Here, in the "Historia" (Book VIII, ch. 14, to Book XI, ch. 2), then, for the first time, we have related in pseudo-historical form the glories of Uther Pendragon and Arthur, his son, the latter's birth and fictitious conquests extending as far as Rome, on the one hand, and the Baltic on the other, until his downfall in his last battle with Medred and his translation to Avalon. Merlin's marvels of enchantment and prophecy, Gawain's valorous deeds, and Guinevere's marital disloyalty all form, likewise, a part of the story.

Although Geoffrey narrated the histories of the kings of Britain from Brutus to Cadwallader, yet his special claim to distinction rests upon the Arthurian section of his history to which he devoted more space than to any other individual king. "The conception of Arthur as a great medieval monarch, the ideal representative of chivalry - not merely a fairy-tale king - originated, we may say, entirely with Geoffrey of Monmouth. He succeeded in embodying this

6. Ibid. P. I.

idea in his work in a truly imposing literary form, and the pretended historical character of the "Historia" gave a dignity to the theme which it had not hitherto possessed.⁷

Geoffrey's Arthurian narrative may be summarized as follows: He begins his account of Arthur's career with the romantic story of his birth. To Uther Pendragon, the King of Britain, Merlin prophesies the greatness of his house. Uther loves Igerne, the wife of Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall; and Merlin, to fulfil the prophecy, lends Uther the semblance of her lord and he becomes the father of Arthur. After the death of her first husband, Uther takes Igerne as his queen, and thus Arthur, at the age of fifteen, despite his doubtful birth, succeeds to the throne as rightful heir. He is no sooner crowned when he is called to face the Saxons whom, with the aid of Hoel of Brittany, he defeats. Then he extends his operations and in a series of victorious campaigns he subdues Ireland, Iceland, Gothland and the Orkneys as well as Gaul, which he wins in single combat on an island of the Seine, while the hostile armies look on from opposite banks. He returns to Britain where for twelve years his success in war is only equalled by his magnificence in peace; and Geoffrey lays stress on his liberality in distributing the conquered lands, the state he keeps with his queen Guinevere, and the gallantry of the court. In the midst of all this pomp envoys arrived with a demand for tribute from Lucius Tiberius of Rome. In full assembly it is refused; and Arthur, leaving his nephew Medred in charge of queen and kingdom, sets out with his knights and vassal kings to make war on the Romans themselves. Accordingly he sails to Brittany, and is marching south to Rome carrying all

7. J.D.Bruce Op.cit., P. 20.

before him, for the Grecian and Eastern allies of Lucius avail little when confronted with the chivalry of the West. In its ranks Gawain takes the first place, and for some time he is almost the chief person of the story, his prowess obscuring that of Arthur himself. Nothing seems able to prevent the Britons from capturing Rome, when they are suddenly checked in mid career. News arrives that Medred has seized the kingdom, married Guinevere, and strengthened himself with heathen auxiliaries. The king immediately returns to Britain, and wages war upon Medred. A great battle is fought, in which Gawain is slain, but the rebels are put to flight. Guinevere flees to a cloister and becomes a nun, but Medred rallies in the West whither Arthur follows him. In another battle the multitudes on both sides perish, Medred is defeated and slain, and Arthur himself, mortally wounded, is carried off to the island of Avalon to be healed.

^{the} In/plan and outline of his book, Geoffrey followed closely the most famous of his predecessors, Gildas, Bede, and Nennius, making more use of Nennius than of the others. He translates their material through the crucible of his personality and they emerge on the pages of his book, embellished, amplified, and transformed to such a degree as to render his sources practically indefinable. Yet, at times, he frequently adopts their very words and phrases and merely recasts their sentences into a more finished form. Thus, Geoffrey, following the custom of other chroniclers of early British history, freely availed himself of the most reliable sources at his disposal. Nevertheless, where the reliable sources fell short, Geoffrey, unlike his predecessors, did not terminate his work, but, undaunted, readily borrowed from the chronicles of his contemporaries,

William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, from ancient Celtic records, Celtic myth, Biblical history, Classical and Scandinavian story, oral tradition, universal stock of folk-tales, the Carolingian cycle, familiar facts of general history, from events in the life about him; in fine, from any quarter he chose, added to these materials from his own imagination - the most important element of all - and moulded the whole into the pseudo-historical work which we know.

Yet Geoffrey himself, for all these indisputable indications of borrowings, in his dedicatory epistle to Robert of Gloucester, claims to have secured all his information from 'a certain most ancient book in the British tongue' which Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, had given him.

That Geoffrey was not solely responsible for his historical romances is quite obvious. He himself has three references to his sources. The most important is in the preface to his dedication. He mentions this source again at the beginning of the eleventh book, saying that from it and from the stories of Walter he learned of the battle fought by Arthur and his nephew Medred after his return from Gaul. And finally, in his colophon, leaving the later history to William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon and Caradoc of Llancarfan, he bids them be silent about the British kings, since they did not have the liber in the British tongue, which Walter brought out of Britain, and from which Geoffrey has put the truth into Latin.

This 'liber' has been the subject of much controversy. It has been accepted and rejected. It has been identified with the

Welsh "Brut", which is post-Galfridian, and with the "Historia" of Nennius which is written in Latin, does not contain the lives of the pre-Christian kings, and passed with Geoffrey for part of the work of Gildas. It has been argued that, if it was a fraud, Walter of Oxford must have been a party to it, and that it is unlikely that two ecclesiastics would stoop to unqualified mendacity in a matter not involving substantial benefit to themselves.

There have been many literary forgeries, and the motives of them have generally been obscure. Certainly some of Geoffrey's contemporaries thought him a liar. They were probably thinking of the substance of his narrative, rather than of the specific allegation as to its source. On the other hand, Henry of Huntingdon evidently took him seriously, and if there was a jest or a convention or a fraud, failed to penetrate it. Geoffrey's manipulation of his material, where its nature is apparent to us, makes it impossible to believe that he was a completely veracious chronicler, even when due allowance is made for what he might reasonably consider as legitimate rhetorical embroidery.

"It does not quite follow that he had no 'liber' at all, or that some of his perversions of fact may not have been due to a predecessor. But it is quite safe to say that, whatever underlies the "Historia" it is not a mere literal rendering of ancient Celtic annals. There is too much of the twelfth century about it for that; the classical scholarship, with its drafts upon Virgil, Juvenal, Lucan, and Apuleius; the attempts at etymology; the modelling of Arthur's personality, court and conquests upon those of Charlemagne; the crusader's knowledge of siege machines and Greek fire; the interweaving of the Ursula legend, as developed in twelfth-century

Cologne... We are in the environment of a Norman ecclesiastic,
rather than that of a remote Celtic." ⁹

Geoffrey does not of course claim that the 'liber' was his sole authority. It supplemented for him what he had already learned from Gildas and Bede. And he acknowledges a debt to Archdeacon Walter for oral information as well as for the 'liber'. Modern scholarship, although still hampered by an inadequate knowledge of the early forms of Welsh, has made it possible to isolate certain notices of Arthur, which seem to represent a conception of the hero independent of Geoffrey. These notices belong to bardic literature. Nennius speaks of men who were famed for song, apparently in North Britain, about the middle of the sixth century. One of the principal functions of these bards was the celebration of the prowess of their chieftains and the glories of their descent. That this would involve the preservation of ancestral legends is obvious.

The only Welsh treatment of Arthur for which, in written form at least, an origin before the late eleventh or early twelfth century can be seriously claimed, consists of obscure allusions in the great compilation known collectively as the "Four Ancient Books"; the "Book of Taliessin"; the "Book of Aneurin"; the "Black Book of Carmarthen"; and the "Red Book of Hergest". Although there has been much dispute as to the relative dates of these compilations, it seems at least safe to conclude that the "Four Books" may well contain allusions to Arthur which are not derived from Geoffrey.

As far as the "Mabinogion" is concerned, Arthur is consistently absent and is only a well-defined figure in the independent story of "Kulhwch and Olwen", the composition of which is commonly dated in

9. E.K.Chambers Op.cit., P. 56-57.

the late eleventh or early twelfth century. There is some trace of the impact of Norman upon Celtic civilization, but none of the influence of Geoffrey or of French Arthurian romance.

A divergent and less glorified conception of Arthur is found in some Latin "Vitae" of South Welsh saints, roughly contemporary with him or with Maelgwn, who ruled in North Wales a little after his time. Herein, he appears less as an emperor than as a local 'tyrannus', with an undisciplined character which occasionally calls for saintly correction. Naturally, the ecclesiastical point of view is not quite that of the herd. Thus we have the "Vita" of St Cadoc which is ascribed to Lifrie, a schoolmaster at Llancarfan about 1075.

Having thus surveyed the field of possible pre-Galfridian Arthurian legend, we have now to consider how far Geoffrey, in search of material to help the play of his fancy in supplementing the chronicle, may be supposed to have drawn, through the alleged 'liber' or otherwise, upon a Welsh tradition about Arthur. As far as the "Vitae" are concerned it is obvious that Geoffrey did not use them. His Arthur lives and dies in the aura of sanctity, and he had no use for a rebellious king or a tyrant recalcitrant against the proper authority of God and his saints, as the "Vitae" would have Arthur be. And even when we compare the "Historia" with the vernacular Welsh literature, the analogies are not so close or numerous as might be expected. Apart from the general tone and method of treatment it is difficult to trace much direct filiation between between the details of Arthur's family, equipment and final disaster as given as given in the "Historia" and in the Welsh documents respectively.

One must conclude, then, that apart from the use of certain common names, there is no obvious draft by the "Historia" upon the body of pre-Galfridian Welsh tradition about Arthur, so far as that has been preserved to us. There is the alternative that any Celtic material used by Geoffrey may have come to him from Cornwall, or from the south-west of the island, or from Brittany, which may have developed an Arthurian tradition more in harmony with that of Cornwall than with that of Wales. The absence of early Cornish or Breton documents naturally makes speculation very unsure.

Something must be added as to the origin of Merlin. It can be brief, since Merlin seems to have been wholly a creation of Geoffrey's active brain. The name of Merlin is untracable in any assured pre-Galfridian document. He is not with Taliessin and Aneirin in the Nennian list of sixth-century bards. "Nor can he, except by an illegitimate transference backwards from the "Historia" be read into the main narrative of Nennius as the prophetic boy who expounds to Vortigern the omen of the dragons".¹⁰ He is not in the "Mabinogion" or in "Kulhwch and Olwen", or in the earliest Welsh poems. The conclusion can only be that Geoffrey, casting about for a mouthpiece for the "Prophecies", in which he proposed to give literary form to the vague rumours of a British hero, invented Merlin, and deliberately identified him with the prophet of Nennius.

In recapitulation: "We need not take very seriously the author's declaration in his dedication to Robert, Earl of Gloucester, that he was translating into Latin an old book in the British language furnished him by his friend Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford. There is no evidence that he had more than superficial acquaintance

10. H.K.Chambers Op. cit., P. 95.

with Welsh and probably he knew Breton no better." ^{II} No one very ancient British book could have indeed contained all the material which Geoffrey avers to have translated into Latin. But although he does not give a truthful account of his source we are by no means to criticize him unduly, for he was but following the custom of his day, when - "every medieval writer had his direct source to which he adhered pretty slavishly, but which he was especially in the habit of citing as an authority when he wished to depart from it,"¹² Indeed, Geoffrey himself could not have regarded the 'British book' with tremendous seriousness, for he would scarcely have otherwise dared to make a renowned archdeacon accessory to his fraud, or to be so unguarded as to say, as he does in one passage, that some of his stories he has heard verbally from Archdeacon Walter. But for that matter, neither was his public sufficiently critical to question sources closely. The resemblance of his book to well-authenticated chronicle, the air of verisimilitude that the narrative had, were sufficient to satisfy most of Geoffrey's readers, although, of course, his subterfuge was quite transparent to many scholars of his day.

II. J.D.Bruce Op. cit., P. 20.

12. Geoffrey of Monmouth Op. cit., P. 117.

Part II

Geoffrey to Chretien

Chapter I.

The Influence of Geoffrey.

"It is difficult to exaggerate, though it is easy to misconceive, the importance of Geoffrey's book. In a certain sense its appearance is the literary incident of the twelfth century. The repeated translations of it into French attest the eager welcome it received from imaginative writers and from the general public. Its lasting popularity is proved by the denunciations which were launched against it even at the close of the century, by historians who were exact and by historians who were not exact... These ebullitions of wrath are very intelligible, for no doubt Geoffrey by his credulity and inventiveness had troubled the waters of history for many a century to come. But there is as little doubt that his book is the well-head of a living stream of poetry that has not yet ceased to flow. The Elizabethan dramatists, with Shakespeare at their head, Spenser and Milton, Wordsworth and Swinburne, to mention only a few of the chief, have alike drawn inspiration from his story."

In writing his history, Geoffrey's aim was primarily to exalt his own race. It touched the vanity of the Anglo-Norman nobility, who were now identified with Great Britain, that they could claim a hero who was the equal, if not the superior, of Charlemagne, the great hero of their Continental kinsmen. The consequences of all this was that Geoffrey's "Historia" had an instantaneous and

I. M.W.MacCallum "Tennyson's Idylls of the King and Arthurian Story"
(P. 35-36.)

prodigious success and it stimulated immensely whatever interest there may already have been in Arthur and his companions.

Thus, whatever the origin and whatever the good faith of Geoffrey's "Historia", it had the fortune to win early an enduring acceptance as a credible narrative. So serious a historian as Henry of Huntingdon, while greeting his discovery of II39 with some amazement, did not hesitate to use it as material for the revision of his own work; and Alfred of Beverley a few years later wrote a summary of its contents and noted the stir it was causing. These, however, are only the precursors of innumerable chroniclers, Latin, English, and French, throughout the Middle Ages, who treat Geoffrey as the primary authority for their accounts of Celtic Britain. They may question his individual statements or weigh them against those of other writers. They may add details from romance or perhaps here and there from oral tradition. They may exercise their own imaginations in interpretation or expansion. None the less, Geoffrey remains the fundamental source.

Translations and paraphrases soon brought the material of the "Historia" into literature, and a series of vernacular "Bruts" linked the chronicle to romance. There ^{were} Welsh as well as Latin adaptations; and all Welsh Arthurian literature, from the "Dream of Rhonabwy" onwards, is much affected by borrowings from Geoffrey. The French "Bruts" probably began with that lost one which preceded the "Historie des Engles" of Geoffrey Gaimar. And the earliest which has come down to us in full is the "Geste des Bretons" of Maistre Wace, which was completed in II55 and dedicated to Matilda, the wife of Henry II.

Geoffrey thus imposed himself upon the medieval imagination

through the double channel of historic and romantic chronicle. But, before leaving him, it must be pointed out that contemporary learning was not without its notes of dissent. William of Newburgh, composing his "Historia Rerum Anglicarum" in Yorkshire, between 1196 and 1198, is explicit enough. He still relies upon Bede and Gildas. Gildas was honest. "In our own day, on the other hand, has emerged a writer, who attempts to clear the reputation of the Britons by weaving together ridiculous figments and exalting their valor beyond that of Rome and Macedon. This is Geoffrey, surnamed Arthur, from the fables of Arthur which he took from the ancient figments of the Britons and added to on his own account, clothing them in Latin speech to give color of an honest history. More audacious still, he has translated and expanded the deceitful divinations of a certain Merlin and sent them abroad as authentic prophecy. The happenings in England since Geoffrey's death reveal these deceits, and no one with any knowledge of ancient history could have a doubt as to his wilful and impudent lying."² In particular, William falls foul of Geoffrey's 'Britannic fable' of the transference of Arthur to the island of Avalon, and does not know whether to ascribe it to unbridled lust for mendacity, or to fear of the Britons who expect Arthur to come again and cannot endure to hear of his death.

The invectives of William of Newburgh finds a more humorous parallel in the references of the Welsh ecclesiastic and antiquarian, Giraldus Cambrensis. Giraldus was interested in the metropolitan claims of the see of St David's, of which he hoped to become bishop, and had to meet opponents who probably relied upon Geoffrey's

2. E.K.Chambers Op. cit., P. 107.

preference for the unhistorical Caerleon in stigmatizing these claims as 'Arthurian fables'. In his "Itinerarium Cambriae" of 1191, he tells a story of one Meilerius of Caerleon who claimed the power of telling truth from falsehood by the help of daemonic familiars. The devils were exercised by placing the Gospel of St John on his bosom, 'thereat they flew away like birds and vanished'. But when, adds Giraldus, by way of experiment, the gospel was removed and Geoffrey Arthur's history of the Britons put in its place, then the devils all came back far quicker than before.

We may thus accredit Geoffrey with being the pioneer as well as sponsor and almost the father of the Arthurian romance. His narrative, either directly or through the medium of Wace and Wace's adapters, is the archetype of the romantic histories of Arthur. Here we have for the first time the transmutation of a British chieftain into the epitome of the emperor of romantic fabrication. And the appearance of so authoritative and popular a book was nothing less than momentous for the development of the romances. As it became known in the original or in Norman-French adaptations, the result was inevitably to give prominence and vogue to the store of Celtic tales, some of which doubtless had already a wide circulation. It supplied the figure of Arthur as center, round which many stories, including some that originally may have had nothing to do with him, could be grouped; and it gave as background for the several incidents the splendor of his reign and court.

Chapter 2.

Wace.

The earliest version of the French "Bruts" which has come down to us in full, is the "Roman de Brut" of Maistre Wace, which was completed in 1155 and dedicated to Eleanor, the wife of Henry II. Wace, to whom has been given the baptismal name of Robert, was a Jersey man by birth. He dwelt long at Caen, where he was 'cler lisant' under the two Henries and under a third, the 'young king' who died in 1183. Ultimately, he became a canon of Bayeux.

The "Brut" is a poem of some 15,000 lines in octosyllabic couplets, and in its structure Wace follows the "Historia" quite closely, but with a poet's freedom of phrasing and with much rhetorical embroidery in speeches and descriptive passages. It is romantic in metre and language, and emphasizes the romantic side of Geoffrey's narrative. He accentuates the elements of chivalry and 'amour courtois', laying stress on the character of Gawain and elaborating the relations of Meared and Guinevere. He omits the "Prophecies", of which he could make nothing. His primary importance, therefore, is that writing in the vernacular he was able by his fluent verse and vivifying touches to command the story to a larger audience than would feel at home with Geoffrey's Latin.

A good example of the 'trouvere' manner is to be found in the considerable elaboration which Wace gives to the account of Arthur's twelve years of peace, his coronation, and his Roman wars. Arthur's court is already, in Wace, more definitely than in Geoffrey, reaching its medieval status as the mirror of knighthood and center of romantic

adventures. Geoffrey's hint as to the relation of 'amour courtois' to military prowess is emphasized in the mouth of Gawain. Besides the "Historia" Wace knew of other stories which many a 'conteur' and 'fableur' had already attached to Arthur. But if he himself drew upon such sources, his borrowings are insignificant. A possible exception is to be made for the famous Round Table, which here makes its first appearance.

I

Professor J. D. Bruce sums up concisely the position of Wace's "Brut" in the Arthurian legend: "He, Wace, adds practically no new material to that which his original offered and so the advantage which his work has over Geoffrey's is merely in its superior vivacity and vividness. A French poem in octosyllabic couplets was likely to be livelier than a pseudo-chronicle in the artificial Latin prose of the Middle Ages, and Wace's style, as it happens, is particularly lively, so that Geoffrey's legends and fictions are now cast in the form which was really appropriate to them - namely, that of a metrical romance, He substitutes direct for indirect discourse, is fond of rhetorical questions and exclamations, and amplifies, especially, the descriptions of battles and festivities... He accordingly contributed largely to the spread of interest in the Arthurian stories, for in the Middle Ages, as well as now, more people could enjoy a tale in the vernacular than in Latin."

I. J.D.Bruce Op. cit., P. 25.

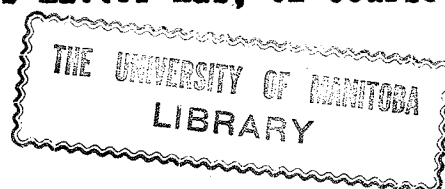
Chapter 3.

Layamon.

Besides contributing to the spread of interest in the Arthurian stories, Wace influenced Arthurian literature in another way also - that is to say, the 'genre' of the "Brut"; the chronicle of British history which follows the Geoffreyan tradition and makes a fabulous Brutus the founder of the kingdom did not end with him. The most important representative of this 'genre' is preserved not in French, but in English. The English poem, however, is undoubtedly based on a lost French original.

Recent research has made it probable that Wace's "Brut" underwent a considerable expansion into a form which has not been preserved, but which seems to have left its traces upon several later works. It may be the "Brut" ascribed in a French romance to a certain Martin of Rochester, who is otherwise unknown. Possibly it arose from a conflation of Wace and Gaimar; possibly it drew upon an oral or written tradition, distinct from that of Geoffrey. The hypothesis, however, has it that this expanded "Brut", rather than Wace's, was the immediate source of the first English "Brut", written about 1195, in some 32,000 irregular alliterative lines, by Layamon, a priest of Arley, in Worcestershire.

Layamon cites as his authorities St Bede, St Albin, and St Augustine as well as Wace; but, following the example of the medieval authors, Layamon sought to bolster up his work with many references, for the "Brut", besides the use of Wace, does not show any use of the other authorities. This matter has, of course, been



established as a meet point for discussion by scholars of the two schools of thought, the Celtic and its opponents, regarding the various aspects of the Arthurian legend.

Thus, R. H. Fletcher,^I attempts to disprove the prevalent theory that Layamon made no use of Geoffrey. He shows that in a few episodes certain of Layamon's details agree with those of Geoffrey and not with those of Wace.

In the first part of the story of Vertigern's tower, both Geoffrey and Layamon, but not Wace, say that the messengers were weary when they arrived at Merlin's city; and represent Merlin's mother as speaking of the maidens in her chamber and of the beauty of the youth who came to her. Layamon, like Geoffrey, implies decidedly that Aurelius did not know of Merlin until Tremorian mentioned him, while Wace's language does not convey that impression: Layamon and Geoffrey say that Aurelius sent messengers for him all over the kingdom, while Wace represents that he sent at once to the right place: and Layamon and Geoffrey that Merlin often frequented or bathed in his favorite fountain, while Wace observes instead that he does not know where it is. Both Geoffrey and Layamon state that when Gerleis was killed he had sallied out of the castle, while Wace strongly implies the contrary. Geoffrey says that in ascending the hill at the battle of Baden, Arthur lost many men, and Layamon that he lost five hundred, while Wace does not speak of any loss at all.

Next to be considered² are Layamon's citations of the prophecies of Merlin. Wace did not include the version of the prophecies which occupy Geoffrey's seventh book, because, he said, he did not know

1. R.H.Fletcher "Did Layamon Make Any Use of Geoffrey's Historia" (P.M.L.A. 18:91, 1903.
2. Ibid. P. 93.

what they meant; and elsewhere he mentions Merlin's prophecies only twice; saying, after Geoffrey, that Merlin had foretold that Arthur's end would be doubtful, and again, not drawing directly from Geoffrey, that the Britons would not regain the island until the time that Merlin had foretold. Layamon, on the other hand, gives several prophecies which he ascribes to Merlin. Professor Wulker had said that Layamon probably based these prophecies on popular tradition current among the Welsh independently of Geoffrey. But Fletcher holds that the assumption that Merlin had been connected with the Arthurian story by any one before Geoffrey, or that any one before Geoffrey had ascribed to him prophecies corresponding very closely with those of Geoffrey's seventh book, seems very dangerous.

Fletcher then goes on to show that all the parts which Layamon cites either correspond entirely with passages of Geoffrey's version, or else agree similarly with Wace or fit very naturally to the story; so that, in the latter case, they may easily have been composed with direct reference to it after the appearance of Geoffrey's "Historia". "Obviously, however, those which belong to the second class afford no evidence of direct knowledge of Geoffrey on the part of Layamon; and it may still be argued that those which belong to the first class had passed from Geoffrey's "Historia" into popular lore, or that Layamon had only Geoffrey's seventh book, which, as existing manuscripts show, sometimes circulated by itself without the rest of the work. But the second of these assumptions would practically surrender the argument, and the first is no more probable in itself than that Layamon drew directly from Geoffrey."

3. Ibid. P. 94.

Next in order we may refer to A.C.L. Brown, the upholder of the Celtic origin school, in his analysis of the sources of the topic under discussion.⁴ Most careful students of the metrical chronicle written by Layamon, he says, agree that it embodies here and there bits of Welsh tradition which its author, who dwelt near the borders of Wales, either heard directly from his Welsh-speaking neighbors or got at second-hand from his English parishioners, among whom legends of Welsh origin were doubtless popular. Thus, Sir Fredrick Madden, the editor of Layamon's "Brut" (1847) vol. I. p. xvi., says: "That Layamon was indebted to Welsh traditions, not recorded in Geoffrey of Monmouth, or in Wace, is scarcely to be questioned." Ten Brink, in his "History of English Literature", remarks: "Some of Layamon's interpolations can have been derived from traditions clinging to places not far distant from the poet's home".

Layamon, writing about the year 1205, in the main translated the Norman-French chronicle of Wace, which was written about 1155, but he expanded its 15,300 lines to 32,250. Part of this great expansion was due to Layamon's love for detailed description and comes from his own fancy. So clever, in fact, is Layamon in transforming a brief hint, dropped by Wace, into a vivid picture, that a feeling might arise in one's mind that perhaps Layamon invented all his additions to Wace, the more important as well as the mere expansions of his original. To dispel this doubt, one has but to see how closely most of the noteworthy additions made by Layamon are connected with Wales and with Welsh tradition.

Layamon puts into the mouth of Merlin the explicit prophecy: "Arthur shall come again to the help of the Britons." This is not in

4. A.C.L. Brown "Welsh Traditions in Layamon's Brut."
(M.Ph. I. P. 95ff. 1903.)

Wace, but as Madden has noted (vss.2865I, and note vol.III,p.412), is in accord with Welsh tradition. The case is similar with Layamon's change of the name of Arthur's last battlefield from Camblan to Camelford. Layamon's circumstantial account of the arms and dress of Irish warriors, Madden has shown (vol.III.p.366), agree exactly with descriptions given by Giraldus Cambrensis and by Froissart. Evidently Layamon's statements regarding Celtic matters are not spun out of his own fancy.⁵

Again, Layamon always presents the Welsh in a favorable light. A good example occurs at the end of his history. Wace's statement that the Welsh are all changed and degenerated from the nobility, the honor, and the manners of their ancestors, he alters to: "The Britons moved to Welshland, and lived in their laws and their popular manners, and yet they dwell as they shall do evermore."

Professor Brown then shows the error that students of Arthurian romance have made in neglecting Layamon. It was perhaps natural that they should; for Layamon wrote about 1205, probably fifty years after traditions about Arthur were widely popular in France. Thus at first thought it seems impossible that his chronicle could throw light on the history of the early development of the Arthurian legend. His additions to Wace might come, apparently, from the French romances. This, however, is not the case. Layamon lived in a wild borderland between Wales and England. The situation was evidently too remote for him to be acquainted with the romances current at Paris and London. The Round Table incident with its archaic features of a combat with knives at a royal feast, and of the brutal punishment of nose cutting, is not from any chivalric French source. It betrays its origin by

5. *Ibid.* P. 97.

its connection with Gwynedd or North Wales and with Cornwall, whence the workman who made the Round Table is said to have come.⁶

The argument for Celtic sources is concluded with the observation that Layamon's additions to Wace, especially the account of Arthur's departure to Argante the queen, and the Round Table story, the longest and most splendid of all, prove that the Welsh had a romantic Arthur about whom tales and legends were clustered. "These additions made by Layamon are fatal to any theory which assumes that the Arthur stories were developed exclusively in Brittany, and that the Welsh knew only a heroic, not a romantic Arthur. Layamon's "Brut" shows that at least some Arthur stories were developed in Wales, and passed directly from Welsh into English."⁷

As opposed to the theory of Celtic origin, we have J. D. Bruce's investigation of names in Layamon which are not found in Wace nor in Geoffrey of Monmouth. Thus, the first name under discussion is that of Argante, Argant, or Argane. This name for the elf-queen who takes Arthur to Avalon, after he has been wounded in his last battle, occurs twice in Layamon's poem. After a good deal of involved philological equations Bruce shows that 'Argant(e)', 'Argane', are merely corruptions of the French forms of 'Morgan(t)'. The 'M' may have first been dropped by some copyist in transcribing the English poem, although it is more likely to have been wanting already in the manuscript of the French original which Layamon used. "In any event (if the theory of corruption is accepted) the -t(e) at the end must have belonged to the word in the French original, so that the form 'Argant(e)' is, in reality, a French form. The name shows, then,

6. Ibid. P. 102.

7. Ibid. P. 103.

that the story of Arthur's translation by the fairy ladies, whatever may be its ultimate origin, was not derived by Layamon, as Brown assumes, (M.Ph.I.103,1903), from the Welsh. On the contrary, the natural inference from these conditions is that Layamon knew so little of the story from any other source than his French original that he made no effort to give the name of the fairy queen its original Celtic form: He merely took over the name from this lost French original as a part of the story which he was paraphrasing.⁸

And now the question arises: What was this French original? The Argante episode is not in the printed Wace, nor in any manuscripts of his "Roman de Brut", as far as has been observed. Bruce does not doubt that the original of the English poem was some expanded version of Wace. The evidence of the two remaining names which follow points strongly in the same direction.

'Meleon': This name for one of Merdred's sons - the one who was slain by Constantine, Arthur's successor, occurs in Layamon's text. There is what is evidently the same name given to the eldest of Merdred's sons in the Vulgate "Mort Artu". The coincidence is suggestive for the sources of both Layamon's "Brut" and the "Mort Artu", since it shows that the authors of both works must have used for the parts of their narratives which we are considering some other source than the Wace or Geoffrey that we know. Bruce does not doubt that this source was the hypothetical expansion of Wace's "Brut", and that Layamon got the name directly from this source.⁹

The last name to be considered is that of 'Oriene', 'Orien'. This name is not found in Geoffrey or Wace. It occurs, however, in

8. J.D.Bruce "Some Proper Names in Layamon." M.L.N. XXVI. P.65. 1911.
9. Ibid. P. 66.

Layamon as the name of the daughter of Octaves (represented as King of Britain in the time of Constantine the Great), who is given in marriage to Maximian, her father's successor. The '-e' is evidently the French feminine ending. "Is not this name simply a French variant of the Welsh woman's name, Orwen? The only thing necessary to convert this form into 'Orien(e)' would be for some scribe to leave of the second stroke of the 'u', and how easy that was no one who has any acquaintance with medieval manuscripts needs to be told. If I am right in my identification, this name too would furnish striking evidence that Layamon was wholly dependent on his French sources and did not recognize a Welsh name in the form which he had before him."¹⁰

In estimating the possible influence of Layamon's "Brut" on the Arthurian romance, we may readily come to the conclusion that apart from its own intrinsic interest, it was merely an eddy in the stream of the legend, out of the current and leading to nothing. Although translating a French poem, Layamon is himself thoroughly under the dominion of the old Germanic epic tradition. He inherits its metrical form - although admitting into his verse many laxities - its stock of epic formulas, and, above all, its ethical emphasis and spirit of staunch courage and devotion. His patriotism is so sturdy that Arthur, the scourge of the English according to Celtic tradition, becomes in his work, himself an Englishman. The narrative, besides being vivid and forcible throughout, contains many passages of high poetic beauty. The version too is important, as showing how the story of Arthur became more and more legendary as the years went by. Above all, however, the "Brut" has for us the grand interest that it is the first celebration of the British King in the English tongue.

10. Ibid. P. 68.

Chapter 4.

The Round Table.

Wace's variations for the most part are matters of detail. Yet, to some extent he employs, and to a far larger extent he knows, the assumptions of popular fancy. His most original contribution to Arthur's story is the mention of the Round Table. In Layamon a much fuller account is given of the origin of the Round Table. Layamon's comment, enlarged from that of Wace, implies his knowledge of many fabulous tales, not necessarily about the knights of the Round Table, but about the Table itself and the king who owned it.

This most famous of Arthur's possessions, like the many of lesser import, has been taken up as a point for discussion by scholars who attempt to probe its origin.

We know from Wace that 'li conteor' and 'li fableor' were embroidering the history of Arthur before 1155. He does not say whether they were French or Celtic. Nor does he furnish any distinction between the two terms which he uses; they may be synonymous. To such tales we perhaps owe the Round Table, as well as later accretions to Wace, which are reflected in Layamon.

According to Wace's "Brut" (L.9994ff.), the Round Table was instituted to prevent quarrels in regard to precedence among Arthur's barons. Layamon's account of how the Round Table came to be instituted (L.22736ff.), shows a good deal of expansion. At a great feast on Yule-day which Arthur gave, says Layamon, a sanguinary quarrel sprang up among the guests, "because each, on account of his high lineage, wished to be within". Several had lost their lives before the king succeeded in quelling it. Shortly after, when the king was in

Cornwall, a smith there offered to make him a table at which 1600 and more people might sit, "all round about so that none be left out without and within, man against man." Moreover, the king could carry it about with him anywhere. In four weeks time the work was completed and thereafter all was peace and fraternity at Arthur's feats.

This passage has nothing to correspond to it in the extant text of Wace's "Brut", but in view of the Irish parallels, must be accepted as undoubtedly derived ultimately from Celtic tradition.¹ It has been taken up as a proof that Layamon drew directly from the oral traditions of his neighbors, the Welsh.² We have seen, however, that the English writer was, in all probability, wholly dependant on a French source (an expansion of Wace) for his so-called additions, so that the inference is unwarranted and we are left in the same state of doubt as to the Welsh or Armerican origin of this incident, as of the incidents of Arthurian romances generally.

Let us now consider Professor A. C. L. Brown's study of this question.³ On comparing Layamon's account of the Round Table and that of Wace, the question arises: "From what source did Layamon derive this extraordinary and extensive addition." Only two hypotheses are possible, thinks Professor Brown. Either it was borrowed, as it purports to be, from Celtic - in this case Welsh - tradition, or Layamon (or some person immediately preceding Layamon) invented it, following the slight suggestion made by Wace. Brown at once rejects the second hypothesis on the grounds that even at first glance it does not appear likely that the story is of Layamon's invention. It is the longest single addition he has made to Wace, and is unique not only in length but also in detail and in local color.

1. J.D.Brace "Evolution of the Arthurian Legend" P. 45 (1903.
2. A.C.L.Brown "Welsh Tradition in Layamon's Brut" M.Ph.I.p.95ff.
3. A.C.L.Brown "The Round Table Before Wace" Harvard Studies (VII. p.183ff. (1900

A more careful examination of Layamon's story, he goes on to say,⁴ confirms this first impression. It contains several incidents which are extremely barbarous in character and which can only be explained, it would seem, as survivals, preserved in story from the primitive manners of early times. A murderous combat with carving knives at the table of a king is not an incident likely to occur to the imagination of a writer of the age of chivalry, anxious to invent a new story about the famous Arthur, whom he regarded as a national hero. Distinct evidence of primitive manners appears also in the savage punishment of the women who were relatives of the instigators of the fight. Mutilation of women of rank by cutting off their noses belongs to the barbarous age described in Irish saga. It cannot reasonably be regarded as an invention of Layamon.

"Since, then, the hypothesis of fabrication by Layamon is difficult, not to say impossible, we seem to be driven to the other alternative, that of a source in Welsh tradition."⁵ But first we must ask if this is possible. Had the English writer access to Welsh tradition, and does he show any signs of Welsh influence? "Both questions are to answered in the affirmative." Layamon lived near the border of Wales on the river Severn, as he himself tells us. He was therefore almost surrounded by Celtic districts. That he felt the Celtic influences at his door is evident from the changes he makes in the proper names furnished him by Wace. Where the names were little known, he generally adopts Wace's spelling; but in other cases, where the names were no doubt familiar to him from Welsh tradition, he shows a distinct tendency to approximate to

4. Ibid. P. 187.

5. Ibid. P. 188.

Welsh forms: eg. Geoffrey's 'Ganhumara', Wace's 'Ganièvre', becomes in Layamon, 'Wenhauer'. The Welsh form is 'Gwenhwyfar'. Geoffrey's 'Hoelus', Wace's 'Hoel', becomes in Layamon 'Howel', which is identically the Welsh form.

Again, there are also a number of places where he alters Wace's narrative in such a way as to favor the Welsh side of the story as opposed to the Saxon, thus seeming to indicate that he is following Welsh traditions. It is therefore not only possible, but altogether probable that Layamon derived this story from Welsh tradition.

The Celtic origin of this quarrel incident can be supported by positive evidence too. Tales of quarrels about precedence at feasts are of constant occurrence in Celtic tradition, and are just the sort of thing that Welshmen might have told in regard to any overlord such as Arthur appears to have been. In Irish literature several good examples of this tendency to quarrels at banquets have been preserved: eg. a detailed account of such a quarrel is the "Seel mucci Mic Dáthó", or "Story of Mac Dathó's Pig"; also "Fled Brierend", or "Feast of Brieriu".

Furthermore, there are many hints that a round table may have been actually used by the Celts in their primitive feasts. Posidonius tells us that Celts banquet around wooden tables slightly elevated above the ground, and when many are assembled "they sit in a circle and the bravest sits in the middle like the leader of a chorus; because he is superior to the rest either in his military skill, or in birth, or in riches; and the man who gives the entertainment sits next to him, and then on each side of the so honored ones, sit the rest of the guests, according as each is eminent or

6. Ibid. P. 190.

distinguished for anything." To support this first hand observation, tradition and archaeology both tend to show that a circular form was the rule in primitive Irish architecture.

"It appears, then, from sources so widely separated as classical antiquity and Irish saga, that a tendency to quarrel about precedence at feasts was a universal Celtic failing, or that the use of a round table, possibly to obviate these disputes, was widely known and probably also Pan-Celtic... Since these incidents appear to be Pan-Celtic, they must have been known in Britain, and stories embodying the idea of a Round Table must have existed in Welsh saga."⁷

Brown concludes his argument by proving to his satisfaction that the relation that Wace's account of the Round Table bears to the corresponding passage in Layamon is apparent when once it is admitted that the tale is borrowed from Celtic saga. Wace evidently knew the whole story, but for some reason did not choose to tell it, probably because he does not find it in Geoffrey's famous history. He contents himself, therefore, with giving a mere summary which by itself is not very clear, but every word of which is explained when the complete tale as given by Layamon is compared with it. That Wace knew the whole story is proved, moreover, by his mention of King Romaree, a name that nowhere occurs in Geoffrey's history. Here again we observe that Wace tells no story about Romaree, but merely introduces him into Geoffrey's list of the kings who became subject to Arthur and gave hostages. Layamon, however, gives a detailed account of how Roumaret, as he spells the name, was compelled by Arthur to send his eldest son to court as a hostage, and adds that it was this young man, 'Roumaret's sons of Winet-lende', who took a

7. Ibid. P. 197.

leading part in quelling the disturbance at Arthur's feast. It appears probable, therefore, that this Round Table story was known both in Wales and in Armorica, to Wace as well as to Layamon, though only the English writer tells it in full.

"Since the existence of a genuine Welsh tradition about the Round Table may now be confidently asserted, let us see what inferences may be drawn. The most simple and natural inference, one that probably every reader has already drawn for himself, is that Arthur's Round Table must be an early Welsh tradition."⁸

It has been also proposed to derive the Round Table from some Celtic feast - some spring festival which descends no doubt from pagan times. Thus Lewis F. Mott⁹ compares the festival days of the court of Arthur with the various festivals of pagan myth, and sees a good deal of analogy between the two. He finds that the establishment of the Round Table had a rather unintelligible Christian significance. This is exactly what we should expect if the account dealt with an original heathen ceremonial. "There are many parallels in the legends of saints invented to explain local customs and in the adaptation of primitive rites to churchly uses. In harmony with this view is the close connection of the Round Table with the Grail, in which, whatever its source, a plenty talisman may easily be discerned. Moreover, according to Wolfram, the Table was measured by moonlight on the grass, a circumstance which suggests some magical significance. While Wace ascribes the establishment of it to Arthur, the Merlin versions ascribe it to Uther, in whom we recognize, according to Rhys (Arthurian Legend P. 9), one of the names of the god of the Underworld, a region the divinities of which are very

8. Ibid. P. 202.

9. Lewis Mott "The Round Table" P.M.L.A. XX. P.231ff. 1905.

generally connected with agricultural observances... That Arthur, on a high fest day, refrains from eating until he has heard of some adventure, is possibly connected with primitive rites. But, above all, the fact that Uther serves the knights before himself eating, is hard to explain unless it be a reminiscence of the ceremonial action of the priest-King who has taken the place of the original head of the family, while the partakers of the common ritual meal form a brotherhood with all the ties of blood relationship."¹⁰

II

Miss J. L. Weston, connects the Round Table with some hypothetical turning table of Celtic tradition of mythical significance. The only evidence for the Round Table as such a turning table is a single line in Beroul's "Tristan" (L.3384), "From the eighth century Irish text called "The Voyage of Maelduin" down, we have turning castles in Celtic tradition; but no mention is made of equally marvellous turning tables in this same tradition. Beroul's words may possibly refer to the vicissitudes of life to which the company gathered about the board, like the rest of the world, are subject, or, if construed literally, they may express a passing fancy of this particular poet - but, whatever the meaning of this obscure line may be, it does not justify us in jumping with Miss Weston to the conclusion that the Round Table is connected with some supposed solar ritual."¹²

A theory more advanced and more fully worked out has been proposed by Laura Hibbard Loomis as an explanation of the origin of the Round Table.¹³ "Though the archaeological evidence in support of the Celtic theory of the Round Table can be proved to be

10. Ibid. P. 256.

11. J.L.Weston "A Hitherto Unconsidered Aspect of the Round Table" in the "Melanges offerts à M.Maurice Wilmette."

12. J.D.Bruce "Evolution of the Arthurian Legend". vol.I. P.47.

13. L.H.Loomis "Arthur's Round Table" P.M.L.A. 41:771-84. 1926.

practically nil, and the evidence from folk-lore is far from satisfactory, the possibility of Celtic influence on many details connected with the Round Table may be admitted at once without in any way explaining the immediate realism, the completeness with which, both as an object and an institution, the Round Table is realized in the very first description we have of it.^{I4}

Miss Loemis claims that there is nothing vague or fantastic about Wace's account, and yet that no conception could have been more completely at variance not only with the ancient pagan Celtic world but with his own twelfth century day: "a fact not sufficiently realized by those who think his description simply an up-to-date rationalization of much more primitive custom." Twelfth century did not use the circular table. "In view of the almost photographic fidelity with which Wace transferred the actual life of his own times, its prejudices, beliefs, customs, dress, to the Arthurian world, this fundamental divergence in his description of Arthur's court dining table and of its social significance is more than worthy of note."

The theory that Layamon's description of the Round Table and the cause of its inception affords any real clue, is at once invalidated. In his version of the creation of the Round Table, the fight, despite all its Arthurian nomenclature, takes us back to the heroic brutalities of the world of "Bricriu's Feast". As an independent story of a fight over the right of precedence it can find numerous parallels in ancient Celtic story; as an explanation, "suspiciously 'post facto'", of a feast and table of equal fellowship, it can find none.

I4. Ibid. P. 771.

Here two important points are emphasized: first, that although Arthur's other possessions began to be listed in the ninth-century, and were carefully inventoried in the early twelfth-century Welsh story of "Kulweh and Olwen", the Round Table was not named among them; second, that European imagination was captured and held, not by the idea of Arthur with simply a magic table, but of Arthur with a round table which more and more even in the twelfth century became "the image of a mighty world".

"It is this last fact which seems most to militate against the belief that waifs and strays of Celtic tradition or of ancient ceremonial, could have been the immediate source for the idea of the Round Table in Arthurian romance. All the hints of primitive folk festival and ritual, and the conception of the Round Table may have a valid though somewhat subterranean relationship, yet they do not explain the explicit, full-fledged concept of the Round Table given first of all by that most courtly, Christian, and sophisticated Norman, the poet Wace. He told of an actual round table, of actual chairs, of a gathering of men from many places, of the institution of a fraternal fellowship which made men friends and equals. Despite the unlikeness to all contemporary usages and beliefs, the idea took instant hold and henceforth every Arthurian story-teller had something to say about the Round Table, its making, its owners, its fellowship. In these details many elements, some pagan, some Christian, some mere individual invention, undoubtedly played their part."

Now between Wace's account of the Round Table and that of Robert de Boron's some thirty years had elapsed. Robert frankly

I5. Ibid. P775

identified the Round Table with the table of the Last Supper. But because so many years had gone by between the first account of the Table and that of Robert's, Celtic scholars generally have dismissed the whole of Robert's account as simply a late Christian interpolation in Arthurian tradition and therefore of no significance for the question of origin. The question remains, however, whether Robert's statement had any possible validity, - whether, in short, legend, art, or anything else had ever associated Christ with a round table. And now Miss Loomis states that it can be absolutely proved by evidence that begins with the end of the first century of the Christian era and continues to the middle of the twelfth century, that to the belief of all Christian Europe, Christ instituted the Eucharist and held his Last Supper at a round table. As proof of this she states numerous examples of religious painting of the Middle ages.

"The evidence of this association is absolutely irrefutable. Known as the scene must have been wherever Christianity itself was known; fixed in the eyes of people who were taught largely by pictures, the idea of Christ's round table seems certainly the most valid immediate source for the idea of Arthur's that has yet been suggested. In the one as in the other there is the concept of an actual table; there is also the inevitable association with an ideal fellowship. The only question which seems rightfully to remain is of the reason that led Wace, or possibly some earlier story-teller, to appropriate the religious concept and image for the purpose of secular story."

I6
I6. Ibid. P. 778.

The clue to this, thinks Miss Loomis, is to be found in the statement made both by Geoffrey and Wace, that among the great nobles who came to Arthur's high feast were the twelve peers of France. In this as in other details, the Arthurian chroniclers were somewhat obviously trying to exalt Arthur at the expense or at least on the model of Charlemagne. The legend of Arthur's continental wars, of his conquest of Rome, his general magnificence, his knights of the Round Table, have been noted by various scholars as reflecting the deliberate imitation in Arthurian romance of the Carolingian legend. Now in the "Chanson de Roland" and in many another of those great and famous tales, it is plainly and frankly said that the twelve peers of France were created in remembrance of the twelve apostles. It was to the honor and glory of Charlemagne, Defender of the Faith, to have his twelve peers; it was to the glory and profit of men to recognize in the Frankish heroes the feudalized replicas of the far-off, glorious twelve. "Could less be done for British Arthur when men like Geoffrey and Wace undertook to make their hero rival the greatness of Charlemagne? They could not in truth take from Charlemagne the tradition of his Twelve Peers but Wace could and did endow Arthur with a fellowship that even more practically suggested the exalted royalty and equality of the first apostolic twelve. As its outward and visible sign there was an object almost unknown in actual medieval usage but associated with Christ by all the intervening centuries of Christian art. It was this object, this round table, which Wace or some earlier story-teller appropriated for Arthur as the very sign and token of chivalric fellowship. It was this round table unquestionably that Robert de Boron had in mind. It became straightway one of those symbols of

the imagination capable of persisting even in centuries that lost the clue to its original significance, capable even of adaptation in the world of today."¹⁷

In a further study,¹⁸ Miss Loomis completes her argument on the Christian origin of the Round Table. From the end of the first century until the twelfth, the table of the Last Supper was regularly represented as round, so regularly in fact that no certain example of this scene with the straight table can be found in European art before the year one thousand. It seems, therefore, to offer a legitimate basis for the conclusion that this pictured round table of Christ, which differed so conspicuously from the actual straight trestle table of ordinary medieval usage, must have acquired a special significance, a special association with the holiest, to the Christian mind, of human fellowships. In this was found the explanation for its transference to Arthur when the exploitation of Arthur, as the greatest of Christian kings, the rival of Charlemagne, became the business of twelfth-century storyteller.

Loomis then brings forward new evidence. "So far as literature is concerned we need remember only the undeniable facts that in the metrical "Joseph d'Armathie", the Grail table, and in the prose "Merlin" the Round Table, are definitely associated with the table of the Last Supper. If this was done at the end of the twelfth-century or beginning of the thirteenth-century by the authors of these texts, there is no inherent improbability in supposing that someone else might have made the same association in the early years of the twelfth century. More particularly, the assumption will

17. Ibid. P. 784.

18. L.H.Loomis "The Round Table Again" M.L.N. 44:511-19. 1929.

seem probable if it can be established that numerous Bretons in the eleventh century had opportunity to know at first hand the holy relic that in Jerusalem was exhibited as the table of the Last Supper.¹⁹"

Miss Loomis then shows where several Bretons in the eleventh and early twelfth century went on pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Thus - "from these historical details concerning the piety of eleventh-century Bretons and the first-hand knowledge which some of them possessed of Jerusalem itself and its holy relics, we may turn to the pilgrim literature of the Middle Ages for reference to the relic known as the table of the Last Supper." A list of a number of men of the Middle Ages who describe the various tables they have seen, then follows... "Inspired by the sight in some cases, but the story of it in others, pious Bretons at the beginning of the twelfth century were unquestionably in a position to transfer to their hero Arthur the table that was associated with the holiest of human fellowships. In so doing they would simply be paralleling the teller of Carolingian story who gave the Twelve Peers to Charlemagne in memory of the twelve apostles."

And now Miss Loomis sets about to disavow the theory of the Celtic origin of the Round Table. This theory, she says, has been urged so often and is held so tenaciously by some scholars, that it seems well to emphasize certain reasons, which, to her at least, make it improbable that non-Christian Celtic customs or tradition had anything to do with Wace's concept of the Round Table. Arthur's fellowship as a fighting, but not a fraternal body; the times of his great feasts; the Perilous Seat, and a number of other concepts

19. Ibid. P. 512.

Part III

The Romance Cycles

Chapter I.

Growth of the Legends on the Continent.

One of the strangest phenomena in the history of literatus is the outburst of the Arthurian romance in the second half of the twelfth century. A few years suffice to lift the hero of obscure and half-subjugated tribes into unrivalled popularity and fame, and the exploits of his followers, a little while before unknown to the world at large, become all at once the engrossing topic for the imagination of Europe. Whatever circumstances may have contributed to this sudden success, it cannot be fully explained save by supposing that the new matter was exceptionally suitable to the spirit of the time. "This new matter must have met a deep-felt want, and shown itself capable of receiving the stamp of the medieval modes of life and thought more perfectly than any previous theme. And in the history of the typical and international fiction of the Middle Ages there are indications that this was the case. The imaginative activity of these centuries seemed to demand the satisfaction of certain spiritual wants, but till the Arthurian stories became available, the attempt has only partial success."^I

France, at the time, possessed what might be considered the typical literature of Europe. All raw material, to obtain completion had to pass through the refining influence of Romance thought in France before it went into European circulation. This was made possible by the fact that all literary classes of Europe were impelled

I.M.W.MacCallum "Tennyson's Idylls of the King and Arthurian Story from the 16th Century." P.

by a common spirit to a common ideal - an ideal which was more clearly realized in France than elsewhere.

The ideals that swayed the higher classes in those days were almost summed up in what is styled Chivalry. This conception of chivalry had been some time in emerging, and when the Arthurian romances came upon the scene everything stood in favor of their immediate acceptance.

Let us recall briefly the distinctive ideals of this society. The first thing to strike our attention is the improved position of women. Even the political arrangement of the time shows this predominant influence, for women were permitted to inherit the great fiefs. The center from which this movement radiated was the south of France - the land of Eleanor of Poitiers, and the land where all ideas of social and intellectual liberty had so far received their highest development. The love lyrics of Provence show ample proof of the growing idealization of women, and the conception of the 'amour courtois' is the product of this idealization.

At its root this movement was earthly enough - for it was the motive of self-advancement that prompted these Provençal singers - the troubadours, as they are called - to confer a poetic exaltation on the wives and daughters of the great barons of the South. This love poetry was in nearly all instances a pure fiction, quite analogous to the poetry dedicated to Elizabeth by the poets who desired her favors. The next step was that of mysticism, so that woman who had been formerly the object of a rhetorical lip-service, became the object of a cult. Thus, from about the middle of the twelfth century, the conventional duties of the lover towards his mistress amounted to a complicated code.

In an analysis of the real meaning of the chivalry of the time, we find that the conception had arisen as a kind of compromise between the ascetic theology of the medieval church and the unsanctified life of the world which that church rejected as wholly bad. The adaptation of lay ethics to clerical ethics was the problem of the higher classes, and its solution was found in chivalry. The transition from the primitive to the medieval state of things is marked by the picturesque trait, that the hero becomes a knight. The principle of honor is introduced, which appeals to the individual's desire for preeminence and mastery, but which gratifies it only if he submit to a certain code of conditions. His valor must be carried to an extravagant pitch; he must seek out adventures, and face the greatest odds; he must refuse advantages and show mercy to the suppliant and courtesy to all; his quarrel must be just, and he must succour the poor and the distressed. And, while only some of the knightly orders were pledged to celibacy, they were all bound to uphold the honor of women; and gradually, without oath, they submitted themselves to that strange kind of gallantry known as the Service of Love.

"It was just this compromise between Teutonism and Latinism in France, this duality of principles, that is the note of the Middle Ages, and therefore, it is just as we should expect, that in France we find the prerogative phases of medievalism, the feudal, the scholastic, and, among others, the chivalrous; and there the earliest, the most progressive, the most effective efforts were made to express the last in successive cycles of romance. Three such groups, French in fabrication, but European in circulation and development, are successive attempts to exhibit the life of chivalry: the Charlemagne romances, the Classical romances, and the Arthurian romances. If

chivalry sprang from the union of medieval religion and secular morality, the relation of these cycles to each other may be formulated as follows: The Ecclesiastical predominated in the lays of Charlemagne, the Secular in the lays of Greek and Roman content; only in the stories of Arthur do both sides, as it were, come to their rights.²

Chivalry, whether seeking its expression in German or in antique story, had failed to achieve a complete success. In either case the hero - Charlemagne or Alexander - had a character too obstinately representative of another age and another code of life thoroughly to submit to a change that would make him merely a chivalrous knight. It was at this juncture that Arthur became known, and it was immediately felt that the problem was solved. The British leader who fought for Christian faith against the invading pagans, was well suited to fulfil the ecclesiastical demands of the chivalrous ideal: the culture-hero of the heathen myth was no less fit to reflect its story, congenial in all essential respects to the spirit of the day but without the rigidity of a fixed historical tradition, was still plastic enough in the hands of the medieval poets and lent itself to all their desires. His exploits and feats could be made to reflect the adventurousness, the sense of honor, the 'courtoisie' in love which were the dream of knighthood in the twelfth century.

There were only two limitations to the perfect adequacy of the material. In the first place, no single person could completely exhaust the possibilities of chivalry; the biography of Arthur was insufficient to portray its whole fulness and wealth. Arthur's career invited supplements from the careers of his followers, and even in the Romantic historians Gawain comes prominently to the front during the war with Rome. But in the second place these personages

2. Ibid. P.

were in some ways even more suitable for chivalrous treatment than their chief, for they were knights while he was king. His exploits were necessarily on the larger public scale, while they had leisure for the private adventures of errantry. They offered themselves for the illumination of the knightly character in the individual, which was the more important side, in all its various aspects. It was natural, therefore, that medieval poetry should occupy itself with them rather than with the king. To make room for them he was thrust aside, as Charlemagne had been by the peers, and his historical significance was entirely forgotten.

The first French chronicles, based on Geoffrey, which developed the Arthurian theme were somewhat earlier in date than any of the Arthurian romances that have come down to us. The earliest of the extant romances, however, is the "Erec" of Chretien de Troyes, which was composed about 1168. "The influence of the chronicles on the new 'genre' is important, but it was not in supplying the latter with specific narrative 'motifs' for development, but rather in giving 'eclat' to Arthur and his court and turning the attention of the literary world of the time in the direction of the stories already connected with his name, and in stimulating the poets to still other inventions of the same nature. That is to say, their influence was the same as Geoffrey of Monmouth's - only more powerful, for, poems in the vernacular commanded a more extensive audience than pseudo-histories in Latin."

As on all other debatable questions concerning the legends, Arthurian scholars have made a close study of the source of these romances that sprang up with such rapidity at this time. And once again we have the two sides ranged against each other: the Celtic origin school and its opponents. There is, however, great difficulty

3. J.D.Bruce "The Evolution of the Arthurian Legend" vol.I P.37.

in coming to a satisfactory conclusion because we have so little preserved of the early literature of the two Celtic peoples who are most directly concerned in the debate - namely, the Welsh and the Bretons.

With the Bretons, we are almost immediately checked, for nothing but names and flosses in the Breton language have survived from the Middle Ages. With the Welsh literature, however, the conditions are somewhat better, for we have the "Four Ancient Books of Wales" which purport to be the work of Welsh bards of the sixth century, but are dated by modern scholars in a much later time - from the tenth to the twelfth centuries. This compilation relates in part to battles which fall in the period to which Arthur belonged - that is to say, the sixth century - and a few of them mention Arthur and certain characters connected with him who play a large part in the French Arthurian romances. The style of these poems, however, is so obscure and oracular, and lyrical in form, that they could not in themselves have contribute to the transmission of legends concerning the heroes that are mentioned in them.

Another Welsh compilation of much greater importance for our purpose are the prose tales called the "Mabinogion". This term applies properly only to four tales in the collection - namely, "Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed", "Branwen, Daughter of Llyr", "Manawyddan, Son of Llyr", and "Math, Son of Mathonwy" - none of which contain Arthurian material. The collection as a whole, however, does contain some tales in which Arthur and the other character of his cycle appear. Three of these tales are, undoubtedly, derived from French romances - either the extant romances of Chretien or lost French versions of the same stories. The tales in question are "Owen" or "The Lady of the

Fountain", corresponding to Chretien's "Yvain" ("Chevalier au Lion"), "Peredure ab Evrawc", corresponding to the same writer's "Perceval" ("Centa del Graal"), "Geraint" or "Geraint and Enid", corresponding to his "Erec" ("Erec et Enid").

The French origin of these tales is undoubted even when compared cursorily with those of uncontaminated Welsh origin; for example, the unquestioned Welsh tale "Kulhwch and Olwen".

The narrative literature of the Celtic races, however, is not as important as the Celtic 'lais' in a consideration of the sources of the French Arthurian romances. Here again we encounter the same difficulty in that although there are French 'lais' from the twelfth century on, like those of Marie de France - 'lais' that are often said to be based on 'lais bretons' - we have no such pieces in extant Celtic literature.

The French 'lais' of which Marie de France is the chief exponent are a 'genre' apart from the preceding forms of poetry. Again, the earliest extant French handling of the 'matiere de Bretagne', outside the "Bruts", is to be found in the 'lais' of Marie de France. We know little with certainty of Marie. She tells us herself that she was 'de France' and dedicated her 'lais' to a 'nobles reis', who was probably Henry II of England. A contemporary calls her 'dame', and she has been conjecturally identified with an illegitimate sister of Henry, who became Abbess of Shaftesbury; and also with Marie, Countess of Champagne, the daughter of Henry's wife Eleanor of Poitou by her first husband Louis VII of France. She writes in French with dialectic touches which suggest the Norman border of the Ile de France. Twelve of her 'lais' are preserved in a thirteenth-century manuscript. They may date from about 1165-67. In most cases she claims to take them

from 'contes', on which 'li Bretun' had made 'lais'. They are all short narrative poems, of less than a thousand lines, in octosyllabic couplets. There are tales of licit or more often illicit love, of battles and tournaments, of children lost and found again, of tasks to be achieved and tests to be undergone. Many of the themes are common to the popular literature of all countries; they draw on folk-superstitions; on werewolves and speaking animals; on magic ships, food and drink tokens; on shape-shifting and fairy lovers. Most of the personages are Bretons, and most of the action takes place in Brittany. Marie's only definitely Arthurian story is "Ianval".

In considering the origin of the French 'lais' we find convincing testimony to the fact that stories concerning Arthur and his followers were current among the Normans both in England and on the Continent about the middle of the twelfth century. Thus, in Wace's "Brut", a work which was finished in 1155, we find several passages to that effect, the most famous of these being the passage referring to the Round Table. But, granting that the French 'lais' embody tales that came to their authors from Celtic sources, we have still to enquire from what division of the Celts did the French poets derive these tales; was it from the Celts of Great Britain or of Brittany? The answer to the question turns on the meaning of the term Breton, which qualifies the word 'lais', in the references of Marie de France and others to their sources. After some argument, Professor J. D. Bruce ⁴ concludes that when Marie de France and her contemporaries refer to 'lais Bretons' as their sources they have Brittany in mind, and their own lays are, accordingly, based on Breton stories, as far as they are of Celtic origin at all.

4. J.D.Bruce Op. cit., P. 59-60.

"Although Marie, then, derived the materials for some of her lays from Breton sources, there is no ground for supposing that she, herself, ever came into personal contact with the Bretons. In any event, she was certainly ignorant of the Breton language; eg. she has distorted many Breton words through ignorance of their meaning. It is evident, therefore, that she was entirely dependant on intermediate written versions in French for her knowledge of these Breton stories. And what was true of Marie was, no doubt, true of the other authors of the French lays. Further, we notice a conventionalization of the term 'Breton lai' which is seen applied to any short narrative poem of the kind which Marie had been composing on genuine Breton themes."⁵

The problem of the origin of the romances - that is, the question of their relation to Celtic tradition - is essentially the same as that of the lays. The most distinctive features of the romances remain of the same general character as in the case of the lays, only in the case of the romances the Arthurization is not limited to a few superficial details as in the Arthurized lays, but is thoroughgoing. Similarly, the adaptation of these 'motifs' to the conditions of feudal society is even more drastic in the case of the romances.

As with the lays, there can be no reasonable doubt that Brittany was one of the sources of whatever is Celtic in the romances of Chretien and his followers. A very credible and logical explanation for the view that Brittany is the most direct source of the Arthurian material in the romances is given by Bruce,⁶ who compares the possibilities of both the insular and Continental Celts in supplying the romancers with their material.

5. Ibid. P. 62.

6. Ibid. P. 68-71.

We come now to Chrétien de Troyes, who really fixes the 'genre' of the 'matiere de Bretagne' for French poetry, as it has been preserved to us. We know nothing positively of the life of the poet and all must therefore remain in the realm of conjecture. He was a man of some classical learning and made translations of Ovid. It has been thought that he visited England, and it has been thought that he was a herald; but both points are uncertain. However, this may be, his days were spent in the atmosphere of courts; firstly that of Marie de Champagne herself at Troyes, and afterwards that of Philip of Alsace, Count of Flanders, either at Paris, where Philip was for some time Regent of France, or at Bruges. An early romance on Tristan is lost, and of his six that survive, one "Guillaume d'Angleterre" is not certainly his. The other five have all an Arthurian setting. Their dates are variously ascribed between 1160 and 1180, or even later, but their order is fairly certain. Probably the "Erec" (about 1168) is the first, and "Cliges" (about 1170) the second. Next come his three latest romances, with the following approximate dates: "Lancelot" 1172, "Yvain" 1173, "Perceval" 1175. The "Perceval" remains a fragment. This was the last of the poet's work, its completion being broken off, it seems, by his death.

Not one of Chrétien's stories is found in the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth or of any other pseudo-chronicler. It is Chrétien, therefore, who gives us the earliest literary version of several stories now of world-wide fame. The plan and main idea of each romance are his own. He makes up his narrative by combining 'motifs' which he derived from earlier sources, and using episodes drawn from such sources to embellish or lengthen out the story which is the basis of his work. In general the sources are composite and the writer exercises a certain amount of invention in combining originally disparate elements.

Thus, on the whole, Chretien is undoubtedly the best of the French authors of metrical romances that deal with the 'matiere de Bretagne'. His greatest services to the cause of poetry were in stimulating immeasurably the imagination of his contemporaries to the beauty and possibilities of the Arthurian romance, and in enriching the whole poetic tradition of Europe with new and beautiful themes.

Chretien is interesting, besides, because he has carried on the work begun by Geoffrey, of giving contemporary setting to the old stories which make up so much of the Arthurian legends. "Geoffrey, we have seen, made some effort to picture contemporary society realistically; he tried to make the background of his generally dull narrative vivid, and occasionally he succeeded; but his characters remained wooden. Wace, without making his characters more alive than Geoffrey, made his background more splendid with Anglo-Norman magnificence. Finally, Chretien, painting his background as brightly and truly as Wace, took more interest in his characters; and so he has given us, on the whole, the best pictures which exist of the upper classes in France in the Middle Ages. For this reason, Chretien, more than any other author, may be said to have established the Arthurian stories in that dignity and popularity which they enjoyed till the Renaissance."

7. H. Maynardier "The Arthur of the English Poets" P.

Chapter 2.

The Verse and Prose Romances.

If we take the literature just as we find it, it falls into two clearly separated groups. First, the Metrical Romances, which describe the biographies of the Knights of the Round Table, or isolated episodes in their careers. In them Arthur himself achieves little, the wars with the Saxons disappear, and the final catastrophe is unknown. The great representative of this class is, as we have said before, Chretien de Troyes. It was he who gave the grand impulse to the whole movement, which, however, both in form and content, after culminating in Chretien himself, soon grows vapid. There were other metrical romancers than Chretien in the twelfth century, and others in the thirteenth. None of them, however, made any important contributions to the Arthurian stories as the world knows them best today.

Of Chretien's extant romances, the Arthurian element in the "Cliges" is only slight. The personages are princes of Constantinople, and here, too, the main action takes place. The connection with Britain is only external and artificial. It is more fundamental in "Erec" and "Yvain", since the heroes of these are themselves British. The "Erec" story is that of Tennyson's "Geraint and Enid". In the "Conte de la Charrete", Chretien handles a more central Arthurian theme. It is essentially the story of the abduction of Guinevere by Melvas as found in the "Vita Gildae". Chretien did not finish this poem and resigned the pen to Godreoi de Leigni who concluded it. Unfinished also, and an enigma for ever, was Chretien's "Conte del Graal". Here, for the first time we have mention of the Holy Grail. The "Conte" is followed in some manuscripts by the work of one or more

unknown writers, who bring in adventures, perhaps originally independent of the general scheme. It was more directly continued, from the point at which Chretien left Perceval, by Wauchier de Denain about the end of the twelfth century; and Wauchier's instalment had itself two distinct continuations, a decade or so later, by a Manessier and by a Gerbert. Attempts are also made to complete Chretien's work in the German "Parzival" of Wolfram von Eschenbach, who claims as his source a somewhat mysterious Provencal Kyot; and in prose romances. It is doubtful, however, whether any of Chretien's successors knew how he meant to finish his poem, or what the significance of the Grail was.

Next in order comes the Prose Romances, most of which have undergone a constant process of editing and combination and enlargement, so that their order, pedigree, and mutual relations, are among the most complicated problems of literature. In their present form they must be later than the metrical stories, which have influenced their conceptions; but they are not always renderings from the verse, and frequently take a different view of things. They, like the romantic histories, celebrate the deeds of Arthur, his victorious combats with enemies and monsters, and his fatal strife with Modred. They soon superseded the metrical romances in favor, and after the first part of the thirteenth century were the most popular form which the Arthurian stories assumed.

The earliest group of prose romances with which we are concerned came into existence about the second decade of the thirteenth century, and is connected with the name of a certain Robert de Boron. Inspired by Chretien's "Conte del Graal", he wrote a poem in which he claimed to trace a history of the Grail before the days of Perceval in

apocryphal adventures of Joseph of Arimathea after the death of Christ. His original intention was apparently to carry the history onwards to Perceval through descendants of Joseph. All that we have in verse beyond the "Joseph", however, is a fragment, perhaps a good deal later, of a "Merlin", in which the mage becomes a link in the Grail story. In addition there is also a prose version of the poems, not necessarily by Beron's own hand, which go on to complete the "Merlin" and to add a "Perceval", largely based on Chretien and Wauchier de Denain, and a short "Mort Artu". These four sections taken together ^{towards} contribute/a fairly complete Grail romance.

The comparatively short 'Beron' cycle of prose romances gave the inspiration for a much longer one, which may be roughly assigned to the third decade of the thirteenth century. The "Merlin", with an elaborate continuation, was taken in as an integral part of this, and the entire cycle is a Grail romance, as well as a Lancelot romance. It has been maintained that the prose cycle, apart from the "Merlin", was the work of a single hand; but the majority of scholars think that it grew up by a process of accretions and expansions. In its completed form it has acquired a certain epic unity, and the large number of extant manuscripts shows that it had a wide circulation. It is generally known as the "Vulgate" cycle, and is composed of five branches: an "Early History of the Grail", a "Merlin", a "Lancelot", a "Quest of the Grail", and a "Mort Artu". The manuscripts ascribe the last three branches to Walter Map, the well-known figure at the court of Henry II, but chronological and other difficulties make it practically impossible that he should have written them. The last French compilation of importance is the "Parlesvaus". It is a distinct romance, although probably inspired by the Vulgate, and has been thought to have a connection with Glastonbury. Essentially, it is a Grail quest.

Though all these prose romances often differ in regard to the stories which they include, most of them show traces of four important stories besides the Arthur-story proper. These are the Arthurian romances best known to the world today. Having attached themselves to the original hero-tale, they became integral parts of the greater Arthurian legend. These four stories are: the story of Merlin, the story of Tristan, the story of Lancelot, and the story of the Holy Grail.

Chapter 3.

Merlin.

In the discussion of these four epic stories that have linked themselves to the Arthurian legend we may well start with that of Merlin. Apart from the mention in Nennius of the story of the red and white dragons and the intervention of the miraculous boy Ambrosius, whom we now associate with Merlin, the only source we may turn to for the origin of this sage is the traditions of the Welsh.

It is only in the writings of Welshmen that we find any trace of a character corresponding to Merlin before the Arthurian romances. With regard to this Welsh evidence, we have in the body of ancient Welsh poetry eight poems which purport to be the compositions of a bard named "Myrddin". That this is evidently the same name as the "Merlinus" of Geoffrey of Monmouth, has been quite ingeniously proposed by Gaston Paris.^I He shows that Geoffrey probably shrank from Latinizing the Welsh name in the natural way as 'Merdinus', owing to the similarity to a French word of unpleasant associations which would have resulted, and so changed the 'd' to an 'l'.

The value of these poems, however, is of a doubtful character, as their antiquity is to be questioned. Scholars have decided that all the poems in question were really composed later than Geoffrey of Monmouth, with the single exception, perhaps, of the "Dialogue of Merlin" and "Taliesin". Nevertheless, these poems do give evidence of the existence in Welsh tradition of Merlin and the personages associated with him in the "Vita Merlini". But, after all, they merely show that Merlin was a bard like Taliesin. The

I. Gaston Paris Romania XII. 376, 1883.

"Dialogue", which is the least open to suspicion of the Welsh poems, gives us a conversation between Myrddin and Taliessin concerning the battle of Arderydd in which Merlin expresses sadness at the slaughter. The poem, however, is so meager and its meaning so dark, that we merely gather from it that Merlin was a bard. There is really no hint of the prophetic powers of Merlin.

Next in order in the Welsh tradition, are the Triads and the Mabinogion. As for the Triads, only two mention Merlin - one of them mentions Merlin as one of the three chief bards of Britain, and another in connection with his marvellous disappearance. But once again, we may say that these are inconclusive evidence, for they, too, are of doubtful antiquity. As for the "Mabinogion" we do not get any mention of Merlin at all. The only connection, in fact, between the tales in this book and the traditions concerning Merlin is that in one of them, "Lludd and Llevelys", there is a story of a combat between a white and a red dragon which figures in the narrative of Merlin and Vortigern's tower in Geoffrey's "Historia". This story, of course, appears in Nennius connected with another name.

"The conclusion to be drawn from extant Welsh literature, then, is, evidently, that Merlin was of relatively little importance in Welsh tradition, and, if we depend merely on the mention that Welsh records make of him, we should say that he was known to that tradition simply as a bard - not as a magician or a prophet. It will simplify subsequent discussion, if we state at once the conclusion to which we are forced by all the evidence - namely, that Merlin owes his fortune in the history of fiction and popular tradition to Geoffrey of Monmouth. He is virtually a creation of Geoffrey."²

2. J.D.Bruce "The Evolution of the Arthurian Legend" vol.I. P.II9.

In tracing the story of Merlin, we must go to Nennius for our first mention of any incident related to him. In the "Historia Brittonum" of Nennius (ch.40-42), we have the story concerning the tower which Vortigern tried to build on Mount Hereri, or Snowdon, as a refuge from the Saxons. This story of Nennius was used by Geoffrey of Monmouth (Book VI. ch.17-19), with certain differences; for example, he calls the boy without a father Merlin as well as Ambrosius. Immediately following this story, Geoffrey inserts the famous prophecies of Merlin, which, as a matter of fact, in large part, refer to recent political events of the author's own time. They make up the entire Seventh Book of his "Historia", but had already been in circulation as a separate book. The next book begins with a prophecy of Merlin concerning the death of Vortigern and, later on, tells of his exploit of moving the stones of Stonehenge - or Giant's Dance, as it is called - from Mount Killaraus in Ireland to their present site. In this affair, which was probably invented by Geoffrey, Merlin appears as hardly more than a marvellous engineer. He reappears, however, (ch.15) as interpreting to Uther Pendragon, the father of Arthur, a portent which betokens the death of Aurelius Ambrosius, whose gallant deeds constitute a large part of the narrative of the eighth Book. Then follows (ch.19-20) the last and most famous of Merlin's achievements related by Geoffrey - his transference of Uther, in the likeness of Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall, to the latter's wife Igerne, on which occasion Arthur is begotten.

Thus, on a close survey of the Merlin material in Geoffrey's "Historia" it seems very unlikely that any of it was derived from oral tradition. Nennius, classical legend (eg. the birth of Heracles and the birth of Arthur), and his own fancy, seem to account for the whole.

The "Vita Merlini", whose authorship has been disputed, (but the general consensus of opinion throws the balance on the side of Geoffrey), is the next important Merlin document. The Latin hexameter poem of some 1500 lines is preserved in a single thirteenth-century manuscript. Herein is given a narrative of the later life of the prophet and magician, who dropped out of the "Historia" after the account of his shape-shifting intervention at the begetting of Arthur.

In the "Vita Merlini", Merlin is a king of the Demetae in South Wales. He has a wife Guendoleana and a sister Ganieda who is the wife of Rodarchus, King of Cambria. Merlin, Rodarchus, and Peredurus, King of the Venedotians in North Wales, defeat the Scots under Guennolous. But Merlin, for grief at the losses of his side, runs mad in the 'nemus Calidonis'. He is brought back more than once, and uses his powers of second sight in foretelling the fortunes of those about him. Finally, a house is built for him in the forest with seventy doors and seventy windows and a troop of scribes are provided to record his sayings. Here he delivers a long prophecy to Ganieda on the future of the Britons. He is then visited by Thelgesinus a pupil of Gildas. They hold a conversation about natural philosophy, based upon the classical learning of Pliny as filtered through Solinus and Isidore of Seville. This is broken by further prophetic and reminiscent utterances of Merlin, and by his return to sanity through drinking of a spring. This good fortune is shared by another madman Maelidinus. Finally Ganieda in her turn breads into prophecy, detailing events of the reign of Stephen. The events of the poem itself have nothing to do with Arthur; they are, in fact, place in the time of Conan, who was the next but one to reign after him. But at more than one point the dialogue recalls, with curious variations, the themes of the "Historia".

Miss L. A. Paton's study of the sources of the "Vita Merlini" shows that the poem was composed of materials drawn from a great variety of sources blended with unusual freedom. She brings forward Celtic parallels of the spelling and unspelling episode, the eating of poisoned apples and the drinking of fountain water as an antidote. She then advances many examples to prove that the despair and the experiences in the woods attributed to Merlin by Geoffrey, may be features derived from the fairy-mistress themes.

Again, Professor Lot believes it probable that in several details and in two episodes, especially, of the "Vita Merlini", Geoffrey was using traditions concerning a mad prophet Lailoken, who had been guilty of stirring up strife among his countrymen, and in consequence, by a decree from Heaven, had been banished to the Caledonian forest, where he passed a solitary life.

For further traces of a fairy-mistress theme, we should turn to Ganieda. Her part in the story resolved into its simplest elements, is that of a woman gifted with prophetic powers, who builds a house in the forest for Merlin, supplies him with food and drink, lives there happily with him. This, says Miss Paton, agrees exactly with the part of the fay in a very ordinary type of fairy-mistress story in Celtic and romantic material.

We may thus form a fairly clear idea of the contents of Geoffrey's original. It doubtless told of Merlin's stay with an otherworld maiden in a beautiful dwelling that she had herself built for him, of her anger against him because he had deserted her, forgotten her command, or disobeyed her will; of his frenzy at the knowledge that he was under the ban of her displeasure, and, probably, of his restoration by fairy agency to reason and to his loved one's presence.

"Every striking alteration that Geoffrey makes in this material may be accounted for by the rationalizing tendency, by the introduction of popular story, by a moulding of the theme to fit the general structure of the poem, by his customary methods and personal aim, The early fairy-mistress story dies out of the extant Merlin material, and is succeeded by that of Niniane. Ganieda has been made Merlin's sister by Geoffrey's hand, and thus spoiled for romantic purposes. Under these conditions another fairy-mistress story, belonging to a popular type and developed along different lines, quite naturally took the place of that which Geoffrey had succeeded admirably in⁴ distorting."

During the next three or four decades following upon Geoffrey's Latin poem, the fame of Merlin was spread far and wide, both through his own writings and by derivatives from them, especially by extensions of Merlin's "Prophecies", and by the paraphrases of the "Historia" in the verse and prose chronicles.

At the appearance of the "Merlin" of Robert de Boron, the stories that center about Merlin received their first material development not directly based upon Geoffrey. This poem, which now survives only in a prose version, falls probably in the last fifteen years of the twelfth century. It constitutes the second member of an intended series of poems and follows, in the main, the account of Merlin given by Geoffrey, whom Robert, however, probably knew only through Wace. The "Merlin" gives the sage a marvellous origin in a plot of the devils to defeat the Redemption through a son begotten by one of their number upon a pure virgin. By the grace of God, the offspring inherits his father's supernatural power, without his sin. He performs many feats of divination, and appoints a scribe Blaise, who sits in Northumberland

4. Ibid. P. 169.

and records both the Grail story and Merlin's own adventures.

No doubt the author, directly or indirectly, knew the "Vita Merlini" as well as the "Historia". He gives the Vortigern episode, the building of Stonehenge, and the shape-shifting at Arthur's conception. And he ascribed to Merlin's advice the foundation by Uther, not Arthur, of the Round Table. It is on the model of a Grail Table established in the "Joseph". There is a vacant seat, to be filled only by the knight who achieves the Grail. This links up with an incident in the "Perceval". Merlin, who disappears from the "Historia" after Arthur's birth, lives on in the prose romance. He takes the boy and has him brought up in retirement by one, Ector. When Uther dies the nobles are in doubt for a king. Merlin bids them await the choice of God. An anvil makes its appearance, with a sword fixed in it and an inscription that he who can draw out the sword shall be king. After a false claim by Kay to have performed the feat, it is accomplished by Arthur, and he is crowned. Here the "Merlin" closes.

Robert's "Merlin", as we have seen, was not only turned into prose, but also incorporated into a larger cycle, and itself enlarged and embellished in many details. The Vulgate continuation of the original "Merlin", sometimes called the "Livre d'Artus", takes up the story where the Baron "Merlin" left it. The vassal kings revolt from Arthur, and are not appeased when Merlin reveals his parentage. He defeats them with the aid of Ban, King of Benoit. They rebel again, and most of the "Livre d'Artus" is occupied with Arthur's wars against them, and against the Saxons, and against the Romans. Gawain is the chief here, and Merlin's advice is invaluable throughout. Much of this is mere elaboration of the "Bruts", but Ban is important, because he is the father of Lancelot. Arthur fights for Leodegan of Carmelide

against the Giant Rion, Geoffrey's Ritho. He falls in love, as Merlin intended, with Leodegan's daughter Guinevere, but unfortunately he has already begotten Mordred on his sister, the wife of Loth, in ignorance of her identity. He marries Guinevere, in spite of a plot, frustrated by Merlin, to substitute her half-sister, a false Guinevere. Loth makes war on Arthur to recover his wife, but they are reconciled by Gawain. The Round Table knights take a vow to aid all damsels in distress. After the conquest of Rome Arthur fights with the monstrous cat of Lausanne. And Now Merlin announces his passing. He has visited Julius Caesar at Rome and divined his wife's adultery for him. He has also visited Jerusalem. He has taught his crafts to Morgain la Fee. And he has himself fallen in love with Niniane, and given her the secret of magic. This is his undoing. She puts him under a spell, and keeps him in bed in a tower in the Forest of Broceliande. Gawain rides by and Merlin tells him that no man will hear his voice again.

5

Concerning Robert de Boron's poems, Professor Bruce has this to say: "They have no striking merit - they are far inferior to those of Chretien de Troyes - but in the 'genre' of the prose-romances their influence is of capital importance. He is, above all, responsible for three innovations in Arthurian romance: he gave it both a religious and a pseudo-historical coloring and he cast his compositions in a cyclic form."

Thus we see that only a few incidents in the Merlin romances have influenced considerably the development of the Arthurian stories as a whole. The new stories of Merlin, in so far as they are not inspired by the "Vita" itself, seem to be of Oriental origin. Thus the story of Merlin's enchantment by Niniane is not Celtic in origin, but is merely a new adaptation of the old fabliau 'motif' of the wise man deceived by a woman, which is ultimately of Oriental origin.

Chapter 4.

Tristan.

"It is rarely possible to trace with certainty the origin of specific incidents. Parallels have been readily collected from Welsh and still more from Irish stories independent of Arthur. The process is rather illusory, since we do not know how far there may have been similar parallels in lost Cornish or Breton or even French sources, and many of the fundamental 'motifs' are common form in the folk-lore of all peoples. Even what looks to modern eyes like the glamor of the Celtic imagination, is not conclusive, for poets bring their own imagination, and the materials of fairydom and magic are widespread. In any case the parallels are generally only for isolated features, and do not extend to the linking together of these in complete stories. Much must be allowed for the conscious literary activity of the Arthurian romancers. They are not like tellers of folk-tales, tied to traditional narrative, or only gradually elaborating them from mouth to mouth. They exercise the arts of selection and combination and deliberate invention. They borrow freely from each other and from earlier cycles of romance. And they certainly bring in elements which are not of Celtic, but of oriental, or even of classical origin."^I

These lines sum up exactly the position of the scholar who attempts to lay arbitrary rules to his findings in the study of the sources of the Arthurian legend. There are so many contradictory elements that one is hesitant about accepting any one view and rejecting any other.

I. E.K. Chambers "Arthur of Britain" P. 153.

In regards to the "Tristan" legend, however, the general concensus of opinion among the scholars rests on the view that the entire tale is almost bodily transferred from the Celtic to the French. On one other point too, there is a substantial agreement among authorities, and that is that all the mediæval romances and shorter poems concerning this hero go back to a lost French romance of a considerably earlier date than any on the subject that is now in existence. The similarity of the incidents in the various extant versions of the story, despite individual divergencies, was explained by scholars as due to the fact that the writers all drew from the same body of lays or prose tales which were supposed to be current orally. A new solution, however, was advanced by two scholars, Bédier, in his edition of Thomas' "Tristan" (1905), and by Golther, in his "Tristan und Iselde" (1907). Their conclusion, of the existence of one common original from which all extant versions drew, is now generally accepted. Bédier had reconstructed the narrative of this primitive, or "Ur-Tristan", as the German scholars call it, by the comparative method.

With reference to the study of the sources of this narrative, Miss Gertrude Schoepperle² has made it virtually certain that the starting-point of this long and romantic narrative is a Celtic "Aithed" (elopment story), similar to the old Irish story of "Diarmaid and Grainne". "The central 'motif' is the same in the two stories, so that the derivation of the "Tristan" story from it or some similar "Aithed" seems to be an acceptable conclusion." It is, no doubt, due to this origin that Tristan of the old French poems still differs so greatly from the conventional hero of the French romances of chivalry.

2. Gertrude Schoepperle "Tristan and Iselt, a Study of the Sources of the Romance."

Even a cursory comparison between Tristan and, say Gawain, will bring this to the fore. Gawain shows perfectly the knightly virtues of prowess and courtesy, whereas Tristan, with his agility of hand and feet, his woodcraft, and his making of 'lais', is never quite the typical knight of the Round Table.

The transformation which this narrative in particular has undergone in its passage, has roused many objections as to its origin. Especially has it been objected that the conflict of passion and law which constitutes the tragedy of the romance, could not have been of Celtic origin, since the dissolution of the marriage tie was easy among the Celts, and the idea of womanly modesty and virtue had little force among the Celtic populations in the period with which we are concerned. But we must overrule these objections in that although it is quite true that womanly modesty and virtue were not of great force at the time portrayed in the narrative, yet in its passing to France it could have undergone that change; and that the parallelism with "Diarmaid and Grainne", or even with the more celebrated story of the love of Naisi and Deirdre, wife of Conchobar, is too striking to be accidental. "All three of these tales, with their forest setting to a drama of adultery, in which the principal actors are a hero, his uncle (a king), and the latter's wife, bear unmistakably, it would seem, the stamp of the same mint."

Having concluded that the story is ultimately of Celtic origin, we have now to discover the detailed sources and to determine, if possible, how much the various territories through which the narrative passed, on its way to France, contributed to its development. Thus the Midas-like horse ears of Mark, and the white and black sails, which, for Tristan as for Theseus, are to herald a successful or unsuccessful voyage. The name of the hero itself, has been found to

be of Pictish origin, although here too, the point is disputable.
³
 F. M. Warren finds numerous evidences of the presence on the Continent of the name Tristan before 1066. There is, nevertheless, sufficient justification for regarding Tristan as, in the first instance, a Pict. The name itself, although not confined to the Picts, is much more numerous among them than among the other Celts. Again, all the chief versions of the story represent the hero's father as ruling "Loonois" and the region in which he and Iseult lead their forest life as "Morois". These names, it seems most probable are the Scottish "Lothian" and "Murray", two districts that were undeniably inhabited by the Picts.

"The fame of Tristan began, then, we may assume, with the Picts, probably merely as a character in heroic saga, with no love-story attached."⁴ But in its passage it gathered accretions from both Wales and Cornwall. The principal evidence bearing on the Welsh side of the question is that which is offered by the Triads. In one of these Tristan is called one of the three chief diadem-wearers of Britain; in another he is one of the three machine-masters of Britain; in still another, he is one of the three lovers of Britain. Lastly, in a fourth triad, he is one of the three great swine-herds of Britain, but he is at the same time the lover of Marc's wife, apparently. He keeps Marc's swine, whilst the regular swine-herd goes on a message to Eissyllt, as she is here called; Arthur, Marc, Kay and Bedivere could not get a single hog from him. Furthermore, in the "Dream of Rhonabwy", a prose tale of the "Mabinogion" collection he appears ("Drystan mab Tallwch") among Arthur's counsellors. This tale is, however, not earlier than the middle of the twelfth century and it may have been influenced by the French poems. The same may be said of the Triads.

3. F.M. Warren "Tristan in the Continent before 1066" M.L.N. XXIV. p.37ff. 1909.
4. J.D. Bruce Op. cit., P. 174.

The story as a whole may well have originated in Cornwall, for the setting is Cornish and its insular geography more precise than is usual in the romances. The personages may even have had a real existence on Cornish ground. A monument in Cornwall bears the inscription 'Drustagni hic jacet Cunomori filius'. Drustagnos may properly become Tristan; and a ninth-century "Vita" of the sixth-century saint Paulus Aurelianus preserves the memory of a King Marcus, 'quem alio nomine Qounomorium vocant'.

As for the love story, it is almost certain from the evidence of the nomenclature in the narrative that it originated in Cornwall. Thus the mistress of Tristan is in all versions represented as the wife of Marc, who we have seen was probably an historical personage. As regards the name of the heroine, Iseult, this has been usually regarded as of Germanic origin, and, accordingly, seemed to conflict with the theory of the Welsh or Cornish, or indeed, Celtic origin of the love-story. "Iswalda", "Ishild", have been suggested as German equivalents. The Cornish place-name, "Ryt-Esselt", which is found in an Anglo-Saxon charter of the year 967, proves, however, that this name could be Cornish as well.

Taking all things into consideration, we come to the conclusion that Cornwall had the lion's share in the formation of the great love-story of Tristan and Iseult. "It would appear that the fame of a character, originally Pictish, had spread through Wales and Cornwall, and that in the latter, owing to circumstances over which time has drawn an impenetrable veil, that character became the hero of this crowning love-story of the Middle Ages"⁵

In addition to the Cornish influence, we have, of course, the Breton and French accretions. Thus, in an analysis of the names in the

5. Ibid. P. 182.

story we find names such as Rivalin, Tristan's father, and Hoel, his father-in-law, which are unmistakably Breton; whereas Blanchefleur, the name of his mother, and Petitoru, that of his marvellous dog, are evidently French. It is plain, then, that the Bretons acted as intermediaries in the transmission of the story from Great Britain to the French. The fact that one of the hero's parents bears a French name, the other a Breton name, is especially significant. The inventor of this part of the legend must have been familiar with both languages and he was, doubtless, a Breton from the bi-lingual zone.

This medieval romance, more than any of the others has had so much influence throughout the ages, that it is fitting to conclude with a quotation from Professor H. Maynadier:⁶ "The story of Tristram and Iseult, quite as much as that of the Holy Grail, and certainly more than any other of Arthurian legends, has profoundly impressed human imagination. One reason is its poetry, especially that of the beginning, the poetry which symbolized the mystery of the sea together with the mystery of love, felt through the ages in the love potion; a poetry so real that Tennyson, in his version of the Arthurian legends, made the excuse for his lovers, Lancelot and Guinevere, virtually the same as that of Tristram and Iseult... But there is more than this poetry which makes "Tristram" remarkable among the Arthurian legends, for none of them is without poetry. The Tristram legend has impressed the imagination of centuries because in it, for the first time, romantic love is the central theme of a long story. In no long story of classical antiquity is love the chief interest, nor of the Middle Ages before "Tristram."

6. H. Maynadier Op. cit., P.

Chapter 5.

Lancelot.

"With no character of the Arthurian cycle, except Arthur and Guinevere, is the modern reader as familiar as with Lancelot. He does not appear, however, in the earliest Arthurian texts and he is in everything but name purely a literary creation - more clearly so, perhaps, than any other character of Arthurian romance." I
 So that on a survey of extant Arthurian material, we note that he is not mentioned in Welsh literature or in Geoffrey of Monmouth and his derivatives. In fact, the earliest extant literary mention of Lancelot is in Chretien's "Erec" (L.1694), in the list of Round Table knights. Following his customary manner, Chretien in this passage gives Gawain the first place. The second place he awards to Erec, because that character is the hero of this particular romance. The third place he gives to Lancelot del Lac.

The name itself, thinks Professor Bruce, is not Welsh, but more likely a mere French adaptation of the Breton name 'Lancelin', which is itself, ultimately of Germanic origin. The most probable explanation of the character's prominence in the above-mentioned list is that Chretien was already planning to make him the hero of a poem.

In the "Cliges", which come immediately after "Erec" in order of composition, Lancelot still holds the third place. In this work Lancelot is overcome by Cliges in a tournament - otherwise he does not appear in the romance. He is, however, the hero of the next poem composed by Chretien - the "Conte de la Charrete" - and it was this romance which ultimately established his fame.

I. J.D.Bruce "The Evolution of the Arthurian Legend" vol.I. P.190.

The story of Lancelot and Guinevere, making its first appearance in Chretien's "Charrete", on analysis, shows itself to be composed of two themes; the abduction story and the love-service of Lancelot. The first theme, that of the abduction, was current in Ireland centuries before Chretien took it in hand, and the second is an outgrowth of the 'amour courtois' system prevalent at that time in the regions in which Chretien lived and wrote. That the abduction theme is Celtic in origin is made manifest by the many manuscript evidences.

There are several other medieval documents in which the abduction of Guinevere is referred to or described. In point of composition the oldest account of the abduction of Guinevere is the story of Medred's unhallowed union with the Queen, as recorded by Geoffrey in his "Historia", written between 1136 and 1138. Somewhat later in date of composition but probably more archaic in character is the story of Guinevere's abduction in the "Vita Gildae", composed, apparently between 1145 and 1160, by Caradoc of Llancarvan. Evidence in twelfth-century art of an apparently similar abduction story has been found in the Modena Sculpture dated before 1150. An account of the abduction of Guinevere occurs in Ulrich von Zatzikeven's Middle-High-German romance of "Lanzelet", which dates probably from the late twelfth or early thirteenth-century. This romance is based on a French text which was carried to Germany by Hugh de Morville, an Angevin adherent who went to Vienna in February 1194, as a hostage for the release of Richard I. Furthermore, the Arthurian romances in prose contain numerous abduction stories. Most of these merely repeat the account given in the "Charrete", or otherwise serve only to illustrate the popularity of the abduction theme in medieval romance.

Reviewing these abduction stories we notice certain motifs recurring, which in time have become almost stock situations.

"The abduction of a wife (or mistress) by a lover, human or supernatural, has long been a favorite theme in mythology and literature. Though various well-recognized forms of the abduction 'motif' were probably accessible to Chrétien at the time he composed the "Charrete", the investigator of Arthurian romance turns at once to Celtic as the most promising of the possible sources.² Tales of the abduction or elopement of women were popular among the early Celts of Great Britain and Ireland. Examples are quite numerous, even among the scanty remains of ancient Welsh epic and romantic literature, but it is in Ireland whose literary and other contacts with early Britain and the Continent were long continued and frequent, that we find the most abundant evidence.

"In a country such as ancient Ireland, where tribal raids were frequently made for the purpose of stealing women or other valuables, it is not surprising that both epic and romantic accounts of wives abducted willingly or by force formed an important part of the stock-in-trade of professional literary men.³ Two such lists of early Irish tales have come down to us. One of these found in the "Book of Leinster", enumerates twelve stories called 'aitheda' (elopement).

Taking as examples some of the above stories, we note: love affairs between supernatural personages and mortal women have long been a favorite 'motif' of Celtic traditional literature; for example, the story of Etain, of about the ninth century. The abduction theme also became associated with Cu Chulinn, the Achilles

2. T.P.Gross and W.A.Nitze "Lancelot and Guinevere" P.32.

3. Ibid. P. 33.

of the Ulster epic, in a number of texts which represent the Ulster hero as opposed to Gu Roi mac Daire, a half-demonic personage. Of especial interest because it contains an abduction story combined with a rescue involving a clearly defined visit to the Otherworld is the "Echtra Chormaic i Tir Tairngire", an Irish tale which, though found in no manuscript older than the fourteenth century, belongs to an earlier date and forms an episode in a document giving the fullest extant account of the legal ordeals of the ancient Irish. The betrothed wife borne off by an unloved suitor (probably an Otherworld personage) appears in early Welsh literature in the Mabinogion tale of "Pwyll Prince of Dyvet". This narrative is one of a group of four tales which, though written in their present form probably between the Norman Conquest and the first quarter of the twelfth century, appear to represent, in their main outlines purely Celtic tradition.

With such evidence now before us, we may indicate certain conclusions with regard to the abduction theme in Celtic literature and medieval romance.

In the treatment of the abductor's character, the Celtic accounts fall into three groups, probably independent of each other in origin but often showing evidences of mutual influence. All three are represented in the earliest recorded literature. In the first, modelled on actual wife-stealing raids, the abductor is a mortal who carried off a woman from a neighbor's stronghold. In the second, representing a well-established folk-lore formula, the lover is a supernatural being who becomes enamored of a mortal and carries her off to his realm. In the third, also popular in origin, the abductor is a fairy personage, as in the second group, but he comes, not to make new conquests, but to claim a 'fée' whom he loved in the

Otherworld. It is this latter type that agrees most nearly with the abduction theme represented in Arthurian romance.

In three of the earliest Celtic abduction stories the abductor gets possession of the lady by a ruse. In two of these accounts he induces the husband to grant a request without knowing what is involved. The motive of the ill-considered promise, usually known as the 'rash boon' turns up in several of our medieval romances. In "Lanzelet", "Iwein", and "Garel", it is the abductor who asks the boon.

In several of the earliest Celtic abductions the abductor delays either in claiming his promise or in consummating the union after the lady has been carried off. It seems clear that a delay of some sort was the established device for gaining suspense in early Celtic abduction stories. This fact may explain certain peculiarities in the later accounts of the abduction of Guinevere. Though the Queen is abducted often, her captors generally show a remarkable self-restraint. The 'motif' of delay, established by the Celtic stories, accounts for Bademaguz' assurance in the "Charrete" that Meleaganz has not violated the Queen.

Again, in the Celtic abduction stories containing an account of the recovery of the heroine, the role of the rescuer is uniformly taken by the husband. He is, moreover, usually accompanied by an army or other armed forces. The situation in our earliest Celtic accounts is most closely paralleled by that in the "Vita Gildae". In "Lanzelet", the army is present, but Arthur, in accord with the established conventions of later romance, is relegated to a secondary position in favor of his son Lout as leader. The substitution of a retainer or a mere adventurer for the husband is extremely common in late Celtic romance and in modern folk-lore, but the typical situation

in Arthurian romance, where the role of rescuer is assumed by the Queen's lover, finds no justification in the earliest Celtic tradition. If Lancelot or any other lover figured as the rescuer before the 'matiere' passed into the hands of courtly poets, the fact cannot be established from the Celtic analogues.

"In view of the supernatural character of the abductor in numerous early Celtic abduction stories, it would be surprising if the account of the rescue had not occasionally attracted to itself some at least of the stock features of the visit to the Otherworld, a conventional type of narrative widespread in popular and sophisticated literature, and especially well represented in early Celtic traditions."⁴

The visit to the Otherworld exists in several well-defined variants, one of which represents the hero as braving the dangers of the supernatural realm for the specific purpose of liberating mortals held captive there. In the "Charrete" Chretien makes the abductor of Guinevere the son of the king of Gorre, but he emphasizes the Otherworld character of his domain, and his narrative of the journey thither contains several features which occur frequently in Celtic visits to the Otherworld, and hence were presumably connected with the abduction theme before it was used in the "Charrete"; eg. the 'hospitable hosts', the 'perilous passage', a Sword bridge, and a falling portcullis. On the basis of the evidence hitherto collected it is highly probable that these features in the "Charrete" are derived ultimately from Celtic tradition.

In an early version of the abduction of Etain, her husband discovers the whereabouts of his lost wife by the help of a magician. The same is true of many other early versions. In view of the Celtic cases here enumerated, it can hardly be accidental that in "Lanzelet"

4. Ibiâ. P. 48.

Arthur is forced to enlist the services of the magician Malduc in order to find the abducted Queen. In fact, all the evidence available tends to substantiate the conclusion that in the "Vita Gildae" we are dealing with a tradition of Guinevere's abduction that existed in Welsh popular tradition before it was altered to fit into the Latin life of Gildas.

As in the medieval romances, so in the Celtic accounts there is no evidence that the abduction theme was connected originally with any particular heroine. Like other traditional plots, it was a sort of blank check to be filled in with character according to the predilections of the narrator. No hypothesis suits the facts of the case better than that which regards the mutual relationships of Arthur, Guinevere, and her abductors in early romance as a reflection of Celtic fairy lore. Moreover, the suggestion that the story of Guinevere and her abductors is based ultimately on a Celtic tale in which a 'fée' leaves her Otherworld husband and becomes the wife of a mortal only to be sought out and carried off later by her first spouse, explains a number of apparent inconsistencies in the romances dealing with Guinevere's character. The complaisant attitude of Arthur toward the erring Guinevere is undoubtedly imitated to some extent from that of the injured husbands in Provençal love poetry, but it should also be emphasized that both Arthur's leniency and Guinevere's frailty, as well as other motifs discussed above, are amply justified in popular tradition as represented by Celtic abduction stories.

"But neither the established traditions of fairy lore nor the highly unconventional relationships of husband, lover, and mistress in courtly society could long escape the taint of bourgeois moral standards. In some of our earliest Celtic abduction stories

the eloping wife is likely to be regarded with extreme disapproval when she is human. As a part of the process of rationalization to which Celtic fairy material was constantly subjected during the Middle Ages, the 'fée' gradually came to be regarded as no better than her mortal sister.⁵ Thus Guinevere becomes merely a bad woman. Hence Geoffrey's condemnation of her affair with Meored. From the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, the successive treatments of the Arthur-Guinevere story have been marked by unfruitful attempts on the part of Christian playwrights and poets to condone the conduct of a heroine whose character was framed originally in an ancient pagan world.

Professors Gress and Nitze, from the evidence presented above, conclude that the accounts of Guinevere's abduction in early Arthurian romance are based ultimately on a Celtic tale of the following type:

1. A husband is visited by a mysterious stranger. The visitor is a former lover of the lady and has come to claim her.
- 2.(a) The stranger claims the right to demand anything he may wish. When his claim is acknowledged, he asks for the person of the lady.
 - (b) He snatches the lady away without ceremony.
3. He does not, however, consummate his union with her at once.
4. He is pursued by the husband, alone, or in company with a band of armed followers.
5. He resides in a supernatural realm, which the rescuer reaches after traversing a perilous passage and being entertained and directed by a 'hospitable host'.
6. The rescuer finally succeeds in recovering the lady, either by the help of a 'wise man', or by a ruse.

7. The heroine is a 'fée' the former wife (or mistress) of the abductor.

When Mary of France, daughter of King Louis VII. became Countess of Champagne in 1164, through her marriage to Count Henry I. the "Roman de la Charrete" had not yet been written; for the very good reason that the first line of the poem already calls her 'ma dame de Champaigne', and no other person could have been thus designated. But it was Mary herself who after 1164 furnished the poet not only with the matter but also with the idea of his romance.

We know now the 'matiere', that is, the evidence hitherto given, but did the 'matiere' represent Lancelot as Guinevere's lover? We may note that as early as "Erec" Lancelot del Lac is mentioned as an important Arthurian knight, and that "Charrete" refers to the 'fée' who brought him up. But nowhere previous to that romance is Lancelot represented as in love with Guinevere.

Let us now consider the 'sens' of the romance in a more detailed manner. First, there is the important fact that in all of his romances, with the single exception of the "Charrete", Chrétien upholds the ideals of love-in-marriage. Contrary to the other romances, "Charrete" presents a relationship that is extra-conjugal, and to which Gaston Paris ⁵ gave the rather general name of 'l'amour courtois'. Its particular traits Paris summarizes as follows:

1. It is illegitimate; it is therefore furtive, or secret.
2. Hence the lover occupies a position beneath his lady, who while reciprocating his love is haughty, capricious, and often unjust.
3. To be worthy of her, he sacrifices himself for her; and she, in turn, tests him in order to make him 'be worthy'.
5. Gaston Paris Romania XII. 579.

4. For love is an art which has its rules, like those of chivalry; and these the lover must obey if he is to prevail.

To all these conditions we find that Lancelot religiously adheres in all the medieval versions of the story of Lancelot and Guinevere.

"In framing this story there can be no doubt that the poet or the Countess, if it was really she that invented it, was consciously ordering it so that it might present a direct contrast to the loves of Tristan and Isuelt."⁶

There was, however, another thirteenth century romance besides Chretien's with Lancelot as its hero. The French original has been lost, but the poem survives in the form of the German paraphrase by Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, called the "Lanzelet", and in order to determine the true position of Chretien in the development of the Lancelot tradition, we shall have to consider this German poem.

According to the author's own statement, it is a translation of a French book brought to Germany by Hugh de Morville, one of the hostages who in 1194 replaced Richard Coeur de Lion in the prison of Leopold of Austria. In view of the methods of most Middle-High-German poets in handling French material, there can be little doubt that we have here substantially a faithful rendering of the lost French original. It is only on the question whether this source was late or early that the doctors disagree.

There are different views held in regard to the relations of Chretien's "Lancelot" and Ulrich's original. "On the one hand, we have what to the present writer seems the true view - namely, that this latter romance was a biographical romance of the weakest sort, comparatively late and built up in a considerable measure on 'motifs' derived from Chretien's poems. On the other hand, Gaston Paris and others have regarded Ulrich's original as derived from the same

6. J.D. Bruce Op. cit., P. 195.

source as Chretien's "Lancelot" - that is, from a biographical romance concerning Lancelot - only the great French scholar thought that Ulrich's original was more primitive than Chretien and reflected better their common source.⁷

7. Ibid. P.2II.

Part IV.

The Holy Grail.

Chapter I.

The Quest Versions.

"Although now inextricably bound up with the Arthurian legend as a whole, the connection with the Holy Grail is late and secondary. In part, at least, the Grail stories were originally independent of the Arthurian cycle, and they present a series of problems differing, in a marked degree, from those involved in the consideration of the other Arthurian romances and necessitating separate investigation."^I

As it would materially facilitate the investigation of the origin of the legend of the Grail if we could fix indisputably the relative dates of the various medieval romances that deal with the theme, we shall treat individually the various romances and attempt to determine the chronological position of each.

The Grail romances may be divided into two main classes:

- (1). That in which the chief stress is laid upon the adventures connected with the quest for certain talismans of which the Grail is only one, and upon the personality of the hero who achieves the quest.
- (2). That in which the chief stress is laid upon the nature and history of these talismans.

The first class may be styled the Quest Version, and the second the Early History Version.

I. A. Nutt "The Legends of the Holy Grail" P. I.

Among the Quest Versions we find a number of romances, chief of which is the vast compilation known as the "Conte del Graal" which was started by Chretien de troyes and continued by a number of poets after his death. At the beginning of his poem Chretien eulogizes Count Philip of Flanders, at whose command he was composing the romance - his source being a book given him for the purpose by this same Count Philip. The nobleman in question was Philip of Alsace, who was born about 1143, and who succeeded his father as Count of Flanders in 1168. In 1190 he went to the Holy Land and died there the following year. So the only positive dates within which Chretien may be said to have written his poem are 1168 and 1190, that is, the limits of the rule of Philip of Flanders before his departure for Palestine, which would surely have been mentioned by Chretien, had he already gone.

Chretien's unfinished "Conte del Graal", or the "Perceval" as it is more commonly called, was carried on by later poets, and these continuations combined are about five times as long as the original poem. The poets who are responsible for the continuations are as follows: (i) An anonymous writer, usually called Pseudo-Gautier or Pseudo-Wauchier, who carries on with the adventures of Gawain. (ii) The next in order is Wauchier de Denain, who appears to have been at one time in the service of the Countess Jeanne of Flanders, who ruled from 1206-1244; but the composition of his part of the "Conte del Graal" probably falls in the twelfth century. Wauchier's work was itself continued by two different writer, who each take up the narrative at the point where he left off. These writers are (iii) Manessier, and (iiii) Gerbert.

We have no precise evidence as to the dates of these continuations. We can therefore only limit them to the dates of Chretien's death, approximately 1190, and the date of the last of the continuators, Gerbert, approximately 1240.

Wauchier's work, like Chretien's, offers us in alternation adventures of Perceval and adventures of Gawain. But the adventures of the latter here, besides being of the most commonplace character, make up not quite a fourth of the whole, and they are subordinated to the adventures of the former, as they are not in Chretien. In Wauchier they are all incidents in the quest of Gawain for Perceval. On the other hand, the continuation of Pseudo-Wauchier relates wholly to adventures of Gawain, including one at the Grail castle. The poet, however, makes it plain that Gawain is not the destined Grail winner, for he cannot put together the pieces of the broken sword, and, besides omitting to ask about the Grail, he falls asleep before he has received an explanation of any of the other objects, save the lance. Coming next to Manessier, we have an even more rambling romance of adventure than in the case of Wauchier's continuation, and in a much duller style. Episodes concerning Gawain and Sagrener, for example, which have nothing to do with the main action are introduced. Manessier's work is mainly a compilation of the mustiest commonplaces of Arthurian romance. There is no ground for assuming that he had access to any source for the legend of the Grail other than the romances in verse and prose on this theme that we still possess. The same thing applies to the last writer of this series, Gerbert. He is acquainted with all the writers who have thus far been discussed and with the Grail prose-romances as well.

The next Arthurian romance in order of date in the Quest Version class, is the "Parzival" of Wolfram von Eschenbach. Chretien's poem is represented in its entirety in Wolfram, but the German poet has prefixed to the main narrative an account of the life of Perceval's father, and he has completed the account of the quest which Chretien left unfinished. Moreover, in these additions, both at the beginning and at the end, we are made acquainted with an elder half-brother of Perceval's, named Feirefiz, who does not appear in Chretien. His continuation of Chretien's poem is wholly independent of the continuation by the French poets; but the condition in which the "Perceval" was left naturally stimulated him to a continuation, just as it did the French, of the theme to a conclusion. Similarly, the addition of the preliminary narrative, which tells of the hero's parentage, the adventures and marriage of his father, was quite natural, in view of the models with which Thomas' "Tristan" and Chretien's "Cliges", supplied him.

Next in order in the Quest Versions is the "Peredure, son of Evrawc", known to us from a manuscript of the thirteenth century, contained in the "Mabinogion". This Welsh tale is in a large measure a logical and straightforward version of a hero's vengeance upon supernatural beings for the injuries inflicted by them upon his kindred. The object of the talismans here is to remind the hero of the wrong done and to supply the avenging weapon.

Different views have been expressed in regard to the relations of the French "Conte del Graal" and the Welsh tale. This tale has been frequently taken by advocates of Celtic origins for the French romances as evidence of the existence in Wales of a Perceval legend embodying incidents that gave rise to the legend of

the Holy Grail. The discussion, however, of the views advanced and refuted will be taken up in the study of the various origin theories.

Lastly, we have the Middle English metrical romance "Sir Perceval of Galles", composed about 1370. This romance contains nothing corresponding to the visits to the first uncle (Genemons) or to the Fisher King, and makes no mention of the Grail or of any other talisman. It is a simple and straightforward version of a widely-spread tale of a son's vengeance upon his father's slayers. But for the final touch of the hero's going to the Holy Land, there is no suggestion of religious coloring. Thus, though this romance contains nothing about the Grail theme proper, it strongly resembles Chretien's "Perceval" in other respects.

The evidence regarding certain points of dispute in the first class versions are as follows: Chretien speaks of a sword, a bleeding lance, and a Grail which is manifestly a vessel. Wolfram speaks of a sword and lance and Grail - but here the Grail is a stone. The Welsh tale mentions a bleeding lance and a head in a salver. The English romance is silent concerning any talisman. In three versions, "Perceval", "Parzival", and "Peredure", the talismans are in some way connected with a hero's restoration to health of a kinsman. From Chretien, we can only surmise how or why this happens, but learn from one of his continuators, Manessier, that it is an effect of successful vengeance; this is also the case in "Peredure", whilst in "Sir Perceval" there is also an injury avenged. In Wolfram, on the other hand, the idea of vengeance is absent; the injured kinsman suffering from the effects of his own sin, is relieved when the hero rises to such a height of spiritual suffering and insight

as enables him to understand and sympathize with the sin-caused affliction. In the Welsh story alone, is the machinery by which the vengeance is effected used in a reasonable and intelligible way.

Let us now look at Chretien's "Perceval", where, for the first time there is mention of the Holy Grail. At the beginning of his "Perceval" Chretien speaks of putting into rhyme the story of the Grail as found in a book which Count Philip gave him. Thus it would seem that he was merely putting into verse a prose-romance. But this is impossible, for there were no prose-romances as early as this. Still further, the other productions of Chretien afford no example of his merely working over in verse some tale that he had before him, whether in prose or in verse. He always makes up his romances by combining elements drawn from different sources.

The "Perceval" itself may be divided into three main elements. (i) The Grail 'motif', to which the 'motif' of removing a spell by putting a question is attached. (ii) What is known as the Great Fool 'motif' - the Great Fool in this instance, being identified with the hero of the Grail Quest. (iii) The Arthurian setting of the whole. Through this last element the Great Fool, who is also the Grail-quester, becomes a knight of Arthur's court and is brought into contrast with the famous knights of that establishment, especially with Gawain, the model of worldly courtesy and prowess. This gives an opportunity for variety, and, as a matter of fact, in the "Perceval", as far as Chretien had carried it out, the number of lines given to Gawain's adventures is not very much smaller than the number given to Perceval.

The ultimate conclusion as to the nature of the book which Chretien says he received from the Count, can thus be reduced to but the one 'motif', that of the Grail. This is so because of two reasons:

the first that it is precisely what Chretien says he got from this book, that is, the story of the Grail. Secondly, if we trust to the analogy of his other romances, there is no probability that these additional 'motifs' were associated with the Grail story in his book. That analogy would suggest to us that he himself was the first to combine these other 'motifs' with the 'motif' of the Grail. As far as the Arthurian setting is concerned, this is obvious on the face of it. In making Arthur's court the center from which the action radiates, he would be merely doing precisely the same thing that he had done in all of his previous romances. Geoffrey and Wace had established the fame of Arthur's court, and in his "Perceval", as in his other romances, Chretien was simply availing himself of the fame of that court to give distinction to his own heroes and their exploits. There can be very little doubt that the same thing is true of the Great Fool 'motif'. In virtually every country and tribe in the world we have these stories of the apparent simpleton or rustic who is able to achieve adventures that have baffled the most celebrated warriors or knights. But nowhere else is the Great Fool the hero of a Grail quest - so that the probabilities are that Chretien was the first to combine the two 'motifs'.

Furthermore, the numerous 'motifs' which Chretien repeats in the "Perceval" from his previous romances show how large a part of this romance is due to his invention and not to his source. Most obvious among these examples of repeated 'motifs' is the role that Gawain plays. This is found in every one of the author's works without exception. In Geoffrey and in Wace this nephew of Arthur's figures as the best knight at his uncle's court, so that in Chretien's romances, which celebrate the exploits of other heroes, Gawain always plays a part - an increasingly important one in the successive

romances. In "Perceval", we find him filling the same function as in the "Lancelot" - only he occupies an even larger place here, and he is a foil to Perceval, that is to say, he is the type of the perfection of worldly knighthood, devoted to arms and ladies, as contrasted with the knight who has a mystic function to perform.

More important, however, among these repeated 'motifs' that even the role of Gawain, is the quest 'motif'. The author starts his hero on a journey the adventures of which make up the material of the story, and so, from the "Erec" on, a quest was the main device which Chretien employed for the development of his romances. In "Perceval" it is again an indefinite search for adventure although one incident of this quest is destined to assume an importance above all the rest - namely, the visit to the Grail castle.

It seems plain, then, that the book which Chretien refers to merely gave him the conception of the Grail, but that the character of the Grail knight and the conception of the quest are Chretien's additions.

The next thing to be considered is the influences that decided Chretien in the choice of the name of his hero. Firstly, the hero, in accordance with the plan of Chretien's previous romances, had to be an Arthurian knight. It was desirable, however, to use for this purpose none of the well-known Arthurian knights. Their characters would not have suited the new theme - the quest of a holy, mystic vessel - but, in any event, in the interest of novelty a new knight was required. Furthermore, in the interest of novelty he confers on this new knight the character of the hero of the Great Fool tale. Again, it was a happy thought that induced Chretien to introduce a hero who, though of noble birth, had grown up in the wilderness, outside of the conventional life of the noble classes

of the time, and whose consequent awkwardness and naivete would render his prowess only the more captivating. It mattered very little what name was given him. The one actually selected, was Perceval li Galeis, which we find already in the list of Arthurian knights in the "Erece". "There is no reason, however, to think that before Chretien any definite story had ever been attached to the name any more than to that of Lancelot. Indeed, the name Perceval is, on the face of it, French, and the epithet, 'li Galeis' was added, merely to give it Arthurian coloring."²

Alfred Nutt³ concludes that Chretien's legendary statements about the Grail talismans are really secondary, and intended to explain the importance attached to them in the story of their quest. He finds, furthermore, the presence of two distinct elements in the romances, one a definitely Christian and the other a possibly non-Christian one, and although the Christian element in one form appears late and secondary, yet in some shape or other it is present in the very oldest versions of the story as a whole.

In reference to the continuations of Chretien, we have Professor J.D.Bruce's stand on the matter.⁴ "In discussions of the origins of the Grail legend, the greatest mischief, in the judgment of the present writer, has resulted from the use of these continuations as if they were original authorities that drew directly from Chretien's sources, independently of him, or perhaps from sources that he did not know. This has been the fault even of some advocates of the theory of Christian origins, but still more of the opponents of that theory... As a matter of fact, one may safely affirm that Wauchier knew nothing of the Grail, except what he found in Chretien's fragmentary poem, and Manessier and Gerbert were in the same case -

2. J.D.Bruce Op. cit., P. 251.

3. Alfred Nutt Op. cit., P.

4. J.D.Bruce Op. cit., P. 293.

only they had Wauchier's and Pseudo-Wauchier's continuations, besides, to furnish suggestions to their imaginations."

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Miss Weston, however, takes Wauchier as the best authority on the subject of the Grail. She believes that he, too, had access to the book that Count Philip gave to Chretien, only she thinks that Wauchier preserves better the character of the book in question than Chretien did.

In considering the "Parzival" we are impeded by the one great difficulty, which lies in Wolfram's appeal to a certain Kyot as the source of his poem. Here Wolfram cites his source not at the beginning but in the middle of his poem. Again, the poet describes what purports to be Kyot's source - namely, the pretended work of a half-Jew, Flegetanis, on the history of the Grail, which Kyot found, cast aside in the city of Toledo, Spain. This Flegetanis is here said to have been a great astronomer and that he read the name of the Grail in the stars and had declared that a host of angels had brought the sacred object down to the earth, where only the chaste and the good of the Christian faith might guard it.

Professor Bruce discounts this claim of Wolfram's and thinks that he had no other story concerning Perceval and the Grail than Chretien's before him and that he deliberately tried to conceal his obligations to Chretien by the invention of an imaginary authority whom he arrays against the French poet. "It is probable that in these appeals to Kyot Wolfram was merely indulging in the common medieval trick of bolstering up his own inventions with an imaginary authority. Nobody disputes that, for the part of his poem which corresponds to Chretien, he stands close to the latter; at times they agree word for word. On the other hand, that the additions

5. J.L.Weston "The Legend of Sir Perceval" I. P.323ff.

are Wolfram's own is shown by their character. There is nothing similar to them in the literature of the French romances. We have in the "Perceval" a pure Arthurian romance introduced by what appears almost as a travesty on the stock situations in the French Arthurian romances."⁶

Alfred Nutt, however, finds other conclusions in a comparison of Wolfram's poem and that of Chretien. He notes the Crusading tone of the introductory history of the hero's father in connection with the fact that the order of the Grail knights is obviously intended to suggest the great Crusading order of the Knights Templar. As the whole of this part of the work is connected with a genealogical legend of the Angevin princes, and betrays Southern French affinities in the personal and place-names, which differ greatly from those in Chretien, it is impossible that it can be the invention of the German poet, who must, in these particulars, at least, be following a French source, which, again, must have been very different from Chretien. He goes on to say that once this existence of a French source is admitted, it seems simpler to refer to it the very important difference between the presentment of the Grail in the two works rather than to attribute it to Wolfram. Thus we see, that in Chretien the Grail is distinctly a vessel, with Wolfram a stone; the former insists little, the latter much, upon its food giving properties. In Chretien, the Fisher King's wound has no moral justification; in Wolfram it is the punishment of the King's sin in breaking his vow. In Chretien the question relates to the nature of the talisman and the use to which it is put; in Wolfram primarily to the sufferer from the effects of sin, secondarily to the hero who can only attain full perfection by sympathetic compassion with

6. J.D. Bruce Op. cit., P. 327.

the suffering caused by sin. This deepened and intensified spiritual interpretation of the incident cannot be disassociated from the Crusading framework and the modelling of the Grail knighthood upon that of the Temple.

The discussion of the sources of the "Peredure" may be postponed, for it is upon this tale that much of the strength of the Celtic origin school is based.

With the Middle English metrical romance "Sir Perceval of Galles", however, the case is different. Here the peculiarity is that although it contains nothing about the Grail, it strongly resembles Chretien's "Perceval" in many other respects. Gaston Paris gave currency to the view that this poem stood closest of all extant works to the primitive form of the story of Perceval, which, he supposed, belonged to the Welsh oral tradition, so that it represents best the versions of that story which was used both by Chretien and by the author of the Welsh "Peredure".

Jessie L. Weston and others have laid stress on some points of supposed agreement even between the English poem and Wolfram's "Parzival", which, they argued, go back to a common source.

The whole subject has been most fully discussed by R. H. Griffith in his "Sir Perceval of Galles", and by Professor A. C. L. Brown in his study "The Grail and the English Sir Perceval" (Modern Philology, 1919-1921). Griffith endeavours to adduce parallels to the Middle English romance from various Celtic folk-tales, and his conclusion is that the English poem is not only wholly independent of Chretien, but is merely an English versification of a folk-tale that was known in the district of the Northwest England.

According to Professor Bruce, however, this poem is plainly an adaptation of Chretien's "Perceval" with the Grail left out. Moreover, the author had before him not only Chretien's genuine work, but a spurious prologue, known as the Bliocadrans-prologue, which is found in two manuscripts. This spurious composition contains an account of the manner in which Perceval's father died and also the story of his youth. Accordingly, we have in the English "Sir Perceval" the story of Perceval's childhood given as well as the incidents of his career after he set out for Arthur's court. As he approaches the episode of the Grail castle in Chretien, he abandons his source, describes how on hearing news of his mother, the hero sought her, found her demented, and going with her to the dwelling of a giant whom he had slain, cured her of insanity by a magic drink. With his mother he returns to his queen and his realm. Afterward he went to the Holy Land and there he was killed.

Bruce furthermore concludes that the motive that actuated the English poet in omitting the Grail incidents from his poem is probably the fact that they differed altogether from the usual material of the romances. The mystery of it all may well have puzzled him. The writer is by no means devoid of constructive skill, but there is no ground for believing that he, any more than the authors of the other Middle English romances, was very highly educated or that he had a brain for subtleties. These works deal as a rule, with stock themes - fighting, especially with pagans and giants, witches, etc. - and it is quite likely that the author of the present poem balked at so unfamiliar a theme as the Grail. This would be particularly true, if he merely had before him

Chretien's poem with the spurious Bliocadrans-prologue, but none of the continuations. In view of the length of Chretien's "Perceval" plus these continuations, and the consequent paucity of copies in circulation, all the probabilities are that such was the case. But Chretien's work, being unfinished, leaves the Grail unexplained, and one can easily comprehend, then, why the English author should have shirked so difficult a subject. Moreover, it is to be remembered that the English romance was already fairly long, according to English standards, before it reached the Grail episode in Chretien, and the writer may have concluded very naturally, that his work was long enough. "Surely, in view of all these reasonable considerations we have no cause to be surprized, if we find the Grail theme omitted in this poem alone of all the romances of which Perceval is the hero."

Chapter 2.

The Early History Version.

The second great class of Grail romances is the Early History Version. This, we see, is composed mainly of a group of tales which are on the whole of a later composition than those of the first class. The first to be considered in this category is the "Joseph of Arimathea" of Robert de Boron.

In attempting to place Robert's poem we are immediately met by a difficulty in that this poem is preserved to us in what some scholars regard as only a second redaction. The poet does, however, make a statement which bears on the question of date: "At the time that I treated it (ie. the story of the Grail) in peace, with my lord, Gautier, who was of Mont-Belyal, the great history of the Holy Grail had never been treated by any man that was mortal". Now, this Gautier of Montbéliard went to Palestine in 1199, became Counstable of Jerusalem there, then Regent of Cyprus, and died in 1212. Inasmuch as Gautier's elder brother (Richard of Montbéliard) died so late as 1237, it is not likely that Gautier himself was born before 1150, or more probably 1160. Robert's connection with him could not have begun before about 1180. As Gautier left for Palestine in 1199 the composition of the "Joseph" in its original form must have antedated 1199. We may thus set the limits to this poem between 1180 and 1199.

Next in order in this class is the "Esteire dal Saint Graal" or "Grand St. Graal" as it is often called. This is part of the great prose cycle of romances known as the Vulgate cycle, because it became the most popular redaction of the romances of the Middle Ages, almost completely displaced all other versions. Included

in this cycle is another of the Grail romances of the second class; the "Queste del St. Graal". The name of Walter Map is also given to this cycle, because the manuscripts regularly ascribe to him the composition of the last three members of the cycle which, incidently, consists of five great romances, only two of which, however, deal directly with the Grail. This attribution, however, is manifestly a fiction and has been generally rejected by modern scholars.

The concluding two tales in this class of Grail romances are the "Didot-Perceval", and the "Perceval le Gallois", known also as the "Perlesvaus". The former romance derived its name from the fact that the solitary manuscript in which it is found belonged to the well-known collector, A. F. Didot. The latter narrative is in prose and was written for a certain John, Lord of Nesle in Flanders, who was living in the year 1225.

In this class of Grail romances we first note that the difference in tone and sentiment between these romances and those of the first class is so marked as to make the reader feel that he has been transported to another world. The chivalric is here subordinated to the Christian ascetic element. True, the hero's prowess is insisted upon in set conventional terms, but the center of interest is shifted from his personality and from the feats and ventures by which it is manifested to the symbolic machinery of the precious vessel and its accompaniments. "These differences in tone and feeling would alone suffice to negative the hypothesis that the twosets of romances are the dissevered halves of a homogeneous whole, or variant versions of a common original theme. The distinction between them is far more deeply seated."^I

The second class of Grail romances gives, it has been seen, a Quest of the Holy vessel differing in part from that in the first class. In two versions belonging to this class, the "Didot-Perceval" and "Perceval le Gallois", the hero is Perceval, as in the first class; and in the "Queste del St. Graal", Perceval is only second to the main hero. Again, one, the "Didot-Perceval", reproduces many of the adventures of the "Conte del Graal", whilst the "Queste" has also the central adventures at the Fisher King's castle, though greatly altered and attached to a secondary personage, Lancelot. The inference, according to Alfred Nutt, is unmistakable; the Quest portions of the second class of Grail romances are in part based upon and derived from a Quest story similar to that found in the "Conte del Graal" and allied versions.

Furthermore, to understand the real significance of the Quest incidents we must address ourselves firstly and chiefly to the romances of the first class. How does it stand with the other portions of the legend, the Early History of the Grail? The latter portions of the "Conte del Graal" contain fragments of an Early History which is substantially the same as that found in "Grand St. Graal" and "Queste". Wolfram's "Parzival", on the other hand, contains an Early History which is absolutely and entirely different. Remembering that these portions of the "Conte del Graal" which do yield this Early History are demonstrably the latest in date of that vast compilation, noting that they bear the traces of being obvious and at times inconsistent interpolations, the further inference is, if not certain, at least highly probable, that the Early History of the "Conte del Graal" is based upon and derived from one akin to that found in the "Grand St. Graal"

and the "Queste". In other words, each section of the legend has borrowed from the other features and incidents inconsistent with its real essence. The fact that Chretien's continuators had to turn for information to works animated by such a different spirit, thinks Nutt, justifies the surmise that they found nothing of a similar nature in his source, and that, as in the intervening lapse of time a special Christian account of the Grail had become the popular one, they felt constrained to clumsily substitute this dominant version for that of Chretien's source.

In Robert de Boron's "Joseph of Arimathea" it is to be noted that the Grail, in Robert's conception, is not a vessel to which appertains the marvellous power of supplying food and drink, youth, health and strength. Such a conception of its power is found in some Grail romances later than his. With Robert, however, it is a vessel of grace in whose service only the good and pure can remain. The delights which the Grail imparts to those that sit at the Grail table are purely spiritual. Sinners are excluded from these delights, and the hypocrite, who tries to partake of them is stricken with punishment.

Now, in the history of the Holy Grail as given by Robert, we have an undeniable parallelism with the history of Christ in his closing days. It is plain, then, that we have in Robert's history of the Holy Grail, a characteristic piece of medieval symbolism. The Grail is the symbol of Christ's body.

The relation of Robert to Chretien is presumed to be as follows by Bruce. The advocates of a non-Christian origin for the Grail legend assume that both were drawing independently from lost sources. As a matter of fact, the only feature which these two

poems on the Grail have unmistakably in common is the term 'Rich Fisher' or 'Good Fisher' as applied to the keeper of the Grail. To be sure, that feature is a very distinctive one. Neither the lance nor the 'tailleur', however, of Chretien's procession appear in the "Joseph", and the whole interest is centered on the Grail. But, after all, there is nothing inconsistent in these facts with the view that Robert derived the suggestion of his poem from Chretien and not from any hypothetical lost sources concerning the Grail. It was not necessary that he should have any intimate knowledge of the "Perceval". It was sufficient if he knew of the Grail and the Fisher King. Just as romances relating to the adventures of a mature hero in the Middle Ages awakened curiosity about his early history, and so stimulated the poets to the production of narrative concerning his youthful exploits, so it may well have been in regard to the Grail.

Chretien's "Perceval" had, undoubtedly, created a widespread interest in this mysterious vessel, and yet, being unfinished, it left the field open to the invention of other poets who might handle the theme. The only thing which his poem had fixed was the Grail, which, since it contained the sacramental wafer, was the vessel so used in the eucharistic ritual. Having once conceived the idea of relating the early history of the Grail, which he recognized as identical with a vessel of the eucharist ritual in Chretien, he would, of course, turn to Biblical and legendary material that would furnish him with the hints to give body to this conception.

The "Merlin", which follows upon the "Joseph", is mainly drawn from Geoffrey of Monmouth or Wace - or, possibly, some other

verse-chronicle derived from Geoffrey - and shows no connection with Chretien. So, altogether Chretien is only in a limited sense a source of Robert. Besides, Robert's poem is in a wholly different style from Chretien's "Parceval". Compared with the latter, the style is homely, awkward and often obscure, without color or legend, not of folk-tale and romance, such as is found in Chretien's poem.

With Alfred Nutt, however, the case is different. He observes that in spite of manifest discrepancies, it is noteworthy that, with the exception of Wolfram's "Parzival", Boron's poem is the only work of the cycle which is not only animated by a Christian symbolic conception, but which carries out that conception in an intelligible manner by means of the incidents of the story. This conception "may be briefly summarized as follows: Sin, the cause of want among the people; separation of pure and impure by means of the fish (symbol of Christ); punishment of the self-willed false disciple; reward of Brons by charge of the Grail; symbolising of the Trinity by the three tables and the three Grail-keepers."

In a more detailed analysis of the "Joseph" Nutt sees that in both its two main forms it is essentially a legend of the Conversion of Britain. Both forms start with Joseph, but at a later stage go widely asunder. In Boron it is kinsmen of Joseph, Brons, or Alain, or Petrus, who are the leaders of the evangelising emigration, it is to them that the Holy Vessel is confided. In the "Grand St. Graal" and "Queste" versions Joseph's son, Josephs, is the leading spirit, and the fortunes of the Grail are bound up with those of Joseph's direct descendants or with the converted heathens Mordrains and Nasciens and their kin. This second is the popular version, the one which affected the later stages of the "Conte del Graal".

The fact that what may be called the Vulgate Early History is in reality a conversion of Britain legend, is important when we recollect that the personages of the "Conte del Graal" and allied versions are British, and that the whole scene of the story is Britain, as also that the Wolfram Early History is asserted to be derived from a chronicle of the Angevin princes, the Lords of Britain throughout the formative period of the Grail cycle.

"The romances of this cycle belong, by their origin, their purport, and their content, to England and not to France, a fact obscured for us by their being written almost entirely in French, and to a large extent by French writers, and only intelligible when we recall that throughout the twelfth century French was almost as much the language of what is now England as of what is now France, and that throughout a large part of the century the 'matiere de Bretagne' was the fashionable and influential romance for all that was cultured in Western Christendom. It also, I think, puts out of court all attempts to derive this great body of romance from the numerous Holy Vessels found on the Continent since the First Crusade. The legends connected with them have none of them any connection with Britain."²

"But if the Early History of the Grail be thus a conversion of Britain legend, whence doest it derive its personages and incidents?" The answer to this question, thinks Alfred Nutt, decisively confirms the contention that the Grail romances are of insular and not of Continental origin. The account of Joseph, of his relation to Christ, his captivity, etc. is derived, in addition to the Gospel narrative, from a group of apocryphal writings, of which the "Evangelicum Nicodemi" is the central and dominant one. Now, owing to circumstances of which we know nothing, this group

2. Alfred Nutt Op. cit., P. 42.

of apocrypha was familiar to , and influential with, English writers from the eighth to the eleventh century, at a time when no trace of it can be found in the other literatures of Western Christendom. These apocryphal writings are entirely silent about Joseph's conversion of Britain, but we do find an elaborate twelfth century account of the evangelisation of Britain by Joseph in a series of documents connected with, and undoubtedly originating from, the famous West British abbey of Glastonbury.

Ignored as it is by Geoffrey of Monmouth, the legend can hardly be older than the second third of the century. Whether it is as old; whether in particular it is mentioned in the genuine writings of Geoffrey's contemporary, William of Malmesbury; whether it be not a reflection of the Grail romances, these are questions still debated by scholars. As the details are different from anything in the romances, as in its earlier and simpler form there is no mention of the Holy Grail, it is hard to see how the Glastonbury legend can be regarded as an outcome of the Grail romances. The balance of probability strongly inclines to the view that divers and independent legends of Joseph's conversion of Britain originated in twelfth-century England, and their origin and popularity was in some way connected with the early and wide-spread, in England, of the apocryphal texts which had Joseph as their hero.

"To realise the fact that both divisions of the Grail legend have their source in twelfth-century England raises afresh the question whether they are really parts of one harmonious whole, parts equal in age and import." The conclusion, however, is that because there is logical disaccord between the various sections of the Grail legend, as we have them, that we are justified in

asserting they can never have formed parts of one harmonious whole. The logical inconsistency is even more flagrant if, turning from the legend as a whole, the nature and attributes of the Holy Vessel itself be considered. In the later stages of the cycle it is, as we have seen, an object of utmost sanctity; by its origin, its properties, its effect upon its devotees, it appertains to what is holiest in Christianity, and yet it retains to the very end attributes which are purely material, and which could not have belonged to it, had it been from the outset the Sacramental Vessel and nothing else. Even the most definitely and fervently spiritual of the romances, the "Parzival" and the "Queste", dwell strongly upon its food-producing qualities.

Let us now look at the "Grand St. Graal". This romance is one of the longest and latest of the cycle. Allusion to an episode contained in it, and it alone, is made in the chronicle of a certain Helinandus, assigned to a date prior to the year 1204, and this has been held by some scholars as a means to enable the dating of the romance. But the argument is doubtful, firstly, on account of the extremely composite nature of the "Grand St. Graal" in its present form, and, secondly, because the dating of the passage in Helinandus' chronicle is by no means sure.

In point of chronological position of each of the five romances of the great Vulgate cycle, the "Grand St. Graal" presupposes the "Lancelot" and the "Queste", and there are apparently allusions in it even to the "Mort Artu". In his "Joseph", Robert de Boron had given an account of the early history of the Grail that is thoroughly imbued with the spirit of medieval Christian legend and doctrine. In this work, however, neither Lancelot nor his ancestors nor his

posterity had been brought into any sort of connection with the Grail, as, indeed, they are not mentioned in the whole poem. But just as in the "Queste" such a connection is established for the quest of the Grail through the supplanting of Perceval, the original Grail Winner, by Lancelot's son, Galahad, so for the early history of the Grail this connection is also established in the "Estoire" through the linking of the vessel's fate in its earlier wanderings with that of the ancestors of Lancelot and his son. The great departure which distinguishes these two closely related romances "The Grand St. Graal" and the "Queste", in Grail tradition, is the substitution of the chaste Galahad for the unchaste Perceval of Chretien and his earlier continuators as the Grail Winner.

The author of the "Grand St. Graal" takes Robert's account of the early history of the Grail as the basis of his romance, but he modifies his source so as to make it conform to the new conception throughout, keeping constantly in mind, above all, the new hero, Galahad, and the ascetic ideal which that character embodies. Just as this ascetic ideal, however, required a new champion as the knight of the Grail quest, so it required a new and stricter representative of the church as the guardian and minister of the Grail in its early wanderings in the Orient and in Great Britain. The tone of Robert's poem is profoundly religious, but to an ecclesiastic with strongly orthodox and ascetic views, there was a flaw even in Robert's conception of the first Grail-keeper, Joseph of Arimathea. He did not fulfil the condition of celibacy which was required by the medieval church of the ministers of its sacraments symbolized by the Grail. Accordingly, Robert's Joseph had to yield the first place to a new creation Josephs, who fulfilled this necessary condition.

In the new romance, as in Robert's "Joseph", the identification of the Grail with a vessel of the Eucharistic service is complete - except that, through an inopportune recognition of the fact that the true meaning of the word 'graal' was a kind of dish, the author rejects Robert's more harmonious conception and makes this vessel the dish, not the chalice of the Last Supper.

The wanderings of the Grail company in Robert's poem, so obviously modelled after those of the children of Israel in the wilderness, in the book of "Exodus", suggested the idea of the ark in which our author represents the sacred vessel to have been borne about. Here too, the ark, like everything in the narrative, has its symbolical meaning. It is the Holy Church which carries in her bosom the fundamental mysteries of the true faith. Again, the bleeding lance is the lance with which the side of Christ was pierced when He hung on the cross. The blood which drips from its point is the blood of the Saviour, and it possesses, accordingly, the power of healing. But following Chretien, who ascribed to this same lance a terribly destructive power, it is here an instrument of wrath as well as of beneficence.

Professor Bruce's conception of the origin and sources of the "Grand St. Graal" differs somewhat. Robert de Boron's "Joseph", he notes, is the main source of the "Estoire". To that poem its author owes his conception of the origin and early history of the Grail, and of its connection with Joseph of Arimathea - also, of Joseph's proselytizing activities and of his wanderings with the Grail and the Grail company in the Eastern lands - finally of the transference of the Grail to the West and of the conversion of Britain to Christianity by Joseph, Josephs, and Calidoine. It is evident,

however, from an analysis of the "Hstoire" that its author modified, according to his own pleasure, the materials which were offered to him by his source, and that he still further filled out Robert's framework with elements that were derived from a great variety of extraneous sources. Inasmuch as Robert himself moved so completely in an atmosphere of Christian legend, it is natural that in the sources of his follower, legendary materials should, next to the "Joseph", have occupied the first place. It is very questionable, however, whether our author had a first-hand knowledge of the apocryphal narratives concerning the careers of the primitive apostles after the ascension of Christ, such as has been attributed to him.

The romance derives, finally, such plan as it possesses, as well as its most significant conceptions concerning the Grail, from Robert's "Joseph". There already we find, first, the history of the Grail down to the departure of Joseph of Arimathea from Jerusalem, then, the wanderings of Joseph and the Grail company in the East, and lastly, the journey of the Grail and its guardians westward for the conversion of Great Britain.

The companion romance to the "Grand St. Graal", in the Vulgate cycle, the "Queste del Saint Graal", comes next under consideration. The former is the early history of the Holy Grail down through the conversion of Britain by Joseph and other members of the Grail company, the latter a narrative of the quest of the sacred vessel by certain knights of Arthur's court in that monarch's reign, some four hundred years after the conversion. As in the "Grand St. Graal" where there are references forward to incidents in the "Queste", so there are in the "Queste" references backward to incidents in the "Grand St. Graal". From the nature of the case, moreover, the main sources

of the two branches were bound to be the same - namely, Chretien's "Perceval" and its first two continuations, besides Robert's "Joseph", since these were the only works on the Grail that had been composed up to that time.

In an analysis of the romances to secure, if possible, the comparative dates of each, we come to the following conclusions. Whether or not we agree with the theory that both of these companion pieces were the work of the same hand or not, it seems reasonable to suppose that the latter, the "Queste", was the first composed. As we have noted, the great departure in Grail tradition which distinguishes the two romances is the substitution of the chaste Galahad for the unchaste Perceval of Chretien and his earlier continuators as the Grail Winner. But the ascetic who first hit upon the idea of this substitution would surely have proceeded forthwith to endow his new conception with life - to create his new hero and put him in action - instead of first composing a long romance, eg. the "Grand St. Graal" about this hero's ancestors and their relation to the early history of the Grail, a romance, indeed, half as long again as that which tells the hero's own story.

Just as in the 'chansons de geste' the poets naturally began by celebrating the great deeds of their heroes, performed in the full vigor of maturity - the deeds that had given these characters their renown - and only later, the original author, or more frequently, another, if occasion arose, exploited the curiosity which the narration of such feats of arms may have awakened among their hearers or readers by presenting, still further, the story of the 'enfances' - achievements of early youth - of the heroes in question, so, doubtless, it was with the Grail. First would come the narrative of the Holy

Vessel, where its quest constituted the highest adventure that would enlist both the bodily and spritual energies of the best knights of Arthur's court; in the second line would come the history of its origins and early fortunes. Thus everything in the "Grand St. Graal" would be conditional on the conceptions and narrative of the "Queste". But when the two romances were brought into intimate manuscript union, as members of the Vulgate cycle, such insertions would have to be made in the "Queste" by the 'assembleurs' as would harmonize it with the new inventions concerning the early history of the Grail, that is, the "Grand St. Graal". Similar insertions were certainly made in the original "Lancelot" after the composition of the Grail romances of the cycle, so that there is nothing arbitrary in assuming modification of this kind in the "Queste".

The "Didot-Perceval", the least known work of the cycle, as we have seen, derives its name from the fact that the solitary manuscript in which it is found belonged to the well-known collector A. F. Didot. This manuscript also contains prose versions of Beron's two poems, "Joseph of Arimathea" and "Merlin", and it is natural to take the "Didot-Perceval" for a prose rendering of the otherwise lost conclusion of Beron's trilogy. But this is certainly not the case. The "Didot-Perceval" lays almost as much stress as the "Conte del Graal" upon the mysterious malady of the Fisher King, but it does not exemplify the spiritual dogmas insisted upon by Beron, and it neglects or misunderstands the incidents to which he intended to pay special attention. It is, in fact, an incongruous jumble of hints from Beron's work, and a confused version of the "Conte del Graal". "Its intention, which is undoubted, to be a sequel to Beron's poems, makes it almost certain that he never completed his trilogy."³

3. A. Nutt Op. cit., P. 33.

Finally, we have the "Perceval le Gallois", or the "Perlesvaus" as it is more commonly called. This romance is written in prose for a certain John, Lord of Nesle in Flanders who was living in the year 1205. A special feature of this romance is the insistence upon Perceval's virginity. It is as marked a feature in this case as it is that of Galahad in the "Queste". It is of great length, and much of it is uninteresting. It also treats to a large extent of matters unconnected with the Holy Grail. An interesting point in the tale is that it is dated at a time when Arthur's court was in a state of demoralization, and when the Knights of the Round Table were much reduced in numbers. There is a religious tone to the entire romance. This work has been in many respects a puzzle to those who have subjected it to a critical investigation. Opinions differ about its date and importance in the Grail cycle.

Chapter 3.

Origin Theories.

(a). Theory of Christian Origin.

"If only Robert's poem were involved, there could be no doubt about the question: the Grail there is the vessel of the Last Supper which was used also to catch the blood of the dead Christ in, and its subsequent history grew out of a combination of uncanonical writings with certain passages in the Bible - especially, the passage in St. Matthew's Gospel that describes the Last Supper."^I

According to Robert, then, the Grail is of Christian origin and its wonder-working powers are like those that were ascribed to many relics in the Middle Ages. But even in Chretien the Grail is really merely a Christian relic. The trouble here is that the "Perceval" is unfinished. Consequently, we have not the early history of the sacred vessel told. That was reserved for the portion which was never composed. All that Chretien actually gives us then, is the account of the procession in the Grail-castle. The Grail is expressly declared to be a holy thing in the passage where it is said that the Fisher King maintained his life merely with a holy wafer in the Grail. So here, too, we have a Christian relic and the whole procession seems a Christian ceremonial - the procession of the Eucharist. The various objects in the Grail procession all figure in the ceremonial of the Byzantine mass, and, accordingly, the most eminent advocates of the Christian origin of the Grail, adopting a suggestion of a former scholar of some note, Konrad Burdach, have been inclined to take this as the model of Chretien's procession.

I. J.D. Bruce Op. cit., P. 258.

There was, as we know, constant intercourse between Constantinople and the West in the twelfth century - especially owing to the condition which the Crusades produced - and Chretien's source may well have contained a description of the Byzantine mass which some crusader had brought home.

It has been objected, however, to the theory of the Eucharistic origin of the procession in Chretien that it takes place in a castle and not in a church - moreover, that the bearer of the Grail is a damsel, not a priest. Such things, it is argued, would have seemed blasphemous to the Middle Ages in the highest degree. On the other hand, as a matter of fact, such processions are not confined in Catholic countries to the churches - and, besides, it is to be remembered that we are dealing with poetry and not with a theological work. Chretien is fitting a religious conception into a romance of chivalrous adventure. The general tone of his work is thoroughly mundane, and there is no reason to believe that he would have shrunk from making use of a Christian theme in the manner that we find the Grail used in the "Perceval."

The Grail legend in some of its versions, we saw, had its source in apocryphal and canonical Scriptures. Again we note that the Grail romances claim for the Church of Britain an origin more illustrious than any to which it had pretended before the twelfth century, one which, if seriously maintained, would have been most unwelcome to the chief ecclesiastical authority of Christendom. What may be called the Grail church has in either form of the Early History an origin only less sacred than that of the official Church of Christendom - and in the Sacramental Vessel form it excels that Church as possessing the most sacred relic of the faith.

Alfred Nutt forwards the conjecture that some of the Grail versions - the "Parzival" and "Grand St. Graal" - are outcomes of the crusading conditions of the early stage of that great conflict between West and East, between Christendom and the Moslem world, which called the Knights Templars into existence. That the Grail romances reveal in part, early attempts to claim for the knightly priesthood a position and sanction equal, if not superior, to those of the regular priesthood.

(b). Theory of Celtic Origin.

"Leaving subsidiary details out of account we may bring all the instances in which the Grail appears under two formulas: that of the kinsman avenging a blood-feud by means of the three magic talismans, sword and lance and vessel; and that of the visit to the Bepelled Castle the inmates of which enjoy, thanks to the magic vessel, a supernaturally prolonged life, from which they are released by the hero's questions concerning that vessel. The one we may call the feud quest, the other the unspelling quest."² "The castle to which the hero - the avenger - must penetrate to win the talismans and that to which he comes with the intent of freeing its lords are both symbols of the Otherworld."³

Nutt, then, finds the original of the Grail in certain magic vessels that had the power of supplying food to an unlimited extent. He cites the cauldron of the Dagda in the Irish legend of the "Tuatha de Danann". Bruce, however, notes considerable doubts about the antiquity of this tradition.

2. A.Nutt Op. cit., P.181.

3. Ibid. P. 183.

Nutt goes on to cite several other Irish cauldrons, the most famous of which being the Cauldron of Bran in the Welsh tale of "Branwen, the daughter of Llyr", a Mabinogion tale which dates from the end of the twelfth century or beginning of the thirteenth.

We have noted before that Nutt considers many inconsistencies in the various descriptions of the Grail. In the later stages of the cycle it is an object of the utmost sanctity: by its origin, its properties, its effect upon its devotees, it appertains to what is holiest in Christianity; and yet it retains to the very end attributes which are purely material, and which could not have belonged to it had it been from the outset the Sacramental Vessel and nothing else. Even the most definitely and fervently spiritual of the romances dwell strongly upon its food-producing qualities. He thus concludes that the Christian is superimposed upon a non-Christian basis. This, too, accounts for the unorthodox aspect to be found in the Grail legends and nowhere else in the medieval legends of a distinctively Christian character.

"In no instance, not even in the case of the "Peredure" or "Sir Perceval" can we be sure that features and incidents have not been distorted in order to fit them into a Christian framework." "Thus, at the back of our present Grail quest stories lie, as we may conjecture, simple tales of which Perceval and Gawain were the heroes. In one the hero avenged the slaying of his father and the harm done to his uncle; in another, by means of lance and sword he avenged the wrong done to uncle and cousin; another told how penetrating to a magic castle within a waste and desert land, he became master of a wonder-working talisman of fertility, and restored plenty to the land; in another, by aid of the same talisman he either restored

a kinsman to health or released him from a supernaturally prolonged life, and took his place."

At an early stage of their development these stories, crystallizing as they did around the same hero, would have a tendency to influence each other, to become confused. From out the mass of varying, but only slightly varying narratives, a few main forms would emerge, differentiated by greater or less insistence upon the vengeance or the unspelling theme, but betraying, as a rule, the mixture of both. The unspelling conception, as the more definitely mythic of the two would suffer most change; the more recondite significance of the old mythic talisman of increase and plenty would tend to disappear; its material food-producing qualities would subsist, and this characteristic as a matter of fact, is found in every version in which the Grail appears, in Chretien as in Wolfram, in the "Queste" as in "Perceval le Gallois".

The recondite significance of the machinery by which the talisman is transferred to the hero's possession might likewise be expected to be lost, and, as a matter of fact, no version offers a satisfactory explanation, nor has any modern interpreter offered one that has won general acceptance. Thanks to the conservation of the story-teller, it retained its place, but it became unintelligible. What related to the vengeance conception, on the other hand, was retained in comparatively unchanged form; mythic it might be in origin and essence, yet its simply human character commended it as much to men of the twelfth century as to those of an earlier age. In the "Peredure" and in Manessier it has suffered little from contamination, but in Chretien and the remainder of the "Conte del Graal" it is subordinated to the unspelling quest, the Grail and question.

Professor A. C. L. Brown, the contemporary exponent of the Celtic theory, has similarly identified the Bleeding Lance of Chretien with various lances of Celtic mythology. Altogether he takes the Grail, lance and sword of Chretien's Grail procession as going back to the shining talismans of the "Tuatha da Danann". Bruce's argument against this is as follows. The sole authority on which this grouping of talismans rests is the seventeenth century Irish historian, Keating. And it is to be remembered further that this late list of objects which we know nothing about is Irish, and we have not a scrap of evidence to prove that it was known only to the Celtic peoples from whom a writer of Northern France would with any probability have drawn his materials.

"No one who is conversant with the way in which man's minds operated in the Middle Ages ought to find any difficulty in thinking of the Grail as a Christianization of a heathen vessel of plenty."⁴ Professor Brown then goes on to show that it was a common thing for men in the earlier Middle Ages to Christianize heathen customs and talismans. The whole paper is an attempt to prove that on Irish soil, previous to the time of Chretien a plenty-giving cauldron with its surroundings had been Christianized into something that closely resembled the Eucharistic service.

"This transition from a Fairy abode with its cauldron of plenty to a church with food supplied by angels can be traced in the Irish 'imrama' or 'oversea voyages', the oldest of which being the 'Imrama Brain', or "Voyage of Bran" of the seventh century."⁵ Brown then cites several of these Irish tales where some form of vessel of plenty or other is in evidence.

4. A.C.L. Brown "From Cauldron of Plenty to Grail" M.Ph. XIV. P.385ff.
(1916. P.385.)
5. Ibid. P. 387.

In these 'imrama' Brown shows a number of connecting steps which may be pointed out in what seems to be a gradual development of a fairy abode with a cauldron of plenty into a monastery of psalm-singing saints who are fed by angels.

It is clear that in Irish a story of a fairy abode with magic cup might have taken on a form which to Chretien and his contemporaries would be likely to suggest an assimilation to the Eucharist feast, and that it might have taken on this form before the time of Chretien.

In a later article Brown questions the authenticity of even Chretien's allusion to the holiness of the Grail.⁶ So far as is known, Chretien's "Perceval", written about 1175, contains the first mention of the Grail, and all other Grail stories are based on this account. Chretien twice describes the Grail at some length; first when Perceval saw it at the castle of the Fisher King, and again when Perceval related to his cousin what he had seen. In neither of these passages does Chretien attach the slightest Christian coloring to the Grail. The only place in which Chretien indicates any connection whatsoever between the Grail and the Mass occurs near the end of his unfinished "Perceval", at a point, 2800 verses after the longer accounts of the Grail. Here a Christian explanation of the Grail is put into the mouth of a hermit who turns out to be Perceval's uncle. After citing as example a manuscript many years older than Chretien - but probably based on an earlier manuscript now lost, where the Grail is not identified with the Mass - Brown concludes that Chretien did not identify the Grail with the Mass and that the identification in the extant manuscripts of "Perceval" is an interpolation.

6. A.C.L. Brown "Did Chretien Identify the Grail with the Mass?"
M.L.N. 41:226-33. 1926.

The Welsh tale "Peredure", of the Mabinogion collection, has been frequently taken by advocates of the Celtic origins as evidence of the existence in Wales of a Perceval legend embodying incidents which gave rise to the legend of the Holy Grail. Alfred Nutt considers it practically a Grail quest before the introduction of Christian symbolism. Furthermore, that the extant "Peredure" must be an amplification of an earlier Welsh tale and that the author of the story in its revised form was strongly influenced by Chretien and drew upon him for material.

Professor Bruce, however, refutes all these theories. He shows that the oldest manuscript of the Welsh tale dates from as late as the thirteenth century, long after the development of the Grail took place. The author of the "Peredure" shows no knowledge of anything concerning the Perceval legend which is not in Chretien. That the construction of the tale bears testimony to its French origin is easily proved when it is compared with the true Welsh tale such as "Kulwch and Olwen". "Peredure" is coherent and straightforward, whereas the native Welsh tales are decidedly incoherent.

The structure of "Peredure is identically the structure of Perceval". Indeed, the actual order of the incidents through the two works is the same. In part there is, for a long stretch of narrative a verbal correspondence between the Welsh and the French. Elsewhere, the errors are manifestly due to the fact that the Welsh writer misunderstood his original.

The chief difference between the two lies in the substitution of the dish with the bleeding head for the Grail. The cause of this difference is quite evident. The Welsh author could make nothing out of the mysterious Grail in Chretien's unfinished poem, so that

he substituted the 'motif' of vengeance which he found in Manessier's continuation, and one which was familiar to him already.

The Welsh tale, then is substantially merely an adaptation of Chretien with some use of Wauchier and Manessier and probably the Eliocadrans-Prologue. "Like the medieval translators, generally, the author does not usually follow his original verbatim, but paraphrases and shortens at will, and, most important of all, gives the style the coloring of the native tales. As we have seen, he has also made some additions, but these are not numerous. There is no need, then, of assuming the very improbable sequence: (i) a Welsh tale about Perceval (ii) a French version of this tale (iii) Chretien's "Perceval", based on the French version (iv) the extant Welsh "Paredure", which is a modification of (i) under the influence of (ii) or (iii). Instead of this complicated scheme, we simply have (i) Chretien plus his continuators (ii) the extant "Paredure" based on the same."

Finally, in regard to these evidences of Celtic origin of the Grail, it has been argued that the position of the fireplace in the hall of the Grail castle as described by Chretien betrays Celtic origin. It is said that the fire before which the Grail-King sat was between four columns and that four hundred men could conveniently sit about it. Now, the chimneys of French medieval castles were the same as at present, whereas the fire here is in the open hearth in the center of the hall, like the one in the palace at Tara, as described in the Irish sagas. Bruce's objections are on the following grounds. We are dealing with a romance - with a narrative of a fantastic kind, like that of a folk-lore, and it is questionable whether we should expect in such a work literal conformity with the

7. J.D. Bruce Op. cit., P.350.

actual customs of that time, even granting that no such primitive hearth may have really existed by way of survival in some French castles of the twelfth century. Moving in the atmosphere of a folk-tale, the poet may have purposely made his description archaic. In any event, there is not sufficient certainty about the matter for this detail to turn definitely the scales in favor of the Celtic theory.

In conclusion, it is obvious to Professor Bruce from this discussion, that the theory that in Celtic folk-tale the Grail legend found its origin is not satisfactory. No one has yet brought forward a folk-tale, Celtic or otherwise, corresponding in incident and setting to the Grail story. Parallels to the individual features of it have to be collected from widely separated sources - sources, too, of uncertain date. "This being the case, there is no need of considering a still further objection - namely, the improbability that a purely folk-lore, food-producing vessel should be identified with the most sacred objects of the Christian faith, the Blood of the Redeemer, the Chalice of the Eucharist - and that not in stories of popular origin, but in the long romances of educated men. As will have been seen, the food-producing quality of the Grail does not appear in the earliest version of the legend - Chrétien's and Robert's. It is a later development, being found first in Pseudo-Wauchier and the very fact that a poet did attach to the vessel this quality, although his predecessors had described it as holy, tends to prove that the medieval romances did not have the scruples that some scholars have imputed to them. But the reasons already advanced for rejecting the Celtic theory, are, we believe, sufficient."⁸

8. J.D. Bruce Op. cit., P.275

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