CHAPTER VI

TENNYSON:
A STUDY IN TREATMENT (II)
TRISTRAM and ISEULT.

The legend of Tristram is the most pathetically beautiful tale in the cycle of Arthurian romance and represents the supreme exaltation of romantic love. Tennyson, however, goes counter to the tradition and represents Tristram as a fallen knight of the Round Table and the love between him and Isolt as base and voluptuous with no transcendent quality to it. Tennyson was a contemporary of W.R. Wagner, the German musician-poet, whose popular opera, Tristan and Isolde wielded great influence on popular taste and in literary circles, but he gives an anti-Wagnerian version of the myth.

Tennyson adapted the tale from Malory, particularly the outline of the story and the Vengeance of Mark. Malory's

1 Malory, VIII-X.
Tristram, however, is an honourable knight who in deeds of
valour and courtesy is next only to Lancelot. King Arthur
praises him in unequivocal terms as:

One of the best knights and the gentlest of the
world, and the man of most worship. For of all
manners of hunting those bearest the prize of all
manners of blowing, thou art the beginning and of
all the terms of hunting and hawking you are the
beginner; of all instruments of music, ye are the
best.²

In Tennyson’s Last Tournament, Tristram, like Vivien,
appears as a representative of Mark’s way when traditionally
speaking, he had nothing in common with Mark who was his
sworn enemy. In Tennyson, he vehemently expounds the
doctrines of Hedonism and Naturalism which Tennyson considered
detrimental to the health of society and fatal for their
civilization. When Vivien flouts the Arthurian principles,
she is motivated by evil but Tristram is a sceptic. He
defends his rejection of the vows by argument.

The vow that binds too strictly snaps itself –
... ay, being snapt –
We run more counter to the soul thereof
Than had we never sworn.³

He questions the authority of King Arthur, the validity of
spiritual values:

² Malory, X (v1), p. 244.
³ The Poems, LT, 11. 652-55.
Whence
Had Arthur right to bind them to himself?
Dropt down from heaven? washed up from out of deep?
They failed to trace him through the flesh and blood
Of our old kings: whence then? a doubtful lord
To bind them by inviolable vows.4

He advocates 'free love-free field,'5 and attributes the
downfall of the Round Table more to the unnatural vows of
King Arthur - 'the wholesome madness of an hour'6 - than to
'the sullying of our Queen.'7 Tristram obviously asserts
that the moral code should be framed in conformity with human
nature, otherwise 'flesh and blood perforce shall violate
them.'8 In short, man's frailties and passions, instead of
being looked down upon, should be accepted as natural.

Tennyson's Tristram utterly lacks the chivalric values
of courtesy, honesty and integrity, though he is a good
warrior, harper and hunter. He flits from object to object
like a butterfly in search of new thrills, for he lives wholly
in the present:

'New life, new love, to suit the newer day
New loves are sweet as those that went before;
Free love - free field - we love but while we may.'9

4 The Poems, LT, 11. 678-83.
5 Ibid., LT, l. 275.
6 Ibid., LT, l. 670.
7 Ibid., LT, l. 677.
8 Ibid., LT, l. 684.
9 Ibid., LT, 11. 279-81.
By breaking off with the Round Table he has severed himself from his past, and he has no thought for the future. Sir Dagonet, King Arthur's fool, accuses Tristram of breaking 'Arthur's music' besides 'making broken music with thy bride Isolt of the White Hands'.

Similarly, in Tennyson's poem, Queen Isolt has no beauty except the physical one. She craves for lies that she may suck 'like sweet vines'. Tristram, as he puts the necklace of red rubies round Isolt's neck, hungers equally for her and for food. Then comes Mark stealthily in the dark and 'clove him through the brain'. Tennyson did not choose the other, more poetical and gentler ending of the story because he wanted to illustrate how violent passions have violent ends.

The clue to the degradation of the characters of Tristram and Isolt lies in Tennyson's omitting the incident of the magic potion. In the traditional myth, Tristram and Isolt drink by misadventure the potent love potion which was meant for the bride and bridegroom, when the former was escorting the latter from Ireland to Cornwall to be married to King Mark. This makes their love and its tragic consequences

10 The Poems, LT, 11. 266, 264.
11 Ibid., LT, 1. 640.
12 Ibid., LT, 1. 748.
inevitable, and exonerates the lovers of any sense of guilt. Tennyson's lovers utterly lack innocence and remorse which alienates our sympathies. Besides, though Tennyson has taken the ending from Malory, he makes no mention of how, 'La Beale Isoude died, swooning upon the cross of Sir Tristram'\(^{13}\) which would have shed an ennobling glow on their love.

Tennyson's aim is to illustrate through the Tristram legend, the disastrous failure of Arthur's knights to keep their vows and, therefore he runs him down cruelly.

**MERLIN and VIVIEN.**

The baffling tale of Merlin who was conceived by the power of the Evil One and born of a maiden; who founded an order and became an agent of its destruction by ordaining the quest of the Grail; who himself a magician, lay bespelled in the toils of his own magic - fascinated the nineteenth century poets who set out to rescue this mythic material from oblivion and remodel it. Quinet, a French contemporary of Tennyson says of his *Merlin l' Enchanteur*: 'My subject is the legend of the human soul till death and beyond.' Merlin, like all mortals combines in him the devil and the

\(^{13}\) Malory, *XX* (xii), p. 449.
saint. But Tennyson identifies Merlin with the poet, the seer, who penetrates to secret wisdom, who has the power to perceive an ideal. His Merlin stands in the line of Tiresias, Lucretius, and the Ancient Sage. In Tennyson's autobiographical poem, _Merlin and Gleam_, Merlin is Tennyson himself and Gleam, in his own words is 'the higher poetic imagination'.

Of the hall of King Arthur, he is the bard, astrologer, architect and wizard. He 'knew the range of all arts'.

It is he who built the city to music and even knew 'the starry heavens'. All these things he learnt from a seer to whom 'the wall that sundered ghosts and shadow-casting men became a crystal.' Tennyson would call that 'wisdom' rather than 'knowledge'. He has the power to see 'tho' life and death; tho' good and ill.' His is intuitive reason which can penetrate to the ideal reality. Vivien's conquest over Merlin symbolises the usurpation of that faculty of the seer by the senses; it means 'rejection of that faculty which perceives the ideal'.

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14 Memoir, ii, p. 366.
15 The Poems, MV, i. 165.
16 Ibid., MV, i. 167.
17 Ibid., MV, ii. 626-28.
by sensuality cannot uphold the ideals of King Arthur.

In Malory, Vivien is 'one of the damsels of the lake, that hight Nimue',\(^19\) who is sometimes friendly, sometimes treacherous. Merlin in his old age ever chased her.

'And always Merlin lay about the lady to have her maidenhood, and she was ever passing weary of him, and fain would have been delivered of him, for she was afraid of him because he was a devil's son.'\(^20\)

Malory has no sympathy with the enchanter, but Tennyson presents the whole story in new colours. Nimue or Vivien is made into the evil genius of the Round Table who in her lustfulness of the flesh does not believe in anything either good or great. The poet himself commented on the poem, "Some, even among the highest intellects became the slaves of the evil which is at first sight half disdained."\(^21\)

Vivien, 'born from death .... Among the dead and sown upon the wind',\(^22\) is of an utterly perverted nature, whose perfect hate for the good has cast out all fear. She creeps out of the court of King Mark into Camelot like Satan creeping into the Middle World to spoil the purpose of God.

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19 Malory, IV (i), p. 75.
20 Ibid.
21 Memoir, ii, p. 131.
22 The Poems, MV, 11. 44-45.
She is an ideal minx, a harlot enchantress about whom Jowett said, "I am not surprised at your Delilah reducing the wise man; she is quite equal to it." She combines in her the roles of Satan and of Eve in order to gain the forbidden knowledge of Merlin. By this episode Tennyson has made the fall of Merlin, which is a peripheral episode in Malory, integral to the central theme of increased sensuality as the root cause of the fall of King Arthur's kingdom.

THE HOLY GRAIL.

In spite of the express wishes of the Queen and the Crown Princess, and the constant nudging from his wife, Tennyson undertook the subject of the 'Grail' after long deliberation because he genuinely felt that 'such a subject could not be handled in these days without incurring the charge of irreverence.' Hallam quotes from his mother's journal that San Graal started on 9 September 1868, had almost been finished by 14 September 1868 and that 'it came

23 Memoir, i. p. 449.
24 Emily wrote to Woolner, 24 Oct. 1863: 'I long for him to be at the Sangreal' and again 11 July 1864: 'I wish he would . . . do the Sangreal for me'. (A. Woolner, Thomas Woolner, 1917, pp. 240, 252).
like a breath of inspiration'. Charles Tennyson points that
the 'subconscious memories of his lost poem',\(^\text{26}\) Lancelot's
Quest of the San Graal aided Tennyson in completing this
work with such rapidity. Tennyson drew the story from
Malory\(^\text{27}\) but modified it considerably.

Tennyson does not interpret the sacred vessel in a
narrow doctrinal sense. He also separates it from its
medieval trappings such as the bleeding spear that smote the
side of Christ. The latter he associates with the
superstitious King Pellam calling it with contempt, 'point
painted red'.\(^\text{28}\) There is no reference to the vessel having
received the blood of Christ and no mention of its magical
powers except that of healing. It is just:

\begin{quote}
The cup, the cup itself, from which our Lord
Drank at the last sad Supper with his own.\(^\text{29}\)
\end{quote}

and

\begin{quote}
... if a man
Could touch or see it, he was heal'd at once,
By faith, of all his ills.\(^\text{30}\)
\end{quote}

\(^\text{27}\) Malory, XIII, vii.
\(^\text{28}\) The Poems, 'Balin and Balan', l. 406.
\(^\text{29}\) Ibid., HG, l. 46.
\(^\text{30}\) Ibid., HG, l. 887.
It also does not symbolise the highest spiritual life, otherwise King Arthur could not have failed to see it. Tennyson says of his poem: 'Faith declines, religion turns from practical goodness and holiness to superstition', 31 to the quest after the supernatural and marvellous and selfish religious excitement. Few are those for whom the quest is a source of spiritual strength.

The Arthurian society was already on the decline when the 'Grail' appeared. People were no longer sure of the values that King Arthur upheld. Discontent was simmering in the hearts of the people who, seized by a yearning for religious certitude, undertook the quest of the Holy Grail. In a way, it was an escapist attitude which the poet condemns squarely. Instead of facing the problems boldly and resolving them, the knights went astray and chased the 'wandering fires', 32 'leaving human wrongs to right themselves'. 33 Such a quest was made for a Galahad or a Percivale but not for all. 'What are ye? Galahads? — no, nor Percivales'. 34 "Ah, Galahad, Galahad", said the King, "for such Art is the vision, not for these'. 35

31 Memoir 11, p. 131.
32 The Poems, HG, 1. 887.
33 Ibid., HG, 1. 894.
34 Ibid., HG, 1. 306.
The Virgin Knight, Sir Galahad is imbued with spiritual truth which hallows and fortifies his life. It is this same spiritual strength which he draws 'from the vision',\textsuperscript{36} that enables him to work wonders in the tourney field. He is able to sit in the 'Seige perilous',\textsuperscript{37} because in losing his life he finds it. Nevertheless, when he is crowned King 'far in the spiritualcity',\textsuperscript{38} he is as much lost to the mankind as Merlin or those who perished in the search of the Holy Grail, and Tennyson does not seem to approve of it.

Tennyson has no respect for a religion that teaches man to turn his back on life, on society, and on his obligations. He firmly believes in practical faith as illustrated in King Arthur,

\begin{quote}
Who may not wander from the allotted field
Before his work be done; but being done,
Let visions of the night or of the day
Come, as they will; and many a time they come.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

Tennyson himself said: 'The Holy Grail is one of the most imaginative of my poems. I have expressed there my strong feeling as to the Reality of the Unseen.'\textsuperscript{40}

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\textsuperscript{36} The Poems, HG, l. 334.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., HG, l. 172.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., HG, l. 483.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., HG, ll. 904-15.
\textsuperscript{40} Memoir, ii, p. 90.
\end{flushleft}
In Malory, when the Grail appears, Arthur is in the hall and he thanks 'unto God of his good grace that he had sent them' the Grail though he regrets the breaking up of his goodly order: 'Alas! . . . Sir Gawaine, ye have nigh slain me with the avow and promise . . . . ye have bereft me of the fairest fellowship and the truest knighthood that ever were seen together in any realm of the world.' But Tennyson's Arthur has gone to rescue a maiden from a bandit hold and, learning of the appearance of the Holy Vessel and of the vows made, laments:

"Woe is me, my knights," he cried
"Had I been here, ye had not sworn the vow." 43

OTHER ARTHURIAN CHARACTERS AND MINOR LEGENDS.

The knights of the Round Table include three nephews of Arthur, born of his half sister Bellicent and Lot. They are Gawain, Modred and Gareth. Originally they were regarded as the offspring of incest, the sons of Arthur and his sister. Swinburne claims, 'the hinge of the whole legend' is Modred's incestuous origin and that 'from the sin of Arthur's

41 Malory, XIII (vii), p. 353.
42 Ibid.
43 The Poems, HG, II. 275-6.
youth proceeds the ruin of his reign and realm'.

But for Tennyson's purpose, incest is irrelevant to the fate of Arthur.

Although, Gawain, Modred and Gareth are real brothers, they differ considerably in nature and temperament. Sir Gawain is the eldest and known for his valour besides being fair of speech. His shield, as displayed in the Hall of Arthur, is 'blazoned rich and bright'. He accompanies King Arthur in his wars against the heathens and falls fighting against the Roman emperor. Tennyson, however, inherits the nineteenth century tendency of denigrating the earlier Arthurian knights, and presents Gawain as 'light of love', brother of the traitor Modred whose 'courtesy' is 'with a touch of traitor in it'.

He disobedys King Arthur in delivering the diamonds to Elaine instead of Lancelot; tries to flirt with Elaine:

'Well — if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!'...
And there he set himself to play upon her
With sallying wit, free flashes from a height
Above her, graces of the court, and songs,
Sighs, and slow smiles, and golden eloquence
And amorous adulation.

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44 Suinburne, 'Microscope', Complete Works XVI, 404-5.
45 The Poems, GL, l. 408.
46 Ibid., LE, l. 635.
47 Ibid., LE, ll. 640-646.
He deceives the simple, credulous knight, Sir Pelleas; joins the quest of the Holy Grail for a thrill of the adventure but forgets all about it the moment he finds 'a silk pavilion in a field, And merry maidens in it',⁴⁸ and when the last grim battle is being fought in the West, his ghost visits King Arthur shrilling "I am blown along a wandering wind, And hollow, hollow all delight"⁴⁹ and forecasts, "Hail King! tomorrow thou shalt pass away"⁵⁰. In Malory the ghost of Gawain appears to warn King Arthur because of his sincere love for his uncle and is granted permission by the prayer of those ladies for whom Gawain had 'done battle in a right-wise quarrel'.⁵¹ Sir Bedivere aptly sums up the character of Tennyson's Gawain:

'Light was Gawain in life and light in death
Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man'.⁵²

Tennyson employs Gawain to represent the spiritual and moral degradation of the Round Table.

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⁴⁸ *The Poems*, HG, 11. 742-43.
⁵² *The Poems*, PA, 11. 56-57.
The picture of Modred, as portrayed by Tennyson, is closer to the source, that is, Malory. He is a treacherous coward, a sneak, and an eavesdropper. When Bellicent tells her sons Gawain and Modred to go away before she tells Leodogran about Arthur's birth, Gawain obeys but 'Modred laid his ear beside the doors, and there half heard'. 53 His shield is 'blank as death'; 54 Modred of the 'narrow foxy face', 55 is like 'a subtle beast...couchant with his eyes upon the throne, ready to spring...'. 56 Contrary to the older tradition, in The Idylls, he is neither the incestuous son of Arthur, nor the lover of Guinevere. In seizing the kingdom, as well as the Queen, he is solely motivated by evil. Tennyson paints him along with the Cornish King Mark and Vivien in the darkest colours with no redeeming feature about him. These are the outside agents of destruction of King Arthur's kingdom.

Gareth, the youngest of the three brothers is estimated by his mother as the best:

'. . . both thy brethren are in Arthur's hall,  
Albeit neither loved with that full love,  
I feel for thee, nor worthy such a love; 57

53 The Poems, CA, 11. 322, 23.
54 Ibid., GL, 1. 409.
55 Ibid., G, 1. 62.
56 Ibid., G, 11. 10-12.
57 Ibid., GL, 11. 81, 82.
He is tall, fair and handsome and in Malory, is named as Sir Baumanns of fairhands. He is loyal, brave and gentle, and imbued to the core with the idealism of King Arthur. Fired with a zeal to enact noble deeds by pouncing 'Down upon all things base and dash them dead, 58 he persuades his mother to allow him to join King Arthur’s Hall. In short, he is an ideal knight of the Round Table during its golden era. In the story of Gareth and Lynette, Tennyson sticks close to Malory except that by the use of apt symbols, he allegorises the story. Besides, Tennyson’s Gareth marries his reviler Lynette whereas Malory’s marries Lynette’s sister.

The story of Geraint and Enid is taken from Charlotte Guest’s Geraint, Son of Erbin in Mabinogion and Chrétien de Troye’s Erec. Tennyson, however, makes a few additions and alterations to link the story with his main theme and shows how the guilty love of Lancelot and Guinevere undermines the golden dream of King Arthur. Tennyson comments:

'The sin not only poisons the spring of life in the sinner, but spreads its poison through the whole community.' 59

Geraint, for fear of the evil influence of the Queen on his wife, Enid, removes her from Camelot and goes to his own land.

58 The Poems, GL, 1. 22.
59 Memoir, II, p. 131.
on a lame pretext. In Mabinogion he goes back simply because his father is too old to look after his lands. Similarly, the words, 'O me, I fear that I am no true wife', 60 which are capable of misconstruction are Tennyson's own. Although Geraint illustrates the power of King Arthur's ideals over the hearts of men, yet with him the homage is less free and spontaneous than with Gareth. Gareth and Enid are exemplars of the ideals of Arthur, Geraint and Lynette, on the other hand, in their perverse obstinacy and reluctant recognition of Arthurian values, present internal forces that lead to the gradual disintegration of the Order. Geraint is brave and his name is 'fair sounded among men for noble deeds', 61 but there is a touch of grossness about him. He is bulky — 'he hurled his huge limbs out of bed', 62 — indolent and sluggish. He is suspicious by nature who readily believes ill of others. 'But when a rumour rose about the Queen, Touching her guilty love for Lancelot, Though yet there lived no proof, nor yet was heard The world's loud whisper breaking into storm'. 63 Geraint, in spite of his worship of the Queen, gives credence to it and takes quick measures to protect his own Enid. Similarly though he loves Enid 'as he

60 The Poems, MG, l. 108.
61 Ibid., MG, l. 427.
62 Ibid., MG, l. 124.
63 Ibid., MG, 11. 24-28.
loved the light of Heaven', 64 the moment he hears fragments of Enid's words — 'I fear that I am no true wife', he jumps at the conclusion that she is 'weeping for some gay knight in Arthur's Hall', 65 and is faithless to him.

The story of Balin and Balan is partly founded on Book II of Malory, in which both the brothers are presented as the knights of Northumberland 66 and their adventures are mixed up with a hostile Lady of the Lake whose head Balin smote off in the presence of King Arthur who grew much annoyed with him. Rhys traces the origin of Balin or Balyon and Balan to Belinus of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and his brother Brennius or King Bran, 67 In Tennyson, Balin, the Savage, is a man of impulsive nature who is exiled from the court of King Arthur for a sudden violence but is received back warmly along with her brother, Balan after three years as 'The Lost one Found was greeted,' 68 in Heaven. Yearning to emulate the gentleness, courtesy and chivalry of Lancelot, he seeks permission to wear the Queen's crown as the device on his shield — 'golden earnest of a gentler life,' 69 in lieu of the 'rough beast.' 70

64 The Poems, MG, 1. 6.
65 Ibid., MG, 1. 117.
68 The Poems, BB, 1. 79.
69 Ibid., BB, 1. 204.
70 Ibid., BB, 1. 192.
upon his shield. But the moment he happens to witness a 
clandestine tryst of Lancelot and Guinevere, his old madness 
returns:

"My father hath begotten me in his wrath. 
I suffer from the things before me, know, 
Learn nothing; am not worthy to be knight — 
A churl, a clown!"\footnote{71}

Tennyson remarks, "Loyal souls are wrought to madness against 
the world".\footnote{72} But the chief cause of his disillusionment 
is that instead worshipping the ideal, that is, Arthur, he 
is attracted to his shadow's shadow in the Queen's crown-royal 
on his shield. But for the final fight between Balin and 
Balan, Tennyson takes hardly anything from Malory. The theme 
of Guinévere's guilt and Vivien's appearance are his own 
additions to connect the story with the central theme of the 
guilty love and to link this story with the story of Merlin and 
Vivien coming next. Through the picture of Sir Pellam 
Tennyson exposes men's blind faith in superstitions and 
wholly condemns the following of ascetic practices at the 
cost of daily obligations. The hall of Pellam is —

\footnote{71}{\textit{The Poems}}, BB, 11. 278-281. 
\footnote{72}{\textit{Memoir}}, ii, p. 131.
lichen bearded, grayly draped
With streaming grass . . .
The ruinous donjon as a knoll of moss,
The battlement overtops with ivy-tops, 73
A home of bats, in every tower an owl.

Sir Pelleas who on his first entry into the Hall of
Arthur brings with him 'the sunshine', 74 and the sweet smell
of the fields', 85 is like Gareth in his youth, in his zest
for enacting noble deeds, in his devotion to the King.
King Arthur's 'lightest whisper moved him more than all the
ranged reasons of the world'. 76 But unfortunately he comes
too late. The eve of Arthur's reign has already set in.
Society has reached its decadent stage. The seemingly fair
is rotten at the heart. The simple Pelleas mistakes the
'beauty of the flesh' 77 of Ettare for 'the beauty of her
soul', 78 and naturally comes to grief. The tale is taken
from Malory but in order to highlight the tragedy of Pelleas,
Tennyson discards the happy ending in Malory, where under
the magic spell cast by Nimue, the spurned 'Ettarre died for
sorrow and the damsel of the lake rejoiced Sir Pelleas, and
loved together during their life days.' 79 In Tennyson,
Pelleas on discovering the treachery of Gawain and truth
about Ettare, rushes to the woods almost half insane with

74 Ibid., PE, 1. 6.
75 Ibid., PE, 1. 5.
76 Ibid., PE, 11. 148, 149.
77 Ibid., PE, 1. 74.
78 Ibid., PE, 1. 75.
79 *Malory*, IV, (xxiii), p. 94.
anger and disgust and turns into a beast. He mauls a churl to vent his anger on King Arthur and lays bare the dishonesty, treachery and hypocrisy of his knights:

"Tell thou the King and all his liars, that I have founded my Round Table in the North, and whatsoever his knights have sworn, my knights have sworn counter to it — and say, my tower is full of harlots, like his court, but mine are worthier, seeing they profess to be none other than themselves." 80

It is, indeed, tragic to see a life so young and promising wasted utterly. Tennyson comments: 'Almost the saddest of the Idylls. The breaking of the storm'. 81

The story of Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat, which Tennyson touched unknowingly, earlier, in The Lady of Shalott is again adapted from Malory's Book XVIII, beginning:

This old baron had a daughter at that time, that was called the fairmaid of Astolat, and ever she behold Sir Lancelot wonderfully; and she cast such a love unto Sir Lancelot that she could not withdraw her love wherefore she died; her name was Elaine la Blaunch. 82

Tennyson wrote about this poem — 'Tender natures sinks under the blight, that which is the highest in them, working their doom.' 83

80 The Poems, LT, II. 77-83.
81 Memoir, ii, p. 131.
82 Malory, XVIII, (ix), 420.
83 Memoir, ii, p. 131.
This poem won loud acclaim as soon as published, as one of the finest love poems in English. In Elaine, Tennyson draws a girl most innocently passionate, delicately beautiful, full of grace, nobility and pathos. The girl must choose between 'Him or death'84 'Him' (Lancelot) she cannot have although as King Arthur says 'this maiden, shaped it seems By God for thee alone', 85 because his 'free love will not be bound.'86 Thus the lawless love of Lancelot and Guinevere is the curse that befalls poor Elaine and kills her. Such is the state of Arthur's kingdom as true love pines and withers and harlots like Vivien and Ettare flourish.

Tennyson's chief addition to the old tale is the fable of diamond, the prize of the tourney. The 'ill-fated'87 diamonds, 'the nine-years-fought-for'88 that came 'from the skeleton of a brother-slayer' are won by Lancelot. And when he presents them:

Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,
Take what I had not won except for you,
These jewels, and make me happy, making them
An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,
Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's
Is tawnier than her cygnet's:89

84 The Poems, LE, 1. 897.
85 Ibid., LE, 11. 1355-6.
86 Ibid., LE, 1. 1368.
87 Ibid., LT, 1. 40.
88 Ibid., LE, 1. 1160.
89 Ibid., LE, 11. 1173-8.
Guinevere, who is burning with jealousy for Elaine, hurls them out of the window. Thus the diamonds of innocence and chastity falling into the river, are lost forever to Arthur and his people.

Sir Kay, the seneschal, and Sir Bedivere, the butler, are the oldest knights to be associated with Arthur in literature and, traditionally, both were supposed to have fallen in war against the Roman emperor. In Tennyson, however, Bedivere outlives the whole brotherhood and it is he who relates the sad story of the last grim battle fought in the West and how Excalibur, being flung back into the sea, was caught by an arm 'clothed in white samite' and how the 'three Queens with crowns of gold' received King Arthur in the 'dusky barge' amidst 'an agony of lamentations, like a wind that shrills All night in a waste land'. The poet is in tune with the tradition in presenting 'the bold Sir Bedivere First made and latest left of all the knights', utterly loyal to his master.

90 The Poems, PA, l. 312.
91 Ibid., PA, l. 366.
92 Ibid., PA, l. 361.
93 Ibid., PA, 11. 368-70.
94 Ibid., PA, 11. 1-2.
"My king,
King Everywhere: and so the dead have kings,
There also shall I worship thee as king." 95

Sir Kay, the mighty warrior of Kulhwch and Olwen who was as tall as a pine tree and who could hold his breath under water for nine days and perform marvellous feats of strength, receives unkind treatment at the hands of Tennyson. In fact, this trend had set in much earlier, Malory being no exception to it, and Tennyson only develops it further. Kay is a distempered man, 'Wan sallow as the plant that feels itself Root bitten by white lichen'. 96 He is rough and indiscreet with Gareth and fails to perceive his true worth for which he is reprimanded by Lancelot —

'Sir Seneschal,
Sleuth-hound thou knowest and gray, and all the hounds;
A horse thou knowest, a man thou dost not know.' 97

As for his gallantry, he is easily overpowerd by Gareth, a mere boy.

Last, but not least of Arthur's knights is Sir Dagonet, the Fool. It is just fitting that the last recruit to the dissolving Round Table should be a fool. The poet had Malory's authority to portray Sir Dagonet as a fool.

95 The Poems, PA, 11. 147-49.
96 Ibid., GL, 11. 443-5.
97 Ibid., GL, 11. 451-3.
King Arthur loved him Sir Dagonet passing well and made him knight with his own hands. And at every tournament, he made King Arthur to laugh. 98

At another place he is referred to as 'Sir Dagonet, King Arthur's fool'. 99 But there is no comparison between the two fools. Malory's Dagonet is a clownish figure who entertains the knights with his crude antics and loud mirth whereas the fool of Tennyson is a tragic character, deeply touching, though full of wit. He embodies a traditional order of social loyalties at a time when the knights of the Round Table take pride in breaking their solemn vows and in flouting the authority. He is '...one true knight, Sole follower of the vows'. 100 Dagonet who has been 'smuttier than blasted grain', 101 has common-sense enough to choose Arthur's illusions to Tristram's philosophies. In the Fall of Arthur's reign, when the knights of his goodly company have fallen off like dead leaves from the trees, and the Queen has fled to Almesbury, the king is left alone with his fool and his adversary. The picture of Dagonet clinging to the feet of King Arthur sobbing, 'I am thy fool, And I shall never make thee smile again', 102 when 'all in a death-dumb autumn-

98 Malory, X, (xii), p. 249.
99 Ibid.
100 The Poems, LT, 11. 302-3.
101 Ibid., LT, 1. 305.
102 Ibid., LT, 11. 755-6.
dripping gloom, Arthur returns home, is difficult to forget. It is strongly reminiscent of King Lear's fool shouting after Lear:

"Nuncle Lear, nuncle Lear, tarry, and take the fool with thee", when the rest of the world has deserted him.

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103 The Poems, LT, 1. 750.
104 King Lear, Act I, Sc. iv.