

INTRODUCTION TO "THE COMING OF
ARTHUR."

"The Coming of Arthur," the first of the Idylls in dramatic sequence, appeared in 1869, and is taken largely from Malory's "Morte Darthur," Book I. It is the prologue to all the Idylls. In it are mingled allegory and story, and the main lines of both are placed before the readers. There is the recognition of the human soul embodied in Arthur, which first appears in a waste and desert land groaning under mere brute power. Its previous history is dark with doubt and mystery, and the questions of its origin and authority form the main subject of the poem.

The Idyll opens with the waste and desolate kingdom of Leodogran, overrun with wild beasts, and devastated by heathen hordes. Leodogran calls on Arthur for help, and Arthur answers the call. While riding by Leodogran's castle, he sees Guinevere, the beautiful daughter of the king, and falls in love with her. Having routed the heathen hosts, and restored the kingdom to Leodogran, he asks the hand of Guinevere in marriage, feeling that with her he may be stronger to lighten the dark land, and make the dead world live. After considerable doubt and deliberation as to Arthur's royal lineage, the king grants his request. Thus stand forth the two central characters of the allegory, Arthur and Guinevere, Soul and Sense, who,

united in the happiness of youth, are to grow more and more apart as life moves on.

The prologue closes with Arthur firmly established on his throne, and married to Guinevere, as the first step in that perfect life which he hopes to make real in the world. He has gathered his victorious Knights about him, bound them by the strictest vows, and organized the Order of the Round Table.

“A glorious company, the flower of men,
To serve as models for the mighty world,
And be the fair beginning of a time.”

THE COMING OF ARTHUR.



LEODOGRAN, the King of Cameliard,
Had one fair daughter, and none other child;
And she was fairest of all flesh on earth,
Guinevere, and in her his one delight.

For many a petty king ere Arthur came
Ruled in this isle, and ever waging war
Each upon other, wasted all the land;
And still from time to time the heathen host
Swarm'd overseas, and harried what was left.
And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
But man was less and less, till Arthur came.
For first Aurelius lived and fought and died,
And after him King Uther fought and died,
But either fail'd to make the kingdom one.
And after these King Arthur for a space,
And thro' the puissance of his Table Round,
Drew all their petty principedoms under him,
Their king and head, and made a realm, and reign'd.

And thus the land of Cameliard was waste,
Thick with wet woods, and many a beast therein,
And none or few to scare or chase the beast;
So that wild dog and wolf and boar and bear