

And horrors only proven a blooming boy.
So large mirth lived, and Gareth won the quest.

1390

And he that told the tale in olden times
Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,
But he that told it later says Lynette.

INTRODUCTION TO "LANCELOT AND ELAINE."

TENNYSON has followed closely the lines of the original romance. He has reproduced the tale with exquisite beauty of thought and touch of fancy. The central figure of the Idyll is Lancelot. On either side stand the contrasted figures of Guinevere and Elaine, both of whom loved him well, but differently, — the one beautiful, of queenly dignity and splendor, but voluptuous and sin-stained, the other a simple maiden, full of sweetness and purity. Lancelot is the peerless knight, gallant and courteous as ever, but with face marred by long conflict between "the great and guilty love he bare the queen" and his loyalty to his lord. Woven in and out of the Idyll is the story of the development to which the love of Lancelot and Guinevere has now attained. In his treatment of the subject, the poet, as Elsdale remarks, trusts to the "effect of alternating light and shadow, to the artistic harmonies and contrasts produced by rapidly changing sequence and grouping of his incidents."¹ We are led rapidly on through shifting scenes, strikingly contrasted, until we come to that characteristic and culminating one between Guinevere and Lancelot in the oriel of the palace. The beautiful soliloquy of Lancelot is a fitting close of the Idyll.

¹ "Studies in the Idylls."

That the reader may more readily understand the Idyll of "Lancelot and Elaine" a brief description of the chief personages is appended.

Lancelot du Lac. Most of those prominent at King Arthur's court had, at least, a historic prototype. It is doubtful if this is true of Lancelot. Some writers are of the opinion that he is a reproduction of a certain Welsh king, Mael, a contemporary of Arthur. There are some points of resemblance between the two, but the opinion seems hardly warranted. The Lancelot of romance is undoubtedly a creation of Map. Whether Map founded his character on a preëxisting Welsh chief is a question. It is more probable that he was a fictitious character, created to embody Map's idea of a purely heroic, chivalric knight of the twelfth century. According to Map, he was the son of King Ban of Brittany, at whose death the infant Lancelot was carried away by Vivien, the Lady of the Lake, who sprang with the child into a deep lake; hence the name Lancelot du Lac. He was afterwards fostered by her, and when he grew to youth was taken to Arthur's court to receive the honor of knighthood. Subsequently by his prowess he became the most renowned knight of the Round Table, and the favorite of Arthur. He it was who acted as Arthur's ambassador to Leodegraunce, to ask the hand of the beautiful Guinevere, when commenced that fatal love which clouded his whole future life.

Guinevere, or, as the bards call her, *Gwenhwyvar*, was the daughter of Leodegraunce, or Leodegran, king of Cameliard. She became the wife of Arthur, and queen of his court. She is represented by the early bards as "of

a haughty disposition even in her youth, and still more haughty in her womanhood." She is jealous, proud, and quick to anger. Her unlawful love for Lancelot, and his attachment to her, brought dishonor to Arthur's court and destruction to the Order of the Round Table.

Elaine was the daughter of Sir Bernard, Lord of Astolat. She represents a gracious and beautiful type of innocent girlhood, and the story of her unrequited love moves all hearts.