

NOTES.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.

Lines 1-5. These introductory lines serve as a sort of second and explanatory title.

Line 1. "The bold Sir Bedivere," a stereotyped epithet often applied to Sir Bedivere after the model of Homer. Compare Homer's "swift-footed Achilles." It is one of the means adopted by the poet to give the poem an archaic flavor.

Line 2. Compare "The Coming of Arthur," lines 175-176:—

"Then Bedivere, the first of all his knights,
Knighted by Arthur at his crowning —"

Compare also "Malory," XXI. 4. At the end of the last great battle, Bedivere is left the sole survivor of all Arthur's knights.

Lines 9-28. These lines are not in the 1869 edition. They are an afterthought of the poet, suggested, perhaps, by the doubt and uncertainty of the times. They are the outburst of a noble soul harassed with doubt and fear for the outcome of things.

"I remember," says Stopford Brooke, "the years in which these lines were written, and the temper of society, and they describe that temper with a great imagination. It was a time when every belief was challenged, when society had almost ceased to hope or believe in the future even of man on the earth, and when political and social ideas which prophesied the advent of a more unselfish world were laughed at as unpractical."

Do these lines contribute to the effect of the poem? Do they aid our conception of the allegory? Is their simplicity of diction significant?

Lines 25-26. ". . . and all my realm reels back into the beast." Compare "The Coming of Arthur," lines 10-12;

"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."

Compare also "The Last Tournament," lines 122-125:—

"Or whence the fear lest this my realm, uprear'd,
By noble deeds at one with noble vows,
From flat confusion and brute violences,
Reel back into the beast, and be no more?"

Line 28. "I pass but shall not die." Even in his despair Arthur has faith in the prophecy of Merlin. See "The Coming of Arthur," lines 418-421:—

"And Merlin in our time
Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn
Tho' men may wound him, that he will not die,
But pass again to come."

Lines 29-49. These lines illustrate the poet's fondness for prophetic dreams and forecasts of the future. The appearance of such vision, significant of coming evil before a fatal fight, is common in old chronicles. The pupil will recall the appearance of Cæsar's ghost to Brutus before the battle of Philippi.

Ellsdale remarks that there is a sort of retributive justice in making it the ghost of Gawain that has to proclaim the hollowness of that delight which the pleasure-seeking Gawain had all his life followed.

Line 33. "Hollow, hollow all delight!" For the character of Gawain see "Lancelot and Elaine," lines 551-557, and the note on the same.

Line 36. "And I am blown along a wandering wind." Tennyson was an admirer of Dante, and this line was probably suggested by "The Inferno," Canto V., where the punishment of "carnal sinners" is thus described:—

"The stormy blast of hell
With restless fury drives the spirits on
Whirled round and dash'd amain with sore annoy,
When they arrive before the ruinous sweep,
Their shrieks are heard, their lamentations, moans,
And blasphemies 'gainst the good Power in heaven."

Lines 38-40. "Like wild birds . . . and wail their way," etc. Again compare "The Inferno," Canto V., i:—

"As cranes,
Chanting their dolorous notes, traverse the sky,
Stretched out in long array, so I beheld
Spirits: who came loud wailing, hurried on
By their dire doom."

Line 41. "Shrill'd." Note the effect of the trochees in the first foot, together with the abrupt break after the first half foot. Is this characteristic of Tennyson?

Line 43. "As of some lonely city," etc. Contrast this simile with that in lines 457-461 below, which describe the jubilant cries welcoming Arthur to the isle of rest.

Line 48. "All that haunts the waste and wild." Compare "Guinevere," lines 127-129:—

"Fled all night long by glimmering waste and weald,
And heard the spirits of the waste and weald
Moan as she fled, or thought she heard them moan."

All creation seems to Arthur to mourn his failure.

Lines 50-64. Contrast the practical, matter-of-fact nature of Sir Bedivere with the highly wrought, imaginative nature of King Arthur. Bedivere does not believe in ghosts or dreams. They are of no significance. Let Gawain go. There is work to be done. Modred and his knights are at hand.

"Arise, go forth and conquer as of old."

Line 59. "Modred." Modred is *the villain* of the Idylls. His character, as developed throughout the poem, is contemptible, treacherous, and malicious. He is frequently mentioned, but never appears in an honorable light. Compare "Guinevere," lines 569-572:—

". . . The man they call
My sister's son — no kin of mine, who leagues
With Lords of the White Horse, heathen and knights,
Traitors . . ."

Line 66. "In the west." According to the romances, when Arthur, hearing of Modred's treachery, returned from his war with Lancelot, Modred retreated toward the west, where he made his last stand.

Lines 67-70. For a list of these wars see "Lancelot and Elaine," lines 283-316. See also the note on the same.

Line 77. "One lying in the dust at Almesbury." Guinevere had taken refuge in the nunnery at Almesbury after her love for Lancelot was disclosed. Arthur, while on his way to meet Modred, came hither for a farewell interview. At his approach the queen was conscience-stricken, and —

"Prone from off her seat she fell
And grovelled with her face against the floor."

Line 78. Meaning of this line?

Line 81. "Lyonnesse." See "Lancelot and Elaine," line 35, note.

Malory places the scene of the battle near Salisbury. Geoffrey of Monmouth, in Cornwall, on the river Cambula. Tennyson, in harmony with the mystic realm of Arthur in the Idylls, chooses the mythical land of Lyonnesse for the scene of the battle.

Lines 82-87. These lines form a most fitting introduction to the battle scene which follows. Note their pictorial power. They are an excellent example of Tennyson's power in this direction.

Line 87. "The phantom circle of a moaning sea." A striking figure suggesting the vague, dimly defined outlines of a distant sea-horizon.

Lines 90-91. "When the great light of heaven," etc., *i.e.* December 21, or, approximately, the end of the year. It will be remembered that Tennyson intended the story of the Idylls should run through one complete year. Accordingly, the final catastrophe and death of Arthur occur at the close of the year.

Lines 90-135. The vividness and realism of this fine description of the battle can hardly be surpassed, yet it is evolved for the most part from Malory's simple account: "And never was there seen a dolefuller battle in no Christian land. For there was but rushing and riding, foining and striking, and many a grim word was there spoken either to other, and many a deadly stroke."

While the poet has not obtruded any allegorical significance in his description of the battle, we can hardly fail to recognize in veiled language a description of the whole battle of humanity for life and faith and hope in the midst of its chill misery.

Tennyson would often quote these lines as some of his best work, and would allow that it was a "presentment of human death" as well as the overthrow of the "old order."

Line 95. "A death-white mist," etc. Contrast this dismal picture with the brilliant picture of Arthur's first battle in "The Coming of Arthur," lines 95-99:—

“When Arthur reached a field-of-battle bright
With pitch'd pavilions of his foe, the world
Was all so clear about him, that he saw
The smallest rock far on the faintest hill
And even in high day the morning star.”

Lines 108–117. Note the effect of the rhythm and the words in echoing the sense.

Lines 120–121. Note the effect of the dominant letter *s* in appropriately expressing the flash of the waves.

Lines 129–135. This last picture of the gradual inroad of the sea is finely conceived and powerfully expressed.

Lines 139–141. Mark the allegorical significance here. The “great voice that shakes the world” seems hardly warranted from the gentle and gradual rising of the tide on a flat, sandy shore. It is rather the voice of Time which gradually pulls down and destroys all things. The sea beating on the coast and wearing away the shore is an apt symbol of the effects of Time.

Lines 147–153. The prosaic Sir Bedivere, little inclined to moralize, again takes the practical view of the situation. His loyalty is not in doubt, his practical nature insists on prompt action in the work to be done.

Line 162. “King am I,” etc. Noble words and a fitting climax. Aroused by the words of Sir Bedivere, Arthur again rises to the full dignity of his kingdom, and the grand purpose for which he has come.

Line 168. “Excalibur.” For a description of this famous weapon see “The Coming of Arthur,” lines 294–308.

Line 170. At this point the poem lapses into the original fragment, “Morte d’Arthur,” published in 1842. The poet is not over particular to join the old and new without a perceptible break. The old introduction, “So all day long,” etc., is retained as a sort of recapitulation of what has gone before, that our attention may be concentrated on the scene that follows.

The remainder of the narrative, although written so many years before the rest of the Idylls, is in the best Tennysonian vein, and serves to rank “The Passing of Arthur” as one of the finest of the Idylls.

Lines 176–180. Note the conciseness yet vividness with which this picture is drawn.

Line 178. “Strait.” Note the use of the word here,

Line 180. “A great water.” This phrase has often been criticised as affected phraseology. What would be the difference in effect if the poet had used the more definite word “lake” for the vague term “water”?

Line 191. “Tho’ Merlin sware,” etc. Compare “The Coming of Arthur,” lines 150 *et seq.*, also lines 418–423.

Line 199. “Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.” An exact repetition of line 284 in “The Coming of Arthur.” The line is again repeated in line 312 below.

Line 205. “And fling him far.” The personal pronoun “him” is used interchangeably with “it” in referring to Excalibur. The former has a suggestion of affection to Arthur. He regards the sword as a person endowed with life and power.

Lines 207–432. In the following pathetic episode Tennyson follows Malory closely, but here and there lights up the narrative with poetic touches of his own.

Lines 212–215. This vivid picture is expanded from Malory’s simple words, “So Sir Bedivere departed.”

Lines 224–226. Compare these lines with the simple prose of Malory, “The pommel and the haft were of precious stones.”

Line 228. “This way and that dividing the swift mind.” This line is almost an exact reproduction of Virgil’s line in the “Æneid,” IV. 285:—

“*Atque animum nunc huc celerem nunc dividit illuc.*”

“And he divides his swift mind now this way, now that.”

The line is expressive of his indecision.

Lines 230–232. Malory says, “And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree.” Note Tennyson’s minute study of outward nature, and reproduction of detail.

Lines 238–240.

“I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag.”

One of the finest examples of onomatopœic effect in the English language.

“These two phrases mark exactly the difference of sound produced by water swelling up against a permeable or impermeable barrier.”

—Brimley.

Line 251. “Across the ridge.” This phrase was inserted in “Morte d’Arthur,” in 1853,

Lines 266-268. "What record," etc. These words show that Sir Bedivere fails to recognize the scope of Arthur's purpose and life-work.

Line 272. "Wrought by the lonely Maiden of the Lake." See "The Coming of Arthur," lines 282-293. For a further account see Malory I. 23.

Line 280. Almost a repetition of line 233. The frequent repetition of single lines is an echo of Homer.

Line 290. "Laid widow'd," helplessly bereft. Tennyson uses the metaphorical word widow'd several times in his poetry. "My widow'd race" and "my heart, though widow'd," in "In Memoriam," likewise "widow'd channel" in "Queen Mary."

Line 300. "I will arise and slay thee with my hands." Forman remarks that this line is "one of the master touches of a masterly poem." Such a passionate outburst is quite unusual to the character of Arthur as depicted by Tennyson. It is a touch of humanity.

Lines 301-310. "In this description of Sir Bedivere's last and successful attempt to throw the sword into the lake every word tells of rapid, agitated, determined action, refusing to dally with temptation that had twice overcome him." — Brimley.

Of lines 307-310 the same author remarks: "An inferior artist would have shouted through a page, and emptied a whole pallet of color, without any result but interrupting his narrative, where Tennyson in three lines strikingly illustrates the fact he has to tell, — associates it with one of nature's grandest phenomena, and give a complete picture of this phenomenon."

Line 307. "A streamer of the northern morn," *i.e.* the Aurora Borealis, or northern light.

Line 308. "Moving isles of winter," floating icebergs.

Lines 335-336. "Half rose, slowly, with pain," etc. Note the effect of the metre in depicting the effort of the wounded king to rise.

Lines 350-351. Note the realism in these lines. Compare also "Guinevere," lines 597-599:—

"The money vapor rolling round the King,
Who seemed the phantom of a giant in it,
Enwound him fold by fold, and made him gray."

Lines 354-360. Another excellent example of onomatopœa.

"As clear as a piece of ringing, smiting, clashing sound as any to be found in Tennyson. . . . We hear all the changes on the vowel *a* — every sound of it used to give the impression — and then, in a

moment, the verse runs into breadth, smoothness, and vastness: for Sir Bedivere comes to the shore, and sees the great water:—

"And on a sudden, lo, the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon,"

in which the vowel *o* in its changes is used as the vowel *a* has been used above."—Brooke.

Line 356. "The bare black cliff clang'd round him," etc. Observe the effect of alliteration and the successive, accented monosyllables.

Line 361. Malory's account is as follows: "And when they were at the water-side, even fast by the bank hove a little barge with many fair ladies in it, and among them all was a queen, and they all had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur. 'Now put me into the barge,' said the king; and so they did softly, and there received him three queens with great mourning, and so they set him down, and in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head; and then that queen said, 'Ah! dear brother, why have ye tarried so long?'"

"He would be a bold critic who should pronounce that Tennyson has improved this. He would be a still bolder critic who should wish to see a touch or letter of Tennyson's version altered. The truth is that in this case there is no parallel between the poet and the romancist. Each had to tell a story in itself so wondrously beautiful, so touching, so suggestive, so picturesque, that it mattered little how it was narrated, provided only it was narrated with fidelity. . . . Tennyson's elaborate beauties command our admiration. Malory's simple words go straight to the heart. In the one case we dwell upon the eloquence of the speaker; in the other we are lost in the story that he tells." — J. Churton Collins.

Line 366. "Three queens." See "The Coming of Arthur," lines 275-278:—

"Three fair queens,
Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends
Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright
Sweet faces, who will help him at his need."

These three queens in the allegory probably typify the three Christian virtues, Faith, Hope, and Charity.

Line 367. "A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars." The cry is from "a company of spirits amid mountains whose natural power of echo is heightened by the silence of the night, the clearness of the

winter air, and the hardening effects of a frosty, wintry night. Such a cry, at such a time, and in such a place, would thrill from rock to rock, from summit to summit, till it seemed to pierce the sky in a hustling storm of multitudinous arrow sounds."—Brimley.

Lines 369-371. "Like a wind . . . of the world." Observe how vividly the simile expresses the idea of utter loneliness and mournfulness.

Line 381. "Like the wither'd moon," *i.e.* like the moon fading before the rising sun.

Line 383. "Dash'd with drops of onset," *i.e.* dashed with drops of blood from the assault.

For "onset" see glossary.

Lines 389-393. This beautiful passage, contrasting Arthur in his hour of darkness with Arthur in his hour of glory, and making his prowess in the lists typical of the latter, is hardly in keeping with Lancelot's description of Arthur in "Lancelot and Elaine," lines 283-316. In the latter passage it is as a warrior, and not as a tilter, that Arthur is pictured in his greatness.

Line 396. "My forehead and my eyes." The use of specific organs for the general term, face, is Homeric.

Line 401. "The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh." See Matthew ii. 11. Arthur is compared to the star of the East which appeared to the wise men, and led them to Bethlehem.

Line 403. "An image of the mighty world." The old belief was that the world was round and flat. Malory has the following concerning the Round Table: "Also Merlin made the Round Table in tokening of the roundness of the world, for by the Round Table is the world signified by right. For all the world, Christian and heathen, repair unto the Round Table, and when they are chosen to be of the fellowship of the Round Table, they think them more blessed and more in worship than if they had gotten half the world."

Lines 405-406. The allegory is apparent here. Humanity sees its ideals shattered, and in the new doctrines is forced to look for others.

Lines 408-423. Tennyson was very fond of reading these lines aloud. In them he strikes his fundamental chord. "He is filled with horror for many of the so-called movements of advance. He is suspicious of the new intellectual, social, and political efforts that characterized his age. Men's souls were shaken by the warring of the high and holy."—Macallum.

Line 408 is a repetition of line 508 in "The Coming of Arthur."

Line 416. "Pray for my soul." Note the effect of the trochee in the first foot in expressing "entreaty."

Line 423. "Bound by golden chains," etc. The old notion that the earth is attached to heaven by a golden chain is frequently alluded to in English literature. Jeremy Taylor writes, "Faith is the golden chain to link the penitent sinner to God." Archbishop Hare says, "This is the golden chain of love, whereby the whole creation is bound to the throne of the Creator." Compare also Milton, "Paradise Lost, II. 1051:—

"Hanging in a golden chain
This pendant world."

Many other allusions might be cited.

Line 427. "To the island-valley of Avilion." Avilion, or Avalon, is supposed to have been the name of a valley in the neighborhood of Glastonbury, where Joseph of Arimathea is said to have first landed with the Holy Grail. It is called an island, because nearly surrounded by the winding of a river. Some romances make it an ocean island, the abode of Arthur. In the Celtic myths it is an island where the wounded are healed and the old made young. In Tennyson it is a mystical place like the other localities in the Idylls.

Line 428. This description of Avilion was suggested, perhaps, by Homer's account of Elysium in the "Odyssey," IV. 566, and VI. 42.

Line 435. "That, fluting a wild carol ere her death." There was a long-standing tradition that the swan just previous to death sings a sweet song. The tradition has no foundation of fact. Compare Tennyson's "The Dying Swan," Stanza III.

Line 437. "With swarthy webs," *i.e.* with her swarthy, webbed feet.

Line 440. The original fragment ends here. The twenty-nine lines added later continue the mystical story. "The passing soul, having fought a good fight, having finished its course, having kept the faith, is received beyond the limit of the world."—Littledale.

Line 445. "From the great deep," etc. This "weird rhyme" is a repetition of Merlin's "riddling triplets" in line 410 of "The Coming of Arthur." According to an ancient belief, "Animated beings have three states of Existence, that of Inchoation in the Great Deep, or lowest point of Existence; that of Liberty in the State of Humanity; and that of Love, which is happiness in Heaven." Read Tennyson's "De Profundis: The Two Greetings," *i.e.* birth and death.

"Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep,

* * * * *

To that last deep where we and thou are still."

Line 460. Contrast these sounds of welcome with the dim cries of despair in lines 41-45, and of lamentation in lines 368-369 above.

Line 469. The cycle of the mystic year is now complete from Arthur's birth. It is the last night of the old year as Arthur passes away, and the sun rises bringing in a new year. The poem closes with a line of hope worthy of the noble character that Tennyson has depicted.

GLOSSARY.

CONTAINING OBSOLETE WORDS, AND WORDS USED IN AN UNUSUAL SENSE IN THE FOREGOING IDYLLS.

ABBREVIATIONS:

C. A. Coming of Arthur.	M. E. Middle English.
G. L. Gareth and Lynette.	M. L. Middle Latin.
L. E. Lancelot and Elaine.	A. S. Anglo-Saxon.
P. A. Passing of Arthur.	G. German.
O. F. Old French.	It. Italian.
O. E. Old English.	

Affiance. L. E. 1346. Trust, confidence. Used in this sense by Shakespeare. Its more common meaning is betrothal or marriage. M. E. *affiance*, *afiance*. O. F. *afiance*, from *after*, to trust in.

Allowed of. L. E. 110. Approved by. This *allow* is from the French *allouer*, to approve; from the Latin *ad*, to, and *laudare*, to praise. It must not be confused with "allow" in the sense of "permit." See L. E. 152 and 201.

Anon. L. E. 342. Soon afterward; literally, in one instant. M. E. *anon*; originally a prepositional phrase, *on an*, i. e. in one.

Armlet. L. E. 1219. A little arm, hence an ornament for the arm; a metal band or ring worn on the upper arm. From *arm* and the diminutive suffix *let*.

Barren-beaten. L. E. 160. Made barren by being trodden. One of the many compounds formed and used by Tennyson as epithets.

Battle-writhen. L. E. 807. Twisted by wielding sword and spear in battle. Another Tennyson compound. *writhen* is an obsolete participle from *writhe*. M. E. *writhen*, to twist.

Belike. G. L. 1312. L. E. 214. Probably in early modern English also written *belyke* or *bylyke*; apparently of dialect origin, *be*, by, prep., and *like*, likely, i. e. by what is likely.

Black-stoled. P. A. 365. Black-robed. The *stole* was a long, loose robe. M. E. *stole*. Latin *stola*, a robe.