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The Anchor

"Spars in Sea"

VOLUME XX

OCTOBER, 1906

NUMBER 1

THE ARTHURIAN CYCLE.*

Paul E. Hinkamp, '07.

When a proud and warlike nation is deprived of its cher-
ished freedom, it longs to keep alive the memory of its ancient
glory in legend and song. Thus a sort of hero-worship arises,
and the deeds and adventures, whether real or fictitious, of
many warriors, gather around the name of one. This is per-
haps the most probable explanation of the rise, among the
ancient Celts of Britain, of that large fund of legendary lore
and great wealth of chivalric romance, which we know as the
story of King Arthur and the Round Table. Perhaps no other
mediaeval or modern legend has exhibited such great vitality,
or has called forth the efforts of so many and so various
writers, as this story of Arthur. Having its origin in remote
Celtic tradition, it worked its way to Mediaeval France, where,
fed by tributary streams, it grew and swelled till it spread
into Britain, the Empire, and even more distant lands. Then
it dwindled and almost disappeared, only to flow on the sur-
face again in the last century, somewhat scantily in its old
French bed, but all the more fully in German and English.

This multiplicity of handlers, each giving to the legend his
own version, and stamping it with his own mark, has its ad-
vantages and its disadvantages. In the first place, the story
has grown to the magnitude of a cycle, and has been presented
in all its possible phases and colors. But, on the other hand,
this growth from different sources, in different ways, with

* Awarded the Geo. Birkhoff, Jr., prize last June.
varying increments, moulded by unlike minds, has given rise to serious discrepancies, amounting often to direct contradiction, until the mass of the romance is such a tangled incompatibility, that almost all unity and identity is lost. And yet not wholly lost. For throughout all this imaginative, intricate and shadowy literature there is a unity of theme, and to a great extent, a sameness of characters, which have given it a distinct setting, consecrated by a popularity long and wide, and cherished by an admiring world.

The task of all those who have given us a version of the romance, has been to gather together the loose threads of the old Celtic traditions, and other versions already extant, assign to each adventure its proper place, and knit them all into one grand scheme. Truly, such a task might engross the best powers of the loftiest genius. And more than one genius has attempted it.

To discuss the sources and chronological order of the earlier writings on the subject with any definiteness is practically impossible. It is also dangerous and useless, and therefore the venture may well be wholly omitted here. The first writer concerning whom there can be no dispute or doubt is Geoffrey of Monmouth, who, a little before the middle of the eleventh century, wrote a little book containing a story which has in it the merest hints of the Arthurian legend. He "set the heather on fire," and perhaps in no other literary instance on record did the blaze heighten and spread with such speed and intensity.

Soon a Frenchman, Chrétien de Troyes by name, appeared as the first to collect this material and weave it into a considerable romance. He wrote between the years 1164 and 1173. This advent of a new fiction indicates a change in the condition of society; and for some part of its delicate and tender sentiment even the modern world is indebted to this minstrel. We know but little about this writer except that his work gained favor at the French court, and we can infer from his work that he was a well-educated, content, genial, considerate and thoughtful man. His version of the Arthurian legend is important, not only because it is among the first efforts on the subject, but also because it probably gave it a tone and manner of structure which has never departed from it. For not only in style and decoration, but also in idea and outline, Arthurian romance is a French construction.

Chrétien de Troyes wrote in octosyllabic couplets, particularly light and skipping, somewhat destitute of force and grip, but full of grace and charm. Nothing can appeal to human instinct more than his bald way of telling how the knights "put the key of love in the locks of the hearts" of their fair ladies. Here we find a simple romance, characterized by a mysticism profound with parable. The language, costume, manners, and pictures portrayed, are thoroughly characteristic, although sometimes their sketching is too fanciful and fantastic. This version of the story gives us a good idea of the looseness of its construction and the artificiality of the way it is generally told. Adventure produces adventure in infinite series, not like a tree whose branches are arranged symmetrically, but one joint growing upon another with surprising irregularity, thus forming not merely a misshapen but almost a shapeless mass.

But Chrétien de Troyes was not a mere jumbling picture-painter. His genius was born of enthusiasm, derived from contact with a new society, open to gentle emotions, and, as to a source in a lonely forest, he showed the path to a clear well of sparkling romance, from which mankind will forever drink with pleasure. Nor was he a mere compiler of rather unrelated legends; in some of his characters he gives us a very fair interpretation of the life of his day. Thus in the "Erec" we see the mediaeval baron, frank and affectionate, but imperious and unwilling to be blamed by his wife, even though he confesses the rebuke is deserved. And in his wife Enide we have a noble woman, disturbed by her husband's loss of honor, daring his anger to admonish him and defying his wrath in order to save him. The character of the lady is thus allowed to shine forth in all its brilliancy, as the proper center of the action. And again, in "Perceval," we see the author trying to interweave two parallel plots in such a manner as to afford contrast and avoid monotony. It is an early attempt to exhibit in fiction the history of mental development. The grief and counsel of a mother, when her only child first leaves home, is very delicately portrayed. The situation in which the youthful Perceval, unconsciously an orphan, finds himself, achieves his
that the loss of the Holy Grail shall be accomplished through a being born with both the diabolical and human natures inasmuch as the discomfort has been made by one having both the divine and human natures. The experiment, however, is only partly successful, for Merlin, the agent born to realize this object, although endowed with supernatural powers and knowledge, and not always scrupulous in the use of them, is yet, through the goodness of his mother, always on the side of the angels rather than of his paternal kinsfolk. After a lengthy narration of the adventures of this youthful Merlin, he is brought into real connection with Arthur. King Arthur, if indeed, there ever was such man, began his career in South Wales, about 500 A.D. Aided by the enchanter, Merlin, he draws the sword from the rock and claims the throne, for whose occupant the people have been waiting long.

Whether Arthur ever actually existed or not, is foreign to a consideration of the cycle itself, and, indeed, the real history and geography in the story are things

"Apart from place, withholding time,
But flattering the golden prime."

Merlin, always making two lovers happy, instead of attending to the strict dictates of morality, brings about the marriage of Arthur to the lovely Guinevere, and acts as assistant and adviser to Arthur generally, until, inclosed in his enchanted prison, made by the fairy woman whom he trusted, and to whom he imparted the secret of his powers, he practically drops out of the story. But he has already done much. He has established Arthur's court and regime in prosperity and power. Among other things which he has done is to preside over the founding of the famous Round Table and its one hundred and fifty knights. These knights, all picked men, knighted by Arthur, each one of whom could have said,

"My good blade carves the casques of men,
My tough lance thrusteth sure,
My strength is as the strength of ten
Because my heart is pure."

lived at his court in jolly luxury, dining at one huge round table in glorious revelry. These companions were bound by
oath to protect each other to the utmost and undertake the most perilous adventures. The action centers at Camelot, with the realm well under control, and with a constant succession of adventures, culminating in the Quest of the Holy Grail. Although every version of the story contains passages of great, and sometimes uncanny, beauty, the excessive mysticism, the stragling conduct of the story, the extravagant praise of virginity in and for itself, and the disproportionate space allowed to mere kite-and crow fighting, have offended many. Among the ingredients of the whole cycle few are more daring and enigmatic than the story of Merlin. The almost blasphemous fiction of his origin to be the Antichrist, the reversal of the diabolical plan, his election to prepare the way for the return of the Holy Grail, and the ambiguity attached to his works and character, so that the order he has founded is broken on the quest he has ordained, while he himself finally is bespelled in his own magic, present a weird tangle, which exacts yet baffles, the imagination.

In regard to the Holy Grail itself, not much which is essential to the plot and plan of the legend is told. Kept in a castle owned by a cripple, it is seen at intervals by different knights visiting there, when suddenly, in some way, nowhere fully explained, it is lost, being snatched away to Heaven because the times grew evil. Before the introduction of the story of the quest for it, however, the legend of Lancelot is brought in.

The story of Lancelot at once completes and exalts the cycle. The necessity for a love-interest was felt, and, according to the thought of the times, it was felt with equal force that the lover must not be the husband. So a young knight, "Like Paris handsome, and like Hector brave," is brought in to be the sinful lover of the queen Guinevere. Knighted by Arthur at the court, the graces of his person, his courage, and his skill in arms made an instantaneous and indelible impression on the heart of the queen, while her charms inspire him with an equally ardent and constant passion. He soon becomes the best of all the knights, and is more and more worshiped by the queen. Secret meetings, a betrayed king, an unnoticing husband; such is the story of Lancelot's love. But beyond and behind that unforgettable association, lies charm and grace, and a dramatic and ethical justification, so to speak, of the fatal passion which wrecked at once Lancelot's quest and Arthur's kingdom.

The "Siege Perilous" or vacant chair at the Round Table, awaiting the coming of a knight worthy and able to achieve the quest of the Holy Grail, is now claimed by and given to Galahad, Lancelot's son, inheritor of all his prowess, but none of his weakness. The quest now begins in earnest, and the knights scatter far and wide on their hopeless mission, while Arthur patiently and anxiously awaits their return. They are almost universally unsuccessful. Lancelot, the mighty, only sees it, and that veiled, while only two others so much as have visions of it. Galahad, however, finds it, but, in a miraculous way departs with it into the city of light above, to be seen no more of men.

But few of the knights return to Camelot; the kingdom is decaying and the king's power is gone with the loss of his faithful knights. And now, Modred, Arthur's nephew, turning traitor, allies his forces with those of the northern heathen, and makes war on Arthur. In this hour of his trial, his soul is almost crushed by the exposure to him of his wife's inconstancy. Yet in his love he forgives her, while she, in utter despair, now loving him truly when it is too late, retires to a convent to shrive her soul in long penance, till it be pure enough to meet his on the other side. Arthur, after bidding the queen farewell, goes to battle. In the final engagement he slays Modred, but is himself mortally wounded. Thus ends the glorious kingdom and the long tale, with a description of his funeral and the expression of a fond hope for his return at some future time, reincarnated in some monarch, who should bring peace and prosperity back to the land once more. Such, in outline, is the tangled maze of story over which men of letters have for ages bent their energies and dreamt in fond ambition.

(To be continued.)
A DAY FROM THE DIARY OF PHILOPOEMAN, "THE LAST OF THE GREEKS."

It was the dawn of a bright summer morning in the last half century of Grecian independence. The great luminary of the world, filled with ambitious factions who were assiduously cutting each other's throats, was fast losing its light in the darkness of national disgrace.

But still there beat true blood in many a son of Hellen, and high with those, Philopoeman, fittingly called "the last of the Greeks," shone with bright lustre. The aged soldier spent much of his leisure time at his secluded home in the hills, west of Athens, and from there was wont to go, at sunrise, to a pleasant arbor that overlooked the harbors of Piraeus, and in his musings often pondered over the destiny of his nation, with its philosophy, art, wisdom, and history.

Philopoeman was thoughtful on this particular morning. He bent his head in silent reflection and apparently was not mindful of the beautiful scenery about him; then, letting his eyes wander slowly along the unruffled water, he saw as in a mirage, a beautiful walled city far off to westward. The panorama glistened a moment in the sunlight, shifted a trifle, and then disappeared as mysteriously as it had come. Suddenly, the faint echoes of a distant lyre fell upon his ears, the strains aroused him from his reverie, and in fancy he saw a boat floating westward over the tranquil sea.

In the prow of the ship under the spreading sail, the aged man saw two fair women, the Queen of Wealth and the Queen of Honor, looking back over years of prosperity and plenty. They raised their voices high in jubilant songs of victory, but gradually their mirthful voices fell, and ever dying the echoes were lost on the morning air.

In the middle of this phantom-barge, sat the Goddess of Destiny surrounded by worshippers. Leaning on the shoulder of the Goddess lay a child-faced suppliant, submissively begging for the long-lost sanctity of the Grecian home. At her feet, the Greek veteran saw a gray-haired philosopher, who was evidently thinking of the great minds that had preceded him, and was wondering whether the hidden treasures of the exhaustless mines they had but touched, would ever be unearthed by Grecian genius.

The scene shifted. The lyre's mournful strains which had filled the intervening silence ceased, and Philopoeman heard the sweet, plaintive voice of a Grecian woman begging the Goddess of Destiny to restore again the lost virtue of her countrymen. "The Goddess gave no answer, and until the day of his death, Philopoeman remembered vividly the sad and expressive look she gave her humble petitioner.

The strains of the lyre, ever varying with the temperament of its hearers sent high, sweet tones through the quiet morning air, and as the last melody died away in the distance, the goddess-like Queen of Grecian Aspirations, standing in the stern near the beautiful women at the lyre, besought the Goddess that Greece might regain her former glory in war. As if in denial, the Goddess turned her face slowly westward, and there she perceived in the hazy distance, the splendid Eternal City, whose reflection the veteran had seen at dawn in the mirage; and Memory, looking quietly on with pen in hand, recorded incisively these happenings in the book of Time.

The music ceased, and through the motionless air sounded the sobs of a little child. The scene was impressive and the tears flowed freely from the pensive looker-on. The soldier recognized in the throbbing form of the child, a personification of Fate, who was bending over the guiding oar of the barge.

Not until the boat began to move away, did the full import of the vision dawn upon the mind of "the last of the Greeks"; and in his heart's agony he said: "O! Zeus. Can this be the Grecian Ship of State, and shall our sons and daughters see their honor, wealth, philosophy and art slip from their grasp as now this phantom-barge flits from my blurred sight?"

The old soldier raised his head again, but the visionary ship had flitted away in the misty west, and then unwittingly this verse came to his memory:

Dark Fate reigns on with never questioned sway,
Rules peacefully the threatening storm-tide's roar,
Holds peerless hand on man and sovereignty,
And will till time shall be no more.

ANTHONY LUIDENS, "B" Class.
THE ANCHOR.

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PROF. JOHN E. KUISENGA.

Although the Anchor staff is sorry to be deprived of the kindly criticism and helpful suggestions of Prof. Nykerk for the present school year, it is highly pleased, through the columns of this paper, to add its voice to that of the student body in welcoming his successor, Prof. John E. Kuisenga. There is a close connection between the head of the English department and the college paper. The criticisms and suggestions of the other professors are also appreciated; but an editor of a college paper naturally looks to the English professor for advice and help. Prof. Kuisenga was himself at one time editor of the Anchor, and therefore appreciates the difficulties an editor has to overcome. There is nothing as helpful as sympathy, especially in things literary; and, although the new professor will not find in our paper works of genius, we believe that he will sympathize with our humble efforts. Prof. Kuisenga is a scholar and a widely read student of English literature, and as such is a credit to the institution. He has for some years been a professor of English in the Northwestern Classical Academy, and is not at all unacquainted with a student’s ways. Many a student in the college department, that used to attend the N. W. C. A., heard with joy the news that he would teach English during Prof. Nykerk’s absence. Although he has the right to the rather dignified title of “Reverend,” the professor is by no means unapproachable. His return to Hope is a sort of home coming, and all, both students and faculty, welcome him heartily into the family.

DR. BERGEN LEAVES HOPE.

Dr. Bergen is gone from Hope College. He will be much missed by the students, for in him they recognized not only their instructor in Elocution and Bible-study, but also their college pastor, their warm and sympathetic friend. Dr. Bergen was always deeply interested in the students’ highest interests. He made it his business to do personal work with each new student in regard to his spiritual welfare, and many a young man received from him his first inspiration to serve his Maker and Saviour. He was often the only member of the faculty present at the Y. M. C. A. meetings, and his stirring testimonies and fervent prayers at those meetings, and also when he led chapel exercises, proved a fountain of spiritual blessing to many an appreciative student. Besides, he filled one of the best pulpits in Holland, and there preached the gospel with the fervor and vigor born of conviction and love. His church was a favorite with many of the students and they were truly sorry to see him go. The students who know him shall ever cherish him in memory as a professor who did not consider it his only duty to assign lessons, hear recitations and give markings, but who really loved them, and made his love manifest in works.

THE NEW COSMOPOLITAN HALL.

The Cosmopolitan Society has been doing things. This does not mean that that is anything unusual, for the society has a reputation for doing things. But during the last few months a special wave of enthusiasm has passed over it that merits more than passing mention in the society notes. Largely
at their own expense and by their own efforts, its members have had their hall enlarged and renovated, and furnished with new chairs and tables, until today it is undoubtedly the finest society hall on the campus. A large number of new members have been added to the membership list, and the society is in the most flourishing condition. On the evening of September 5th the new hall was formally dedicated. Several of the alumni were present on that occasion, and a special program was rendered. After the literary program a social time and dainty refreshments were enjoyed. We want more of this spirit of independence, this reliance on self in all the organizations connected with the college.

**SOCIETY NOTES.**

**Cosmopolitan Officers.**

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**JOTTINGS.**

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Who's the guy with the "little behind hand?"

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**H. Illohan.** Graduate in the Boot and Shoe Art.
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Away out West, De Zeeuw had a beautiful hirsute appendage gracing his upper lip, but no sooner does he appear in Holland for his last fond farewell than this labial adornment vanishes,—perhaps for utilitarian or rather utilitarian purposes.

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And from the disconsolate Seniors there arose a wail of despair and amid it all we heard the heart bursting cry of Roggen as he uttered these sad words, "Oh would that Bergen and Nykerk were back!"

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The all absorbing question with one of the college men is—"Can a Laman (layman) become a preacher?"

This summer Hinkamp visited the Zoo at Lincoln Park, Chicago. In relating his experiences to a friend, he said: "Say, I went down to Lincoln Park Zoo and the first thing I saw was Dick Dykstra and Nettie De Young.

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J. W. B., Jr.—"Woman suffrage is a great deal like hugging. We can’t approve of it, but it’s got to come."

Dr. Hollin had some interesting experiences with the highland lassies during his stay in Scotland.
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