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THE GERMAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE MATTER OF
BRITAIN, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE LEGEND
OF KING ARTHUR AND THE TABLE ROUND¹

THE contribution which German poets made to the matter of Britain during the Middle Ages may be divided into two main categories. In the first place, texts which fill a gap in the literary tradition and help to establish lost sources. In the second, those valued for their own individual poetic worth. There is a third category larger than either of these which, in spite of its inferior quality, cannot be left entirely out of account: imitative works of secondary value in which stock situations and motives are renewed, sometimes not without skill, but without any notable breath of new inspiration. Such are hardly to be reckoned as forming a real contribution. The matter of Britain, viewed in its entirety, would be little the poorer if all these had vanished. Their very existence, however, bears witness to the magnetic power of the tradition from which they borrow.

Examples of all three categories may be found in the German renderings of the romance of Tristan. To the first belongs without question the *Tristrant* of the North German poet Eilhart von Oberge, composed about the end of the twelfth century, and invaluable as a reproduction of material which is otherwise lost. Graceless and mediocre in its treatment of a famous tale, it supplies, none the less, a complete account of the pre-courtly version of the romance of Tristan represented in Old French by a surviving third of the work of the Norman Bérout. Whereas Eilhart's account is complete, all that is left of Bérout's fine and spirited poem is the middle part. The *Tristan* of Gottfried von Strassburg belongs to both the first and the second category. As Eilhart to Bérout, or to some other poet of his class, so in similar yet different relation, Gottfried to 'Tomas von Britanje': that is to say, the Anglo-Norman poet Thomas of whose work only three fragments, covering the conclusion of the tale, survive. The courtly version which Thomas created has had a happier fate than the pre-courtly version represented by Bérout. The *Tristan* of Gottfried von Strassburg not only gives us, as do the other derivatives from the work of Thomas, material drawn from the lost major part of the source, reproduced with such fidelity that no link in the chain is missing; it is, at the same time, a poetic re-creation harmoniously in tune with the spirit of the original source. We need not hesitate to go further. For Gottfried undoubtedly transcends his French master and is the finer artist of the two. In subtlety of thought and in magical beauty of style his version of the romance is unrivalled. But he did not live to complete it. His poem

breaks off just where the first fragment of the source begins. Two later poets, one belonging to the middle, the other to the end of the thirteenth century, undertook, severally, to manufacture a conclusion, combining the material of Eilhart with a style imitated from Gottfried. Ulrich von Türheim, the earlier of the two, falls easily into the third category with a third-rate journeyman's performance. Heinrich von Freiburg, not unworthy of a place in the second category, belongs also mainly to the third. A poet of quality, he remains too much hampered by the dead hand of convention to allow his own ideality free play. Had he done so, he might have conceived a new and interesting variation of the theme. In contrast to Gottfried, who has given the story of Tristan and Isolt an impassioned stamp of immortality, Heinrich von Freiburg is haunted by a plangent sense of the mutability and transitoriness of human happenings as opposed to the rigid finality of death, an attitude of mind which has its full scope only in the beautiful elegiac close. Here, passing in review the events of Tristan's life, he repeats and repeats the melancholy burden that death is the end of all. In Gottfried's thought of those two perfect lovers, life and death are joined together as one immortal memory, for 'although they are long dead, their sweet name lives yet', and

ir leben, ir tôt sint unser brôt.
sus lebet ir leben, sus lebet ir tôt.
sus lebet si noch und sint doch tôt
und ist ir tôt der lebenden brôt.

'Their life and their death are our bread. So their life lives, so their death lives. So they live still and yet are dead, and their death is the bread of the living.'

In the German contribution to the matter of Britain the two major achievements are, indisputably, the *Parzival* of Wolfram von Eschenbach and the *Tristan* of Gottfried von Strassburg, so different as to be mutually exclusive, so that only by contrasting can we treat of them both together. Each, again, imposes its own limiting condition. The Table Round of King Arthur, in which the matter of Britain is otherwise centred, plays but a casual part in the pre-courtly version of *Tristan*, while in the courtly version of Thomas-Gottfried it has no longer any place at all. For this reason, the *Tristan* of Gottfried demands isolation. The *Parzival* of Wolfram with its teeming wealth of material demands, on the other hand, rigorous selection. Its source, the only one which can be proved, is the unfinished *Perceval* of Chrestien de Troyes; but the matter of Wolfram's epic is incomparably richer than that of Chrestien. In particular, the legend of the Graal, with which the Arthurian legend is interwoven, assumes in Wolfram's epic such full significance that it claims to be considered alone. The realm of King Arthur and the realm of the Graal are two distinct though interacting

¹ Read at a meeting of the Oxford Mediæval Society on 25 November 1948.

spheres; and the hero Parzival has a place in them both. But he belongs more positively to the latter. Despite his membership of the Table Round, he is never more than a guest at King Arthur's court, here to-day and gone to-morrow. His destined heritage is Munsalvæsche: it is there that his appointed goal is set. Then, too, the story of his father, Gahmuret the Angevin, which precedes his own, is no integral part of the Arthurian cycle. Connection is made by means of a genealogical tree: Gahmuret and King Arthur are given a common ancestor and ancestress from the two sons of whom their collateral lines are descended. There remain the adventures of Gawan (= Gawain), who belongs so essentially to the Table Round of which he is the flower; but here again we are faced with an unruly wealth of incident which drives us to concentrate on a narrower theme. There is scope enough and to spare if, within the matter of Britain, we limit ourselves to King Arthur, to the court of which he is the centre, and to the figures most intimately connected with him, leaving out of account, or at least merely touching upon, the adventures of individual knights in the lands outside his realm.

As starting-point let us take a remark made by Wolfram's young Parzival when he comes for the first time to Arthur's court, a child in mind and upbringing, ignorant of the great world. To the page Iwanet who has taken him in tow he remarks in bewilderment: 'Ich sihe hie manegen Artûs'—'I see here many an Arthur'. For he has never before seen so many splendid-looking people all at once, each one he thinks must be Arthur, and as he rightly expects to see only one Arthur he is naturally much amazed by this multiplication. Iwanet laughs and explains.

This remark may be aptly applied to the legend of King Arthur in general, for even if there are not as many Arthurs as Parzival fancied, there are certainly more than one. Broadly speaking, we can distinguish three, if not four.

There is, in the first place, the Arthur of Geoffrey of Monmouth, an active and enterprising king who is the ruler of a great and expanding realm, a famous leader in battle, the beater-back of the invading Saxons, whose reign reaches its peak in the successful defiance of Imperial Rome. This is the Arthur of an older pseudo-historical tradition whom we can trace in bare outline from the first mention of him by Nennius in the ninth century until we come to the full-length portrait of Geoffrey of Monmouth about the middle of the twelfth. His picture remains unimpaired with the successors of Geoffrey, with Wace and Layamon. It has been preserved to English readers by Malory's *Morte Darthur*, notably in the opening events and in the close, in what Tennyson has styled 'The Coming of Arthur' and 'The Passing of Arthur'. Originally he is not only a battle-leader and the ruler of a splendid court, he engages also in single-handed adventures after the manner of a knight-

errant. In Geoffrey's history he is the slayer of two giants. Earlier records speak of him as killing a dragon which had laid waste the land of Cornwall and as hunting a wild boar.

Then in the French romances from Chrestien de Troyes onward there emerges a second Arthur, the pacific and benevolent ruler of a court which represents the Golden Age of Chivalry. He is no longer a great actor, but rather the producer of a many-sided and loosely-built drama of shifting scenes, in which the knights of the Round Table play leading parts. King Arthur now represents the point of rest at the centre of a very busy sphere of action, both in regard to the court with its social pleasures and problems and to the adventures which go on outside. The priority which in Arthurian romance is given to the single-handed adventure of the individual champion over organized warfare does in fact necessitate this static position of the king. In the midst of all the romance there is this much realism. The king himself does not normally sally forth to seek adventure. That is not his *métier*.

One would expect, all the same, that this wise and steadfast Arthur at the centre of things would, if a crisis arose, show resource and enterprise. It is here, however, that we encounter a third Arthur. It is an Arthur who, in the face of a formidable crisis, behaves in a foolish or in a faint-hearted way. We meet him at the beginning of Chrestien's *Lancelot*, in the events leading up to the abduction of Queen Guinevere. Though the flaw in his behaviour is lightly stressed, none the less it is clear that he has acted with criminal levity in the rash promise he made which resulted in the carrying-off of the queen. Gawain reproves him for it. 'Sire,' says he, 'you have done a very foolish thing, which causes me great surprise.' There is a similar situation in Chrestien's *Perceval* (859-1300),¹ containing the same kind of primitive and irrational folk-tale element. Here King Arthur's ineffectiveness in a time of crisis is very patent. Perceval when he comes riding into Arthur's court finds the king buried in sorrowful thought, while the knights around are engaged in gay conversation, a strange uncourtly situation. The king finally explains that his worst foe, the Red Knight of Kinkerloi, has openly defied him here in his own court, has boldly robbed him of his gold goblet, and has added insult to this act of robbery by spilling the wine on the queen. The king admits in conclusion that he does not know what to do. Young Perceval kills the Red Knight and removes the peril with which neither the king nor any of his knights had known how to deal.

This third Arthur belongs to a different world from that of the first and from that of the second Arthur, a more primitive world where abnormal things happen and ordinary standards of conduct do not obtain. Chrestien understands this and quite rightly does not interpret

¹ In the edition of Alfons Hilka (Max Niemeyer Verlag 1932).

King Arthur's weak conduct in ethical terms. He knows how to distinguish the atmosphere of the folk-tale from that of the sophisticated and courtly world in which he is at home, and treats it with matter-of-fact simplicity, as is meet. His objective presentation, however, is succeeded in due time by an attitude directly critical, in the author of the prose *Perlesvaux*. Here King Arthur is characterized as culpably neglectful of his royal honour. 'For ten years was King Arthur in such estate as I have told you, nor never was courtly king so praised as he, until a slothful will came upon him, and he began to lose the pleasure in doing largesse that he was wont to have, nor was he minded to hold court neither at Christmas-time nor at Easter nor at Pentecost.'¹

In the German contribution this third Arthur (so far as I know) is not apparent. It is generally the second Arthur, the benevolent and gracious host, who is presented. But there is also, in the *Lanzilet* of Ulrich von Zatzikhoven,² a striking trace of the active and enterprising Arthur who belongs to an older tradition. This is in Ulrich's account of the abduction of Queen Guinevere, which is in many ways different from the account of Chrestien. Ulrich's *Lanzilet* as a whole represents a lost portion of the Old French literary tradition: in this, as in Eilhart's *Tristrant*, lies its specific value. It reproduces the matter of a French text which Ulrich, as he tells us, obtained direct from Huc de Morville, one of the hostages of Richard Cœur de Lion. The poem begins with the childhood of Lanzilet (Lancelot), telling how he was carried off by a water fairy, the Lady of the Lake, and brought up on an island inhabited only by maidens, how when he grew up he departed thence, had several adventures, and ultimately arrived at King Arthur's court, where he took part in the rescue of Guinevere, not as a lover, simply as a loyal servant of King Arthur. There is no trace here of any close affection between Lancelot and Guinevere. The hero has his own wife Iblis, to whom he is devotedly attached. Arthur himself is the devoted husband of Guinevere, and so far from playing the passive and inglorious part ascribed to him in Chrestien's *Lancelot*, he shows up very well. The ravisher, King Falerin 'von dem verworrenen tan'—of the Tangled Forest—makes a surprise attack on Arthur and his knights while they are hunting the White Hart, overpowers them with superior forces, and carries off the queen. Arthur is in no way to blame: he resists stoutly, but the odds are too great. Several knights are killed and he himself is severely wounded. On his recovery he takes counsel on how best to effect a rescue. The enemy's castle is rendered impregnable by a thicket surrounding it which teems with serpents and other noxious beasts, and through which it is impossible to penetrate alive. At this point King Arthur's son Lôût (< Lohot or Lohut) arrives with a large army. We hear great praise of the young man, and incidentally,

¹ From the English translation of Sebastian Evans: *The High History of the Holy Graal, Branch 1.2.*

² Ulrich von Zatzikhoven: *Lanzilet* (herausg. von K. Hahn 1845) ll. 4966-5360 and 6708-7444.

what seems a new variation of the Breton hope, how in the end, not in this story but long afterwards, both he and Arthur, father and son together, rode away into a strange land and were no more seen, and how the Britons wait always for their return. Lout, arriving, is much distressed about his mother the queen, and exhorts people in general to come to the aid of Arthur, for, says he, he deserves it well, no man ever came short who relied on my father's help. In the council, Tristrant or, as he is here called, Tristrant, 'der listige Tristrant'—the sage, the cunning Tristrant—advises the king to seek help from the wizard Malmik who dwells by the Misty Lake (*bi dem genibelten sæ*). And now we find King Arthur himself taking part in a perilous adventure. His son Lout is left in charge of the kingdom while he and three others set out to visit the wizard Malmuk. Those others are Karjet (Gaheries), Tristrant, and Lancelot. It is a dangerous journey. The way lies across the Shrieking Bog and there are other danger-points as well. At the Shrieking Bog they are aided by the timely arrival of a certain knight of the Round Table who is generally little more than a name, 'der wilde Dodines', Sir Dodinas le Savage, usually found in company with Sir Segrarmors. Here it is told of him that he lived at King Arthur's court in winter, and in the summer roamed abroad seeking wild adventures, and in particular warring with the King of Ireland; and that he rode a horse so swift that he could skim across the Shrieking Bog (*daꝛ schriende mor*) without so much as stirring up any mud. This Dodines now offers to guide King Arthur and his companions, and with his good help they reach the wizard's house. And here they get help from the wizard's beautiful daughter, who persuades her father to give them his powerful aid. And what he does is to put an enchantment on the serpents and other evil creatures guarding Falerin's castle as well as on everyone in the castle itself. So they are able to penetrate into the stronghold and rescue the queen. And so, says Ulrich, the noble king was released from all his troubles. Or nearly so; for the wizard demands his price; and thereby hangs a fresh hazard in which, however, the king this time is not directly concerned.

In Wolfram's *Parzival* we find a trace of Arthur in the role of knight-errant, but there is nothing traditional here. It is simply that Wolfram imagines Arthur in the second book of *Parzival*, in the time before he became king, as a young man who would naturally be swift to act. The situation is this. In the tourney of Kanvoleis, in which Parzival's father, Gahmuret the Angevin, is victor, characters from the Arthurian cycle are introduced, and it is remembered that all this is a generation earlier than the main story. So Uther Pendragon is king, and although rather old is not too old to take part in the tourney. King Lot of Norway, the father of Gawan, is in his prime. Gawan himself is a little boy and is only allowed to look on, he is thrilled with excitement and longs to be a man. And Arthur is not here because he has gone off in quest of his

mother, has in fact been absent for three years.¹ This anticipates the adventure of the enchanted castle (*Sebastel Marveil*), which is achieved a generation later by Gawan. All that is told here is that a clerk, one skilled in necromancy, has run away with the queen, Uther Pendragon's wife, and that Arthur has run after them—'den ist Artûs nâch gerant'. So here is a chance glimpse of an active and enterprising Arthur, setting off to rescue his mother (as it happens, a wild-goose chase), just as in *Lanzlet* he takes part in the rescue of his wife.

Of the great battle-leader of Geoffrey of Monmouth the German poets have apparently no cognizance. That line of tradition seems to have been unknown. King Arthur as man of action is never more than a mere knight-errant. Of this kind of role there is a further example in an episode of that well-meaning but mediocre and formless poem, the work of the Styrian Heinrich von dem Türlin (ca. 1200), which bears the pretentious title of *der Aventiure Krône*, the Crown of Romances.² In the episode with which we are here concerned, the whole situation is extraordinarily naïve, equally so the conception of the worthy king. This naïveté is certainly not due to anything old or primitive in the elements of the story; we can trace, in its ingenuous plot, the inventions of a crude but energetically fertile mind.³

Thus it is. King Arthur one day wakes up to find all his knights gone except three who have remained to keep him company. The rest have given him the slip, riding away at break of dawn to take part in a certain tournament, contrary to his will. It is too late to pursue them and bring them back. The king settles down meanwhile with his three companions. One winter day the queen finds him warming himself at the fire. She mocks his effeminacy, comparing him to his detriment with a certain bold knight who roams about in the winter cold clad only in his shirt, and singing love-ditties as though it were the month of May. King Arthur, anxious at once to redeem his character, sets out with his three companions to encounter that hardy stranger. Each one is posted in a different spot. The wandering knight comes on the scene, and details are given of his picturesque appearance. His arms consist of shield, sword, and spear; he wears a chaplet of flowers on his head, is clad in a fine white shirt and scarlet breeches, without cloak or tunic, and is singing a joyous song. His name is Galozein. The three knights engage him severally and are each overcome; but King Arthur succeeds where they fail. Having surrendered, the stranger declares himself to be the lover of Queen Guinevere, whom he claims to have known and adored long before her marriage to Arthur, claims in fact to be her rightful mate. The ensuing situation is naturally tense and vexatious; and the king decides to bring it to a head (ll. 3313-5468). The story

¹ 66, 1-8.

² Heinrich von dem Türlin *Die Krone* (herausg. von G. H. F. Scholl, Stuttgart 1852).

³ This does not deny the presence of fossilized relics indicating an earlier stratum in the Arthurian tradition.

then turns upon the adventures of Gawein. When at length we return to King Arthur's court, the missing knights have come back, all but Gawein; and with their approval the king formally arranges to do combat with his rival—a preposterously naïve situation. The combat commences, the king all eager for the fray,¹ but Galozein refuses to fight it out. The queen is now challenged to reveal the truth. She affirms that the stranger's tale is completely false, and that she is King Arthur's faithful wife. Arthur is satisfied, and Galozein departs in high dudgeon. Soon after this, the queen is carried off by another violent character (a variation of the abduction-theme), and is rescued in mid-forest by no other than Galozein. Having her in his power, he tries to force her into submission; she resists while she can, and is just at the end of her strength when Gawein appears on the scene, engages that other in combat, and finally, after a long and bitter fight, knocks him out. The queen and Gawein return with the wounded prisoner to Arthur's court, where, on recovering, Galozein now admits that his story concerning the queen was a pure lie. The king, moved to mercy by his avowed repentance, forgives him, and Galozein becomes a worthy member of the court until, in due time, he is provided with a suitable bride (ll. 10113-12600).

This astonishing tale has two points of interest: the conception of King Arthur as fighting his own battles, in marked contrast with that of the *roi fainéant*, and the fact that the queen is involved in a triangular situation, which, while it turns out to be based on a false assumption, suggests the influence of the famous legend of the love between her and Lancelot.

Elsewhere, King Arthur appears, first in the romances of Hartmann von Aue, and then in Wolfram's *Parzival*, in his well-known pacific role as ruler of his court and as the benevolent host of Table Round. And the queen plays a similar part, that of a gracious and indeed perfect hostess. There is no hint by either poet of a relation other than marital, though Wolfram quite evidently knew Chrestien's *Lancelot*,² and seems also to have known of a lost French romance in which Iders had been her lover.³

Hartmann's *Erec* and *Iwein* are derived from the like-named romances of Chrestien de Troyes, and are in themselves epoch-making, but only in relation to German literature, not necessarily to the Arthurian cycle as such. Hartmann's *Erec* is, so far as can be judged, the earliest Arthurian romance in German. Its probable date is round about the year 1191; this at least has been a long-accepted *terminus a quo*. A lost Arthurian

¹ Artûse wart vil schiere geholt
sin ors, sper unde schilt,
sam ein vogel gereiztez wilt,
sin herze gein dem kampfe spilt. (10570-3)

² *Parz.* 583, 8-11.

³ See the author's article: 'Ither von Gaheviez' *Modern Language Review*, 1931.

epic in Low Franconian is, on the evidence of other casually preserved fragments, not impossible, but if so, all trace has vanished. For us, as indeed for his own generation, the Swabian Hartmann marks the starting-point of a new line. Certainly it was he who gave the Arthurian legend its vogue in his own tongue, introducing not only the matter but also the knightly ethos which goes with it and gives it its peculiar value. His *Erec* and *Iwein* are more than the first Arthurian romances, they are also the first real romances of chivalry, in the German language.

The position of Hartmann as introducer of the Arthurian scene is aptly realized by Wolfram von Eschenbach, at the point where his young hero Parzival comes to King Arthur's court for the first time, an odd rustic figure joined with an odd companion, the fisherman with whom he has spent the night. Wolfram turns aside and addresses Hartmann von Aue, the author of *Erec*, as an old inhabitant of Arthur's court, as a master of ceremonies whose business it is to look after the young guest and see he is properly treated:

Mîn hêr Hartman von Ouwe,
frou Gînovêr iuwer frouwe,
und iuwer herre der kûnc Artûs,
den kumt ein mîn gast ze hûs . . .¹

'Sir Hartmann von Aue, a guest of mine, is coming to see your lady Guinevere and your lord King Arthur. Ask for him to be safeguarded from mockery. He is not a fiddle or a rote for people to play on. Let them choose themselves another plaything: do this, or I for my part will soon make short work of your lady Enide and of her mother Karsnafide.'

This in itself emphasizes the position of Hartmann as pioneer. But the service he did his own literature does not imply a corresponding importance in the field of Arthurian legend as a whole. The question may well be raised, whether he did more than reproduce, in his own rather serious way, the excellent matter provided him by Chrestien de Troyes, whether he added anything of note to Chrestien's vivid descriptions of King Arthur's court and of the leading figures belonging to it.

On the whole—and this is true of both *Erec* and *Iwein*—there is a perceptible loss of vivacity. The court of King Arthur, seen through the soberer medium of Hartmann's temperament, is not nearly so lively a place, nor is the German poet able to give the same feeling of careless spirited high-breeding, the same air of easy elegance. Hartmann's presentation of good manners is more self-conscious and errs somewhat on the side of gentility. There is not the bold aristocratic freedom of speech we find with Chrestien and also with Wolfram. Hartmann has been praised for his deepening of the ethical side, not without reason, but to a greater extent than is his due. His long-winded comments are often no more profound than Chrestien's pungent sallies. Where Chrestien seizes the ethical point and expresses it in a swift aphoristic

¹ 143, 21 ff.

phrase understood by all, Hartmann turns it over and over. His reflective tendency comes out best in the soliloquies of Iwein, to the study of whom he brings a stronger pathos and a more intimate sympathy than Chrestien.

To the portrait of King Arthur as royal host Hartmann adds no particular trait. But we can give him credit for deepening that of Guinevere. Queen Guinevere for him is more than a gracious hostess, she is a woman of quick and warm sympathies. It is in relation to Enite, or Enid (as we may prefer to call her), that he brings this out. That relation is also depicted by Chrestien, but Hartmann has developed it further. Chrestien tells how Enid, coming to King Arthur's court in all her poverty, was instantly looked after by the queen, who dressed her and adorned her most beautifully, evidently taking the liveliest interest in Erec's young bride. Hartmann strengthens this charming relationship. Later on in the story, Erec and Enid, in the course of their unnecessary roamings, are invited to spend a night in King Arthur's camp. Here the two poets differ. Chrestien's Erec is a hot-blooded, impetuous young man, who never knows when he has had enough. King Arthur and the rest are convinced that he has had as much fighting as is good for him, he is weary and wounded, and they are all much concerned. King Arthur in particular looks after him like a father, puts him to bed, and sees that he has a good night's rest (ll. 3931-4280). Hartmann's Erec is a cold-blooded young man, so deliberate and calculating that although he has been through the same adventures as Chrestien's Erec, one feels he can very well look after himself. Hartmann's sympathies are with poor Enid, who is worn to shreds, we are made aware of her misery, and Queen Guinevere is aware of it too. In a passage of sixteen lines (ll. 5100-115) it is related simply and clearly, and with such delicacy and rightness of phrase that we see it all, how Guinevere showed a 'sweet will' in her reception of Enid, how she led her away from her husband, took her to her own private room, tended her, asked womanly questions, and when Enid told her of her troubles lamented with her. It is a pleasing and intimate sketch of the friendship between the older and the younger woman. Wolfram has caught the spirit of it where he makes Guinevere express her sorrow at having had to part with her 'sweet playmate' Cunneware, whom, after she had left to be married, the queen never saw again.¹

A word may be said about Hartmann's treatment of the seneschal Keie (or Kay) in the opening scene of *Iwein*. Here the picture of Arthur's court, while derived from that of Chrestien, is so good that it can be placed on the same level. As for Kay, for once Hartmann's sober deliberate style is quite as effective as Chrestien's vivacity. Both pictures of Kay are good, different in kind rather than in degree. Chrestien's Kay is impetuous, brusque, and choleric; Hartmann's is cooler, more

¹ Parz. 646, 10-12.

deliberate and self-possessed, the tone in which he speaks is a sarcastic drawl. The contrast between him and his more active companions is, moreover, brought out by Hartmann with clear independence in his grouping of the six figures: the lazy, inert figure of the 'unmannerly Kay' taking his ease on the floor, in contrast with the four knights seated and Calogreant standing to tell his tale.

There is again full equality between the two poets in the scene where Laudine's messenger (by Hartmann identified with her maid Lunete) denounces Iwein (Ivain or Yvain) in the presence of King Arthur and his court. Hartmann's rendering of the scene is at every point as forceful and trenchant as Chrestien's.

There are, both in *Erec* and in *Iwein*, several occasions where, on a hint from Chrestien, Hartmann shows a new delicacy of perception, or adds some telling detail of his own. Yet, when all is said, his contribution to the legend of King Arthur and the Round Table is, relatively, of minor importance. And this is still more true of his successors in that same field, Wirnt von Gravenberg and the rest. The German poets who follow in Hartmann's train get neither the superb brilliance and gallantry of Chrestien's presentation, nor the curious old-world glamour we find in the French prose romances, as also in the prose of Sir Thomas Malory. Instead, they continue to develop the moralizing strain bequeathed by Hartmann, which, in their master's work, bears the stamp of his more interesting cast of mind. Even so, it is not here, in his Arthurian romances, but in his religiously toned narratives, *Gregorius* and *Der Arme Heinrich*, that Hartmann's strong moral trend is poetically right.

Pioneer though he is, the achievement of Hartmann as interpreter of the matter of Britain is nowhere near that of his great contemporary, Wolfram von Eschenbach. In the region common to them both, Wolfram far outstrips Hartmann. He also outstrips, not altogether perhaps but in the main, Chrestien de Troyes, and this because the world he creates is of larger dimensions. Although his chief concern is with the Graal, and although finally the glory of Munsalvesche casts into the shade the lesser glory of the Table Round, none the less, he gives a picture of the latter which in its life-like humanity and breadth is unrivalled. The court of King Arthur as presented by Wolfram becomes in reality what is assumed for it in the poetic ideal, but is nowhere else worked out so fully, a complete symbol of the chivalrous life.

Wolfram's presentation falls into three stages, each of which corresponds to a definite stage in the life of his hero. The first is that of *Parzival* bk. III. Here the boy Parzival pays his first visit to King Arthur's court. The story is essentially the same as in Chrestien's *Perceval*, but the impression created is entirely different and more complex.

The story is at bottom a folk-tale with a simple-minded hero and, to match his mentality, a primitive and rude conception of King Arthur's court, here a place quite different in type from the cultured and modern-

ized court which Chrestien presents to us in *Erec* and *Yvain*. It seems as though, in this particular part of his new story, Chrestien must have kept close to his source and, recognizing that the primitive court suited this type of hero and this type of tale, pictured it as primitive.

Wolfram, on his side, achieves something more. With his strong realization of the child's personality, he enables us to see King Arthur's court from two angles, as the seat of a mature aristocratic life and, at the same time, through the eyes of young Parzival, as the king's court in a fairy tale. The personality of the child is so completely alive that we are able to accept from his point of view the primitive features of the story, the Red Knight snatching up the gold cup from the Table Round, and Kay's beating of the damsel who laughed, and yet feel that the environment in which the tale is set is by no means primitive but, on the contrary, a sphere of life which the child does not yet understand.

The queen's page, Iwanet, forms a link between these two spheres. While he himself is quite sophisticated, he is still boy enough to enter into the feelings of another and simpler boy for the time being, evidently finding it good fun to instruct and direct the young greenhorn. So he helps Parzival to put on the armour of the Red Knight Ither whom he has slain in combat, and teaches him how to hold shield and spear. But as soon as Parzival has ridden away, Iwanet now thinks of the queen his mistress who had loved Ither as a friend, and goes to her in all seriousness, bringing news of his death. And the queen laments for one who had been the flower of perfect manhood.

We are left with an unsolved discord. Because the Red Knight whom Parzival has killed is no longer Chrestien's felon, but a generous and gallant man whose enmity towards King Arthur is no foreigner's hatred but an unhappy rift in an old alliance, therefore the tragedy of Ither's death falls as a black cloud across the sunlit levity of a fool's paradise.

It must be confessed that the dual presentation of Arthur's court raises more than one difficulty. What, exactly, was the nature of the feud between Arthur and his kinsman Ither? That question is imperfectly solved. But at least King Arthur is cleared from the slur of unmanly weakness depicted by Chrestien. It is the sad thought of an earlier and kinder relation which stays his hand.

For the rest, in this part of the story, Arthur is shown as the kind of king the boy expects to find, friendly and affable and not at all proud. And while other qualities are added, these remain. It is true that wherever, in mediæval tradition, we meet with King Arthur, he is, almost invariably, an obliging and accessible monarch. But Wolfram brings out his complete lack of pride in a very explicit way. He speaks of him once as 'der unlöse Artûs niht ze hêr'—the modest Arthur who was not too grand; and there is a good example of this absence of grandeur when, in a later phase of the story, his young nephew Segramors comes bursting into his tent in the early morning with an urgent

request which cannot wait. The king and queen are asleep; and Wolfram now adds a lively touch of his own to what Chrestien gave him. For Segramor's snatches away the coverlet and wakes them both up; and they laugh at his wild behaviour.¹

About this good-humoured Arthur who sees a joke Wolfram makes a mild joke of his own. He calls him 'der meienbare man'—the man of May—because, says he, everything told about him seems to have happened at Pentecost, in the blossoming May season.

There is the same shrewd humour in Wolfram's illuminating comment on the seneschal Kay. Kay, according to Wolfram, had been much maligned; he was really a very useful fellow, and King Arthur would have done badly without him. For Arthur's court was a place which drew to it all sorts and conditions of men, both good and bad, and Kay's sharp tongue did useful work in driving away the undesirables. Then, turning to his patron, Landgrave Hermann of Thuringia, Wolfram says: 'Lord Hermann, you could do very well with a seneschal like Kay, to keep *your* court in order!'

These humorous touches are very human, and fit naturally into the life-size conception of Table Round which, with preliminary sketches in Books IV and V, is worked out to its fullest extent in Book VI. This is when, a year later than his first visit, Parzival again comes into contact with King Arthur's court, this time on equal terms. He has proved himself a most valiant knight, has put away childish things, and with honourable welcome takes his place in the adult company of Table Round, until 'Cundrie with harsh words' drives him forth to seek the Graal, and he renounces his share in that high fellowship. To this second phase of Parzival's life, a season of well-being and honour disastrously ended, belongs the second picture of Arthur's court, and this time it is a full and life-like picture of a great court renowned for its nobility.

It is thronged with personable figures: the impetuous young Segramor, who is always spoiling for a fight, the sardonic Kay, Gawan the flower of courtesy and kindness, in whom Parzival finds a new and steadfast friend, Beacuts, Gawan's devoted younger brother, who offers to do battle for him in his stead, the lovely and faithful Cunneware, whose affection for Parzival is so humbly and loyally true, Ekuba of Janfuse, the wise Indian queen. More especially, we may observe the firm and excellent portrayal of King Arthur himself, seen here in the round as a man of mature wisdom, with a strong sense of kingly duty and an ability to cope with the situation as it arises. At the beginning of Book VI, before Parzival re-enters, he and his court are encamped outside the forest encircling the hidden castle of Munsalvæsche. It is a perilous region. For the knights of the Graal who act as sentries have no mercy upon the intruder, whence to trespass on their domain is as

¹ 285, 11-20.

good as death. Arthur knows his own knights and how eager they are for adventure, and he is not going to let his man-power be frittered away in unnecessary combats. So he orders his knights, let them like it or no, not to engage in combat without his consent; and the simile he uses gives just the right tone to the sort of foolhardy courage he intends to check, and divests it of glamour. 'If you want to rush one in front of the other like rude hounds which have been unleashed, that is not as I wish it.'¹

Subsequently, he does give leave, first to Segramor and then to Kay, to do combat with the stranger knight who all this time is Parzival, the very man they have set out to find. As with Chrestien, it is the courteous Gawan who discovers his identity and brings him back to the king's court, where he is warmly welcomed. And since the Table Round of which he is now made a member is not there in concrete reality (for how could they have carried it about with them?), a large piece of costly silk is cut out in the form of a disc to serve as symbol, and is spread on the blossoming field. They are not long seated here, when there comes riding into their midst 'urhap trûrens, freuden twinc'—a bringer of sorrow, a binder of joy—Cundrie, the ill-omened messenger of the Graal.

It is strange and paradoxical that the glory of Table Round seems to reach its height as Cundrie denounces it, denounces its lord King Arthur, and above all denounces Parzival, through whom, she declares, Table Round is disgraced beyond repair. In reality, her denunciation brings out both the splendour and the integrity of the Table Round. Its splendour, because in the wild rhetoric of her speech, and in the praise she mingles with her invective, we catch the image of something great and glorious tottering to its fall. But this is illusion. The Table Round is unshaken by her speech and gives proof of its integrity. All are very sad because of the young man whom her words have stricken, but they do not feel themselves disgraced in him, and in this they judge rightly and sanely, just as he for his part does right in obeying the sterner voice of his own tortured soul. What the knights best remember of Cundrie's speech is the information she let fall that Parzival was the son of Gahmuret the Angevin, to her, the unworthy son of a noble father. But not to them. And some begin to say: Gahmuret the Angevin! how well I remember him, the time he fought in the Journey of Kanvoleis and won his bride. And now here is his son: he is welcome, both for his own and for his father's sake.

Then comes another denouncer, this time the proud knight of Ascalon who accuses Gawan of having murdered his lord by foul play, and challenges him to do combat. Before Gawan answers, the king takes up his nephew's cause, and in a speech of great dignity and power defends him. 'Sir, he is my sister's son. Were Gawan dead, I would

¹ 281, 2-5.

undertake that combat, sooner than let disgrace haunt his bones. If luck will, Gawan shall prove to you yet that he is blameless. Should any other man have likewise grieved you, blaze not his guilt abroad without due cause. For, if he prove his innocence and win your favour, what you have spoken against him will but weaken your own good name.¹

The sixth book ends with the dispersal of the company. Parzival rides away to seek the Graal, Gawan to fight his combat, the guests of the Table Round go back to their own lands, and several of Arthur's knights set out for the Castle of Marvels (Schastel Marveil), of which Cundrie had told them before she left. Long afterwards in the story, Queen Guinevere laments the dispersal and loss of so many she had cared for.

The third picture of the Table Round follows on Gawan's great adventure of the Castle of Marvels, which in its turn is preceded by something far more momentous, and that is Parzival's stay with his uncle the hermit Trevrizent (Book ix). The pageant of Gawan's adventure shrinks in significance when compared with that finer adventure of the soul. In the hermit's cell, remote in its forest solitude from court or camp, we sound the depth of Parzival's spiritual experience, listen with him to Trevrizent's wise teaching as he expounds the mystery of man's life and the mystery of the Godhead; and as the story is told of the race to which they both belong, we pass in imagination into a kingdom which is the seat of an Order more austere and more magnificent than the Order of Table Round. It is in comparison with this grander Order that King Arthur's court appears from now on diminished in value. And when Parzival again takes his place in the fellowship of Table Round (in Book xiv), it is made abundantly clear that he no longer belongs to it, that it represents a sphere of life he has outgrown. Yet the picture is full of colour and action; nor does it lack the aid of a congenial theme.

That theme, by which the third picture is pleasantly illumined, is, quite simply, the happiness of an unexpected family reunion. Chrestien breaks off with the coming of Gawan's messenger to King Arthur's court. Wolfram, continuing, describes the arrival of the king and queen and all their retinue at Schastel Marveil, where, after greeting with joy the long-missing Gawan, they discover, among the prisoners he has freed, four lost members of the family clan: Arthur's mother, the old queen Arnive, his sister Sangive, mother of Gawan, and Gawan's two young sisters, Itonje and Cundrie (second of that name). Arnive (Wolfram's substitute for Igerne, or its variant Iverne) is a spirited old lady; but Sangive is colourless, and the girls, of whom Itonje alone has a definite part, are of somewhat tenuous charm. Bene, the ferryman's daughter, Itonje's friend, is more real than either, and Orgeluse, Gawan's proud lady, is the most real of all. So magnificently real that, beside her,

¹ 322, 15-30.

the many conventional figures which fill that third picture are mere silhouettes.

King Arthur, it must be said, does hold his own. As before, we feel his benevolence, his avuncular goodness, not so much as in Book vi his kingly worth. He is especially charming in a scene with his young niece Itonje and her friend Bene. The two girls (Bene takes the lead) come to him in great distress, for Itonje's brother (Gawan) and her lover (Gramovlanz) are about to fight a mortal combat. King Arthur promises to intervene and stop it, and he is as good as his word. But what stays in one's memory is the perfectly charming way in which Arthur, 'der wise höfsche man', the wise and courteous man, enters into his young niece's trouble, and asks her to tell him about her lover, saying: 'Did he ever see your fair face and your sweet red mouth?' And Itonje says, No, but they have corresponded.

There is a lovable and laughable touch in the absurd extreme of King Arthur's kindness when, having duly accomplished Itonje's betrothal to Gramovlanz, he follows this up with the betrothal of her aunt and sister, for whom two more bridegrooms are somewhat quickly chosen. 'Artûs was frouwen milde'—Arthur was a bountiful giver of ladies, is Wolfram's comment.² But, he adds, it was planned beforehand.

In this part of the epic, strictly speaking at the beginning of Book xii, allusion is made to King Arthur's dead son, Ilinot, who long ago had been slain in battle, fighting to win the prize of his lady's love. Only cursory details are given of a story which Wolfram assumes to have been already known. To us, it is tantalizingly aloof from all our knowledge. The name Ilinot must be derived in some way from Lohot; but there is no other clue. We may console ourselves for the gap in our knowledge with the thought that King Arthur makes up nobly for the loss of his son in the affection he lavishes on his other young relatives. His son denied him, he remains a most excellent uncle. How fondly does he not speak of 'mîn neve Gawân'—my nephew Gawan—then also, though in a more distant relationship, of 'mîn neve Parzivâl', and finally, when Parzival meets and introduces his half-brother Feirefiz, of 'mîn neve Feirefiz'! That the word *neve* means both nephew and cousin is immaterial. For to all his young relatives Arthur is primarily uncle: that is his status.

In this and other ways, King Arthur remains true to himself, and the same can be said of his nephew Gawan, with his inbred courtesy and generosity of mind. Nothing in Gawan is more commendable than the readiness with which, after his own spectacular achievements, he frankly recognizes that he has been excelled by Parzival. In Gawan, the brotherly spirit of Table Round is revealed incarnate, for, as Wolfram says elsewhere, 'nieman nâch gegenstuole sprach'—no one laid claim to the best seat.

² 712, 18-20.

² 730, 11.

Queen Guinevere, in the little we see of her, remains true to type, as one to whom the court in which she moves is a circle of dear friends. As, formerly, she lamented the death of Ither, so now, looking back, she has poignant regrets for friends she had known and lost five years ago: Cunneware, who had been one of her ladies-in-waiting, and Jeschute, and Ekuba the Indian queen, who had been with them as guests.

Yet, in spite of all the charm and goodwill and generosity in the society of the Table Round, each time we are brought close to the mind of Parzival in its heroic solitude we realize, as in the first phase, but reversed, the disparity between two different planes of being. In the depth of his long inward suffering and in the strength of his unfaltering single purpose, Parzival stands out in strong relief against a world of ephemeral joys. The disparity reaches its climax in that wonderful scene where, in the night watches, Parzival lying awake and alone, thinking of his wife Condwiramurs, sees the intolerable gulf between a sorrow bordering on despair and the light-hearted happiness around him, and resolves once more to break away from the Table Round, for 'here in the midst of this joy I cannot stay. God give joy to all this company! I will depart and leave this joy behind.' And in the grey light of dawn he rides away.¹ He returns, it is true, in a happier frame of mind, to introduce his new-found brother Feirefiz; but a hint has been given that this last stay is only for an hour. For now, with sudden felicity, the Quest is ended; and when, with Cundrie the messenger of the Graal as guide, Parzival and his brother Feirefiz ride away in the direction of Munsalvæsche, Table Round has played its last part. The company disperses. 'I do not know,' says Wolfram, 'where they all went to,' and indeed he does not care. And in the next line attention is riveted on the three figures who matter. 'Cundrie and those two rode on.' The scene then shifts immediately to Munsalvæsche, where Anfortas lives on in agony, kept alive against his will because the people now know that his deliverer is coming:

Mîn hêr Hartman von Ouwe,
frou Ginovêr iuwer frouwe,
und iuwer hêrre der kûnc Artûs,
den kumt ein mîn gast ze hûs . . .

Harking back to the words in which Wolfram announces the arrival of his guest at King Arthur's court for the first time, we sense their significance in the light of all that has followed. For it is through the personality of this most individual guest that we get that threefold picture of Arthur's court, with its three grades of reality, which is Germany's chief contribution to the legend of the Table Round.

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¹ 732, 1-733, 30.