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SIR GAWAIN OF BRITAIN:

A STUDY OF THE ROMANCE ELEMENTS

IN THE BRITISH GAWAIN LITERATURE

by
Alan M. Markman

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SIR GAWAIN OF BRITAIN: A STUDY OF THE ROMANCE ELEMENTS IN THE BRITISH GAWAIN LITERATURE

by Alan M. Markman

The principal aim of the present study is to direct attention to the human qualities of Gawain, as opposed to his alleged divine quality, and to both the realistic and marvelous details in the background against which he has been displayed by native British writers. For over three hundred years Gawain was a popular hero in British literature. Three divisions of his extensive literary career have been made: The Primitive Gawain, The Early Literary Gawain, and The Late Literary Gawain. In chapters bearing those titles there will be found (1) a discussion of Gwalchmei and Gwri-Pryderi, early Welsh heroes who bear some relation to Gawain, (2) an analysis of Gawain as he is presented in four pseudo-histories, and (3) an analysis of Gawain as he is presented in seven native British metrical romances. The second and third chapters also contain an analysis of the social and intellectual background of the narratives.

Because so little is known about Gawain before Geoffrey of Monmouth, it was impossible to define accurately the primitive conception of him. Actually, before Geoffrey there is hardly anything in Welsh literature which suggests that either Gwri-Pryderi or Gwalchmei is a prototype of Sir Gawain. In the pseudo-histories and romances, however, Gawain is a complete literary figure. By placing all the information in various categories, such as Gawain's Fighting Skill, Gawain's Loyalty, Love, and The Marvelous, to name but a few, and by comparing that information, whenever possible , with contemporary

non-literary documents, there has been established an accurate and complete description of the British Gawain.

These are the chief results of the study. In the 12th century pseudo-histories Gawain is a realistic representation of the feudal knight. Excepting Arthur, he has no peer as a fighter. His loyalty and courage are unmatched. He knows practically nothing of courtesy or chivalric behaviour. In the 14th-15th century romances Gawain is a representation of the ideal courtly knight. All his knightly qualities are exaggerated, but he nonetheless is presented as a probable human being. He is not a servant of love; Courtly Love is not represented in the British Gawain romances. Perhaps the most important finding is that Gawain is always presented as an actual man. He is not an average man, indeed, but not once are there ascribed to him supernatural or superhuman characteristics. Of unusual interest, too, is our estimate of The Marvelous - those actions, people, and descriptions which are clearly non-rational - only about ten per cent of the material is not realistic, or marvelous. The marvelous, however, is always functional in the romances, and its influence on the narratives is exceptional.

In many ways this study represents a new direction in Arthurian scholarship. The Gawain romances constitute a complex narrative cycle. Heretofore the hero, as he is presented in romance, has been neglected. By calling attention to Gawain's human qualities and the strange situations in which he has been placed, it is hoped that new interest in the British Gawain romances will be encouraged, so that they may be regarded as a humanistic literary creation which one may read not only for the escitement which their marvelous adventures

offer, but also for the more rewarding experience of participating in the acts and deeds of a splendid human being.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

HRB - Geoffrey of Monmouth's Latin text, ed. A. Griscom.

BHG - Thompson and Giles tr. of Geoffrey's text.

WB - Welsh Brut, tr. R. E. Jones, printed in Griscom.

BYB - Brut Y Brenhinedd, tr. J. J. Parry

LB - La3amon's Brut, ed. Sir F. Madden.

GGK - Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. Gordon and Tolkein.

GCC - Sir Gawayne and the Carle of Carlisle, ed. R. W. Ackerman.

AKA - The Avowynge of King Arthur, Sir Gawain, Sir Kaye, and Sir Bawdeyn of Bretan, ed. J. Robson.

AA - The Aunters of King Arthur at the Tarnewathelan, ed. F. J. Amours.

GG - The Knightly Tale of Golagros and Gawain, ed. F. J. Amours.

WG - The Weddynge of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell, ed. Laura Sumner.

TG - The Turk and Gowin, ed. Hales and Furnivall (Percy Folio MS.).

These abbreviations are also to be found on p. 80, at the beginning of Chapter Two, and p. 188, at the beginning of Chapter Three. The complete references are listed in the Bibliography.

Introduction

Forþi an aunter in erde I attle to schawe,
Þat a selly in si3t summe men hit holden.

(GGK, vv. 27-28)

"What may mon do bot fonde?"

(GGK, v. 565)

That Gawayne...
...were comen...out of Fairye.

(Sq. T., vv. 95-96)

For many years now the primary aim of the bulk of Arthurian scholarship has been to uncover, in early Celtic legends and folktales, either written or oral, the origins of the plots and characters of the mediaeval narratives which constitute the extensive fiction of "the matter of Britain". A secondary purpose of this scholarship has been to draw attention to the fantastic nature of the romances, which form a large share of the Arthurian stories, by concentrating critical effort upon the marvelous elements which they contain. By 1927 Professor Loomis was able to focus his studies upon what he felt to be the desiderata for Arthurian scholarship: a renewed attack upon the myth, the ritual, the folklore, and the ethnology of the entire Western world. Therein, it was hoped, lay the key which would unlock all the Arthurian mysteries. Frequently the offensive has been directed at one particular knight of the Round Table.

Of all those knights Gawain has borne the brunt of the heaviest barrage.

Because Gawain is Arthur's favored nephew, because he is, in some of the narratives, represented as possessing either a "sword of light" or an exceptional horse, and because his strength, in certain stories, is said to increase from morning until noon and to decrease from noon until evening, he has frequently been regarded as a mythical personage. Surely these so-called "solar characteristics" must, it is held, lead back to a Celtic sun god. Any feat of Gawain's, any action of his which appears to be unusual in the slightest degree, is almost certain to call forth an explanation which rests, ultimately, on the mythical hypothesis.

No serious student of the mediaeval romances would ever deny the value of the type of Arthurian scholarship which has been indicated. No one, for example, would deny that Gawain's character has been illuminated by the intensive study devoted to him, or that he can be understood completely if his hypothetical origins are ignored. But as one reads the Gawain stories it is not always clear just what value there is, for example, in recalling that the career of Cuchulainn in some ways parallels Gawain's development, or that the prototype of Gawain may lie behind the deeds of the early Welsh hero, Pryderi. To the reader of the Gawain narratives, something seems to have been left out. Gawain, as any reader knows, is also portrayed as a human being. Most Arthurian critics recognize this fact, but they appear to give it little thought; they simply take it for granted and pass on to what they consider to be the more interesting problems of his character. Consequently the real nature of Gawain has been, to some degree, obscured. Certainly the long shadows of myth and ritual, the direction to sources and analogues, and the appeal to Celtic influences have about run their course. It is time to turn to Gawain the man and the feudal background against which he is displayed. These human

and social elements, actually, constitute the major portion of the British Gawain narratives. It is our intention to give them the place they deserve in romance criticism.

The problem at hand may be put in this question: what is the nature and extent of the realistic and marvelous elements in the native British Gawain narratives? This study is limited to the British productions. At some later date it is hoped that the investigation can be extended to include every reference to Gawain in the literature of Western Europe, but for the present we shall confine ourselves to what may be called the native British view of Gawain. Other questions lie behind this central inquiry. How much of Gawain's British career reflects realistic action? What contemporary habits and practices are portrayed? What proportion of the narratives may be called "real", what "marvelous"? We meet Gawain in strange situations: what are we to think of him? How, finally, ought we to regard his stories? These are, it is believed, serious questions, and the aim of the investigations and analyses which form this study has been to provide valid answers for them.

We begin with the earliest information. Prior to Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia there existed stories of the Welsh heroes Gwalchmei and Gwri-Pryderi. We wished to describe the complete native British view of Gawain: since it has been suggested that in the Gwri-Pryderi-Gwalchmei complex the prototype of Gawain is to be found, a study of all the Welsh evidence which appeared prior to 1139 was imperative. The results of that investigation form the first chapter of this study. There we have assembled what is believed to be an accurate description of the primitive Gawain. From this foundation we pass to a consideration of the native British literary Gawain. The British literature has been divided into two groups, the Early Literary Gawain and the Late Literary Gawain. The first group comprises four pseudo-

histories composed between 1139 and 1205, while the second group is made up of seven metrical romances composed between ca. 1375 and ca. 1475. Each group has been subdivided into categories which, when taken together, represent the British view of Gawain and the feudal background against which he is displayed. Wherever possible contemporary, non-literary evidence has been adduced to indicate the degree of reality which each category may be said to possess. And, in both groups, the marvelous elements have been set off from the realistic. All this information, of considerable bulk, forms the second and third chapters. A summary of everything which has been learned about Gawain in the British literature, a brief comparison of the career of Gawain with the career of a composite "typical" romance knight, and a very modest statistical analysis of the British Gawain literature have been appended to the third chapter. Certain miscellaneous observations which occurred to the writer, but which are not essential to the main argument, and our final estimate of Gawain have been set down in the short conclusion. Such, in brief, has been the method adopted to obtain an answer for the central question proposed. A word about minutiae will suffice. To facilitate reading, translations have been inserted wherever it was felt that they might be helpful. Unless otherwise accredited, the writer is responsible for all such translations.

In offering what in some ways is a sharp departure from the older Arthurian scholarship the writer cannot avoid a certain amount of apprehension. At various times during the course of his work he has felt both despair and elation. He is aware of the major shortcoming of this study. The arbitrary limitation to native British productions, ruling out, as it does, the important French contributions, means, of course, that we have constructed a partial description of Gawain. At times, too, the whole work

has seemed so obvious that the writer doubted its importance. At worst, then, he would condemn his own labors as having resulted in a partial, obvious answer.

There is, on the other hand, a better view. The writer is convinced that the character of Gawain has, in the past, been studied imperfectly. He believes that no author can cut himself off entirely from his own society, or divorce himself from human nature. He also believes that one function of literature, wherever it exists, is, by bringing characters into action, to reflect human capabilities for action, good or bad. The analysis of Gawain presented here will, it is believed, convince any reader that British writers always presented Gawain as a representation of a human being, and that he presents, for his society, a formula for the highest reaches of human behaviour. When one considers this view of Gawain, plus the many realistic elements of feudal society which fill out the pages of these narratives, one concludes that any criticism which neglects the human and realistic components is also, in its own way, a partial criticism. At best, then, this study may be regarded as a step in the right direction.

There is no substitute for knowledge. The information which, over the years, ardent Arthurians have uncovered is invaluable. If he were to ignore it a critic would, indeed, be hiding his head in the sand. By the same token, we need the kind of information about the British Gawain which is presented in this study. If there is any bias in it, it is a humanistic one. No evidence has, however, been omitted or shifted. Nevertheless, we have suggested, with the help of patently favorable quotations in the heading, that the proper view of the native British Gawain narratives is obtained by those readers who, inquiring about the function of the realistic details within a framework of the marvelous, have decided that a human hero, not a superhuman, or supernatural, or god-like one, is the <u>sine qua non</u> of their

structure. Although the situation may be "selly in si3t", the human hero, as Gawain puts it, will, to the best of his ability, contend against it. Chaucer, of course, never intended what we are going to make him say. But surely the time is now ripe to bring Gawain out of Fairyland into the world of real men and their affairs.

Chapter I

The Primitive Gawain

Of all the knights who attended Arthur none achieved greater renown than Gawain.[1] Shortly after the middle of the 12th century "le grand romancier", Chrétien, telling off the names of the knights of the Round Table, declared that "Gawain, before all the excellent knights, ought to come first."[2] Some few years earlier an Englishman, the shrewd historian William of Malmesbury, described Gawain as "a fighter most celebrated for courage."[3] From Cornwall to Italy, from Brittany to Germany, every literate person knew of the matière de Bretagne, and the minstrel, the jongleur, the conteur passed this knowledge to the illiterate,[4] so that by the

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[1] As Gawain, Gawayne, Gwalchmei, Galvagin, Gauvain, Galvaginus, Galvanus, Walgan, Walganus, Walwanus, Walwen, Walwein, etc., he was, by the first quarter of the 13th century, known all over Western Europe. Cf. Gaston Paris, Hist. litt. de la France, XXX, 29-45; R. S. Loomis, "The Arthurian Legend Before 1139," The Romanic Review, XXXII (1941), 24-25, fig. C; R. S. and L. H. Loomis, Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art (New York, 1938), pp. 32-35, figs. 6, 7.

[2] Erec und Enide, ed. W. Foerster (Halle, 1890), vs. 1688-1692:

> Vos sai je bien dire les nons,
> De ceus de la Table Reonde,
> Qui furent li mellor del monde.
> Devant toz les buens chevaliers
> Doit estre Gauvains li premiers;

[3] De Gestis Regum Anglorum, ed. W. Stubbs (Rolls Series), II, 342: "...Walwen...miles virtute nominatissimus."

[4] H. J. Chaytor, From Script to Print (Cambridge, 1945), pp. 2, 3, 10 n. 2, and especially 11-12; E. K. Chambers, The Mediaeval Stage, I, 23-86. For Welsh court story-teller see G. Jones and T. Jones, The Mabinogion (Everyman Edition, 1949), pp. xi-xii.

beginning of the 14th century, it is safe to say, practically "every man, woman, and child" in Western Europe could tell stories about Arthur and his knights,[5] and about the chief hero of the "matter of Britain", Sir Gawain. Indeed, Geoffrey himself, the first known writer to assemble the widespread tales about Arthur and his knights, stated at the very outset of the Historia that he was surprised to find no account in the earlier writings of Gildas and Bede of either Arthur or other kings who lived in England both before and after the birth of Christ even though their deeds "...were recited pleasantly by many people 'by heart' as if they had been written."[6] By Geoffrey's time, then, Gawain was a well known personage.

This description of the reputation of Gawain and its dissemination, both in oral and written story-form, would, doubtless, be acceptable to all

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[5] Before the end of the 12th century Alanus de Insulis asked, in his commentary on Geoffrey's Prophecies of Merlin, "What place is there within the bounds of the empire of Christianity to which he has not extended the winged praise of Arthur of the Britons? Who is there, I ask, who does not speak of the Britannic Arthur, who is but little less known to the people of Asia than to the Britons, as we are informed by our pilgrims who return from the countries of the East? The Easterns speak of him, as also do the Westerns, though the breadth of the whole earth lies between them." (Tr. T. Stephens, Literature of the Kymry (London, 1876), pp. 404-405; this is p. 26 of the 1608 Frankfort ed. of the Prophetia Anglicana Merlini.)

[6] Geoffrey of Monmouth, Historia Regum Britanniae, ed. A. Griscom (New York, 1929), p. 219: "...a multis populis quasi inscripta iocunde & memoriter predicarentur." It goes without saying, of course, that wherever Arthur was known Gawain, Kay, Bedvere, and other Round Table knights were known also. The most convenient description of the extent of the Arthurian legend before Geoffrey, including specific references to the appearance of Gawain's name in localities as far off as Modena in Northern Italy, is R. S. Loomis's "The Arthurian Legend Before 1139," The Romanic Review (February, 1941), pp. 3-38.

Arthurian scholars.[7] What is not clear, however, is what lies beyond this. How did Gawain gain his reputation? What stories were told about him? These questions lead us into the unimaginably tangled wood, Arthuriana. In Geoffrey's Historia we meet Gawain in a mature story for the first time in British literature, and there we find him a developed character. We are told who his parents are, what relationship existed between him and Arthur, how he was trained and educated, how he fought, and how he died. Whence did Geoffrey derive his information? It is inconceivable that Gawain was invented by him.[8] These questions, and others like them that might be asked about all the Arthurian characters, suggest that no clear statement about the British Gawain is possible until all available information about him, from the very earliest mention of his name, has been assembled and analyzed. If we are to know how we ought to regard the Gawain of the later British romances, first we must know what his development has been. We must search the accounts of all English and Welsh writers who knew, or appeared to know, about Gawain; we need to collect all the known evidence. Because Gawain was drawn into the cycle of stories about Arthur, it will be necessary, also, while considering the pre-Galfridian Gawain, to examine any Arthurian accounts written by English or Welsh authors prior to the appearance of Geoffrey's Historia in 1139, as well as any Welsh documents containing

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[7] Disagreements arise only (1) regarding the transmission of the Arthurian materials from Britain to France and back to Britain, and (2) concerning the sources of the legends or the degree of Celtic influence exerted upon them. A full discussion of these problems is found in J. D. Bruce, Evolution of Arthurian Romance (Baltimore, 1923), II, 45-174 and in K. Voretzch, Einführung in das Studium der altfranzösischen Literatur, tr. F. M. Du Mont, Introduction to the Study of Old French Literature (New York, 1931), pp. 259-322, especially 312 ff. See also G. Paris, Hist. litt. de la France, XXX, 2-14 and W. Foerster, Erec und Enide, op. cit., pp. xxii-xliii.

[8] We have already seen from the evidence of William of Malmesbury, n. 3 supra, that this could not be possible.

references to Gawain which appear to antedate Geoffrey even though their MS. dates may be later than 1139.[9]

Before turning to this evidence, however, it is necessary to consider what is perhaps the most perplexing of all Arthurian problems, the relationship between the Welsh Gwalchmei, Geoffrey's Walgamus, and the French Gauvain. While at first sight this may appear to be a digression, actually the connection between these three variant forms of the hero who, later, is known to us through the British romances as Gawain is important. The frequent movements of the Celtic peoples from Wales to Brittany and from Brittany back to Wales account for the confusion which exists. When we consider that a folk-hero of the Celts in Wales in, say, the 5th century might very easily have become a folk-hero of the Bretons in the 6th century; that Breton characteristics might as easily have become attached to such a hero; that in the 7th and succeeding centuries this hero as easily might have been re-introduced to Wales; that such a folk-hero might quite reasonably have been the Welsh prototype of Geoffrey's Walgamus; when we consider these not very credulous possibilities it is small wonder that no one yet is able definitely to state that any specific Welsh hero is the prototype of Gawain. It is therefore highly desirable to state briefly, and clearly, the information which has proved to be most useful, most nearly valid.

Fifty years ago almost all scholars believed that Geoffrey's Walgamus was derived from the Welsh Gwalchmei.[10] Yet there is hardly any evidence

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[9] It may even be necessary to speculate about the absence of his name when other Round Table knights are mentioned.

[10] See, for example, A. Nutt, Studies in the Legend of the Holy Grail (London, 1888), p. 225 ff.; J. Rhys, Studies in the Arthurian Legend (Oxford, 1891), p. 13 stated "...Gwalchmei...and his name, which in Geoffrey's Latin becomes Walgamus, appears in French as Gauvain, English Gawayne..."; apparently this is the view, also, of E. K. Chambers: see his Arthur of Britain (London, 1927), p. 151.

in the extant Welsh literature which antedates Geoffrey to suggest this connection; actually, the Gwalchmei disclosed in the pre-Galfridian Welsh literature barely resembles Geoffrey's Walganus.[11] If the Welsh Gwalchmei is not the source of Walganus, it would be convenient to assume a French prototype. Yet there is no French romance extant, nor any other French document containing any reference to a Gauvain, which antedates Geoffrey.[12] This is the quandry in which Arthurian scholarship finds itself.[13] There are only two possible explanations. We assume either (1) that early Welsh documents or oral tales or French folk tales containing references to Gwalchmei or Gauvain, or actually recounting stories about them, were available to Geoffrey and are now lost, or (2) we must entertain the possibility that another Welsh hero is the origin of Geoffrey's Walganus and the French Gauvain.

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[11] As will be demonstrated in this and the next chapter. Furthermore, linguistic evidence does not suggest that Welsh Gwalchmei, OF Gauvain, and L Walganus are easily related. Cf. R. S. Loomis, Arthurian Tradition and Chretien de Troyes (New York, 1949), pp. 148-150.

[12] G. Paris stated that the very first mention of Gawain occurs in the passage of William of Malmesbury already cited. "Son nom nous apparaît pour la premiere fois dans un curieux passage de Guillaume de Malmesbury. ..." (Hist. de la litt. France, XXX, 29.)

[13] It was recognition of this puzzle, of course, which led J. D. Bruce, some thirty years ago, to observe that the Welsh Gereint, Owain, and Peredur were not the sources of Chrétien's corresponding poems, Erec, Yvain, and Le Conte del Graal. He showed that Chrétien's poems must have preceded the Welsh romances, and that the later are, if not simply translations of Chrétien, largely influenced by him. Bruce explained this process and stated, concerning the names of the heroes, that "...when Welshmen came to translate the Arthurian romances, they thought that in Percival they recognized their native Peredur and they accordingly substituted the latter's name for Percival; similarly they substituted Gwalchmei for Gawain...etc." (Evolution of Arthurian Romance, I, 192.)

Although it is unlikely that any argument which relied on the assumed existence of texts or oral tales should ever convince all persons, nevertheless we cannot dismiss such conjectures lightly. Simply because we do not today possess a text to prove that the original of Geoffrey's Walganus must have been X, we cannot conclude that X did not once exist in either oral or written story form. There can be little doubt that many stories, lost to us, did exist, and, furthermore, that they were recited frequently. Some knowledge of the method employed to transmit such stories is, fortunately, known to us. We know, for example, from the Venedotian Code that in the 10th century in Wales the eighth officer of the King's Court was the Bard of the Household, the Bard teulu.[14] We know also that

> the cyfarwydd's, or story-teller's, stock-in-trade included many elaborate saga-cycles in which prose was the medium of narrative and description, and verse, often of the englyn type, of monologue and dialogue. Other tales were entirely in prose, and we are encouraged to guess at their number when we remember that the Irish ollamh was required, as a professional qualification, to know three hundred and fifty such.[15]

We assume reasonably, then, that many stories, and many heroes, once popular, are lost to us, as well as additional adventures of heroes whose names and feats have survived. Therefore we must not be too exacting, too strict in our acknowledgment of what constitutes reliable evidence: we ought willingly to admit that Geoffrey knew more about Gawain than he wrote down, that he knew more about him than we might ever know. We should not, moreover, throw up our hands because we cannot, any more than Geoffrey could, produce his librum vetustissimum. This attitude, this willingness to accept the

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[14] "The Laws of Howel DDa", tr. G. Thomas in The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales, 2nd Ed. (Denbigh, 1870), pp. 1014, 1019.

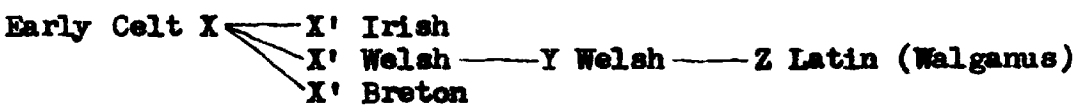
[15] G. Jones and T. Jones, The Mabinogion, p. xi.

probability that we might never know the prototype of Walganus, even though we do know certainly that Geoffrey did not invent him, recommends itself when we turn to a consideration of the second alternative.

It should not surprise us to discover that two or more heroes of widely separated nations are strikingly similar. The primitive American Indian mind could produce a hero who seems to be almost an exact counterpart of a primitive Teutonic demi-god or, for that matter, of a Melanesian god. It would appear more likely to assume that a certain sameness of primitive human nature would account for such likenesses in the views of reality and non-reality on the part of geographically distinct peoples rather than to insist that the later hero must somehow be dependent, ever so mysteriously, upon the earlier. It is therefore a highly speculative venture to look about for a specific prototype of a given hero, and to state that Y does indeed come from X. We must subject any such candidate to the closest examination, realizing all the while that such a relationship is possible, although it may not be demonstrable.[16]

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[16] It must be admitted, however, that the case for dependency is strengthened when the two factors, two separate heroes, originate in an area which was once linguistically and culturally homogeneous. One only has to refer to the earliest Celtic world, to a time, before the P - Q split, when one group may have revered a specific hero. Such a hero easily could have been transported by the Celts to such separate areas as Brittany, Wales, and Ireland. This hero probably would, in time, have become three different heroes, each bearing certain resemblances to the original. And in each area a second hero could have developed from the copy of the original which was first transplanted. This possible development is suggested:



The dependence of Y upon X, then, is not direct, may even be remote, might possibly be non-demonstrable. It may very well be that the relationship between Pryderi and Walganus, discussed below, is this X' - Z relationship, that the Gwalchmei-Walganus relationship is represented by Y - Z, and that Geoffrey himself may have known more about Y and X', or even X, then he reveals.

Among the candidates proposed as the original of Gawain a promising warrior is found in the famous list of Arthur's household in Kulhwch and Olwen, Gwrvan Gwallt Avwyn.[17] At least according to R. S. Loomis, the first, to our knowledge, to suggest this relationship, he is the prototype of Walganus and Gauvain.[18] Loomis postulates that Gwrvan Gwallt Avwyn might be a substitution for Gwri Gwallt-euryn, and he marshalls sufficient evidence to enable him to state that "...no one can deny that Gwrvan Gwallt-avwyn may have been an alternative form of the name Gwri Gwallt-euryn, borne by the hero of the Four Branches."[19] Considering the possibility of a scribal error, avwyn for advwyn, which means "bright, fair", Loomis then concludes: "Thus Gwallt-advwyn would be almost the equivalent of Gwallt-euryn, "Golden Hair", and renders plausible the identity of Gwrvan with Gwri. Gwri, too, might have been called Gwallt-advwyn."[20] Now the linguistic difficulties which beset the earlier attempts to account for the transformation of Welsh Gwalchmei[21] into Old French Gauvain[22] disappear with the substitution of Gwallt-advwyn for Gwalchmei, because this trisyllabic Welsh name could easily pass into French Galvagin, the "...earliest recorded form of Gauvain."[23]

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[17] J. Loth, Les Mabinogion, 2nd Ed., I, 277; G. Jones and T. Jones, The Mabinogion, p. 104, where he is identified as Gwrfan Wild Hair.

[18] R. S. Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, p. 149.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] This means "Hawk of May", and it does not suggest any significant characteristic of Gawain.

[22] R. S. Loomis, op. cit., p. 148.

[23] Ibid., p. 151.

The implication of this demonstration cannot be under-estimated, for Gwri, we know, is none other than Pryderi,[24] son of Pwyll Prince of Dyfed, the hero of what is perhaps the most primitive of all known Welsh legends.

In spite of its attraction and plausibility, however, certainly we should not rest our case on evidence "which no one can deny": if this linguistic demonstration cannot be denied easily, neither can it be proved absolutely. Other evidence must be adduced to strengthen Loomis's suggestion. The materials lie close at hand. If we examine Pryderi closely we can determine whether or not he is sufficiently similar to Walganus to substantiate the claim made for him. We can also judge whether or not Gwalchmei has acquired any of his characteristics, because it is possible that Welsh bards remodeled Gwalchmei to play the part which lost French sources assigned to Galvagin or Gauvain, and which probably were similar to the role given to Gauvain in the Erec.[25] For example, Gwalchmei is introduced among the warriors in Kulhwch and Olwen, but he is not a significant character.[26] Yet in the Peredur, somewhat later, Gwalchmei is just like Gauvain. So it is possible that Gwalchmei was "inserted" into the list of Arthur's warriors simply to give him prestige. Therefore we should be attentive, although cautious, to Loomis's suggestion that Pryderi might be

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[24] G. Jones and T. Jones, The Mabinogion, pp. 20-23.

[25] R. S. Loomis, op. cit., p. 148 also suggests a similar transformation; cf. n. 11, supra.

[26] "Gwalchmei son of Gwyar" (Jones, The Mabinogion, p. 106.) Arthur sends him along with Kei, Bedwyr, Cynddylig the Guide, and Gwrhyr Interpreter of Tongues. These men accompany Kulhwch to Ysbaddaden's castle, but Gwalchmei does nothing. And, in spite of his especially good qualifications ("...he never came home without the quest he had gone to seek. He was the best of walkers and the best of riders." [Ibid., p. 108] he was not assigned any of the missions undertaken by the rest of Arthur's warriors. Loomis, op. cit., also notes this.

the origin of Walganus. What we have to do, then, seems to be clear. We must, in order to make the necessary clear statement concerning the promitive Gawain, take into account both Gwri-Pryderi and Gwalchmei, and our area of search must include any Welsh document containing references to these heroes which either (1) antedates Geoffrey's Historia or which (2) appears to describe the primitive conception of the heroes even though the MS. date is later than Geoffrey. Thus our search for the primitive Gawain might take us back several centuries before Geoffrey, for the Kulhwch and the Four Branches frequently suggest the very earliest stage of man's story telling development, far beyond the day when he was able to write down what had been passed on to him.

No starting point is more convenient than Kulhwch and Olwen. Although this is not the oldest Welsh Arthurian material,[27] it is the most important early story, and there can be little doubt that some of the events and people which it describes refer to a time centuries before the usual date assigned to the MS., about 1100.[28] Furthermore, we find both Gwalchmei and Gwri-Pryderi mentioned in this story, a combination which occurs nowhere else in extant Welsh literature: only once were these two contenders brought together. Kulhwch and Olwen, moreover, reveals brilliantly Arthur, his court, and their several reputations, mixed with the most curious and ancient legends, in a fascinating and magical world.

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[27] Taliesin's "Spoils of Annwyn", for example, includes an account of disastrous attacks made by Arthur. This poem may not be as old as Taliesin; it may have been attributed to him much later. But it is generally agreed that Taliesin, Aneirin, Myrddin, and Llywarch Hen lived during the 6th century. Cf. Thomas Stephens, The Literature of the Kymry, 2nd Ed., p. 1.; J. E. Lloyd, History of Wales (London, 1911), I, 169 ff. The problem of dating the early Welsh poetry is discussed ably by H. I. Bell, The Development of Welsh Poetry (Oxford, 1936), pp. 17-20.

[28] Cf. T. P. Ellis and J. Lloyd, The Mabinogion (Oxford, 1929), I, 162; J. Loth, Les Mabinogion, 2nd Ed., I, 35-46.

The reader is transported, at once, from this world to the world of extreme romance: he enters, at once, the heart of the Arthurian mysteries. Even the skilled reader is excited, is puzzled. We turn to this story, "...the earliest written record of the Arthurian cycle"[29], for some flash, some bold descriptive stroke. Here, if anywhere, we should expect to find Gwalchmei in his greatest moment, for all Arthur's warriors are paraded here, and some achieve greatness. Of the assembled host we notice the unusual pair,

> Morfan son of Tegid (no man placed his weapon in him at Camlan, so exceeding ugly was he; all thought he was a devil helping. There was hair on him like the hair of a stag), and Sandde Angel-face (no one placed his spear in him at Camlan, so exceeding fair was he; all thought he was an angel helping.)[30]

We could hardly overlook Osla Big-knife,

> who bare Bronllafn Short-broad. When Arthur and his hosts came to a torent's edge, a narrow place of the water would be sought, and his knife in its sheaf laid across the torrent. That would be bridge enough for the hosts of the Island of Britain and their three adjacent islands with their spoil.[31]

Neither would it be easy to find a more impressive quartet than this:

> Gilla Stag-shank (three hundred acres he would clear at a single leap, the chief leaper of Ireland), Sol and Gwaddyn Osol, and Gwaddyn Oddeith (Sol could stand all day on one foot. Gwaddyn Osol, if he stood on the top of the highest mountain in the world, it would become a level plain under his foot. Gwaddyn Oddeith, even as the hot metal when it would be drawn from the forge was the bright fire from his foot-soles when a hard thing came against him. He cleared the way for Arthur on the march.[32]

In the presence of such distinguished company Gwalchmei is almost passed over: as if 'among those present', the brothers "...Gwalchmei son

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[29] Ellis and Lloyd, The Mabinogion, op. cit.

[30] The Mabinogion (Everyman Edition, 1949), p. 102. Unless noted otherwise, all future references to The Mabinogion are to this edition.

[31] Mabinogion, p. 104.

[32] Mabinogion, pp. 104-105.

of Gwyar, Gwalhafed son of Gwyar..."[33] are introduced. He is given no more notice, say, than that received by Llwydeu son of Cel Coed, Huabwy son of Gwryon, or Gwyn Godyfron,[34] all now meaningless names to us. Kei and Bedwyr, on the other hand, are listed first: "He [Kulhwch] invoked his boon in the name of Kei and Bedwyr...."[35] More information, to be sure, is disclosed shortly. Arthur chose Gwalchmei to accompany Kulhwch, and, as we have already noticed, he was especially qualified: "...he never came home without the quest he had gone to seek. He was the best of walkers and the best of riders. He was Arthur's nephew, his sister's son, and his first cousin."[36] But this, unfortunately, is all we hear of Gwalchmei. He drops out of the story at once; he is not heard of again. Because this information is suspect, it is especially interesting to compare Gwalchmei's accomplishments with those of Kei and Bedwyr. This pair plays an important part in the story, and it is easy to see why, for they too are eminently qualified:

> Cei had this peculiarity, nine nights and days his breath lasted under water, nine nights and nine days would he be without sleep. A wound from Cei's sword no physician might heal. A wondrous gift had Cei: when it pleased him he would be as tall as the tallest tree in the forest. Another peculiarity had he: when the rain was heaviest, a handbreadth before his hand and another behind his hand, what would be in his hand would be dry, by reason of the greatness of his heat; and when the cold was hardest on his comrades, that would be to them kindling to light a fire....Bedwyr, who never shrank from an enterprise upon which Cei was bound. It was thus with Bedwyr,

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[33] Mabinogion, p. 106.

[34] Mabinogion, p. 104.

[35] Mabinogion, p. 100.

[36] Mabinogion, p. 108. Cousin is the equivalent of "relative".

> that none was so handsome as he in this Island, save Arthur and Drych son of Cibddar, and this too, that though he was one-handed no three warriors drew blood in the same field faster than he. Another strange quality was his; one thrust would there be of his spear, and nine counter-thrusts.[37]

The most striking difference between Gwalchmei and Kei is the complete absence of any supernatural quality in Gwalchmei. While Kei's accomplishments are all "wondrous gifts", Gwalchmei's are quite natural. A sword stroke from Kei inflicts an incurable wound; he can exist nine days without drawing a breath; he can increase his height at will; he carries his own heat-energy with him: clearly we have a supernatural being in Kei. Between Gwalchmei and Bedwyr the apparent difference is the absence of superhuman qualities in Gwalchmei. While Bedwyr's talents are sufficiently superlative to enable him never to "shrink from an enterprise upon which Kei is bound", Gwalchmei's are quite human. Bedwyr is one of the three handsomest men of Britain; one-handed, he was more than the equal of any three other warriors; nine spear thrusts were required to equal one thrust of his spear:[38] certainly Bedwyr is superhuman. The Kei-Bedwyr combination represents the blend of a God and a hero. Together they reveal the extraordinary qualities we expect the God-Hero to possess: they complement each other.

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[37] Mabinogion, pp. 107-108.

[38] A different interpretation of this phrase is suggested by T. Gwynn Jones, "Some Arthurian Material in Keltic", Aberystwyth Studies, VIII (1926), 76 where he reads "His spear thrust made one wound and the withdrawal made nine." This is the same as Loth gives: "sa lance produisait une blessure [en entrant], mais neuf en se retirant." (Les Mabinogion, 2nd Ed., I, 287) But Loth admits honestly (Ibid., n. 2) that he is explicating, not translating, the text, and that, although the text gives "one blow" and "nine counter blows", "...il semble qu'on soit ici en présence d'une arme dans le genre du gae bulga du héros irlandais Cuchulain. Le gae bulga ou javelot du ventre faisait la blessure d'un seul trait en entrant, et trente en se retirant." This is an interesting parallel, but it seems more in keeping with Bedwyr's superhuman accomplishments to prefer the literal translation of the Everyman Edition, instead of girding him with an "un-natural" supernatural weapon.

No task, presumably, could be too severe for them, for what quality necessary to insure success one might lack, the other, to be sure, could provide. As we read this story, part romance, part myth, part magic, it seems to us altogether fitting that the God-Hero, Kei-Bedwyr, should be present.

Gwalchmei, as he is presented, does not belong among this company. There are two kinds of warriors in Arthur's household: those who are named and then forgotten, and those whose accomplishments are listed. Among those named only we find Gwyrfan Wild-hair. It may well be that these names were once meaningful, that they were popular once as Gods or heroes in well known stories. They are lost to us now. Therefore we learn nothing of Pryderi here. Each warrior in the second group is distinguished for either a supernatural or a superhuman accomplishment. Gwalchmei, however, has neither. He was unusually successful--he always obtained what he went after; he was strong physically--the best walker and rider. There is little room for doubt, he is a man here, not a God or a hero; an accomplished man, to be sure, but a human nevertheless. His accomplishments, too, are human: there is nothing supernatural or superhuman about him. Clearly he does not fit here, and the suggestion that he might have been inserted, rather violently, in this list at a late date in order to give him prestige, while only a guess, probably is not far from the truth.

Obviously Gwalchmei is misplaced, and because Gwyrfan Wild-hair is listed without comment, we can conclude that the original Gawain, as we are able to determine him, played no part in the absorbing story of Kulhwch's ordeal. We must admit to some disappointment, for we should like to have found an active Gwalchmei in this story, "...the starting point for anyone who wishes to study and understand the Arthurian cycle."[39] Since we cannot,

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[39] T. P. Ellis and J. Lloyd, The Mabinogion, I, 168.

therefore, be sure that this notice of Gwalchmei actually antedates Geoffrey, we shall have to look elsewhere for information concerning the prototype of Gawain. We can, somewhat wishfully, accept this evidence from Kulhwch and Olwen, although, at the same time, we must admit that it is shaky. But we must not underestimate the important fact that in this most significant story Gwalchmei, although a minor character who was most probably inserted at a late date, is, unlike the principal actors, human and devoid of supernatural taint.

Apart from Kulhwch and Olwen the pre-Galfridean Arthurian evidence, which has survived from the hands of British writers, comprises two types of literature. The more pretentious is composed of annals, chronicles, chartularies, and biographies of Saints. These, placed together, may be called non-imaginative, expository accounts, although we must admit that some of the information found in this group would appear, to the careful historian, to be more imaginative than factual. In this group we find only five works: Gildas, De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae; Nennius, Historia Britonum; Annales Cambriae; Liber Landavensis; Lives of the Cambro British Saints.[40] A second group may be formed from the imaginative prose and poetry of the period. Here are to be found those Welsh literary productions which, in the aspect they present to us, appear to reflect all the mystery and romance, the color and vivacity, the quick flash of illuminated character and the brilliance of description long associated with the peak of Celtic genius. The Triads, the early Welsh poems of the

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[40] The appropriate excerpts from these sources, and others, are collected by E. K. Chambers. Cf. his Arthur of Britain (London, 1927), pp. 233-282. This is a convenient location of Arthurian records. He omits, however, the Liber Landavensis.

Cynfeirdd, of the poets Aneirin, Taliesin, Myrddin, and Llywarch Hen,[41] and the "Four Branches" of The Mabinogion contain Arthurian references which suggest the early popularity of the British Hero-king and his band of loyal warriors. At first sight, nothing seems to us more curious than the fact that no mention of Gwalchmei occurs in the first group, while Kei and Bedwyr appear to have been familiar to some of those writers. Gwalchmei and Pryderi, on the other hand, appear in the second group. Our examination of this material will be facilitated if we take up first the expository accounts, principally to consider if Gwalchmei's absence is significant, passing on then to the second group, to consider Gwalchmei first and Pryderi last.

Anyone who desires to follow the slim thread of evidence leading back to the birth of Arthur in the Celtic imagination feels some compulsion to linger over the works of Gildas and Hennius. It is true that Gwalchmei is unknown to these earliest authorities. Nennius, however, knew of Arthur, and Gildas knew of an important battle between the Britons and the Saxons which, later on, was regarded as Arthur's greatest triumph, "...obsessionis Badonici montis,"[42] "The Siege of the Badonic Hill." We must observe, however, that this evidence forms the foundation of the entire Arthurian legend, that this unpretentious notice is the root of all later Arthurian romances. Furthermore, since, by Geoffrey's time, Gawain was known as

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[41] H. I. Bell, Development of Welsh Poetry, pp. 17-18.

[42] Gildas, De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae, § 26, in Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctorum Antiquissimorum, XIII (Chronica Minora Saec. IV. V. VI. VII., ed. T. Mommsen, Vol. III), Berlin, 1898, p. 40. Nennius stated that Arthur participated in this and other battles: "... tunc Arthur pugnabat contra illos [Saxons] in illis diebus regibus Brittonum, sed ipse dux erat bellorum." (Historia Brittonum, ed. T. Mommsen, loc. cit., p. 199.) Concerning the confused date of this battle see A. W. Wade-Evans, Nennius's "History of the Britons" (London, 1938), p. 24.

Arthur's nephew it is prudent to recognize the character and reputation of the uncle, for we could ill afford to over-look the tremendous importance which was, during the Middle Ages, placed upon the Uncle-Nephew relationship.[43]

From Nennius, more precisely, we learn that Arthur was, in the first place, Christian:

> ...octavum fuit bellum in castello Guinnion, in quo Arthur portavit imaginem sanctae Mariae perpetuae virginis super humeros suos et pagani versi sunt in fugam in illo die et caedes magna fuit super illos per virtutem domini nostri Iesu Christi et per virtutem sanctae Mariae virginis genitricis euis.[44] (The eighth battle was at Castle Guinnion, in which Arthur carried on his shoulders the image of St. Mary, ever a virgin, and the pagans were on that day put to flight, and there was a great slaughter of them as a result of the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and of St. Mary the Virgin, his mother.)

The next information which Nennius has to offer concerning Arthur illustrates the curious growth of legend. We no longer hesitate to accept Arthur as an historical personage.[45] We are prepared to believe that Arthur, a battle leader of the Romano-Britons, did in fact fight, in South Britain, against the invading Saxons. Other than this nothing can be said about him. It also seems reasonably "...certain that a victory of the Britons

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[43] Cf. W. O. Farnsworth, Uncle and Nephew in the Old French Chansons de Geste (New York, 1913); W. A. Nitze, "The Sister's Son and the Conte del Graal", Modern Philology, IX (1912), 5-7 suggests that this matriarchal motif is equally significant in the story of Percival, where we find that the Fisher King is Percival's uncle, on his mother's side.

[44] Nennius, Historia Brittonum, op. cit., pp. 199-200.

[45] During the last half of the 19th century it was fashionable to regard Arthur's story as a myth, to deny that such a person ever existed. E. Guest, for example, had to argue for Arthur's historicity. Cf. his Origines Celticae (London, 1883), II, 193ff. E. K. Chambers, Arthur of Britain devotes a chapter to the historicity of Arthur, and E. Foord, The Last Age of Roman Britain (London, 1925), pp. 231-248 discusses the matter intelligently. Foord also sees no reason for doubting Gildas or Nennius, when they are discussing the events of their own time.

at Mount Badon in the year 520 checked the progress of the West Saxons...."[46]

Nennius described this action:

> ...duodecim fuit bellum in monte Badonis, in quo corruerunt in uno die nongenti sexaginta viri de uno impetu Arthur; et nemo prostravit eos nisi ipse solus, et in omnibus bellis victor extitit.[47] (The twelfth battle was on Mount Badon, in which nine hundred and sixty men were felled in one day as the result of one rush by Arthur, and he alone, no one else, overthrew them. And in all the battles he emerged the victor.)

We find it difficult to believe that one warrior, no matter how skilled and courageous he may have been, could have killed nine hundred and sixty men in one day. It seems clear that the actions of the historic Arthur had, by Nennius's time, become embroidered, that, as the result of simple exaggeration, Arthur had been translated from the position of a human "dux bellorum" to the rôle of a superhuman hero. It is this peculiar attachment of improbable or superhuman attributes to an important person, for reasons which are hidden from us forever, which accounts for the rise of legends. Arthur acted like a strong magnet: to his already powerful stature other characteristics, other stories, and even accounts of other heroes were drawn. The result, to our eyes, is the complete Arthurian legend.

Nennius's last words about Arthur introduce a third order of ideas: to the human and the superhuman achievements there is now added the mysterious, the supernatural, the apparently miraculous occurrence. This leads us into the world of romance. Nennius devoted the last section of his Historia Brittonum to the "Mirabilibus Britannia", and of the twenty marvels described, Arthur is mentioned in two. "There is another wonderful thing,"

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[46] J. R. Green, A Short History of the English People, Rev. Ed. (New York, 1911), pp. xxi, 11-12. But cf. A. W. Wade-Evans, Nennius's "History of the Britons", p. 24, who places this battle in 665.

[47] Nennius, Historia Brittonum, op. cit., p. 200.

says Nennius,

> ...in the region which is called Buelt. There is in that place a heap of stones, and one stone superposed on the pile with the footprint of a dog on it. When he hunted the boar Troynt, Cabal, who was the dog of Arthur the soldier, impressed his footprint on the stone and Arthur afterwards collected a pile of stones under the stone, whereon was the footprint of his dog, and it is called Carn Cabal. And men come and carry the stone in their hands for the space of a day and a night, and on the morrow it is found upon its pile.[48]

The second marvel is the grave of Arthur's son. "There is another marvel," the account continues,

> ...in the region which is called Ercing. There is to be found in that place a sepulchre by the well which is named Licat Anir, and the name of the man who was buried in the tumulus was called so, Anir. He was the son of Arthur the soldier, and he killed him in the same place and buried him. And men come to measure the tumulus, sometimes six feet in length, sometimes nine, sometimes twelve, sometimes fifteen. In what measure you should measure it in turn, the second time you will not find it in the same measure, and I have tested it myself.[49]

A stone returns to its own pile by means of its own power and a grave apparently changes its dimensions: these are supernatural activities which we do not encounter in this world, but which we meet frequently enough in the world of romance.

Nennius shows us what can be done with a man of uncommon prestige. Such a man can become, as a result of nothing more than simple exaggeration to start with, the center of a wide circle of legend and romance. His

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[48] Tr. in A. W. Wade-Evans, op. cit., pp. 119-120; Mommsen's ed., p. 217.

[49] Tr. in A. W. Wade-Evans, op. cit.; Mommsen's ed., pp. 217-218. Geoffrey, incidentally, did not know of any son of Arthur. Is it possible that we have left here a trace only of a story about Arthur and his son, a story arising from the theme of the mortal combat between a father and a son who do not recognize each other? The details of this motif are discussed fully in M. A. Potter, Sohrab and Rustem (London, 1902).

attraction is so great that all is drawn to him. It comes as no surprise, then, to find, much later, that Gawain has become attached to Arthur. From one point of view it is unfortunate that Nennius did not know of Gawain. We should like to believe, in spite of the fact that there is no evidence for it, that independent stories about Gawain were known, at least by Nennius's time.[50] Yet if Nennius knew of Arthur's dog, of the hunt for Ysgithyrwyn Chief Boar,[51] and of the death and strange grave of Arthur's son, it is curious that he should not have known of other Arthurian warriors, Gwalchmei in particular. We are content, however, to hear of Arthur, and to discover that, by 800,[52] there already was a tradition, a

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[50] In her Legend of Sir Gawain (London, 1897), p. 7, Miss J. L. Weston states there "...is practically no doubt that, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the Arthurian legend proper has become greatly obscured by the introduction of legends connected with other heroes; there is but little more doubt that the first of all the heroes with whom Arthur gradually became connected was he who we know from the Anglo-Norman and French romances as Walwein, Gauvain, Gawain, and from Welsh texts as Gwalchmai." She suggests further (p. 12) that "...at first he [Gawain] may have been even a more notable hero than Arthur himself." Then Miss Weston has to admit, reluctantly, that, as G. Paris pointed out, the name of Gawain first occurs in William of Malmesbury's history.

[51] Clearly the boar, Troynt in Nennius's account, is the Ysgithyrwyn Chief Boar in Kulhwch and Olwen: "And after that Arthur...went after Ysgithyrwyn Chief Boar....And Arthur himself took his place in the hunt, and Cafall, Arthur's dog, in his hand....It was not the dogs which Ysbaddaden had named to Culhwch which killed the boar, but Cafall, Arthur's own dog." (Mabinogion, p. 129.)

[52] A. W. Wade-Evans, op. cit., p. 10, gives, as the earliest date for the completion of the Historia Brittonum, 796, and suggests 801 as the terminus ad quem. But see Bruce, Evolution, I, 8-9, where he suggests that "...in the third decade of the ninth century a writer named Nennius, who lived in South Wales, re-edited and expanded an older Historia Brittonum that dated back to 679." In his review of the Thurneysen-Mommsen-Zimmer investigations Bruce stated (ibid. n. 19) that Thurneysen's conclusions "...concerning the origin and development of the Historia Brittonum, as stated Zs. f. celt. Ph., I, 166f. (1896) are to be preferred, viz. that in the neighborhood of Builth (in South Wales), in the year 826, Nennius (Nemnius), compiled the work in the full form, known as the Harleian recension. Immediately thereafter, on the advice of his teacher, Beulan (cp. ch. 10), he prepared an abbreviated edition of this Harleian recension. Later on, he entered additions and corrections of this abbreviated recension."

legend of the British Hero-King.

The next two authorities, the Annales Cambriae and the Liber Landavensis, offer very little. Gwalchmei is unknown to the authors of these documents, and Arthur himself is given but little space. Yet the Annales Cambriae, an attempt at accurate historiography, is, according to one of its editors, "...perhaps the oldest chronicle of Welsh affairs that we possess."[53] Its early entries are brief, and only three notices of Arthurian matters occur:[54]

A.D.

516. LXXII. Annus. Bellum Badonis, in quo Arthur portavit crucem Domini nostri Jesu Christi tribus diebus et tribus noctibus in humeros suos, et Britones victores fuerunt. (The Battle of Badon, at which Arthur carried the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ on his shoulders for three days and three nights, and the Britons were victorious.)

537. XCIII. Annus. Gueith Camlann, in qua Arthur et Medraut corruere. (The Battle of Camlann, in which Arthur and Modred fell.)

573. CXXIX. Annus. ...Merlinus insanus effectus est. (Merlin became insane.)

The last two entries afford new information: we hear, for the first time, of Modred--who is, later, presented always as Gawain's brother--and Merlin, but learn nothing about them except that one died and the other became insane. The first entry is curious. The annalist has transferred the mystic support which Arthur received in combat from the eighth battle,

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[53] Annales Cambriae, ed. J. W. Ab Ithel (Rolls Series), p. ix.

[54] Ibid., pp. 4-5. J. Loth, Les Mabinogion, 2nd Ed., II, 375-382 also prints the Annales, but he does not print, for the 573 entry, the information about Merlin. E. K. Chambers, Arthur of Britain, pp. 240-241 also prints a portion of the Annales. He too does not include the notice of Merlin's insanity. He also advances the date of each entry two years, thus placing the battle at Badon in 518, and that at Camlann in 539.

as Nennius stated it, to the twelfth battle. He has, furthermore, changed the nature of this support considerably. It is here the cross of Jesus which Arthur carries in battle, and he does so for three days and nights. Thus is his victory attributed to Christ, whereas Nennius wrote that Arthur carried an image of Mary, and that the Blessed Virgin, as well as her son, helped to bring him victory. We are able to conclude little from this, other than to note that the early tradition admitted some variation in detail.

From the Liber Landavensis itself we are able to extract no notices of Gwalchmei or of Arthur, but an account of Arthur's coronation is given in an appendix called "A Chronicle of the Church of Llandaff, from Brutus to the year of Our Lord 1370".[55] The description is very much like that found in Geoffrey's Historia. "In the year of the incarnation of our Lord 506," the annalist wrote,

> Dubricius, Archbishop of Llandaff, crowned the most celebrated King Arthur, in the city of Cirencester, in the 15th year of his age. And after the fame of his liberality and probity was spread abroad to the furthest parts of the world, and he had subdued divers nations by bloody wars, and toil, he caused the Archbishops, Bishops, Kings, Princes, and Leaders subdued by him, to assemble at the City of Legions, and there solemnly celebrate the great festical of Whitsuntide; who, being sent for, and having arrived, all were called who performed obedience to him on account of his honours, and he liberally endowed every one with certain possessions; and so leave having been asked and obtained, all and every one returned home with joy.[56]

In spite of the fact that the heading of this passage reads "Of the Original Construction And Building Of the Church Of LLandaff", the feudal tone of the account indicates that this passage probably was not written before Geoffrey's time. We have, besides, Rees's word for it that the entire appendix was

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[55] The Liber Landavensis, ed. and tr. W. J. Rees (Llandovery, 1840), p. 620.

[56] Ibid., pp. 621-622.

"...written in the year 1439."[57] It is therefore several centuries too late. Dubricius, however, was useful to Geoffrey. The holy man, after crowning Arthur, retired from public life. His piety was known and admired by all. Thus Arthur, because he received the blessing of St. Dubricius, was brought under the sanction of the church. Yet when we turn to the "Life of St. Dubricius", in the Liber Landavensis proper,[58] a document which might very well antedate Geoffrey, we find no mention of Arthur. The only possible connection, then, between the Liber Landavensis and the Arthurian tradition is sheer coincidence. Dubricius, in Geoffrey's work, is the Primate of Britain, the holy man who crowned Arthur. In the chartulary of the diocese with which Dubricius was supposed to have been invested, however, no attempt was made to connect him with Arthur. Geoffrey's delicate coronation official would appear to be the product of his own sprightly invention.

Our last evidence, from this group of expository accounts, is found in several of the Welsh Saint's lives.[59] These biographies appear to have been composed sometime during the 12th century when, according to Rees, "...the descendants of the Norman invaders were desirous to render more intimate the connection that existed between the British and the Roman churches, and to conciliate the Welsh by writing favourable partic-

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[57] Ibid., p. 620.

[58] Ibid., pp. 323-331.

[59] Printed in one volume with an English translation by W. J. Rees, Lives of the Cambro British Saints (Llandovery, 1853); the work is a companion piece to the Liber Landavensis.

ulars of their national Saints, whom they venerated."[60] Here we encounter Arthur and his chief warriors in a different rôle. Sometimes absurd, sometimes dishonorable, Arthur, seen through the eyes of the hagiographer, presents a strange aspect to those of us who, as a child gained our first impression of the Hero-King from the poems of Tennyson and the popular re-tellings of the legend, and who, later on, reinforced that early conception by finding, delightfully, the 'real' Arthur in the pages of Nennius and Geoffrey. We recover by affirming that Arthur was indeed someone to be reckoned with; we take with several grains of salt the ridiculous actions ascribed to Arthur by zealous monks who had, of necessity, to reduce Arthur from a Hero-King to an ordinary man. More especially useful, however, is the inference we induce from these biographies. We are sure that many tales of Arthur and his warriors must have been current. Otherwise, there would have been no need to ridicule Arthur. Considering the absence of Arthurian texts which antedate Geoffrey, these Welsh biographies of Saints comprise the most conclusive evidence we possess which indicates the popularity of early Arthurian tales.

We first meet Arthur in the Prologue to the "Life of Saint Cadoc", where we find him, with Kei and Bedwyr, in a curious situation. Gwladys, daughter of Brychan, was seized by King Gwynlliw, after Brychan had refused Gwynlliw's request for betrothal. Brychan pursued the pair, engaged Gwynlliw's followers in combat, and forced them to retire to a hill which marked the boundary between their two dominions. At this propitious

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[60] Lives of the Cambro British Saints, p. viii. E. K. Chambers reports that the "...composition of the Vitae is put by scholars, not with complete unanimity, in the late eleventh or early twelfth century." (Arthur of Britain, p. 81.) Rees's suggestion that the lives are, more or less, English propoganda is plausible, although difficult to substantiate. The denigration of Arthur, however, helps to make this view acceptable.

moment,

> ...three brave heroes, Arthur, with his two knights, namely, Kai and Bedwir, were sitting upon the top of the aforesaid hill and playing dice. When they saw the king with the young lady coming near them, Arthur was immediately seized with love towards the lady, and full of bad thoughts, said to his companions, "Know ye that I am vehemently inflamed with love towards the lady, whom the soldier carries off, riding." But they forbidding him said, "Far be from thee to commit such wickedness; wherefore let us go forward, and quickly render our assistance that this contest may be terminated."[61]

Arthur instructed Kei and Bedwyr to determine who was the owner of the territory, and, discovering that Gwynlliw was the owner, he and his companions rushed upon the enemies of Gwynlliw and forced them to flee in great confusion.[62]

Apart from the obvious attempt to depict Arthur as lewd and avaricious, the passage is of interest, for if it in fact does antedate Geoffrey,[63] it is the earliest British notice of chivalric behaviour. It is further curious that, in view of their later development, Kei and Bedwyr, and not Gwalchmei, should be the ones to restrain Arthur and urge him to assist the lady. From the text itself, however, we learn only that Arthur's first impulse, in this situation, was lustful, and that his companions had to urge restraint. We meet Arthur later on in this same biography. St. Cadoc, we discover, is the son of the very pair, Gwynlliw and Gwladys, whom Arthur had assisted. Years later, a certain Ligessawc killed three of Arthur's soldiers, and, pursued by Arthur, came at last to St. Cadoc for refuge. For seven years the saint kept Ligessawc, after which time he was betrayed, and Arthur, with a large force, came to St. Cadoc to demand justice. It was

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[61] Lives of the Cambro British Saints, p. 312.

[62] Ibid., pp. 312-313.

[63] Cf. E. K. Chambers, Arthur of Britain, p. 81, who suspects that this is a late interpolation.

agreed betwen them to submit Arthur's claim to arbitration, and, after the case had been heard, it was adjudged that Arthur should receive one hundred cows for each of his men who had been killed. "This being accepted," the biographer continues,

> Arthur, in an insolent manner, refused cows of one colour, but would have those of two colours, viz:—with the fore part red, and the hind part white, and required those so distinguished by colour, with much wrangling. And they, being altogether ignorant where cattle of that colour were to be found, were in doubt what they should do respecting them. Therefore the man of God, in the name of three persons, ordered young men of the company, to the number of nine, or more as some say, to bring to him one hundred heifers, of whatever colour they might be. And when the said animals were brought before his eyes and those of other servants of God, they were, on account of the perverse desire of Arthur, immediately turned into the aforesaid colours.[64]

The entire herd of now parti-colored cows was driven half way across the river which separated the two contesting parties. From this mid-point,

> Kai and Bedwir, greatly desiring to have them, drew them by their horns with their hands to the river's side; but immediately, whilst they were in their hands, they were by the direction of God changed into bundles of fern. Which miracle being seen by Arthur, he humbly intreated the blessed man that the injury which he had inflicted on him should be forgiven him. And pardon for the offence was granted to him....[65]

When the council was finished, all the cows that St. Cadoc had enchanted were found safe in their owners' stalls. "And from that day, the place is called, in the British language, Trefredinauc, the Town of Fern."[66]

Arthur, hardly the magnanimous king, is here greedy and perverse. Kei and Bedwyr are seen as over-anxious, rapacious lieutenants. Humility comes only after embarrassment, and good sense only after miracle. Clearly this story represents an attempt to reduce the Hero-King to the stature of an

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[64] Lives of the Cambro British Saints, p. 341.

[65] Ibid., pp. 341-342.

[66] Ibid., p. 342.

ordinary man, to place Arthur, as all men ought to be placed, under the power of the Church and her agents. One had to show respect to Holy Church, and Holy Church sometimes demanded awe of her human fledglings. Somewhat later on, St. Cadoc had occasion to restore sight to several humble blind men. This feat so impressed the king then reigning, we are told, that he "...increased his [Cadoc's] refuge, as pious Arthur...had constituted it...."[67] When we read of "pious Arthur" we may be sure that the efficacy of the holy saint's demonstration had not worn off, that, to our biographer at least, Arthur remained chastened for the rest of his days.

Meeting St. Carannog next, Arthur fares a little better. This holy man, upon his return from Ireland, received an altar from God: no man was able to tell what color it was. Carannog cast the altar into the Severn River, "...and it went before him where God wished him to go."[68] It went, of course, into Arthur's land. Arthur, meanwhile, had been seeking a dragon which had terrorized the district of Carrum. The saint and Hero-King met. Receiving St. Carannog's blessing, Arthur promised to tell him where the altar had landed if he would reward him. "What," Carannog asked, "dost thou require to be done?" "That thou shouldest," Arthur replied, "lead the serpent that is near thee, and we shall see whether thou art a servant of God."[69] Immediately following Carannog's prayers, a very docile dragon came "...running as a calf to its dam. And it bowed its head to the servant of God, as an obedient servant to its master, with a humble heart, and downcast eyes."[70] Led meekly by the saint, the dragon was taken to King

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[67] Ibid., p. 347.

[68] Ibid., "Life of Saint Carannog", p. 398.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., p. 399.

Cato's castle, where it was explained that the dragon had been sent by God to destroy the sinners of Carrum. Carannog released the dragon, against the pleas of the people who wished to kill it, commanding it to "...hurt no one, nor return any more; and it injured none as God had commanded."[71] Keeping his part of the bargain, Arthur then produced the altar, admitting, however, that he had "...intended to make it a table, but whatever was put thereon, was thrown off to some distance."[72] This display of unearthly powers must have astonished King Cato; he gave Carrum to St. Carannog and built a church there. The altar, floated next in the sea, landed at the port of Guellit. This town too was given to the saint. "Afterwards Carannog came and built there a church, and the city was called Carron."[73] Surely it is unwise to doubt whether a holy man is indeed a servant of God. Arthur must have concluded this, at any rate, for, although treated very kindly by the saint, he was taught that his earthly powers were as nothing compared with those of God. Thus even one who willingly seeks out a dragon to fight is, after all, shown to be an inferior dragon-slayer when his potential strength is compared with that of God who can tame dragons. In this very saint-like manner the Hero-King was taught humility, and Holy Church was allowed to exhibit her superiority.

The "Life of Saint Illtyd" adds nothing to the "saintly" view of Arthur. We learn only that St. Illtyd, a distinguished son of noble parents, was, in early life, a soldier. It also appears that Illtyd was a cousin of Arthur, and

> ...hearing of the magnificence of his cousin,...and being desirous to visit the court of so great a conqueror, left what we call the Farther Brittain, and by sailing, came to

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

> where he saw a very large collection of soldiers. Being honourably and munificently received according to his military wishes, and his desire for receiving rewards being satisfied, he departed, much pleased, from the royal court....[74]

The feudal reception suggests, once more, that this portion of the "Life of St. Illtyd" may not antedate Geoffrey. Although Arthur is not described, we may infer, however, that Illtyd found, later in life, that even the magnificence of a court like Arthur's was not to be compared with the greater glory attending the service of Christ.

Arthur is subjected to the greatest humiliation as a result of his encounter with Saint Padarn: mercifully, this is the last meeting of king and saint. The wearied saint was in his church resting one day when

> a certain tyrant whose name was Arthur...came...to [his] cell...and while he spoke to Padarn he looked at his coat, and being seized with the affection of avarice, asked if he should have it; and the Saint answering, said, "This coat is not suitable for the wearing of any malicious person, but for a clerical habit."[75]

An angry Arthur stormed from the monastery, returning somewhat later vowing to seize the coat by force. An alarmed disciple hastened to tell St. Padarn that the mad tyrant was, as a result of his vicious stamping, leveling the ground. The saint pronounced: "Yes, may the earth swallow him." "With the word," we are told,

> the earth opened its bosom to some depth, and swallowed Arthur as far as his chin, who immediately acknowledged himself guilty, and he began to praise both God and Padarn: until by asking pardon, the earth delivered him up. And in that place with bended knees, he begged the favour of the saint, and obtained it, and he accepted Padarn for his perpetual patron, and so departed.[76]

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[74] Ibid., "Life of St. Illtyd", p. 467.

[75] Ibid., "Life of Saint Padarn", p. 508.

[76] Ibid., p. 509.

Arthur a tyrant; Arthur greedy: this is the strangest view of all. The biographer had, at any cost we feel, to ridicule Arthur. By any means he must be degraded, so that readers for all time, in spite of whatever glorious accomplishments they may have heard attributed to the Hero-King, would know, finally, that the greatest achievements in this world were as nothing compared with the accomplishments of the saintly, humble servant of God.

Now it is hard to believe that Gwalchmei, had he been a popular hero or a prominent member of Arthur's household, could have escaped this priestly censure. Arthur, Kei, and Bedwyr: this is the Arthurian triumvirate which appears most to have caused concern. Chiefly it is Arthur against whom the "monkish biographers" level their attack. Yet Kei and Bedwyr are at least recognized. Later on, wherever we find Kay we are sure to find Gawain, usually in the role of foil to Kay. Kay is rude, Gawain is courteous; Kay boasts loudly but almost always fails to accomplish his mission, Gawain speaks gently and is generally successful. Thus it becomes more and more difficult to believe that Gwalchmei existed much before Geoffrey, or that Geoffrey's Walgamus lies under any debt to Gwalchmei. In the entire roster of pre-Galfridean Arthurian expository accounts, from the 6th century on, Gwalchmei is never mentioned. Other Arthurian personalities are mentioned and are assumed to be familiar characters. Is there an explanation for Gwalchmei's absence? Apart from the suggestion already made, that he was inserted in the Kulhwch at a late date, only one other plausible answer is possible: other pre-Galfridean expository accounts once existed, but are now lost. If this early prose, then, offers no clues, perhaps the early poetry and the Four Branches may prove more rewarding.

Almost all the early Welsh poetry is found in a collection called the "Four Ancient Books of Wales", namely, "...The Black Book of Carmarthen, dating from the end of the twelfth century, the Books of Aneirin and Taliesin,

both of the thirteenth, and the Red Book of Hergest, written at various dates in the fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries."[77] It is not easy to date the composition of this poetry: whether or not any of it actually dates from "...the late sixth or the seventh [century] is still a matter of dispute."[78] Once accepted as a genuine product of the sixth century, once regarded as a late forgery, this early poetry so far has defied exact definition. "No doubt," writes Bell,

> it would in many ways be simpler to suppose a genuine sixth- or seventh-century core increased by later accretions; but literary history must submit to the evidence, and until some general agreement has been arrived at on the difficult linguistic problems involved the verdict must remain in abeyance.[79]

It is difficult to say, then, whether or not any of the poems attributed to Aneirin, Taliesin, Myrddin, and Llywarch Hen actually antedate, in their present form, Geoffrey: a skeptic could, for example, ask for proof which, so far, is not available. Without proof, however, it appears that a statement such as this represents what may be regarded as the best opinion:

> In any case we should regard the names of the four poets mentioned above rather as labels for various schools or cycles of poetry, as nuclei round which particular poems crystallized, than as those of the authors of the existing poetry; but we have early ninth-century evidence for the actual existence in the sixth century of two of these poets; and the supposed process of crystallization would certainly be helped by the survival of genuine relics of their work which attracted to themselves later compositions of the same school.[80]

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[77] H. I. Bell, Development of Welsh Poetry, p. 17.

[78] Ibid., p. 18.

[79] Ibid., p. 19.

[80] Ibid. Even Thomas Stephens, a vigorous 19th century skeptic, stated that "...in the eleventh century, the Welsh had an ancient literature; a language which had been forming for many centuries, and was always used as the vehicle for the transmission of thought; and an order of bards possessing great influence over the popular mind, very numerous and held high in public estimation." (Literature of the Kymry, p. 10.)

We may therefore accept these poems as representative of the earliest Welsh productions which have survived. Any Arthurian notices found in these poems can thus be regarded as being at least as old as Geoffrey, if not centuries older. What do we find?

The "Gododdin", ascribed to Aneirin, is obscure: since it is mainly lyrical rather than narrative, it is difficult to interpret. The subject is a total military defeat inflicted upon the North Britons by the Angles. Loomis puts the composition of the poem in about the year 600.[81] In his Four Ancient Books of Wales, W. F. Skene arranges the poems of Aneirin in four books, and indicates that the "Gododdin" is Book of Aneirin I, the other three books being "The Gorchan of Tudvwlch", "The Gorchan of Cynvelyn", the "The Gwarchan of Maelderw".[82] Three passages are of interest. We meet Peredur first:

> Peredur with steel arms, Gwawrddur and Aeddan.
> A defence were they in the tumult... (Bk. I, st. xxi)[83]

Gereint receives somewhat more attention:

> Gereint from the south raised a shout;
> A brilliant gleam reflected on the pierced shield.
> Of the lord of the spear, a gentle lord;
> Attached to the glory of the sea.
> Posterity will accomplish
> What Gereint would have done. (Bk. I, st. lxxxiv)[84]

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[81] Arthurian Tradition and Chretien de Troyes (New York, 1949), p. 12: "...the Gododdin, now assigned by experts to about the year 600."

[82] W. F. Skene, The Four Ancient Books of Wales (Edinburgh, 1868), I, x, 374-426. This is the place to observe, also, that the English translations of these poems are not Skene's. "Mr. Evans," he writes, "has translated for me the poems in the Black Book of Caermarthen, the Book of Aneurin, and the Red Book of Hergest...Mr. Williams has translated for me the poems in the Book of Taliesin...." (pp. 17-18.)

[83] Skene, I, 386.

[84] Skene, I, 404-405.

Last we read of an unknown hero:

> He was worthy to be at the head of an army,
> most gentle;
> He fed his horses upon barley in winter.
> Black ravens croaked on the wall
> Of the beautiful Caer. He was an Arthur
> In the midst of the exhausting conflict... (Bk. IV, st. xxxiii)[85]

We are impressed by the concrete imagery, by the evident reflection of careful observation present in these lines. The mind of the poet must have turned naturally to exact description, to rejection of general qualities. A pity, then, that he does not tell us more. Peredur and Gereint are more familiar later on as knights of the Round Table, yet we observe that the names were known independently of Geoffrey. Let us suppose for a moment that the "Gododdin" was composed shortly after the Battle of Catraeth.[86] The use of Arthur's name as an epithet to indicate perfection on the battlefield suggests that very early Arthur achieved great renown. If we suppose the poem, on the other hand, to have been composed in the 10th century, we have this notice to bolster any theory of the persistence of Arthur's reputation without Geoffrey. But, again, we look in vain for Gwalchmei.

In the "Book of Taliesin" we uncover additional notices of Arthur and his warriors. Arthur is named at the end of a curious poem, "The Battle of Godeu", which treats of many transformations: trees apparently became warriors, and the poet himself became, at various times, a sword, a tear, a star. A Christian tone permeates the concluding lines of this poem, but before speaking of Christ, Taliesin proclaims:

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[85] Skene, I, 426.

[86] H. I. Bell, Development of Welsh Poetry, p. 20: "...fought towards the end of the sixth century, probably at Catterick Bridge in Yorkshire...."

I travelled, I made a circuit,
I slept in a hundred islands.
A hundred Caers I have dwelt in.
Ye intelligent Druids,
Declare to Arthur,
What is there more early
Than I that they sing of. (vv. 233-239)[87]

The inference to be drawn, of course, is that Arthur is the important man, the one to whom all declarations ought to be made. In the "Death Song of Uthyr Pendragon" Taliesin declares, among other things, that he has borne his portion of the defense of Arthur.[88] A curious mixture of transformations and listings of famous horses is the so-called "Song of Steeds". Taliesin states that he is not a cowardly old man; on the contrary, he says, he is still able to fight. It would be an advantage, he continues, to have on the battlefield in addition to his own horse,

...a steed used to the field.
And the steed of Genethawg,
And the steed of Caradawg,
Perfect for travelling.
And the steed of Gwarddur,
And the steed of Arthur. (vv. 26-32)[89]

Arthur's horse is not named, but we infer that it must have had a reputation, otherwise it should not have been included here.

By far the most interesting of Taliesin's poems, however, is the "Spoils of Annwyn". This poem describes a series of adventures, expeditions led by Arthur against eight fortresses. These are the most curious and perplexing engagements that we are ever likely to read about.

I worship the Lord, the Sovereign, the king of the Realm
Who hath extended his sway over the world's strand.
Perfect [i. e., richly equipped] was the prison of Gweir in the
Faery Fortress [Kaer Siddi],
According to the tale of Pwyll and Pryderi.
No one before him went into it,

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87 Skene, I, 283.

88 Skene, I, 298, vv. 10-14.

89 Skene, I, 308.

Into the heavy blue [i. e., steel] chain which held him,
faithful youth,
And before the spoils of Annwn dolefully he chanted
And till the Judgment he will remain in bardic song.
Three shiploads of Prydwen we went into it;
Save seven none returned from the Faery Fortress [Kaer Siddi].

I am illustrious if song be heard.
In the Four Cornered Fortress [Kaer Pedryvan], four sided,
My first utterance, it is from the caldron that it was spoken.
By the breath of nine maidens it [i. e., the caldron] was kindled.
Even the Chief of Annwn's caldron, what is its nature?
Dark blue [i. e., enamel] and pearls are round its rim.
It will not boil the food of a coward; it has not been destined.
The sword of Llwch Lleawc was ... to it,
And in the hand of Lleminawc it was left.
And before the gateway of hell lamps were burning,
And when we went with Arthur, - glorious hardship, -
Save seven none returned from the Fortress of Carousal [Kaer Veddwit].

I am illustrious; song is heard.
In the four cornered fortress [Kaer Pedryvan], the isle of
the active door,
Noonday and jet-blackness are mingled.
Bright wine was their liquor before their retinue.
Three shiploads of Prydwen we went on the sea;
Save seven none returned from the Fortress of the King-Dwarf
[Kaer Rigor], or the Fortress of the Royal Horn [Kaer
Rigorn].

I, lord of letters, do not reward mean folk.
Beyond the Fortress of Glass [Kaer Wydyr] they saw not the
prowess of Arthur.
Three score hundred men stood on the wall.
It was difficult to converse with their sentinel.
Three shiploads of Prydwen went with Arthur;
Save seven none returned from the Fortress of Frustration
[Kaer Goludd].

I merit not the laurel of them of the long shields:
They know not which is the ruler's day or who he is,
At what hour of early day he was born or where,
Who made...went not...
They know not the Speckled Ox with the stout halter,
With seven score joints in his collar.
When we went with Arthur, anxious visit,
Seven alone did we return from Caer Vanddwy.

I merit not the laurel of thos of long...
They know not which is the day of the ruler and chief,
At what hour of early day was born the owner,
Or what myriad guards the silver of the head.

> When we went with Arthur, anxious contest,
> Seven along did we return from Caer Ochren.[90]

Two of the eight fortresses named call up echoes from other Welsh stories. Gwair (v. 3) reminds us of Gwri, and Gwri-Pryderi, as we shall see shortly, disappeared into a curious caer. Gwair, however, is not Pryderi in this poem: Pryderi (v. 4) apparently warned Gwair, thus the two could not be identical. The caer into which Pryderi disappeared, however, might have been similar to the prison which held Gwair.[91] A more striking parallel is found in the second stanza. The fabulous cauldron located in Caer Pedryvan (vv. 12-17) is, it seems, very much like the Cauldron of Rebirth which Bendigeidfran gave to Matholwch. This cauldron was manufactured in Ireland, and, taken back to Ireland by Matholwch, it was put to good use when the Irish were under attack by Bendigeidfran's forces.

> And then the Irish began to kindle a fire under the cauldron of rebirth. And then the dead bodies were cast into the cauldron until it was full, and on the morrow they would arise as good fighting men as before, save that they were not able to speak. (A Briton managed to have himself tossed into the cauldron: he then, stretching out, broke the cauldron, and, Samson-like, died gloriously.) And it was because of that that such victory as there was came to the men of the Island of The Mighty. Even so, there was no victory save for the escape of seven men....[92]

We have not the "breath of nine maidens", to be sure, nor a pearl-studded rim, but both cauldrons "boil not a coward's food", and in both accounts "seven alone did return". The similarities may be accidental, but they indicate that there might have been other versions of these adventures, but they indicate

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[90] The first four stanzas, vv. 1-34, are Prof. Loomis's tr., taken from his "Spoils of Annwn", PMLA, LVI (1941), 889-891, and the last two stanzas are taken from Prof. Rhys's tr. as printed by Chambers, Arthur of Britain, pp. 62-63.

[91] T. Gwynn Jones, "Some Arthurian Material in Keltic", p. 52 points out that Sidi "...reminds us of the Irish sid, which was underground." Hence the linking of Annwyn with the other-world.

[92] "Branwen Daughter of Llyr", Mabinogion, p.37.

that there might have been other versions of these adventures, and that there might likewise have been stories of the other six adventures. It seems likely that this is so, for otherwise this poem "...could never have been intelligible to any audience."[93] Certainly the remaining six adventures are unintelligible to us. Taliesin says no more. He knew of Arthur, he records the names of warriros whose horses were a help in battle, and he knew of Pryderi. Once again, however, Gwalchmei is not noticed.

From the "Black Book of Carmarthen" we are able to extract four references to Arthurian matters. What at one time must have been an extended dialogue between Arthur and the porter Glewlwyd, now only a fragment, seizes our attention first; it will be worthwhile to look at the entire fragment.

'Who is in the dooryard?'
'Glewlwyd of the mighty grasp.
Who is he who asks?'
'It is Arthur, with mighty Kei.'

'Who go with thee?'
'The best men in the world.'
'Into my house thou comest not
Unless thou discover them.'
'I shall discover them,
And thou shalt behold them -
Wythneint, Elei,
And Sivyon, the three of them
Mabon son of Modron,
The servant of Uthr Pendragon,
Kysceint son of Banon
And Gwyn Godyvrion,
My servants were...
In defence of their laws -
Manawydan son of Llyr,
Whose counsel was profound -
Manawyd, who verily brought
Broken spears from [the field of] Tryvrwyd;
And Mabon son of Mellt,
Who caused the grass to be spotted with blood;

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93 T. Gwynn Jones, op. cit., p. 53. Cf. Loomis's extended discussion in "Spoils of Annwn", op. cit.

And Anwas Edeinawc [winged]
With Lluch Llawynnawc;
They were defensive
Against the Hewer of Eiddin.
As a lord who would reconcile them,
My nephew would have made amends (?)
Kei pleaded with them
Whilst he cut them down by threes;
When the grove was lost,
Fury was experienced;
Kei still pleaded with them
The while he hewed them down;
When the grove was lost,
Fury was experienced;
Kei still pleaded with them
The while he hewed them down;
Arthur, though he played [or, laughed],
He made the blood flow,
As in the hall of Avarnach
He fought with a witch;
He pierced the head of Palach
In the hiding-places [or, Among the
treasures] of Dissethach;
At Mount Eiddin,
He fought with dog-headed ones,
By hundreds they fell,
They fell by hundreds
Before Bedwyr of the four-pronged spear;
On the sands of Tryvrwyd,
Fighting against Garwlwyd,
With sword and with shield;
A whole line was but vain
Before Kei in battle;
It was a sword, in contest,
That was the pledge of his hand;
He was an equable chief
Of a legion, for the country's good.
Bedwyr...
Nine hundred, in hearkening,
Six hundred, in raising the shout,
Was the worth of his rush.
There were [also] warriors of mine -
It were better they were still [with] me.
Before the chiefs of Emreis
I have seen Kei in haste,
Leader of raids,
A tall man was he among enemies;
His vengeance would be heavy,
His thrusting would be grievous;
When he drank out of a horn,
He would match four men,
When he would come to battle,
In hewing down he would be match for a hundred;
Unless it were God that should cause it,
The death of Kei would be beyond reach.

Noble Kei and Llacheu,
They would make battles
Before the pang of keen blades;
On the ridge of Stawngun
Kei pierced nine witches;
Noble Kei went to Mona
To destroy...
His shield was...
Against Cath Paluc -
Why do folk ask
'Who slew Cath Paluc?'
Nine score hoary-headed ones
Used to fall in its feeding;
Nine score leaders... [94]

Although the fragment takes up the story somewhere in the middle and breaks off short of its expected end, we can at least recognize that we are on familiar ground. Our triumvirate is present: Kei, the slayer of the monster Cath Paluc; Bedwyr, the equal of six hundred; Arthur, the killer of the witch of Avarnach. As in the Kulhwch, here too Kei and Bedwyr exhibit, between them, the supernatural and superhuman qualities of the God-Hero. And, like the "Spoils of Annwyn", this poem alludes to what once must have been familiar adventures. We have, moreover, for the first time what might be a disguised reference to Gwalchmei.

As a lord who would reconcile them,
My nephew would have made amends (?) (vv.29-30)

The lines are ambiguous: we do not know who the "them" refers to, nor do we quite know why the subject is interjected here. We observe later that Arthur fought "at Mount Eiddin" (v. 48), and that this nephew might have made amends and effected a reconciliation between Anwas Edeinawc, Lluch Llawynnawc, and the "hewer of Eiddin". (vv. 25-28) We cannot be sure, however, that this trio is the "them" referred to. Yet the lines are informative: a nephew is regarded highly, and we know only three such nephews, Gwalchmei, Gwalhafed, and Medrawt. If it is a matter of choice, we should prefer to read Gwalchmei,

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[94] Tr. T. Gwynn Jones, op. cit., pp. 54-57.

but since the nephew is not named, and all other warriors in the poem are named, we have no real reason for choosing Gwalchmei. There are only two explanations. Either an opportunity to expand the story has been passed over or the poet did not know Gwalchmei. It is possible, of course, that the original audience would know who the well regarded nephew was. Yet if Kei and Bedwyr are named, why not Gwalchmei?

Gereint is the next to receive attention. A poem, "Geraint, Son of Erbin", is printed by Skene in eighteen three-line stanzas, of which the first, eighth, and ninth suffice to indicate the tone of the eulogy:

> Before Geraint, the enemy of oppression,
> I saw while horses jaded and gory,
> And after the shout, a terrible resistance.
>
> In Llongborth I saw Arthur,
> And brave men who hewed down with steel,
> Emperor, and conductor of the toil.
>
> In Llongborth Geraint was slain,
> A brave man... [95]

As Jones observes, the poem is interesting because, "...in the early poetry, Arthur is associated with Gereint, one of the Knights of the Round Table in later romance."[96] More rewarding are the "Grave Stanzas":

> The grave of Gwalchmai is in Peryddan,
> Where the ninth wave flows.[97]
>
> There is a grave for March, and a grave for Gwythur,
> And a grave for Gwgawn of the red blade,
> Unknown [or a mystery] is a grave for Arthur.[98]

Here at last we find a positive statement: this poet knew of Gwalchmei, and

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[95] Skene, I, 266-267.

[96] T. Gwynn Jones, op. cit., p. 58.

[97] Skene, I, 310.

[98] T. Gwynn Jones, op. cit., p. 54.

he knew, moreover, that he was important enough to deserve mention. Unfortunately, we learn nothing of him; the location of his grave is all that is recorded. The notice of Arthur's grave does not surprise us. No man, before William of Malmesbury, could say where it was.[99] The last Arthurian evidence in the "Black Book of Carmarthen" corroborates the earlier statement of Nennius that Arthur had a son.

> 'I have been where Llacheu was slain
> (The son of Arthur, whose arts were marvellous)
> When the ravens called loudly for blood.'[100]

In Nennius's mirabilia the son's name is Anir. Llacheu, however, is the name used by Arthur in the dialogue between Arthur and Glewlwyd (v. 89).

We must conclude that the early Welsh poems of the Cynfeirdd are but little more suggestive of an early Gwalchmei tradition than were the expository accounts. In addition to what we have established as the early Arthurian triumvirate many heroes are named, and several now unintelligible adventures are recorded, but Gwalchmei is slighted. We have the positive statement describing the location of his grave, and the ambiguous reference to Arthur's nephew. But we have nothing, as yet, about the hero Gwalchmei. It is difficult to believe that Gwalchmei made much of an impression upon these early Welsh bards. To do so would require us to believe that all their references to Gwalchmei perished, while a large share of their references to, say, Kei or Bedwyr, survived. This seems unlikely. Thus the mystery, far from clearing, becomes more intriguing. We know Geoffrey's Walganus was not his own creation; we see other Galfridean names appearing in the early Welsh prose and poetry; we are puzzled because we have encoun-

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[99] Late in the 12th century Giraldus gives an account of the "discovery" of Arthur's grave at Glastonbury. Chambers prints the passage from De Principis Instructione as Record xxvi in Arthur of Britain, pp. 269-271.

[100] T. Gwynn Jones, op. cit., p. 54.

tered Gwalchmei so infrequently. To be sure, more evidence is still forthcoming. Unfortunately, however, our next source of information, the Triads, is equally as perplexing. They are also as difficult to date accurately.

It is as easy to believe the Trioedd to be the earliest Welsh Arthurian materials as it is to insist that all Arthurian references in the Triads are late interpolations. "According to Rhys," Jones writes, "...they contain the earliest Arthurian material. Probably, Rhys is right, but it is necessary to examine carefully the various versions, as the later of them show evident additions and expansions."[101] In a long note inserted in his introduction to H. B. Wheatley's edition of the prose Merlin, W. E. Mead, having to consider the Triads briefly, quotes from a letter sent to him by E. Phillmore. After outlining the various printings of the Triads, Phillmore considered their antiquity and authority, and he set down this opinion:

> ...what I mean by 'genuine' is, that the authors wrote down actual tradition or legend which they found to hand; by "spurious', that the authors invented some at least of what they record, out of their own heads. The genuine Triads do not purport to be written at any particular date. The oldest MSS. are of about 1225 and 1275...and 1300-1325..., but contain archaisms and errors of transcription which carry them back each, say, from fifty to a hundred years in their present form. But how much older some of the Triads may or may not be no one can say![102]

Although he considers some of the Triads to be influenced by Geoffrey, this is essentially the opinion, too, of J. Loth.[103] One cannot say, then, that any notice of Gwalchmei found in the Triads absolutely antedates Geoffrey.

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[101] Ibid., p. 63.

[102] E. Phillmore, in Merlin (English Prose), ed. H. B. Wheatley, EETS, (61), 10, 21, 36, 112 (London, 1865-1899), p. xcix.

[103] Les Mabinogion, 2nd Ed., II, 225. In their present form, Loth writes, the greater portion of the Triads betrays an influence of Geoffrey, although they probably were first composed long before Geoffrey.

Here too the skeptic could demand proof which no one could produce. The wisest course, it would seem, is to set down whatever references there are to Gwalchmei, as well as certain other notices of additional Arthurian characters when it is helpful to do so. Then we may infer what seem to be the most apt conclusions. Of the various collections of the Triads Loth's is the most convenient:[104] his translations, too, are probably the most accurate available. From the one hundred fifty-three triads Loth prints we discover only four in which Gwalchmei is described:

> 3. Trois coursiers pétulants de l'Île de Prydein: Gwyneu Godwff Hir, cheval de Kei; Ruthyr Ehon Tuth Bleidd, cheval de Gilbert Kadgyffro; Keincaled, cheval de Gwalchmei.
>
> 27. Trois deivniawc de l'Île Prydein: Riwallawn Wallt Banhadlen (aux cheveux de genêt); Gwalchmei, fils de Gwyar, et Llacheu, fils d'Arthur. (Loth, n. 1 explains deivniawc: "Probablement inventeurs, qui devinent la nature des choses....")
>
> 93. Trois chevaliers à la langue d'or de la cour d'Arthur: Gwalchmei, fils de Gway; Drudwas, fils de Tryphin; Eliwlod, fils de Madawc ap Uthur. C'étaient trois hommes sages, si gentils, si aimables, si éloquents dans leur conversation, qu'il etait difficle de leur refuser ce qu'ils desiraient.
>
> 100. Les trois hommes les meilleurs envers les hôtes et les étrangers étaient: Gwalchmei, fils de Gwyar; Gadwy (Garwy), fils de Gereint; Cadyrieith, fils de Saidi.

When we consider what little we have learned about Gwalchmei from all the evidence thus far arrayed, these four brief notices appear to be a windfall. Yet in proportion to all the information in these one hundred fifty-three triads the notices are slight. We have discovered the name of Gwalchmei's horse, Keincaled, noticeably missing in Taliesin's "Song of Steeds".[105]

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[104] Ibid., pp. 227-325. He has numbered them consequetively. Unless noted otherwise, all citations from the Triads are from this edition; the numbering, too, is Loth's.

[105] Cf. p. 40, supra.

Gwalchmei and Llacheu, we learn, were two of the three men who, presumably because their intuition and intelligence were superior, were able to divine, or to know, the nature of all things. In view of his later development (if numbers 93 and 100 can be proved to be early) it is most interesting to observe that Gwalchmei is one of the three 'golden-tongued' knights of the court; one could hardly refuse any wish of his--he spoke so eloquently, he was so wise, so gentle, and pleasant. And he was one of three who, better than anyone else, was kind and courteous to guests and strangers. What a curious document these four triads make! They have transformed Gwalchmei from a relatively unknown warrior to the Gauvain of the French romances, to the courteous Sir Gawain of the later British romances, and, most astonishing of all, Geoffrey's Walganus is all but completely by-passed in this tremendous leap. It is worth a few moments time to consider this information in a little more detail.

Much has been made of the fact that Gwalchmei possessed a horse, that, later on in the romances, his horse, unlike the mounts of ordinary knights, was known by name. Miss Weston saw in this a signification of solar God-hero manifestations in the original Gawain. "It is practically certain," she writes, "that if Gawain were ever looked upon as a solar hero he would in that character have been possessed of a steed of especial beauty and value."[106] She appears to indicate that Gawain is thus set apart from his fellows because "...he possesses a steed, which is known by a special name."[107] If this were a unique attribution, if no other horses belonging to early warriors were known to us, Miss Weston's suggestion would be tenable. But we have

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[106] The Legend of Sir Gawain (London, 1897), p. 15.

[107] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

seen already that Taliesin, at least, believed that other horses of other warriors were sufficiently noteworthy to be singled out. Furthermore, the first four triads Loth prints are placed together as "Triads des Chevaux du Livre Noir de Caermarthen".[108] The three steeds taken in battle as a prize, or spoil (chevaux de butin), were Carnavlawc, Bucheslwn Seri, and Kadwallawn ab Kadvan. Other horses and their riders are: Arvwl Melyn, the mount of Pascen ab Uryen; Duhir Tervenhydd, of Selyv ab Kynan Garwyn; Drudlwyd, of Rydderch Hael; Lluagor, of Karadawc Breichvras; Melynlas, of Kaswallawn ab Bely. There are still other horses "known by a special name": Triads 57 - 61 [109] add the names of twelve steeds, including Gwineu Gwddwv Hir, the mount of Kei (no. 60). And triad sixteen contains the names of three famous horses who carried large or strange loads.[110] In view of these facts it would seem likely that there is at least one other alternative explanation of the circumstances which prompted Miss Weston's suggestion. The Welsh authors of these triads may not have "looked upon" Gwalchmei as a "solar hero". When we find some two dozen 'famous' horses recorded, it does not appear that, of necessity, any one of the possessors of such a steed was regarded as a mythical personage. On the contrary, it is more likely that Keincaled is named for the very same reason that the other horses were named: he was an outstanding mount in his own right. There is no necessary implication hidden in this notice that Keincaled is important for any other reason, as, say, that he constitutes a significant part of the usual paraphernalia of a solar hero. Such an ascription simply does not accord with the other facts of Gwalchmei's career as it is revealed to us

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[108] Loth, nos. 1-4, pp. 227-229.

[109] Loth, pp. 268-269.

[110] Loth, pp. 242-245.

by Welsh writers.[111]

Triads 27, 93, and 100 are no less troublesome, no less curious. Number twenty-seven introduces a strange quality: it joins Gwalchmei with Llacheu, and states that these warriors were two of the three inventeurs of the Isle of Britain. Skene's edition reads, for diviners, naturalists.[112] Loth's translation is more convincing: these three could, intuitively it appears, hit upon the precise nature of an object or person. Certainly it would be a mistake to read in here any notion of a vegetation myth, or to attempt to make capital of the connotations inherent in the translation, naturalist.[113] Numbers ninety-three and one hundred, on the other hand, ring a familiar note for any reader who knows the post-Galfridean Gawain. If he is remembered for anything, Sir Gawain is always thought of as the courteous knight, the knight of gentle speech and manners, the only one of Arthur's knights who could persuade perfectly - who could, for example, convince both Peredur and Erec, although at first they did not wish it, to visit Arthur's court. Could it be that here, long before Chrétien's and the later British romances, we have the source of Gawain's courtesy? It

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[111] R. S. Loomis considers Gwalchmei's horse to be more significant, more directly connected with early Celtic tradition. Taking advantage of French as well as English writings, he sees connections which we, using only the Welsh works, have not been able to substantiate. He believes the Welsh Keincaled corresponds with Old Welsh guin-calet, meaning "white and hardy". He points out that white horses should have red ears, and that red-eared white horses are a familiar Celtic feature, usually a supernatural one. Cf. his Arthurian Tradition & Chrétien de Troyes, pp. 90-97, 131-133, 156-159. Nowhere in the extant Welsh material, however, is it ever stated that Gwalchmei's horse was either white or red-eared. Nowhere is it implied that his steed was one bit different from any of the other horses we have pointed to. The most likely conclusion is that the Welsh writers did not regard Gwalchmei, or his horse, as supernatural creatures.

[112] Skene, II, 457.

[113] Cf. Loth, II, 253, n. 1.

would be tempting to claim these triads as the origin of his courtesy, but in order to do so we should first have to surmount several obstacles. In the first place, what little we have uncovered of Gwalchmei's character does not suggest that he might be especially courteous or 'golden' of speech. Second, Geoffrey, as we shall discover, makes little of Walganus's courtesy: he chiefly distinguishes Walganus by attributing to him great courage, an unrestrained boldness and proclivity for rash action, and exemplary skill in battle. Third, these two triads are too much like the later romances. The Gwalchmei here is suspiciously like the later Sir Gawain, and for no other early Welsh characterization of Gwalchmei does this particular resemblance hold true. We have seen already that it is impossible to date the Triads accurately. Therefore it would not seem too likely that these two triads are the source of Gawain's courtesy: it would, on the other hand, seem more likely that these two triads, as they now stand, are late, post-Galfridean productions.[114]

There is no further mention of Gwalchmei in the Triads. Other members of Arthur's court appear: like the early Welsh poetry, the Triads slight Gwalchmei and reflect more familiarity with other Arthurian characters. Number ten contains a long account of Modred's treachery; eighteen considers the blow given Gwenhwyvar by (her sister?) Gwenhwyach as one of the three worst blows struck in the Isle of Britain - it brought about the battle of Camlann; nineteen discusses the frightful waste caused by the plundering

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[114] Cf. Loth, II, 280, n. 4, where he suggests the diverse origin of these two triads. It can be pointed out, further, that triad 94 lists "...trois chevaliers à la cour d'Arthur: Nasiens...Medrod...Hywel.... C'étaient des hommes si amiables, si conciliants, à la conversation si belle, qu'il était difficle à qui ce fût de leur refuser ce qu'ils cherchaient." Three others, including Gawain's own brother, are also distinguished for their fine manners, for their pleasant speech. This weakens any claim that number 93 is an early production.

expeditions raised by Modred and Arthur against each other; twenty-eight reflects upon Arthur's unfortunate division of his troops at the Battle of Camlann; twenty-nine names Kei and Drystan (Tristram) as prominent crown-bearers; thirty declares Arthur to be the most pugnacious of all warriors; seventy-nine labels the Battle of Camlann as the most senseless, the battle which, waged over a trivial issue, exacted the most fearsome toll; one hundred twenty laments the betrayal of Arthur by Iddawc Corn Prydein; one hundred twenty-one ranks Arthur among the three valiant kings of Britain, who, until they were betrayed, were invincible; one hundred thirty names Modred as one of the three traitors who espoused the cause of the Saxons against the rightful rulers of Britain. There is in all this an echo of persons and deeds familiar to us only because later authors described them: there is also, as we noticed in the early Welsh poetry, a hint of fascinating exploits and stories irrevocably lost to us. We are rewarded for our review of the Triads, however, because we now know something of Gwalchmei's character, something of his personality. Clearly he was regarded by these writers as a human being; it is perhaps more equitable to state that the aspect of Gwalchmei reflected in the Triads is absolutely human, is quite free from superhuman or supernatural traces. But whether or not this all precedes Geoffrey is still a matter of debate. In either event, however, early or late, the principal conclusion drawn as a result of the examination of the Triads is hardly affected. As was true for all the Welsh productions seen thus far, Gwalchmei appears to have been regarded as a human being. We, at least, can find no hint of mythical apparatus, can find no substantiation for the "solar hero" ascription.

There exists in MS. a portion of a dialogue between Gwalchmei and Trystan.[115]

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[115] "Englynion Trystan A Gwalchmai - Llyma Englynion", Myvyrian Archaiology, pp. 132-133.

Here we find Gwalchmei in a very curious situation. Trystan and Esyllt, having fled from King March to the forest of Celyddon, discover that March has complained against them to Arthur, who, with his followers, has come to the forest to seek them out. Trystan meets his pursuers and discourages any notion they might have had of fighting with him. March is then advised to send harpists to entertain and soothe Trystan. Trystan, pleased, rewards the minstrels for their performances.[116] "After that", we are told,

> the Chief of Peace was sent to him, to wit, Gwalchmai, son of Gwyar; and then Gwalchmai sang this ancient rime:
>
> Fierce is the unbounded wave
> When the middle sea doth rave.
> Who art thou, O warrior brave?
>
> Trystan: Fierce are thunder and the flame,
> Though they be no whit the same.
> In battle Trystan is my name.
>
> Gwalchmai: Trystan, I can nowhere see
> Blemish in thy chivalry.
> Gwalchmai once was friend to thee.
>
> Trystan: If Gwalchmai in the day of blood
> Needed me, for him I would
> Do more than a brother could.
>
> Gwalchmai: Trystan, noble prince of light,
> Sore thy buffets. I am hight
> Gwalchmai, Arthur's nephew wight.
>
> Trystan: When, O Gwalchmai, I should see
> Battle's burden weary thee,
> I would shed blood to the knee.
>
> Gwalchmai: Trystan with the heart of fire,
> Thou wouldst give all I require;
> I would do thy least desire.
>
> Trystan: This I ask to shield my head;
> This I ask not out of dread.
> Whose this band against me led?

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116 Thus far we have followed the account given by T. Gwynn Jones, "Some Arthurian Material in Keltic", pp. 60-61.

Gwalchmai: Trystan, worthily renowned,
Dost thou know not, hast not found,
Arthur's host that hems thee round?

Trystan: Arthur I fear not a whit;
Nine hundred fights give proof of it.
I will fight if I am smit.

Gwalchmai: Trystan, friend of maids, before
Thou begin the deeds of gore,
Better far is peace than war.

Trystan: If my sword is at my thigh,
And my right hand wakeful, I
Envy not my enemy.

Gwalchmai: Trystan, thy repute is clear,
And thy blow can cleave a spear.
Spurn not Arthur's friendship dear.

Trystan: Gwalchmai of the gracious deeds,
Rain may drench a hundred meads.
Arthur's love in me love breeds.

Gwalchmai: Trystan, men thy praise rehearse;
A hundred oaks rain may immerse.
Come and with thy friend converse.

Trystan: Stubborn Gwalchmai, this I know:
A hundred fields rain may o'er flow.
Where thou willest I will go.

Then went Trystan and Gwalchmai unto Arthur, and Gwalchmai sang this stave:

Arthur, rich in courtesies,
Rain may drench a hundred trees.
Here is Trystan; be at ease.

Arthur: Gwalchmai, man of worth complete,
From fight thou soughtest not retreat.
I my nephew Trystan greet.[117]

In spite of the fact that we do not have the complete tale, this remnant,

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[117] Tr. R. S. Loomis, The Romance of Tristram & Ysolt, Rev. Ed. (New York, 1951), pp. xxiii-xxv. The rest of the story concerns Arthur's judgment of the rival claims of March and Trystan to Esyllt: she is given to Trystan. There is nothing further of Gwalchmei.

preserved in 16th century form, probably represents a very early tradition.[118] But it should not be safe to regard this version as composed before Geoffrey, although it is certainly free of any influence from Geoffrey. Apart from the illustration of Gwalchmei's courtesy, the most interesting discovery is that Gwalchmei is the "Chief of Peace", the very one to make amends, to effect reconciliations between estranged people. It will be remembered that in the long dialogue between Arthur and the porter Arthur speaks of "a nephew" who "would have made amends".[119] This present information thus strengthens the earlier suggestion that the unnamed nephew might be Gwalchmei. It is the courtesy of Arthur's envoy, of course, which attracts attention. Like the Gwalchmei of Triad ninety-three, this Gwalchmei is 'Golden-tongued'. Both Trystan and Arthur, too, speak of his "complete worth", of his "gracious deeds". His speech and manner prevail where music and song did not. This also is the perfect reflection of Gauvain, of the later Sir Gawain. Yet this dialogue cannot be regarded certainly as the source of Gawain's courtesy. Like Triads 93 and 100, these verses, in their present form, present a view of a Gwalchmai who is suspiciously like the post-Galfridean Gawain. The original version of this fragment is probably much older than Geoffrey, but we have no way of knowing what precise characteristics of Gwalchmei it might

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[118] Ibid., p. xxi; T. Gwynn Jones, op. cit., p. 62, who adds "...the composition is certainly earlier." In a letter to the writer dated February 14, 1953, Prof. John J. Parry states: "Quite clearly this is a story transmitted orally, perhaps for centuries. All the manuscripts are late (the earliest ca. 1550) but they do not determine the date of the text. As each reciter modernized it, we cannot date by language, except that the poetry is older than the prose, which was never fixed. You will find the same difficulty with the Triads. You may think them as old as you like, but I don't know how you can prove it to a sceptic." Both Loomis and Jones point out similarities between this Welsh love story and the Irish tale of Diarmuid and Grainne, but this offers no clue to the date of composition.

[119] Cf. p. 44, supra.

have presented. It would seem unlikely that a very early Gwalchmei would be 'Golden-tongued'. On the other hand, there is nothing here to suggest that Gwalchmei was considered to be anything more than a human being. We should like to know exactly when Trystan, Gwalchmei, and Arthur were drawn into the same situation, but that knowledge is denied us. We are content to conclude that while perhaps very early he may have been regarded as the polite, the courteous one, Gwalchmei was never looked upon, by these Welsh writers, as the superhuman, supernatural one.

Beyond this, concerning Gwalchmei the extant Welsh literature is silent. Scarce as the information is, it is somewhat surprising that this much has survived. Beyond the 12th century, beyond Geoffrey, Chrétien, and the late romances in the Mabinogion stretches an epoch filled, doubtless, with noteworthy men and actions, but sufficiently unsettled and fluid to discourage deliberate written expression for entertainment purposes. The 11th century, especially in Wales or Cornwall, was hardly a time for encouraging written literature. And beyond that century we can only guess at what might have been produced. What has survived, then, is a gift, made possible by circumstances which we shall probably never know. Some of these circumstances, however, might very well have caused confusion, might make it plausible that several heroes either conflicted or were mistaken one for the other. It was pointed out earlier that Pryderi, the hero of The Four Branches, has been suggested as the prototype of Gawain.[120] It is now necessary to examine this hypothesis closely. Certainly we want all the information we can muster; if Pryderi does appear to resemble either Gwalchmei or the later British Gawain we shall find that knowledge quite welcome.

The strange circumstances attending the birth of Pryderi form the focus

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[120] Cf. p. 14, supra, for Loomis's suggestion.

of the latter half of the First Branch of the Mabinogion.[121] "Pwyll Prince of Dyfed" is a fascinating tale. We are introduced to Pryderi's parents, Pwyll and Rhiannon. Both are extraordinary people. Pwyll had lived in the Otherworld for a year, and Rhiannon possessed a remarkable horse: they are, nonetheless, recognizably human. This pair, after a hectic courtship, settled down to rule Dyfed, and they "...ruled the land prosperously...."[122] In three years a son was born, but, on the very night of his birth, the child was snatched away by some unknown person. Miraculously, it seems, the child was delivered, again by an unknown hand, to Teyrnon, Lord of Gwent Is-Coed, on that very night, and, it so turned out, on the very night a fine colt was foaled in Teyrnon's stable. It was no ordinary child. Teyrnon and his wife knew, from the silk sheet found wrapped around the infant, that the child was of "gentle birth". Named Gwri Golden-hair, before he was a year old he could walk well, and "...he was bigger than a bay three years old who was of great growth and size."[123] At two he was as large as a normal six year old child, and before he was quite four he had talked the grooms into allowing him to water the horses. While still not four years old, his foster-mother persuaded her husband to give Gwri the colt that had been born on the same night they had found him. She spoke with the grooms, and bid "...them be careful of the horse, and for it to be broken in against the time the bay would go a-riding...."[124]

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[121] Throughout this discussion of the Four Branches we shall be drawing freely on the excellent introduction to the Mabinogion by Gwynn and Thomas Jones in their Everyman Edition. All citations are from this edition.

[122] Mabinogion, p. 11.

[123] Mabinogion, p. 21.

[124] Mabinogion, p. 21.

Shortly after this Teyrnon and his wife heard about the disappearance of Rhiannon's son, and, putting things together, decided that Gwri was the child of Pwyll and Rhiannon. They took him quickly to Pwyll's court: the child was recognized, and all ended well. Gwri, re-christened Pryderi, was given in fosterage to Pendaran Dyfed.[125] "Pryderi son of Pwyll Head of Annwn," it is reported, "was raised with care, as was fit, until he became the most gallant youth and the handsomest and the best skilled in all manly pursuits of any in the kingdom."[126] Following the death of Pwyll, Pryderi ruled the seven cantrefs of Dyfed: he also conquered seven other cantrefs. At last he married Cigfa, daughter "...of the high born ones of this Island."[127] Thus ends the enfance of Gwri-Pryderi. Unlike so many others who begin their lives as strangely as these two do, however, this newly married couple did not "live happily ever after".

In the Second Branch, "Branwen Daughter of Llŷr", Pryderi is all but forgotten. This story ought, as the Joneses point out,[128] to contain the youthful exploits of the hero. But the children of Llŷr receive all the

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[125] An indication of the kind of difficulty encountered in the Four Branches is observed in the career of this retainer, Pendaran Dyfed. Here he appears to be a trusted, older companion, an important person, fit to be a foster parent. But in the Second Branch, when Pryderi is sufficiently old and skilled to participate in the invasion of Ireland, seven men were left in Dyfed as overlords while the army was in the field, "...and Pendaran Dyfed as a young lad with them." (Mabinogion, p. 33.) His career is clouded: later we find him mentioned in a triad - he had been given the swine which Pryderi guarded. G. and T. Jones would like to make him the original Lord of Dyfed, "...with whose wife the King of the Underworld had slept." (Mabinogion, p. xvi.) Loth, Les Mabinogion, I, 81, n. 1 can offer no help. He remains a mystery.

[126] Mabinogion, p. 24.

[127] Mabinogion, p. 24.

[128] Mabinogion, p. xvi.

attention here, and we learn only that Pryderi was one of seven men who escaped from Ireland. As a matter of fact, we do not even know that Pryderi was a member of the expedition until the story-teller reveals, after the final battle, that "...the seven who escaped were Pryderi, Manawydan...."[129] In the Third Branch, however, Pryderi and his wife return. "Manawydan Son of Llŷr" is by far the clearest of the Four Branches. The Joneses have described it thus:

> The Third Branch, what the Irish would call the indarba or incarceration, is altogether clearer. Pryderi's imprisonment in the Otherworld caer and his deliverance thence by Manawydan's guile are as plain as words can make them. So too the fall of mist, the desolation, the infertility which oppress the land of Dyfed on two occasions, and the destruction of Manawydan's crops by Llwyd Son of Cil Coed, suggest that we have here to deal with a myth like that of Persephone, daughter of Demeter the Earth Mother, whose abduction by Dis in the fields of Enna robbed the earth of its increase and joy.[130]

As this story opens Pryderi is thoughtful and generous: he bestowed his mother and the seven cantrefs of Dyfed upon Manawydan. The two friends then spent two years feasting and hunting, until at last Manawydan complained that men could not live thus, that they needed a trade. In succession they became the best saddlemakers, the best shield makers, the best shoemakers, but, always driven off by other jealous tradesmen, they returned to Dyfed to hunt. One morning Pryderi's dogs flushed a white, wild boar: following their quarry, the dogs disappeared into a strange caer, situated in a spot where no building had ever before been seen. Unable to detect any trace of them whatsoever, Pryderi told Manawydan that he would "...go into the caer to seek tidings of the dogs.' 'Faith,' he replied,

'it is not good counsel for thee to go into the caer. We never

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[129] Mabinogion, p. 37.

[130] Mabinogion, p. xvi.

> saw this caer here. And if thou wilt follow my counsel, thou wilt not go inside. And it is he who cast a spell over this land caused the caer to be here.' 'Faith,' said Pryderi, 'I will not give up my dogs.' For all the counsel he received of Manawydan, he sought the caer.[131]

He never returned, and Manawydan had to report to Cigfa and Rhiannon that Pryderi had disappeared. Rhiannon, at once, rushed to the caer to seek her son: she too disappeared, for, once she had entered the strange walls, "...lo, a peal of thunder over them, and a fall of mist, and thereupon the caer vanished, and away with them too."[132]

The rest of the story unfolds the release of the pair, mother and son. After a short turn at shoemaking again, Manawydan and Cigfa return to Dyfed, where, after planting three fields of wheat, they saw two of them destroyed mysteriously after they had reached full growth. Determined to save his third field, Manawydan, watching it at night, was amazed to see the wheat attacked by the "mightiest host of mice in the world". Unable to defend the entire field, Manawydan did, nevertheless, manage to capture the largest mouse. Against the plea of Cigfa that the mouse was an unworthy prize for him, he set about to hang his victim. A clerk and a priest, the first people seen in Dyfed for seven years, could not dissuade him. A third person, a bishop, his entire retinue with him, could make no headway with Manawydan until he promised to restore Pryderi and Rhiannon, to remove the enchantment from the seven cantrefs of Dyfed, and to identify the captive mouse. The bishop met these conditions, but Manawydan demanded, further, that no vengeance be taken upon Pryderi and his mother, and that they both be restored before the mouse is set free. The bishop complied. At once

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[131] Mabinogion, p. 46.

[132] Mabinogion, p. 47.

Pryderi and Rhiannon were restored, the land was populated once again, and the mouse, set free, was changed to the fairest young woman ever seen. She was the bishop's wife, and the bishop, it is declared, was Llwyd son of Cil Coed. Llwyd had enchanted Dyfed and imprisoned Pryderi and Rhiannon to avenge Gwawl son of Clud, who had been shamefully disgraced by Pwyll. During his incarceration Pryderi's durance had been to "...have the gate-hammers of my [Llwyd's] court about his neck."[133] Thus restored, Pryderi is to have one more adventure.

Pryderi's last action forms the first part of the Fourth Branch, "Math Son of Mathonwy". His death, perhaps once the core of a celebrated story, is made an insignificant incident in the career of Gwydion, a magician. Gwydion undertook the task of obtaining Pryderi's swine for Math. These swine, the first of their kind, were given to Pryderi by Arawn King of Annwn; they were highly regarded. Gwydion, disguised as a bard, took ten men to Pryderi's court. Well received because of his excellent stories and tales, Gwydion announced the object of his visit, to obtain the swine. Pryderi informed him that they could not be taken from his care until they had doubled their number. Gwydion, however, by his magic conjured twelve stalions and twelve greyhounds: "...anyone that saw them would not know but that they were of gold, and twelve saddles upon the horses, and every part where there should be iron upon them was all of gold, and the bridles of the same workmanship."[134] These, with twelve gold shields which he had made from toadstools, Gwydion swapped with Pryderi for the swine. "And then they took leave and started off with the swine. 'My brave lads,' said Gwydion, 'we

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[133] Mabinogion, p. 54.

[134] Mabinogion, p. 57.

must needs shift in haste. The spell will last but from one day till the morrow!"[135] Gwydion delivered the swine to Math, finding, of course, that Pryderi, incensed over the ruse, had mustered his men and was not far behind in pursuit of his prize. The end comes quickly. Indeed, for this hero, the end is flat, altogether unsatisfactory. Defeated by Math's forces in two encounters and forced to withdraw, Pryderi is persuaded to meet Gwydion in single combat, their clash to settle the entire matter. "Those men," the story-teller concludes,

> were set apart and the equipping of them begun, and they fought. And by dint of strength and valour and by magic and enchantment Gwydion conquered, and Pryderi was slain. And at Maen Tyriawg, above Y Felenrhyd, was he buried, and his grave is there.[136]

We have before us now the whole story - the birth, the early accomplishments and adventures, the incarceration and release, and the death of the hero. One further notice is found in Triad 63:

> 63. Trois grands porchers de l'Île de Brydein, le premier est Pryderi, fils de Pwyll Penn Annwn, qui garda les porcs de Pendaran Dyvet, son pere nourricier; c'étaient les sept porcs qu'avait emmenés Pwyll Penn Annwn et qu'il avait donnés à Pendaran Dyvet, le père nourricier de son fils. C'est à Glynn Cuch, en Emlyn, que Pryderi les gardait. Voici pourquoi on l'appela un des trois grands porchers: c'est quo personne ne put rien contre lui ni par ruse, ni par violence....[137]

Although the last sentence of this triad contradicts the account given in the Fourth Branch - Gwydion did obtain the swine by ruse - and, indeed, the whole triad adds new details, we have here corroboration of the fact that Pryderi was associated with these extraordinary swine. Beyond this there is nothing: there is no more to be learned of Pryderi. Perhaps it would,

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[135] Mabinogion, p. 58.

[136] Mabinogion, p. 60.

[137] Loth, Les Mabinogion, II, 270.

however, be helpful to repeat again why it is necessary to give all this attention to Pryderi. We are looking for the prototype of Walganus and Gawain. Gwalchmei may have supplied some traits, and Pryderi, since his other name, Gwri Gwallt-Advwyn, suggests linguistic affiliation with the French Galvagin, may have supplied others. The creators of Walganus and Gawain, then, may have drawn upon Pryderi as well as upon Gwalchmei, and probably upon others too, now unknown to us. Thus we must be concerned with Gwri-Pryderi.

It is convenient, now, to list the main details of Pryderi's career. We know quite a bit about him. His parents appear to have been part human and part superhuman. He himself visited the Otherworld and was detained there. He is connected, mysteriously to be sure, with horses. He was, as a child, precocious and large for his age. He was reared by foster parents, he married well, and he and his lovely wife, Cigfa, ruled Dyfed. He was one of seven who escaped from Ireland. We know, further, that he was the "most gallant youth and the handsomest and the best skilled in all manly pursuits." He was, also, impetuous: he rushed into the strange caer after his dogs in spite of the advice of his older and wiser friend, Manawydan. He was, at last, gullible and somewhat greedy, and he was killed by an opponent who had the power of magic at his command. He was not associated with Arthur, although Taliesin's "Spoils of Annwyn", as we have seen, suggests that Arthur attempted to raid a caer which had been known to Pryderi and Pwyll. It is not at all clear that Pryderi possessed any supernatural quality. His disappearance, to be sure, was followed by the desolation of Dyfed, and, at his release, people and dwellings reappeared in Dyfed. The very same sort of desolation, however, had occurred before. All signs of habitation by humans and domesticated animals had disappeared earlier, before Pryderi and Manawydan first decided to take up a trade. But they

lived happily "...on the meat they hunted and on fish and wild swarms. And in this wise they passed a year pleasantly, and a second."[138] In no way is a "Waste Land" implied: wild animals and natural foliage were not affected. The land, moreover, suffered no lack of fertility: Manawydan's corn grew well, it just "happened" to be destroyed by Llwyd's supernatural mice. There is in all this an echo of the Irish Celtic belief that the land of a good king will prosper, and that a bad king's land and people will suffer. Irish kings and chiefs were careful to avoid specific geasa, thus making certain that their lands would benefit. Pryderi was not restricted by any taboos, but his connection with the welfare of his land appears to reflect the Irish custom, appears to suggest, at any rate, that the Welsh Celtic folklore is, in this episode, quite similar to Irish Celtic tradition.[139]

Pryderi, thus, is not really like Persephone, as the Joneses suggest; neither is his mother. He is not a god, the agent of a nature or vegetation myth. The land was put under spell: the enchantment was punitive, to

> ...avenge Gwal son of Clud; through friendship for him, did I [Llwyd] cast the enchantment; and Pryderi did I avenge the playing of Badger in the Bag on Gwal son of Clud, when Pwyll Head of Annwn wrought that - and he wrought that at the court of Hefeydd the old, ill-advisedly.[140]

Pryderi is simply an unknowing victim. This is Celtic magic, this is the land of spell, enchantment, and of un-spelling: it is not myth, it is not a vehicle

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[138] Mabinogion, p. 43.

[139] Cf. J. R. Reinhard, The Survival of Geis in Medieval Romance (Halle, 1933), pp. 103-121, where the subject of the good king is discussed thoroughly.

[140] Mabinogion, p. 53. Llwyd avenges the injustice his friend received from Pwyll and Rhiannon. Rhiannon had been promised to Gwawl, but she did not love him, and so arranged affairs that Pwyll could humiliate him. The vengeance is carried out against Rhiannon and Pryderi, her son, since Pwyll is already dead. Cf. "Pwyll Prince of Dyfed", Mabinogion, pp. 12-16.

in which Gods, or chiefly supernatural beings, disport and carry on their affairs. Pryderi may be superhuman, but he is not supernatural, and he has absolutely nothing to do with the fertility of the land, or the lack of it. Pryderi is not, in other words, a god, and the incident is not properly a myth. This is magic, and it represents a point of view, a view of reality on the part of the story-teller, vastly different from the world-view of a myth-maker. We have, it is true, left Gwalchmei far behind. He is an ordinary human being, and Pryderi is a ruler beset by magic spells. Yet we are looking for traits which might be found later in Gawain, and Pryderi has to be examined. We shall see shortly in what ways Gwalchmei and Pryderi differ: we are obliged to observe here that neither is a god in a myth.

Our picture of Gwalchmei is not nearly so complete. We know nothing of his parents; from Kulhwch and Olwen we learn only that his father is Gwyar, that he had a brother, Gwalhafed, and that he was nephew to Arthur, the son of Arthur's sister. The Kulhwch also informs us that Gwalchmei was the best rider and the best walker, and that he never returned home "...without the quest he had gone to seek." Four triads supply the name of his horse, Keincaled, disclose Gwalchmei's ability to divine the nature of things, and bear testimony to his 'Golden-tongue', to his kindness and courtesy to guests and strangers. The dialogue between him and Trystan is further witness to his courtesy, and to his ability to resolve personal conflicts. Beyond this we know nothing of Gwalchmei.

Thinking only of the early Welsh literature before Geoffrey, it is hard to believe that British story-tellers could ever have confused these two heroes. If we simply arrange in parallel columns the facts thus far uncovered it will be seen that these two, before Geoffrey, have little in common:

Pryderi	Gwalchmei
Parents	
Birth	
Connection with horses	Connection with horses
Precocious youth	
Training:	Training:
Foster parents	
Gallant	Courteous (but probably late)
Handsome	
Skilled in manly arts	
Married	
Ruled kingdom	
Impetuous	
Known adventures:	
Ireland	
Otherworld	
Swine	
Human; perhaps superhuman, but not supernatural	Human
Independent of Arthur	Never independent of Arthur

The only positive similarity, we note, is this matter of the horses. But we have seen already that many Welsh horses were known by name, that the mounts of many warriors achieved recognition. Furthermore, we should be very much surprised if, from a society in which men and animals were frequently very close, and which knew the value of a good mount, no written testimonials of favorite horses had survived. Therefore little weight can be attached to this parallel. And certainly the circumstances which brought Gwri and his colt together are far more strange, more nearly supernatural in tone, than the mere mention of Keincaled in the one triad. If we could ever prove that the triads actually antedate Geoffrey we could then point to a second positive similarity: both heroes were courteous, or 'gallant', as the First Branch puts it. Pryderi is, we should think, more a superhuman being than he is, strictly, an ordinary human being. Gwalchmei, however, is quite human. And neither one is supernatural. Pryderi is known independently of Arthur, but Gwalchmei is not. These are the only four points of possible contact which one is able to establish between the two heroes. If we had never heard of Gauvain or Sir Gawain it would be ridiculous to think that

Pryderi and Gwalchmei should ever have to be untangled: confining one's curiosity to literary matters before Geoffrey, it would be ridiculous, for example, to suggest that Gwri Gwallt-euryn might be what was intended by Gwrvan Gwallt Avwyn, and that the latter really ought to be Gwri Gwallt-advwyn.[141] As a matter of fact, no one would have had cause to think about it. As soon as we introduce Gauvain, Walganus, and Gawain, however, it becomes more tempting to recall Pryderi. If we look ahead, for a moment, to Geoffrey's Walganus and his British successors, we can decide if Pryderi actually is as important as he has been made out to be.

Again it is most convenient to arrange two columns, Pryderi and Geoffrey's Walganus plus two other post-Galfridean descriptions of Gawain. Let us, to keep this simple, call Pryderi's opposite Gawain.

Pryderi	Gawain
Parents	Parents: Geoffrey
Birth	Birth: Geoffrey; De Ortu Waluuanii
Connection with horses	
Precocious youth	Precocious youth: Geoffrey
Training:	Training:
Foster parents	Fosterage: Geoffrey
Gallant	
Handsome	
Skilled in manly arts	"A knight with the best": Laȝamon
Married	
Ruled kingdom	
Impetuous	Impetuous: Geoffrey
Known adventures:	Known adventures:
Ireland	Many, but none in Geoffrey
Otherworld	
Swine	
Human; perhaps superhuman, but not supernatural	Human: Geoffrey
Independent of Arthur	Never independent of Arthur

Without recourse to Arthurian narratives outside of England, except in one instance, and without advancing much beyond Geoffrey [the De Ortu Waluuanii

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[141] See p. 14, supra. This is Loomis's suggestion.

is put at ca. 1225], we notice twice as many possible points of contact as we noted before. Geoffrey makes Gawain the son of King Loth of Norway and Anna, Arthur's sister. He has, however, a brother, Modred. And Anna and Loth are quite human, the birth of Gawain quite normal. Since nothing is said of the birth we assume nothing extraordinary occurred: if his birth were in any way extraordinary, Geoffrey certainly should have said so. The author of De Ortu Waluuanii, however, makes quite a story of Gawain's birth. Drawing on French sources,[142] the author related that Loth, while a hostage at the court of Uther Pendragon, had a secret love affair with Anna. Knowing that she was about to deliver a child, Anna arranged to have foreign merchants take the child, as soon as it was born, to their country, to rear it there. When a son was born, the merchants received the boy and took him into Gaul. They carried with them, also, a rich cloak, a ring, and a sealed document which stated that the boy was the son of Loth and Anna, that he had been named Gawain, and that he was sent out of the country to escape the feared wrath of King Uther.[143] There is not much here which resembles Pryderi's birth, but it is useful to recall this incident because it is the only account of Gawain's birth by an English (?) author which supplies any kind of detail. Both Pryderi and Gawain were taken, at birth, from their mothers, but there the resemblance ends.[144]

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[142] Cf. J. D. Bruce, ed., Historia Meriadoci and De Ortu Waluuanii, Hesperia, Ergänzungsreihe, II (Göttingen and Baltimore, 1913), p. xxiv.

[143] We have followed the abstract given by Bruce, op. cit., pp. lxx-lxxi; the appropriate part of the text is found on pp. 54-55.

[144] According to Bruce, op. cit., pp. xli-xliii, the ultimate source of this account of Gawain's birth appears to be the legend of Pope Gregory. But the early 13th century French vie, the basis of most versions of Gregory's legendary life, recounts the birth of this child, of incest, his setting-adrift, and his eventual rearing by an abbot. This makes him very much unlike the Gawain of the De Ortu. Actually the French legend is but another instance of a child taken from its mother. The three, Pryderi, Gawain, and Gregory, are the victims of different circumstances.

Continuing down the list we note next that both heroes were precocious youths. Pryderi was the more advanced, and his youthful accomplishments are listed in detail. Gawain's precociousness is inferred: Geoffrey places Walganus, at the age of twelve, in the service of the Pope, from whom he received his arms. This is not a usual fosterage, therefore we may assume that the twelve year old Gawain was, for his age, in some way exceptional. Their training, however, seems to have achieved the same result. Pryderi, as we have seen, was gallant, handsome, and the best skilled in the manly arts. Laȝamon describes Walwain in almost the same words:

þa wes Walwai þider icumen:
Lottes aeldeste sune.
of Rome from þan Pope:
þe Supplice wes ihate.
þa long him wes dihte:
and makede hine to cnihte.
Waelle wel wes hit bitoȝen:
þat Walwai wes to monne iboren.
for Walwaein wes ful aðelmode:
an aelche þeouwe he wes god.
he wes mete-custi:
and cniht mid þan bezste.
Al Arðures hired:
wes swiðe ifurðed.
for Walwaine þan kene:
þe icumen wes to hired.[145]

At that time Gawain, Lot's eldest son, arrived; he came from Rome, from the Pope, Supplicius he was called, who had instructed him for a long time and made him a knight. What a grand thing it was that Gawain was born a man! For Gawain was extremely noble-minded: he excelled in each virtue, he was liberal, and he was the peer of the best knight. All Arthur's army was overjoyed because the noble Gawain joined the ranks.

Gawain, however, took no wife, and he did not rule a kingdom. Although he participated in no adventure which resembles the actions of Pryderi, later on, of course, he was the hero of many adventures. He was, like Pryderi, somewhat impetuous, somewhat brash. At least Geoffrey so regarded him. Sent by Arthur as one of three representatives to the Emperor Lucius, Geoffrey informs us that the young men who "...attended Walgan, highly rejoicing at this opportunity, were urgent with him to find some quarrel in the commander's

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[145] Laȝamon's Brut, ed. Sir. F. Madden (London, 1847), vv. 23247-262.

camp, that so they might engage the Romans."[146] Gawain did not disappoint his retinue: offended by something said at the Roman commander's headquarters, Gawain struck off the head of Lucius's nephew. This action precipitated the general clash of armies. Gawain, finally, is absolutely human, and he is never encountered apart from Arthur.

This comparison suggests that it is not at all certain that Pryderi is sufficiently similar to Gwalchmei or Walganus or the later British Gawain to substantiate Professor Loomis's interesting hypothesis that Pryderi, or Gwri Gwallt-advwyn as he proposes, is the prototype of Gawain.[147] The resemblances are not exact or frequent: it is just as possible that we have two distinct heroes to contend with. It must be admitted, in all fairness, that Loomis, drawing on French sources as well as on Irish and British analogues, is in a better position than that assumed here: he has far more material at hand to analyze, and from which to induce a general conclusion. Yet it would appear just as likely that simple coincidence would explain the similarities which do exist, and Loomis's solution by no means rules out this possibility. From the British point of view, at least, there is no reason to believe that Pryderi, any more than Gwalchmei, is the prototype of Walganus. This suggests that some statement, or theory, ought to be offered. Although such a theory is not a part of the chief argument presented in this study, it shall be set down as an interesting by-product. It is, nevertheless, an opinion which was formed only after the problem was given considerable attention.

We have considered only the British conception of Gawain. What did

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[146] The British History of Geoffrey of Monmouth, tr. A. Thompson, rev. ed. J. A. Giles (London, 1842), p. 209.

[147] See p. 14, supra. Especially so when he suggests that Pryderi is also the prototype of Percival. Cf. Arthurian Tradition, pp. 341-346.

British writers who preceded Geoffrey say about Gawain? What was their attitude towards him? These are the questions which we set out to answer. There have been used, as evidence, Latin and Welsh documents written in England before Geoffrey. Gwalchmei and Pryderi are the only two heroes described in this material who can possibly stand as the prototype of Gawain. There may have been others, but only these two have survived. The principal aim is to describe these two heroes, to illustrate, in so doing, the primitive Gawain. But it became clear that the prototype of Walganus and the later Gawain is neither Gwalchmei nor Pryderi nor the two taken together. The difficulty in dating the Welsh poems, tales, and Triads further confuses an already obscure situation, but arguing from the evidence which has been examined so far, it would appear that Geoffrey's source for Walganus is lost to us. It is not likely that any French document antedating Geoffrey will turn up with an early Gawain in it. This leaves us only Welsh materials to work with, or other Celtic materials, Breton or Irish, which may have been known to Geoffrey but which are lost to us. And we can rule out Irish tales on the grounds that Geoffrey would have had easier access to Breton stories. The best guess is that the traits which now adorn Gwalchmei and Pryderi once belonged to another hero, and that this hypothetical hero, who may have been very different from either Gwalchmei or Pryderi but who must have exhibited at least the traits we now find attributed to them, is the prototype of Walganus and Gawain. Although Gwalchmei, especially in the Kulhwch, is suspect and Pryderi is more unlike Walganus and Gawain than he is like them, both heroes do, nevertheless, bear certain resemblances to Walganus and Gawain. They may therefore be regarded as all we have left of the hypothetical British primitive Gawain: hence the great attention paid to them here. We should like very much to believe this: Geoffrey saw fit to create a worthy nephew for Arthur. Such a nephew, in the pattern of

events set down by Geoffrey, is functional and important. This nephew, whom he named Walganus, may (1) have been known to Geoffrey or (2) have been made forcibly to fit the rôle Geoffrey created for him. If the first hypothesis were true, that source, the hypothetical primitive Gawain, is lost to us. The only extant trace of him is the obscure reference to the "lord who would reconcile", the nephew who "would have made amends" described in the dialogue between Arthur and the Porter.[148] If the second were true, the Gwalchmei-Pryderi we know was twisted into the Walganus we meet in Geoffrey's Historia.

The second alternative is the more favorable, although, to be frank, one would be hard put to prove it: a skeptic could ask for evidence which no one could, at present, produce. And yet this explanation seems to be the only reasonable one, the only one which takes into account all the facts thus far set down. This theory, for what it may be worth, accords, furthermore, with what may be regarded as a proper respect for Geoffrey's tremendous imagination. He had sources, to be sure, but he combined and shaped them, and he gave to the 12th century, and to the world, a coherent story, an account of Arthur and his knights which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Geoffrey, of course, did not invent Walganus, but, using information lost to us, he fixed Gawain's relationship to Arthur for all time. We ordinarily discourage theories for which no evidence is available, but some compulsion was felt to deliver this one. In the lists already crowded with protagonists, one more pennon will hardly be obtrusive!

We have reached, now, the end of the examination of the pre-Galfridean materials. It has been a long passage, and one frequently obscured by difficulties of interpretation and dating. Yet it has been necessary to

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[148] See p. 26, supra.

consider all the early Arthurian references because it is here only that we find any reflection of the primitive Gawain. Surely it is worth while tc assemble all the data, valuable to analyze all that has survived. Much has been said of the early Gawain: infrequently, however, have writers drawn their conclusions from a survey of all the known facts. We have, for example, seen Miss Weston's statement that there must have been many tales of Gwalchmei, that he was probably the hero of an independent cycle of stories.[149] There appears to be no early British evidence, however, to support this suggestion. Yet even today critics persist in finding Gwalchmei where he really does not exist. Thus Louis Rigaud writes: "Gawain, le plus célèbre des chevaliers d'Arthur, selon la vieille tradition, semble avoir été le héros original de la queste. On le retrouve souvent dans les triads galloises et dans les Mabinogion sous le nom de Gwalchmai."[150] One simply does not find him in the Triads often, and he is never found in the Four Branches, only once in Kulhwch and Olwen, and 'frequently' in the late romances (i. e. Owein, etc.) of the Mabinogion only, where French influence is certain. Statements such as these are meretricious. In order to discourage misdirections we have gone to great lengths to assemble all the information available: all the evidence has been brought together here for just one reason, to support an accurate description of the primitive Gawain.[151]

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[149] See n. 48, supra.

[150] "Naissance du Graal en Angleterre", in Lumière du Graal (Études et textes presentés sous la direction de René Nelli) (Paris, 1951), p. 88.

[151] As E. K. Chambers' Arthur of Britain produces evidence of Arthur to support a description of him, so too this description of Gawain, it is hoped, will be supported.

We have, then, all the pre-Galfridean notices of Gwalchmei and Pryderi which have survived from the hands of British story-tellers. What does it all amount to? What can be said about Gawain, according to the British point of view, before Geoffrey? Probably the most important observation is that Gwalchmei is not known apart from Arthur: no separate stories in which Gwalchmei is the hero have survived. The next observation is as startling. In the extant British Arthurian materials before Geoffrey, Gwalchmei is not very important: we should hardly notice him if it were not that he turned into Gawain. Certainly he has less stature than Kei or Bedwyr, and it would not appear that Gwalchmei was either well known or highly regarded. The earliest authorities - Gildas and Nennius, the Annales Cambriae, the Liber Landavensis, and the Welsh "Saint's Lives" - are silent: these writers did not know Gwalchmei, or, if they did, they did not regard him as one worthy of mention.[152] The early Welsh poets did not know Gwalchmei. It is only from four triads, the dialogue between Gwalchmei and Trystan, and from Kulhwch and Olwen, all of uncertain date, that we have been able to piece together the primitive view. Pryderi is better known: the Four Branches are not only an eloquent testimonial; they also provide a detailed picture of him. Analysis of these materials allows us to describe the prototype of Walganus and Sir Gawain, what little has survived of it, in this manner: An intelligent, brave warrior, the nephew of Arthur, the primitive Gawain, always regarded as a human being, was noted for his physical strength and skill, for his gentle speech and fine manners, and for his brash, impetuous nature. He also possessed a horse, Keincaled. This, reduced to its simplest terms, is the British conception of the Primitive Gawain.

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[152] The absence of Gwalchmei in the "Saint's Lives" is most interesting: the writers obviously felt that there was no need to complain against him, that he was not important enough.

We should observe, too, what is not attributed to him. Miss Weston believed that Gawain's most striking characteristic "...and one which may undoubtedly be referred to the original conception of his character, is that of the waxing and waning of his strength as the day advances and declines."[153] Rhys too regarded this peculiarity as both early and important, and he added that "...his horse is likened to the gleam of the sun."[154] But Miss Weston has to admit that the earliest occurence of this well known peculiarity is in Gautier de Doulens' continuation of Chrétien.[155] We have discussed Gwalchmei's horse. "But," Miss Weston wrote, "besides the horse the 'solar hero' ought to possess a sword, and in the early romances we find Gawain in possession of a sword, and that no other than Excalibur."[156] Again, however, she is obliged to state that she can find no reference to such a sword before Chrétien. Nevertheless, she is able to conclude that we "...shall scarcely go far astray if we believe that Gawain, at the outset of his career, was equipped, as befitted a 'solar' hero, with a steed and sword of exceptional virtue; nor shall we, I believe, be wrong if we accept the statement of the early romance-writers and believe that the sword was Excalibur."[157] This has long been regarded as the primitive Celtic conception of Gawain. We make

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[153] The Legend of Sir Gawain (London, 1897), p. 12.

[154] Studies in the Arthurian Legend (Oxford, 1891), p. 14.

[155] The Legend of Sir Gawain, p. 12; the lines are vv. 19139-146 in Conte del Graal, ed. Potvin, III, 334.

[156] The Legend of Sir Gawain, p. 15.

[157] Ibid., p. 17. Although we disagree with her, we should not like to create the impression that Miss Weston's work on Gawain is of no value. As a pioneer she has provided a stimulation for all who followed her, and some of her insights are remarkably keen.

no claim on the general Celtic point of view, but there is absolutely nothing in the early British materials to support this belief, and it would appear quite clear that Gwalchmei, or Gwalchmei-Pryderi, as we have observed him, was never looked upon as a 'solar hero', and that he was never endowed with the 'solar' equipment with which Miss Weston and Rhys supply him. As far as the British writers before Geoffrey are concerned, they simply have no knowledge of these 'solar' characteristics. Where the later Sir Gawain's waxing and waning strength originated remains a mystery. It is certain, however, that it did not come from the extant works of early British writers.[158]

Actually, when we come right down to it, we know very little about the primitive Gawain. He was not, apparently, as popular as Kei or Bedwyr. He was not a god, he was not a 'solar hero'. It is believed that the statement made, the description of the British conception of the primitive Gawain, is a fair one, and that its most important inference is that British writers, from the beginning, regarded him as a human being. The trouble is that attempts have been made to map an unknown wood in advance, and that, after actually journeying through the wood, travellers have been reluctant to correct their maps, to revise their preconceived ideas. Certainly if we set out to look for a 'solar hero' we are going to turn one up. Yet all the early British evidence, it shall be repeated for the last time, suggests that Gawain, before Geoffrey, was regarded not as a god, not as a 'solar hero', not as a popular hero of an independent legend, but as a human being, a warrior in Arthur's warband. Some of the clouds, at least, have been

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[158] G. Paris considered Gawain's waxing and waning strength as his most outstanding characteristic, but he was unable to discover its exact source. "Le plus singuliere [trait]," he wrote, "qui doit avoir une base celtic et une origine mythologique, ne nous est malheureusement pas indiquée avec une précision suffisante." Hist. litt. de la France, xxx, 35.

dissipated, and even if we cannot carry with us an accurate, correct conception of the early Gawain, we can, at any rate, turn to the achievements of Geoffrey and later British writers with some assurance that the Gawain we shall find there is somewhat known to us.

Chapter II

The Early Literary Gawain, 1139 - 1205

The following abbreviations are used throughout: complete references are listed in the Bibliography.

HRB - Geoffrey's Latin text, ed. A. Griscom.

BHG - Thompson and Giles tr. of Geoffrey's text.

WB - Welsh Brut, tr. R. E. Jones, printed in Griscom.

BYB - Brut Y Brenhinedd, tr. J. J. Parry.

LB - Laȝamon's Brut, ed. Sir F. Madden.

The chief problems, still largely unsolved, which delayed and clouded our comprehension of the primitive British Gawain, namely obscurity and insufficient evidence, are, happily, not present as we turn our attention to Geoffrey's Walganus[1] and the Sir Gawain of his literary step-children. With the appearance of the Historia Regum Britanniae in 1139 a new character, so far as British writers and evidence support our inquiry, was born. In the time of Aurelius Ambrosius, Geoffrey writes, "Loth...sororem ipsius [Arthur] duxerat ex qua gwalwanum & modredum genuerat."[2] Some twenty-three years later, he states, "...gwalwanus nepos regis cum innumerabilibus alilis

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[1] Variously given in the text as Walganus, Gwalwanus, Gualguanus, etc.

[2] Geoffrey of Monmouth, Historia Regum Britanniae, ed. A. Griscom (New York, 1929), p. 444.

in die illa corruerunt."[3] With these notices of Gawain's birth and death, and from other details of his career fixed between them, our study of Gawain's nature and actions is established on firm footing. From this point forward definite texts and exact details are available for consideration.

The narratives which may be said to be "native" British productions appeared in two eras. The first group, hereafter to be called "The Early Literary Gawain", comprises four pseudo-histories composed between the years 1139 and 1205: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia; The Welsh Brut (MS. LXI, xv century, Jesus College, Oxford); Brut Y Brenhinedd (Cotton Cleopatra Version); Laȝamon's Brut. The second group, to be named "The Late Literary Gawain", comprises seven metrical romances composed between the years ca. 1375 and ca. 1475: Sir Gawain & The Green Knight; Syre Gawene and the Carle of Carelyle; The Avowynge of King Arthur, Sir Gawan, Sir Kaye, and Sir Bawdewyn of Bretan; The Awntyrs Off Arthure At The Terne Wathelyne; The Knightly Tale of Golagros and Gawane; The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell; The Turke & Gowin.[4] These eleven narratives contain considerable information about Gawain: they contain, too, details and descriptions, moods and feelings, and other characters and actions which constitute a backdrop of feudal society against which the British aspect of Gawain is seen. Some space and attention, furthermore, are devoted to characters and actions which are clearly supernatural or fantastic, which are, as we shall

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[3] Griscom, p. 497.

[4] All other references to Gawain in British literature have been excluded because we wished to concentrate, in this study, on the native British view of this hero. As far as one is able to determine, the authors of the pseudo-histories and romances listed did not follow any known French sources. Their ultimate sources are unknown. We may, therefore, call these narratives native productions. Thus the reader will not be afforded the somewhat different view of Gawain contained in the prose romances and the Middle English translations or renderings of Chrétien's poems.

call them, the marvelous. The primary aim now at hand is to demonstrate that the extent of the marvelous in these narratives is, when compared with the extent of the realistic portrayal of men and feudal life, very slight. This is not altogether a new step. Almost sixty years ago, for example, W. P. Ker, considering the rise of the romance in France, wrote that French "...romance is part of the life of the time, and the life of the twelfth century is reproduced in French romance."[5] Much more recently R. S. Loomis wrote of Chretién's poems that although "...here and there a trace of the more barbarous world from which the romances emerged remains...on the whole, Chrétien's world is that of twelfth-century France."[6] Yet no one has pointed out the exact amount of realism present in any one British narrative, or in any group of them.

For the most part, the great mass of Arthurian scholarship devoted to Gawain has laid emphasis almost exclusively upon the origin of the hero in Celtic myth and folktale, and upon the reflection of this enfance in the later romances. Gawain the man and the society he represents have been neglected. Clearly a readjustment, a redirection of effort, in a sense, is

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[5] Epic and Romance (London, 1897), p. 368.

[6] Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes (New York, 1949), p. 49. Other similar opinions are recorded, but these two are sufficient. One may determine just how far these views conflict with earlier statements about romance by consulting not only the well known opinions of such critics as Ritson, Wharton, Mrs. Reeve, Hurd, Scott, and R. L. Stevenson, but also the interesting remarks of Ascham, The Scholemaster, Arber Reprint, p. 80, Thomas Hobbes, The English Works, ed. W. Molesworth (London, 1840), IV, 451, and Goldsmith, Essays, "On The Education Of Youth," ed. A. Dobson, The Temple Classics (London, 1903), p. 123. That the romances show little relation to life is the more recent opinion of J. W. H. Atkins, "Metrical Romances, 1200-1500" in CHEL, ed A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (New York, 1933), I, 354. Cf. the unfortunate remarks of Douglas Bush, English Poetry: The Main Currents (London, 1952), p. 10, that, aside from Gawain and the Green Knight, the romances deserve only "the life-in-death" of scholarly regard.

in order. It is our intention now to examine the British pseudo-histories and romances about Gawain for the express purpose of discovering, as accurately as we can, the degree and nature of the realistic and marvelous elements which comprise these narratives. The information which we shall assemble will, it is hoped, prove invaluable for a future study of the nature of romance.

We shall find it both convenient and desirable to maintain the chronological division already suggested. Accordingly, two primary headings have been established: "The Early Literary Gawain", the subject of this chapter, and "The Late Literary Gawain", which is the subject of Chapter Three. The method of analysis for both groups is identical. We shall isolate, as clearly and rationally as possible, a significantly large number of incidents or reflections which stand a fair chance of representing, when taken in their totality, the complete British view of Gawain and the background against which he is portrayed in these narratives. We shall also provide some check, some reference to non-imaginative contemporary written records, wherever possible and desirable, to support the claim that any particular element is realistic. The results of the analysis, set down in the following pages, present, it is felt, an accurate view of Gawain. The account, certainly, is complete: not a line, not a word, has been overlooked. The aim is to present as complete an account as is possible of the British view of Gawain, from his first appearance in British literature to the years just preceding Malory's compilation. Under both major headings the elements are presented in what appeared to be a logical order: first, all notices of Gawain himself are listed, and, second, the reflections of feudal society which attracted the attention of the writers of these pseudo-histories and

and romances are set down.[7] Always, for each element, or category, the quotations are arranged chronologically, and, where feasible, an historical reference follows to demonstrate its degree of realism.

1. Gawain's Family Relationship

Geoffrey relates, first, that Uther Pendragon and Igerna, after their secret affair, "...continued to live together with much affection for each other, and had a son and a daughter, whose names were Arthur and Anne." (BHG, p. 171.)[8] Laȝamon adds some details:

þer Vðer þe kīg:	At that time King Uther took Igerna
nom Ygærne to quene.	as his queen: she was pregnant, King
Ygærne wes mid childe:	Uther having caused it. As a result
bi Vðer kīge.	of Merlin's craft, all this was
al þurh Mᵊlines wiȝel:	accomplished before they were married.
ær heo biwedded weore.	
(LB, vv. 19246-19251)	

A short time later, Laȝamon states:

Æfter Arður wes iboren:	The beautiful lady was born after
þeo ædie burde.	Arthur; she was called Anne, the
heo wes ihaten Aene:	beautiful maiden.
ϸ ædien maiden.	
(LB, vv. 19270-19273)	

Some years later Loth, "...consul ille miles strenuissimus" (HRB, p. 428),[9] highly favored by Uther, was married to the king's daughter, Anne. Following the death of Uther, Arthur, now king, also had occasion to reward Loth, "...who

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[7] The order is not exactly arbitrary. It was not possible, for example, to follow the well known fifteen categories set down by Gautier in his La Chevalerie, 3º éd. (Paris, 1895). We have had to find a place for each element which our analysis disclosed, whereas Gautier, illustrating chivalry and feudal society from a wide selection of literary accounts, was able to impose his own order on his findings. Cf. G. Cohen, Histoire de la Chevalerie (Paris, 1947), p. 7.

[8] HRB, p. 427; WB, p. 427 and BYB, p. 153 add nothing to this account.

[9] Laȝamon calls him "swiðe god cniht", v. 19398.

...had married his sister, by whom he had two sons, Gawain and Modred...." (BHG, p. 186.)[10] Laȝamon, customarily expanding, adds that Arthur is most pleased to reward the husband of Anne, for she had borne two sons "...who are the dearest children to me of all in the kingdom." Thus Arthur spoke

> þa wes Walwain lute child.
> swa wes þe oðer:
> Modraed his broðrer.
> (LB, vv. 22208-22210)
>
> when Gawain, as well as the
> other, his brother Modred,
> was a small child.

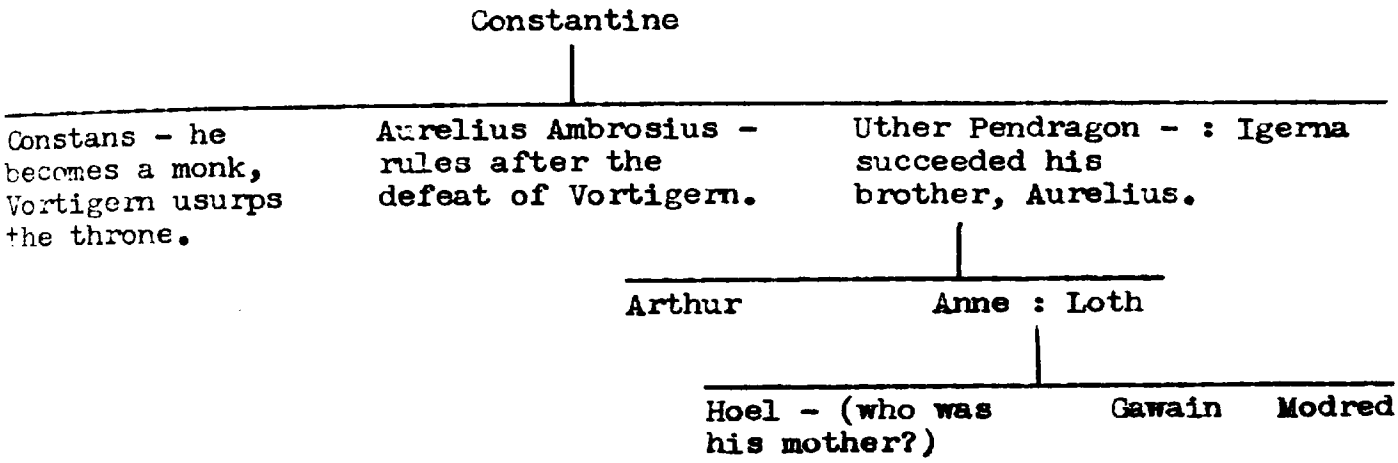
One further relationship is shown. At a time when Arthur was forced to raise a substantial army to meet the serious threat posed by the coalition of Colgrim's and Childric's forces, it was suggested that he send messengers to Brittany, to ask for the help of his relative Hoel. It is not quite clear just what, exactly, Hoel's relation to Arthur is. Geoffrey simply states that "...erat autem hoel filius sororis arturi ex boudocio rege armaricanorum britonum generatus." (HRB, p. 435.) We never know the real identity of Hoel's mother; Geoffrey does not give it, nor do the Welsh Bruts. "The decision was to send to Howel, the son of Emyr llydan, his nephew, his sister's son, who was king of llydan, to ask support of him." (WB, p. 435) "...Howel the son of Emir of Brittany - he was Arthur's nephew his sister's son, and king in Brittany." (BYB, p. 158.) Beyond this no more is said. Laȝamon, who must have been aware of this hiatus, modifies his account, slightly, to read:

> Arður sende ouer sæ:
> sele tweie cnihtes.
> to Hoele his mæi:
> þe wes him leofest monne.
> þe ahte Bruttaine:
> (LB, vv. 20443-20447)
>
> Arthur sent two good knights
> overseas to Hoel, his relative,
> who possessed Brittany, the
> dearest of men to him.

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[10] HRB, pp. 444-445, WB, p. 444; BYB, p. 163 erronously names Lot as Arthur's son-in-law, which reading Parry questions.

There are frequent mentions of Gawain's family relationship,[11] but beyond this no new information is added. Using Geoffrey's account as the base source, it is possible to construct the following genealogical table:



All four pseudo-histories provide the same account of the birth of Arthur and Anne. It may now be noted that (1) Gawain, the son of a king (Loth) and a princess (Anne), is of royal blood, that (2) the most important relationship of uncle - nephew is established between Arthur and Gawain, that (3) Gawain is the grandson of King Uther, and that (4) Gawain is the brother of a traitor (Modred). Gawain's relation to Hoel, King of the Armorican Britons, is never made clear. Geoffrey and the Welsh Bruts state that Hoel is the son of Arthur's sister, but it is nowhere stated whether (1) this sister is Anne, (2) whether Arthur had more than one sister, or (3) whether Anne was married more than once or had extra-marital relations with some other man. Hoel's father, we know, is Budec, not Loth. It is possible that Gawain could be either cousin to Hoel or his step-brother. It is worth noting that the

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[11] q.v. BHG, pp. 188, 208, 215, 226; WB, pp. 447, 474, 498; BYB, pp. 164, 191; LB, vv. 23105, 23247, 24949-24950, 25467, 26243, 26415-26416, 28200, 28201, 28344.

Welsh Bruts make no mention of Anne: Gwalchmei[12] is recognized simply as the son of Gwyar. La3amon, as we have seen, avoids the issue, stating that Hoel is Arthur's relative only, a man very dear to him.

2. Gawain's Age

We are interested in Gawain's age because we wish to determine whether the actions ascribed to him are appropriate to a man of his age. Also, we may determine if the progress of his career corresponds with that of the actual youth of the society Gawain represents. The information concerning Gawain's age provided in the pseudo-histories is not always definite. Furthermore, since the four narratives do not agree, we shall have to consider them separately. Nevertheless, we are able to form a fairly accurate estimate.

Geoffrey's first notice occurs as Arthur's fleet prepares to sail for Norway. At that time "Walgan, the son of Lot, was...a youth of twelve years old...." (BHG, p. 188.) Within a few months, "Arthur made a voyage to Gaul." (BHG, p. 188.) "At the end of nine years...Arthur returned to Paris...he returned in the beginning of spring to Britain." (BHG, pp. 190-191. Ten years have elapsed; Gawain would be twenty-two. In the summer of the same year, seven weeks after Easter, Arthur "...resolved to place the crown upon his head." (BHG, p. 191.) In that same year he was forced to war by the emperor, Lucius; his army assembled on the Kalends of August. At the conclusion of this campaign Arthur "...stopped in those parts [France] till the

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[12] At this date Gwalchmei and Gawain are equivalents. The doubts attending the name Gwalchmei discussed in the preceding chapter have by this time vanished. Both Welsh Bruts are close renderings of Geoffrey, and the Gwalchmei presented by them corresponds to Geoffrey's Walganus.

next winter was over...at the beginning of the following summer...he had news brought him..." of Modred's treason. (BHG, pp. 224-225.) One more year has elapsed; Gawain would now be twenty-three. "As soon, therefore, as the report of this flagrant wickedness reached him...[he] returned with speed to Britain." (BHG, p. 226.) Gawain was killed in the landing. This is represented as occurring in the same year. Gawain, therefore, was twenty-three when he died. Another passage, however, must be considered. After Lucius' messengers delivered their challenge to Arthur, Cador, in the course of his debate, stated that "...almost five years have passed, since we have been abandoned to these delights, and have had no exercise of war...." (BHG, p. 197.) This would add five years to our estimate, raising Gawain's age, at his death, to twenty-eight.

The Brut Y Brenhinedd, following Geoffrey, places Gawain's age, at his death, at twenty-three. A similar ambiguous addition of five years occurs. (BYB, p. 173.) The Welsh Brut and Laȝamon, however, offer equivocal testimony. The Welsh Brut states that Arthur's age, at his coronation, was "...merely fifteen years." (WB, p. 433.) Following a year's campaign, Arthur "...returned to ynys Brydain." (WB, p. 446.) "And there for twelve years Arthyr rested...." (WB, p. 446.) Thirteen years have elapsed since the coronation. At this time Arthur prepared his invasion of Llychlyn, where Gwalchmei was living "...in the service of the bishop of Ryfain." (WB, p. 447.) But we are not told how old Gwalchmei was at this time, or at the time of Arthur's coronation, if, indeed, he was born then. Eleven years passed between the invasion of Llychlyn and Gwalchmei's death. (WB, p. 496.) In spite of the confusion it is clear that Arthur was thirty-nine when he fell in battle, when "...the age of Krist was then five hundred and forty-two years." (WB, p. 502.) Gwalchmei's age, however, we may only guess. He was killed eleven years after his name is first introduced, and twenty-four years after Arthur's

coronation. Arthur was twenty-eight when Gwalchmei was first mentioned; since Gwalchmei is Arthur's nephew, a reasonable estimate of his age at this time would be fifteen years; eleven years later he fell in battle; we may take twenty-six, then, as a fair estimate of his age at the time of his death.

Laȝamon's account is the least responsible: in the Brut the sense of time is seldom clear. Following Arthur's restoration of York, we encounter the first mention of Gawain: "then Gawain was a small child." (LB, v. 22208.) There follows a campaign in the north; estimated time, six months. (LB, vv. 22309-22700.) Arthur resided then twelve years "in peace and amity." (LB, vv. 22719-22724.) The Round Table "episode", occurring at this point, should require, in time, not more than a month. There follows the campaign in Norway; no indication of the time involved is suggested, but we do encounter Gawain:

> Þa wes Walwaī þider icumen:
> Lottes ældeste sune.
> of Rome from þan Pape:
> Þe Supplice wes ihate.
> Þa longe him wes dihte:
> and makede hine to cnihte.
> (LB, vv. 23247-23252)
>
> Then Lot's eldest son, Gawain,
> came there from the Pope of
> Rome, who was called Supplicius;
> he taught him for a long time
> and made him a knight.

Gawain is now a young man. Arthur's next campaign, directed successfully against Frollo of France, discloses a mature Gawain, a trusted companion. But again, no indication of time is afforded. (LB, vv. 23396-23998.) Arthur held France nine years before he returned to London to be crowned. (LB, vv. 24129-24131.) Perhaps six months passed before Arthur initiated his campaign against the Romans. The campaign against Lucius of Rome consumed, probably, a year. At the return to Britain, Gawain is killed. From this review we learn only that approximately twenty-one years have elapsed between Arthur's coronation and Gawain's death. Since Gawain was but "a little child" at the time of Arthur's coronation we are able to induce that, at the time of his death, Gawain was a young man, possibly as young as twenty-two, probably not older

than twenty-eight.

We may take it, then, that Gawain is reported, in the pseudo-histories, to have joined Arthur's host when he was approximately fifteen years old. At his death he was twenty-three, or, as two of the narratives have recorded it, between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-eight. Because the age of the knight is closely related to the progress of his training for knighthood, we shall delay evaluating this estimate of Gawain's age until after we have examined the education and training which he received.

3. Gawain's Education and Training

Befitting his birth and station, Gawain's education and training were extraordinary. He received the best preparation. The notices are very brief, but they are unusual. Geoffrey states simply: "Erat tunc filius predicti loth gualguannus nomine xii anorum iuuenis obsequie sulpicii pape ab auuncule traditus a quo arma recipit." (HRB, p. 447.) To this the Welsh Bruts add that Gawain also learned from the men of Rome "...manners and usage and horsemanship," (WB, p. 447) "...manners and courtesy and knighthood." (BYB, p. 164.) La3amon, unusually succinct, observes that Gawain had resided for some time with Pope Supplicius, that the Pope had instructed him and "made him a knight." (LB, vv. 23247-23252.) Some time later, when Arthur had to select messengers to send to the Roman Emperor, the barons advised the King that Gawain be among those chosen,

> for Walwain cuče Romanisc:
> Walwain cuče Bruttisc.
> he wes iued inne Rome:
> wel feole wintre.
> (LB, vv. 26245-26248)
>
> for Gawain understood both the Roman and British languages: he was educated in Rome for many years.

It seems extraordinary that Gawain should have accomplished so much between the ages of fifteen and twenty-two, or twenty-eight. It is no sur-

prise that he was killed so young: death in battle can occur at any age in any century. But it does seem unlikely that he would have been knighted when he was fifteen. There are, unfortunately, no manuals of chivalry extant which were composed in the 12th century. The earliest treatise which has survived, the anonymous Ordene de chevalerie, is not a manual of chivalry, but an allegory which relates the experience of one Hue de Tabarie, who, a prisoner of Saladin, won his freedom by explaining the symbolic meaning which Christian knights attached to each part of their knighting ceremony. The Ordene is a poem of 506 verses, dating from about the middle of the 13th century.[13] There is no early 12th century documentary evidence to which we can refer, but from what we are able to assemble about the normal training for knighthood and warfare we should say that Gawain ought to have been about twenty-one years old before he was knighted. Now only Laȝamon stated that Gawain was a knight, but since it is recorded that he received arms from the Pope, all readers assume that Gawain was regarded as having passed the apprenticeship period as squire and reached the status of knight.

F. J. C. Hearnshaw has constructed an outline of the training for knighthood, but, drawing chiefly, as he does, on the mid-fifteenth century Le Petit Jehan de Saintré, his sketch represents practices which are three hundred years too late for Geoffrey's Walganus. We shall give his observations, however, because Antoine de la Sale, himself a connoisseur of chivalry, made his romance of Little John a perfect mirror of knightly training in the late Middle Ages. We assume that his statements regarding the age of the youth, as he passed from one stage to the next, are a fair indication of normal progress to knighthood throughout the entire Feudal Age. For the first seven

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[13] The poem is described by U. T. Holmes, Jr., A History of Old French Literature from the Origins to 1300 (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1937), p. 302.

years of his life, then, the youth would remain at home under his mother's care, and she, of course, would be assisted by the other ladies of the castle. For the next seven years the boy would reside at the castle of his father's feudal lord. Here, under the watchful eyes of the ladies at this castle, the page, for such would be his status, learned the manners and customs of court society. Toward the end of this period his education would be directed by the lord's men: the page learned the rudiments of warfare and horsemanship. During the next seven years, as a squire, the youth mastered the technique of all his weapons, as well as the science of hunting, hawking, and, in some instances, music and verse. At the age of twenty-one he was qualified for knighthood.[14]

Ramón Lull's Le Libre del Orde de Cauayleria (ca. 1280) is much closer to Geoffrey's age, but his book, as read in Caxton's translation, sheds little light on our immediate problem. What he thinks the knight should know strikes us as being in no way different from what Antoine de la Sale outlined; furthermore, Lull says nothing about the age of the page, or squire. The knight should teach his son, at an early age, to ride, for example, but nowhere does he indicate how old the son ought to be before he can become a squire, or a knight.[15] What ought to be our best source, L'Histoire Guillaume le Maréchal, is also disappointing. Guillaume, born in 1144 (?), was sent by his father to the court of Guillaume à Tancarville,

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[14] F. J. C. Hearnshaw, "Chivalry and Its Place in History," Chivalry, ed. E. Prestage (London, 1928), pp. 21-24; Cf. H. H. Milman, History of Latin Christianity, 3d Ed. (London, 1872), IV, 206-209, who gives a similar account.

[15] William Caxton, tr. The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry, ed. A. T. P. Byles, EETS 168 (London, 1926), pp. 21 ff. Caxton, of course, translated a French version of Lull's Libre.

Chamberlain of Normandy, in 1156 (?). A squire in the Chamberlain's court, "...om dist que vint anz entiers/ Fu il bien eskuiers...."[16] Since he was knighted in 1164 the poet obviously is in error when he states that Guillaume was a squire for twenty years. P. Meyer rightly observes that we should read "huit" for "vint". Guillaume, then, was sent to the Chamberlain's court to serve as squire when he was twelve years old, and was knighted in his twentieth year. We shall come no closer to Walganus than this. All the authorities, of course, point out that under extraordinary conditions, such as general war, a youth might be knighted on the field of battle at an earlier age than was considered proper.

The pseudo-historians had a poor sense of time, and their chronology is frequently erratic. But as the texts stand, we may suppose that Geoffrey and Laȝamon are reflecting contemporary custom and practice when they represent Gawain, at the age of twelve, as being in the service of the Pope. He would have been either page or squire. As closely as we can determine, they are not writing realistically when they state that Gawain joined Arthur's army, already having received his arms from the Pope, at the age of fifteen. That, without doubt, would have been most unusual.[17]

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[16] L'Histoire de Guillaume de Maréchal, ed. P. Meyer (Paris, 1891), vv. 772-773.

[17] It has been observed by Manly and others that Chaucer, according to his testimony at the Scrope-Grosvenor trial, may have been only fourteen years old when, in 1359, he joined the army for service in France - this would place his birth in 1345. Manly states that "as may be seen from the London Letter Books, the summonses issued by the king regularly called for the enlistment of all able-bodied citizens between the ages of sixteen and sixty." (Some New Light on Chaucer (New York, 1926), p. 65.) Thus, it might be held, the pseudo-historians are not unrealistic when they show Gawain joining Arthur's army at fifteen. But there is little reason to believe that these 14th century conditions might have existed two hundred years earlier. And we have an instance of a noble youth of royal blood being knighted at the age of fifteen. That, we feel, would have been unusual.

Likewise, no detailed record has survived of the training program leading to knighthood in the 12th century. The general outline of such a program, however, can be reconstructed. One testimonial is especially illuminating. Ramón Lull's Le Libre del Orde de Cauayleria composed about 1280 is a century later than we should like it to be, and Caxton's version of it comes, of course, much later yet and through the intermediary of a French translation of Lull. Even so the passage which is directed at the need to train young men for knighthood, as it stands in Caxton's translation, is a fair enough indication of the general type of education which must have been afforded to the youths of Geoffrey's own day. It is, at any rate, as close as we shall come to 12th century theory. In Caxton's words, Lull's concern for the preservation of knighthood, especially for the preparation of the young men who are to become knights, is a vigorous appeal to all knights to train their sons. For the "...scyence and the scole of the ordre of Chyualrye," we read,

> is that the knyght make his sone to lerne in his yongthe to ryde/ For yf he lerne not in his yongthe/ he shalle neuer lerne it in his old age/ And it behoueth/ that the sone of a knyȝt in the tyme that he is squyer can take kepynge of hors/ And hym behoueth that he serue/ and that he be fyrste subgette or he be lord/ For otherwyse shold he not knowe the noblesse of the seygnory whan he shold be a knyght/ And therefor euery man that wylle come to knyghthode hym behoueth to lerne/ in his yongthe to kerue at the table/ to serue to arme/ [and to adoube a knyȝt/] ...it behoueth that a noble man that loueth the ordre of chyualrye/ and wyl be a knyght/ haue fyrst a mayster that is a knyght/ for thus as a discouenable [improper] thyng it shold be that a man that wold lerne to sewe shold lerne to sewe of a carpenter/ Al in like wyse shold it be a discouenable thyng that a squyer shold lerne thordre & the noblesse of chyualry of any other man than of a knyght/ So moche is hyhe and honoured the ordre of chyualrye that to a squyer ne suffyseth not only to kepe hors and lerne to serue a knyght/ and that he goo with hym to tornoyes and bataylles....[18]

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[18] The Book of the Ordre of Chyualry, op. cit., pp. 21-22. There follows Lull's appeal to establish a formal school to receive and instruct aspirants for knighthood.

In spite of the fact that Lull is a late 13th century apologist for chivalry, and in spite of the fact that he wished to establish formal schools for the purpose of training noble youths for knighthood, we are reasonably safe to conclude that the subjects, the curriculum for knighthood which Lull describes, were pretty much the same in the 12th century. The squire should learn to ride, to care for his mount and equipment, to "carf biforn his fader at the table", to be an obedient subordinate before he became a leader, to handle his weapons, and to observe and look after his tutor knight in action in tourney or battle. The feudal knight would need to know all these things.

In addition to this general outline of the feudal requirements for knighthood we must add injunctions taken over from the two other guides of mediaeval society, the Church and the Lady. By the 12th century the Church had made her influence felt: Christianity was the undoubted faith, and every knight was a Christian. He was a fighter first, but he liked to think that he fought under God's sanction. And by the 12th century the lady was making her wishes known, was gaining some influence in the shaping of knightly conduct, although it was well into the 13th century before courtly chivalry was established on equal footing with the feudal and Christian requirements.[19] Softer manners and a receptiveness towards humane behavior were the chief contributions of the Lady and Holy Church to knighthood.

We are in a somewhat better position to describe the practice of training for knighthood. Although the most familiar account of the career of page and squire is two hundred and fifty years later than Laȝamon, Antoine de la Sale's Le Petit Jehan de Saintré outlines the course which was undoubtedly

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[19] The best discussion of these matters is Sidney Painter's French Chivalry (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1940), pp. 28-148; especially lucid is the same author's essay in the Cornell Development of Western Civilization series: see particularly Ch. I of Mediaeval Society (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1951).

in vogue throughout the feudal period. Hearnshawe, drawing on Le Petit Jehan, has described what must have been the ordinary course of events for all noble youths during the feudal age.[20] For the first seven years of his life the boy remained at home under his mother's care. During the next seven years the boy resided away from home in the castle of his father's feudal lord.[21] For the duration of these seven years, as a page, the youth was instructed by the men and women at the lord's court. At the age of fourteen or fifteen the youth became a squire, and from that time until he attained his majority he was instructed in the use and care of arms and armor, horsemanship, hunting, hawking, music, and poetry, all the while being required to look after the equipment of the knights. At the age of twenty-one he was eligible for knighthood. Such, in brief, was the career of the noble youth during the feudal age.[22] During Geoffrey's lifetime the squire would no doubt have received little instruction in hawking, music, and poetry, much more in arms, horsemanship, and the general rigor of a hardy life.

Luckily we are able to verify this general sketch. William Marshall (1144-1219), the most accomplished English knight of the age, was also fortunate enough to have attracted the skill of a capable biographer. Although L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal undoubtedly shows William in his best

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[20] "Chivalry and its Place in History," op. cit., pp. 21-24.

[21] Painter, Mediaeval Society, op. cit., p. 27, writes that in "...the belief that parents, in particular the mother, would be too indulgent toward a boy, the young noble was sent off when he was seven or eight to be brought up in another feudal household, usually that of his parents' lord or some relative."

[22] Another convenient summary of the preparation for knighthood is found in The Cambridge Mediaeval History, VI, 805-807. See, also, H. O. Taylor, The Mediaeval Mind, 4th Ed. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1949), I, 540-547.

light, there is no reason to doubt the sequence of events described, and but little more to doubt the nature of the events.[23] William remained at home until he was about thirteen.[24] He was then sent to the court of his father's cousin, William, lord of Tancarville, Chamberlain of Normandy, where, as a squire, he was, for the next eight years, guided by the retainers of the Chamberlain's court. In 1164, while Henry II was in France harrying Louis, the Chamberlain knighted William. The knighting ceremony, a simple but effective "battlefield promotion", launched William on his amazing career. The biographer skips quickly over the eight years William was a squire,[25] but there is no doubt whatsoever, to judge from his immediate and lasting successes in combat, that the greatest part of his training had been devoted to the two components of feudal knighthood, horsemanship and skill with lance and sword, which were most admired by his age, and which produced, in William, an outstanding fighting knight.[26]

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[23] William has also attracted the attention of two most capable scholars, M. Paul Meyer who edited the text of the biography in 1891 and Sidney Painter who published his excellent study of William Marshall in 1933. Both Meyer and Painter find no reason to doubt William's biographer.

[24] Had his father not been away so frequently fighting he undoubtedly would have sent William to his cousin's court earlier.

[25] L'Histoire, ed. P. Meyer, vv. 769-773:

> Ne voil mais emplier mon sens
> A conter les anz e les tens
> Que Guilleaume fu eskuiers
> Mes l'on dist que vint [sic] anz entiers
> Fu il bien eskuiers....

[26] Prof. Painter adds that "...other quite different qualities were also expected of him. God and Woman, the church and the troubadour cult of Courtly Love, were beginning to soften and polish the manners of the feudal aristocracy. For a long time the church had demanded that a knight be pious, now ladies were insisting that he be courteous." (William Marshall (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1933), pp. 17-18.) William's piety was intense, and he was never discourteous to women, but his fame, until he was forty, rested on his strong right arm.

It should be quite apparent now that Gawain's preparation for knighthood conforms, in general, with feudal theory and practice. His years away from home, the fosterage and training at another lord's court, the kind of training he received - instruction in horsemanship, knighthood, manners, courtesy, usage, and language - all this is a reflection of 12th century custom, and Gawain, thus far, stands as the counterpart of any noble youth of his day. Geoffrey, and after him Laȝamon, err, however, in placing Gawain under the tutelage of the Pope in Rome, and in suggesting that Pope Supplicius knighted Gawain [Geoffrey's words, "a quo arma recipit", would suggest that in giving Gawain his arms Supplicius probably made him a knight, as Laȝamon says, "...makede hine to cnihte"] when the youth was but approximately fifteen years old. We noticed before that only rarely was a squire knighted before he reached the age of twenty-one. Perhaps Geoffrey regarded Arthur's projected invasion of Norway an emergency, and wished us to understand that Arthur recalled Gawain for some especial purpose. This is, of course, mere conjecture: Gawain is given no particular mission when he does join Arthur's host. He ought not to have been knighted so soon.

The presence of Gawain at the Papal Court represents too, so far as it can be determined, an event never known to have occurred in actual practice. King Loth, Gawain's father, was following the normal practice in sending his son to Arthur's court. Arthur, theoretically, should have kept Gawain at his own court, have had him trained as page and squire, and have knighted him himself. Perhaps Geoffrey felt that because Gawain was Arthur's sister's son, and therefore more a son than nephew to Arthur, that Arthur regarded Gawain as a son. If the king had a son, to whom but to the Pope, the only feudal overlord King Arthur could possibly recognize, would Arthur send such a son? And Geoffrey, the faithful servant of Holy Church, would no doubt have been pleased had this interpretation of his choice of tutor

for Gawain been recognized. Apparently no king's son (or nephew) ever was sent to the Papal Court to learn the rudiments of knighthood.[27] It is a mark of distinction which Geoffrey accords Gawain, and although it tarnishes an otherwise accurate and realistic characterization, it is in no way a lapse into fantasy. Gawain is not less human: he has but received an unprecedented honor.

4. Gawain's Fighting Skill

There is ample evidence to show that Gawain learned his lessons well. The predominant characteristic attributed to Gawain in the four narratives is his skill in arms; more than anything else Gawain is seen as a bold courageous warrior, sure of sword and spear.

His prowess is first disclosed in the presence of Lucius' entire court. Sent there by Arthur as one of three messengers, Gawain, enraged at the insult which Lucius' nephew directed at him, "...ran upon him with his drawn sword, wherewith he cut off his head, and then retreated speedily with his companions to their horses." (BHG, p. 209.)[28] Pursued by a large Roman force,

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[27] It may be that Geoffrey knew of Asser's report that Alfred, at the age of five, was sent to Rome by his father Aethelwulf in 853. See the passage in Asser's Life of King Alfred, tr. A. S. Cook (Boston, 1906), p. 5. We know that today the Papal Court maintains its Swiss Guards: certainly Innocent II (1130-1143) and Innocent III (1198-1216), both great feudal popes, must have maintained guards also. Such guards must have been an elite corps, commanded by a knight well prepared to train others in the customs of knighthood. But this is conjecture only, and a wide search through the literature bearing on the Papacy and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (if any monarch might have sent a youth to Rome, the rulers of The Two Sicilies were in the best position to do so) has not shown any evidence that anyone ever sent his son to learn knighthood at the Papal Court. But, again, it was not a fantastic idea: it would seem that Geoffrey merely wished to mark out Gawain for distinction.

[28] HRB, p. 475; WB, p. 475; BYB, p. 180.

the three British messengers are overtaken. "...Marcellus Mutius, with great eagerness to avenge Quintillian's death, was just upon the back of Walgan, and laid hold of him; which the other [Gawain] quickly obliged him to quit, by cleaving both his helmet and head to the breast with his sword." (BHG, p. 209.)[29] Gawain's conduct during the final battle of the Roman campaign is singled out. "But Walgan, whose valour was never to be foiled, endeavored to gain access to Lucius himself, that he might encounter him, and with this view beat down and killed all that stood in his way." (BHG, p. 221.)[30] Gawain, then, desiring to engage the enemy leader in single combat, forced

> ...his way through the enemy's troops, as we said before, [and] found at last (what he had wished for) access to the general, and immediately encountered him. Lucius, being then in the flower of his youth, and a person of great courage and vigor, desired nothing more than to engage with such a one as might put his strength to its full trial. Putting himself, therefore, into a posture of defense, he received Walgan with joy, and was not a little proud to try his courage with one of whom he had heard such great things. (BHG, p. 221.)[31]

As it turns out, however, Gawain is denied the honor he sought: their combat was indecisive, Lucius falling later, victim of a spear thrown by an unknown warrior.

Laȝamon adds much to this account. In outline he follows Geoffrey, but he infuses a vigor which the other narratives lack. At Lucius' headquarters Gawain strikes his enemy so vigorously that his head "...fell in two pieces."

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[29] HRB, p. 475; WB, p. 476; BYB, p. 181. See, too, HRB, p. 476; BHG, p. 210; WB, p. 476; BYB, p. 181.

[30] HRB, p. 481; WB, p. 490, where it is recorded that "...whoever met Gwalchmai, he killed with a single blow." BYB, p. 187 adds that Howel and Gawain "...enkindled their courage unanimously like fire in a dry forest..." and attacked their enemies, and that "...whomever Gawain met with there, he killed him with a single stroke or made on him a deadly wound."

[31] HRB, p. 492; WB, p. 491; BYB, p. 188.

(LB, v. 26456.) Where the other narratives present Gawain splitting Marcellus's head with his sword, Laȝamon shows him employing the lance: turning and spurring his horse to his enemy, he

...smat hine þurh mid þan spere:
swa he ispited weore.
& braeid to him þat spere:
þe gume iwat sone.
(LB, vv. 26521-26524)

...pierced him through with the spear as if he were spitted, and withdrew the spear to himself; the man died at once.

Apparently not satisfied, when the body fell to the ground, Gawain "...drew out his sword at once and cut off Marcel's head." (LB, vv. 26533-26534.) During a later action Gawain captured Petrius (LB, vv. 26789-26804), and he and Howel distinguished themselves in combat (LB, vv. 27696-28322). It is the account of the single combat, however, which shows Gawain at his best:

And Walwain forð rihte:
þer he ifunde.
Luces þene kaiser:
leouien under scelde.
& Walwain him to sweinde:
mid þe stelene sweorde.
and þe kaisere hine:
þat gome wes swiðe sturme.
sceld aȝein scelden:
sciuren þer wunden.
sweord aȝein sweorde:
sweinde wel ilome.
fur fleh of þe stelen:
þa ueond weoren abalȝen.
þer wes uiht swiðe strōg:
stureden al þa ferden.
þe kaisere wende:
Walwaī to scende.
þat he miht an uuere daȝe:
ȝelpen uor þere deden.
Ah Bruttes him þrungen to:
þræfliche swiðe.
& þa Romanisce men:
arudden heore kæiseren.
and heo to-somne healde:
swulc heouene wolde ualle.
(LB, vv. 27776-27801)

And, forthright, Gawain found Lucius the Emperor, alive under shield; and Gawain struck at him with the steel sword, and the emperor at him, who was a man exceedingly stern. Shield against shield, the pieces flew there; sword clashed very often against sword, so that fire flew from the steel. The enemies were enraged! There was a strong fight! All the host stirred. The Emperor hoped to destroy Gawain, that he might, in later days, boast of the deed. But the Britons thronged towards them most angrily; and the Romans liberated their emperor. And they charged together as if the heavens would fall.

To these writers Gawain is the bold champion. Eagerly he seeks combat, and, once committed, he fights skillfully. With sword or spear few men are his equal, and only Arthur, in his youth, excells him.

Gawain's human quality, actually, is seen in rather sharp relief when we contrast the deeds ascribed to him with Arthur's battle exploits. Laȝamon provides a close view of Arthur in action at Mt. Baden. The Saxons have been surrounded, but they fight a fierce defensive action. It is Arthur the bold champion, not Arthur the king, who shows his men how to fight. He grasped his sword firmly,

> & he smat ænne Sexise cniht.
> ÞÞ sweord Þ wes swa god:
> æt þan topen at-stod.
> & he smat enne oðer:
> þt wes þat cnihtes broðer.
> þat his halm & his hæfd:
> halden to grunde.
> þene þridde dunt he sone ȝaf:
> & enne cniht atwa clæf.
> (LB, vv. 21382-21390)

> and struck a Saxon knight so
> that that good sword stopped
> at the teeth; he struck another
> - the first knight's brother -
> so that his helm and head fell
> to the ground; he struck a
> third blow at once and cut a
> knight in two.

Reaching, at last, the Saxon leaders, Colgrim and Baldulf, Arthur dispatched them both:

> his brode swærd he up ahof:
> and hærdliche adun sloh.
> and smat Colgimes hælm:
> Þ he amidde to-clæf.
> and þere burne hod:
> þat hit at þe breoste at-stod.
> And he sweinde touward Baldulfe:
> mid his swiðre hōde.
> & swipte þat hæfued of:
> forð mid þan helme.
> (LB, vv. 21417-21426)

> He raised up his broad sword
> and struck down boldly and hit
> Colgrim's helm so that he cut
> it in two; and the burny hood
> broke so that the sword stopped
> at the breast. And with his
> right hand, he struck at
> Baldulf and cut off his helm
> and head.

But not only with the sword is Arthur master. He can use the lance too. As he started his rush, a Saxon earl stood in his path. Arthur took his spear, Ron, in hand;

> he strehte scaft stærcne:
> stiðimoden king.
> his hors he lette irnen:
> þat þe eorðe dunede.
> sceld he braid on breoste:
> þe king wes abolȝen.
> he smat Borel þene eorl:
> þurh ut þa breosten.
> þat þæ heorte to-chā:
> and þe king cleopede anan.
> þe formeste is fæie:
> (LB, vv. 21225-21237)

> the stiff-minded king extended the
> stark shaft; he let his horse run so
> that the earth dinned. The king,
> incensed, drew his shield to his
> breast, and struck Earl Borel
> through the breast so that his heart
> burst. At once the king called out,
> "The first one is dead."

So too, on the plains of Troy, Achilles and Hector fought; so, on the Laurentian field, Aeneas and Turnus dispatched their foes; it is the epic way. And in this manner, presumably, Arthur killed, according to Nennius, nine hundred and sixty men. Gawain, by this standard, is a normal fighter.

In the 12th century, to judge from these pseudo-histories, skill at arms and success in battle are to be equated with horsemanship and a strong right arm. We hear, actually, little of horsemanship: the knight, it was assumed, rode well.[32] The pseudo-historians are all agreed, however, that the strength of Gawain's blows was responsible for his success on the battle-field. It is a familiar notation. In the pseudo-histories, and later in the romances, we are never permitted to forget that the knight could, with his sword or lance, inflict mortal wounds upon his foes. Time and time again we read that a lance pierced an enemy's body, or that a burny was shattered, or that a steel blade sheared through a coat-of-mail and severed an arm. Geoffrey and Laȝamon have endowed Gawain with tremendous strength. Yet it is a human strength, and none of the feats ascribed to him would have surprised a 12th century audience. Such an audience may well have doubted that Arthur killed nine hundred and sixty men in one day, but no one would have doubted that Gawain, with one sword blow, could have decapitated a man.

It is suggested so frequently that a man, armed with sword or lance, could or could not strike a mortal blow, could or could not hack or pierce protective armor, that it will be of some interest to consider what earlier writers have had to say about the effective use of sword or lance in battle. Information from eye-witnesses of 12th century battles is quite rare, but we

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[32] By the middle of the 14th century the knight and his horse were so heavily armored that horsemanship was reduced to little more than the ability to maintain one's seat during a straight-away charge. In the 12th century, however, the knight and horse were capable of rapid and sudden maneuver. Cf. R. P. Dun-Pattison, The Black Prince (London: Meuthen & Co., 1910), p. 51.

have been able to assemble, nonetheless, an illuminating number of reliable reports. They all indicate that none of the feats assigned to Gawain is impossible.

Competent writers, for example, have described the actions of Godfrey of Bouillon in the Holy Land during the First Crusade. A strong capable fighter, L. Bréhier writes that "...according to the tradition repeated by Guibert de Nogent (Gesta, VII, ii) he had, with a stroke of the sword, hewn a Turkish horseman through the middle so that his body fell in two equal halves."[33] Albert of Aachen tells this same story, adding the Godfrey demonstrated his great strength by decapitating a number of Turkish fighters.[34] So much has been added to Godfrey's real accomplishments that it is difficult to separate fact from legend. If he did not in fact sever the Turk's body, we may be sure that he did, as Albert relates, decapitate several Turks.

Other historians of the Crusades mention many feats of arms similar to those ascribed to Gawain. Thus we read in William of Tyre's account how Roger de Barneville, killed by an arrow that pierced his heart, fell from his horse, and how "...in full view of all on the walls and towers - powerless, alas, to aid - the enemy cut off the head of that illustrious man and retreated unharmed."[35] William describes, too, the valor of Anselm de Ribemont who,

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[33] Catholic Encyclopedia (New York, 1913), Vol. VI, 625. We know that the Abbot of Nogent was considered to be a reliable, trustworthy man. He must have believed what he was told about Godfrey, and set down what he thought his informant had seen.

[34] Alberti Aquensis Historia Hierosolymitana, Recueil des historiens des croisades, Hist. Occ., IV, 385. Godfrey's blow, according to Albert, cut through the Turk's lorica, and severed his body from the juncture of the neck and shoulder to the pelvis.

[35] A History of Deeds Done Beyond The Sea, tr. E. A. Babcock and A. C. Krey (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1934), I, 263.

forgetting his own safety, "...rashly plunged into their [Turks] midst, overthrew some, thrust others through the heart with his sword, and exerted himself so valiantly in the work of slaughter that he drew to himself the eyes and good will of all the ranks.[36] Ambroise, Geoffrey de Vinsauf (i. e. Richard de Templo), and Anna Comnena all attest to the knight's skill with sword and lance.[37] An outstanding feat is attributed to Godfrey of Lusignan. A valiant fighter, he opposed a group of Turks one day and "...drove them back from the barricades, which they had already seized upon, above our men; and he slew ten of them with an axe he carried in his hand, in a most glorious manner; and none he smote escaped."[38] In view of these notices from several writers declaring the feats of arms and strength of the knights' blows it would appear that the pseudo-historians attributed to Gawain a perfectly reasonable, although superior skill. We have, moreover, an even more reliable witness to consider.

A North Syrian aristocrat, Usāmah Ibn-Munqidh (1095-1188), has described what he believed to be notable deeds of valor. Much of what he wrote is a record of what he himself had seen. Because he fought against the "Franks", because his impressions are those of the "enemy", his testimony is reliable. The lance and the sword are the weapons which impressed Usāmah most. Among "noteworthy lance thrusts" we read this account: "One of the terrible lance

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[36] Ibid., p. 289.

[37] Ambroise, Estoire de la guerre sainte, tr. M. J. Hubert (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1941), vv. 1641-1666; Geoffrey de Vinsauf, Itinerary of Richard I and others to the Holy Land (London: Bohn Antiquarian Library, 1848), pp. 188, 203; Anna Comnena, The Alexiad, tr. Elizabeth A. S. Dawes (London, 1928), pp. 398, 401.

[38] Geoffrey de Vinsauf, op. cit., p. 203.

thrusts I witnessed was one administered by a Frankish knight (may Allah render them helpless!) to one of our cavaliers, named Sābah ibn-Qunayb of the Kilābi tribe, which cut three of his ribs on the left side, and hit with its sharp edge his elbow, cutting it in two just as the butcher cuts a joint. He died on the spot."[39] Another lance thrust pushed a piece of a link of chain mail into the abdomen of a Frankish knight.[40] Especially vigorous is this report of the death of a knight:

> ...the Count of Cerdagne, the lord of Tripoli, made an incursion against us. Our men rushed to the encounter and Hamadat was among those who rushed. He took his post on an elevation of the ground and faced south. As he stood there, a Frankish cavalier attacked him from the west. One of our comrades, seeing him, shouted, "O Hamadāt!" So he looked around and saw a horseman headed towards him. He immediately turned the head of his mare northward and, holding his lance with his hand, he thrust it straight into the chest of the Frank. He hit him so hard that the lance transpierced him. The Frank went back, hanging to the neck of the horse and breathing his last breath.[41]

None of the lance thrusts attributed to Gawain exceeds these described by Usāmah.

The sword blow, too, is impressive. Of a duel between two Moslem champions, Usāmah reports that "...Mālik struck him with the sword on his shoulder, which he split as far down as the saddle, and killed him."[42] His own strength is noteworthy. Exercising considerable self-restraint,

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[39] An Arab-Assyrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usāmah Ibn-Munqidh, tr. P. K. Hitti (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1929), p. 76.

[40] Usāmah, p. 76.

[41] Usāmah, p. 78. The editor identifies the Count of Cerdagne as William Jourdain, nephew of Raymond of St. Giles, and places this incident in the year 1108.

[42] Usāmah, p. 65.

but obviously proud of his feat, Usāmah states that one day

> ...I had an encounter with an Ismā 'īlite, who had a dagger in his hand, while I had my sword. He rushed on me with the dagger, and I hit him in the middle of his forearm as he was grasping the handle of the dagger in his hand and holding the blade close to his forearm. My blow cut off about four inches of the blade and cut his forearm in two in the middle. The mark of the edge of the dagger was left on the edge of my sword. An artisan in our town, seeing it, said, "I can remove this dent from it." But I said, "Leave it as it is. This is the best thing in my sword." The trace is there to the present day. Whenever one sees it he knows it is the trace of a knife.[43]

No sword blow of Gawain's exceeds these.

The pseudo-historians, having created a human figure, would hardly ascribe superhuman feats to him. Gawain is a skilled fighter, and a strong man, but nowhere in the pseudo-histories are unreasonable feats of arms attributed to him. The fury of the mêlée is well known, the characteristics of the knight's individual weapons, the sword and lance, are known, and the tremendous striking force of those weapons, when wielded by a strong man, is easy to imagine. No one should doubt Gawain's ability to decapitate a man with one sword blow, or his ability to thrust a lance through a man's body. The testimony of the writers which we have assembled indicates that the pseudo-historians created, in Gawain, a strong fighter, but an apparently normal man.[44]

5. Gawain's Skill With Words: "Golden-Tongued"

We noticed that the ascription "Golden-tongued" was applied, although

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[43] Usāmah, pp. 146-147.

[44] There comes to mind the feats of Stephen at Lincoln in 1141. His army dispersed, he fought on against overwhelming odds, and, alone, withstood the charge of an armed mounted knight. When his sword broke, he fought on with a battle-ax. For all the details, see Kate Norgate, England Under The Angevin Kings (London, 1887) I, 319-320. Nothing accredited to Gawain exceeds Stephen's exploits at Lincoln.

not significantly, to the pre-Galfridean Gawain, and we shall observe later that Gawain's courteous speech is given some attention. In this light it is interesting to note that the pseudo-historians attach but small importance to this part of his character. They record some speeches, but they do not give them any attention. His laconic wit would appear to be more impressive than his ability to speak eloquently. When Gawain does speak at length we are more aware of the knowledge of feudal relationships which he discloses than we are of a courteous, or courtly, manner of expression which he might have possessed.

The evidence is slight. Lucius' nephew had insulted Gawain and his two companions by remarking that the Britons boasted of their skill in battle, but could not match their words with deeds. Gawain killed him with one blow, and, in the course of the pursuit which followed, he killed another. As Marcellus died, Gawain shouted to him, bidding him, "...when he arrived at the infernal regions, to tell the man he had killed in camp, that in this manner the Britons showed their boasting and their threatening." (BHG, p. 209.)[45] Laȝamon's version is slightly more humorous:

& þas word kende:
Walwaȝ þe kene.
Cniht þu ride to swiðe:
betere þe weore at Rome.
...
Marcel far to helle:
& tel heom þer spelles.
and wune þer to-ȝere:
mid Quencelien þin ifere.
and halde þer unker rune:
betere inc weoren inne Rome.
for þus we eou scullen techen:
ure Bruttisce speche.
(LB, vv. 26525-26544)[46]

And Gawain the bold said these words: "Knight, you rode too swiftly; better you were at Rome! Marcellus, go to Hell, and tell them tales there, and dwell forever with Quencelin, your companion, and there continue your fellowship. Better it were for you to be in Rome! For thus we shall teach you our British manner of speaking."

[45] HRB, p. 475; WB, p. 476; BYB, p. 181.

[46] Not in HRB, WB, and BYB.

The wit does not sparkle; in fact, the humor is dull. Yet, these are the remarks of the skilled fighter who is sure of himself. Somewhat more skillful is Gawain's conduct in debate. Having delivered Arthur's message to Lucius, that he desist from his attempt to conquer the Britons, Lucius remains silent. Gawain, enraged, speaks further to the point:

Luces þe riche:
þu ært kæisere of Rome.
We beoð Arðures men:
aðelest Brutten.
He sent þe his sonde:
wið uten gretinge.
he hat þe faren to Rome:
þe riche is þin aʒen.
let hine halden France:
þe he biwon mid fehte.
and hald þu þin richē:
and þine Rom-leoden.
While þine aldrē:
France ieoden.
mid fehte heo þer biwūnen:
unimete wunnen.
swa ane while heo þer luuedē:
and seoðen heo hit leoseden.
mid fehte Arður hit biwen:
and he hit wule walden.
He is ure lauerd:
we beoð his leod-kempen.
He us haehte suggen:
soð to þe seoluē.
ʒif þu nult aʒen buʒen:
þe bone he wule iwurðen.
and ʒif þu nult aʒenwendē:
ah iwurðien þin iwillen.
and þu wult þat kinelond:
bi-tellen to þire hond.
nu to-morʒen is þe dæi:
haue ʒif þu biʒete mæi.
(LB, vv. 26363-26394)

"Mighty Lucius, you are Emperor of Rome. We are men of Arthur, the noblest Briton. He sends you his messengers, without greeting. He orders you to march to Rome - that realm is your own. Let him hold France, which he won by fighting, and you hold your own realm and your Roman people. Once your ancestors invaded France; by fighting they won immense possessions there. So awhile they lived there, and afterwards they lost it. Arthur won it by fighting and he will hold it. He is our lord; we are his warriors. He ordered us to say directly to you: unless you march back home, he will be your bane. If you will not march back, but choose to execute your will - and you would win the kingdom to your own hand - then tomorrow is the day; have it if you can obtain it!"

Lucius's reply to this was a straightforward refusal. France, he stated, belonged to him, and Arthur had won it illegally. Graciously, however, he would accept peace if Arthur should swear to become his man. Gawain's reply to this suggestion is a vigorous justification of Arthur's claim to the disputed possessions. Arthur's ancestors, he points out, Belen and Brenne, possessed both Britain and France. They conquered Rome, furthermore, and

dwelled there for many years. And Rome, Gawain concludes,

...is ure icunde:
þa þu haldest an honde.
and 3if we mote libben:
we nit wulle habbē.
beute 3if þu wulle icnawen bee:
Ƿ Arður is king ouer þe.
And ælche 3ere him sendē:
gæuel of þine londen.
and 3if þu gæst him a leoð:
þu miht libben þa eð.
(LB, vv. 26429-26438)[47]

"...which you hold in hand, is ours by right; and if we may live, we will have it, provided that you will acknowledge that Arthur is king over you, and each year send him tribute of your lands. And if you go to him in peace, you might live more quietly."

Hardly the manner of the courteous, "Golden-tongued" speaker, Gawain's expression is forthwright and outspoken. Not interested in showing us that Gawain's speech is considerate or courteous, La3amon, speaking through Gawain, voices what is certainly a central feudal precept: that which the suzerain can win by force of arms is his to hold as long as he can defend it.

6. Gawain's Bold Spirit

In keeping with the temperament manifested by his speech, Gawain is possessed of a bold spirit, rising on two occasions, at least, to a sincere passion. Before leaving Lucius' headquarters after he had killed the Emperor's nephew, Gawain shouted his defiance to the Romans. "So help me God," said Gawain the bold,

3if æuer aie is swa kene:
of eouwer moncunne.
þat us after kenne:
ich hine wulle aquelle.
he scal beo to-swungen:
mid brade mine sweorden.
(LB, vv. 26465-26470)[48]

"if any of your men are ever so bold, that they pursue after us, I shall kill one of them; he shall be cut in pieces with my broad sword!"

Even more spirited is his reaction to the announcement of Modred's treachery.

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[47] Also not in HRB, WB, and BYB.

[48] Not in HRB, WB, and BYB.

Publicly he makes a vow:

Ældrihtē godd:
domes waldend.
al middel-ærdes mund:
whi is hit iwurðen.
þat mi broðer Modred:
þis morð hafueð itimbred.
Ah to dæi ich at-sake hine here:
biuoren þissere duȝeðe.
and ich hine for-demen wulle:
mid drihtenes wille.
mi seolf ich wulle hine an-hon:
haxst alre warien.
þa quene ich wulle mid goddes laȝe:
al mid horsen to-draȝe.
For ne beo ich nauere bliðe:
þa wile ich beoð aliue.
and þat ich habbe minne ǽm:
awrǽke mid þan bezste.
(LB, vv. 28204-28221)[49]

"Almighty God, shaper of man's destiny, guardian of all middle earth! Why has it happened that my brother Modred has wrought this sin? But here today I forsake him, before this assembly - and, with God's will, I will destroy him. I myself will hang him, greatest of all scoundrels. I will, with God's permission, draw the queen all in pieces with horses. For I shall never be happy while I am alive until I have avenged my uncle as best I can."

These two passages are the most spirited in the four pseudo-histories. Brief as they are, they indicate that Gawain was not only capable of an intense, human feeling, but also that he was deeply, sincerely loyal to Arthur.

7. Gawain's Gentility

To show us that Gawain was not an altogether simple character, the valiant warrior only, Laȝamon interrupts, it seems, the progress of a debate to indicate that there was a softer side to his nature. Arthur, having heard the ultimatum of Lucius' messengers, assembled his barons to seek their advice. The first earl of the realm, Cador, urged immediate war. In a brisk speech, which reminds us very much of the feelings expressed by Erec's retinue after Erec's marriage, Cador declared that Lucius' challenge was welcome news. The warriors, he urges, have been idle too long, and idleness is evil. "For idleness," he continues,

[49] Also not in HRB, WB, and BYB.

...makeð mon:
his monschipe leose.
ydelnesse makeð cnihte:
for-leosen his irihte.
idelnesse grædeð:
feole uuele craften.
idelnesse makeð leofen:
feole þusend monnen.
þurh ideliche dede:
lute men wel spede.
(LB, vv. 24913-24922)[50]

"...causes man to lose his manliness; idleness causes a knight to lose his rights completely; idleness causes many wicked crafts; idleness destroys many thousands of men; as a result of idle deeds, little men fare well."

Gawain apparently found this distasteful, for he replied heatedly. "Cador," he called out,

...þu ært a riche mon:
þine rædes ne beoð noht iden.
for god is grið and god is frið:
þe freoliche þer haldeð wið.
and godd sulf hit makede:
þurh his godd-cunde.
for grið makeð godne mon:
gode workes wurchen.
for alle monnen bið þa bet:
þat lond bið þa murgre.
(LB, vv. 24955-24964)

"...you are a powerful man; [nevertheless] your advice is not good. For peace and amity are good, whosoever holds them freely. And God himself, expressing his Godliness, made them. Peace makes a good man perform good works; for all the men are the better, and the land is the merrier."

Cador, certainly, speaks for the majority of his peers: Gawain's opinion is extraordinary.[51] We may point out that Gawain's actions hardly fit this point of view; we may conclude that this speech had little effect on the decision reached; we may syggest that this is a new propaganda, or new humane ideal, tempered by Christian feeling, which was slowly to civilise the age; nevertheless, since these words are put into Gawain's mouth, we must consider them to be an important, although slight, reflection of his human character.

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[50] This, as well as Gawain's reply, is not in HRB, WB, and BYB.

[51] See, too, LB, vv. 26292 ff., where Gawain's closest companions argue that only open warfare and bloodshed, not a reconciliation with Lucius, can erase the "folkshame" the Britons have incurred as a result of Lucius' challenge.

8. Gawain's Courtesy

We looked in vain for traces of courteous behavior in the primitive Gawain: we shall find next to nothing in the early literary Gawain. There is absolutely not one word in Geoffrey's entire account which would lead us to suspect that his Walganus is at all related to the courteous knight we shall meet later in the romances. As a matter of fact, the reputation Geoffrey has bestowed on Gawain would lead us to believe that this knight is the least likely candidate for future writers to select as the knight to be known, until Malory and his followers degraded him, as the paragon of courtesy. One instance shows rather well what Geoffrey thought of him, what, obviously, he considered Gawain's reputation to be. When it was announced that Gawain was to be one of three messengers to be sent to Lucius' headquarters, the "...retinue of young courtiers that attended Walgan, highly rejoicing at this opportunity, were urgent with him to find some occasion for a quarrel in the commander's camp...." (BHG, p. 209.)[52] In light of his subsequent behavior at Lucius' camp we may feel sure that Gawain, far from being recognized for his courtesy - his violence contradicted the behavior expected of messengers - was regarded widely as an impetuous youth, as a man whose temper, not his deeply seated social code, ruled his actions. This, of course, is a definite human trait.

The Welsh Bruts, too, yield no direct evidence of Gawain's courtesy. Both narratives, however, provide what might be considered a bare hint. "And living there was Gwalchmei," we read, "the son of Llew, son of Kynvarch, in the service of the bishop of Ryfain, where Arthyr his uncle had sent him to learn manners and usage and horsemanship from the men of Ryfain." (WB, p. 447.)

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[52] HRB, p. 447.

To learn "manners and usage" - this is the only word. But his reputation in the Welsh Bruts is the same as Geoffrey has it, and what Roman manners he may have learned we never know.

Nor does Laȝamon speak of his courtesy. We have seen already that Laȝamon does make a point of Gawain's softer nature, that he does make Gawain the apologist for peace and amity. We could argue that such a knight might be courteous, but there is no evidence for it. One other passage offers an additional hint. When Gawain joins Arthur's army prior to the invasion of Norway, all Arthur's men rejoice that Gawain has arrived. "It was a splendid thing," Laȝamon writes,

þat Walwaī wes to monne iboren.	that Gawain was born to be a
for Walwæin wes ful aðelmod:	man, for he was exceptionally
an ælche þeouwe he wes god.	noble-minded: he excelled in
he wes mete-custi:	each virtue. He was liberal,
and cniht mid þan bezste.	and peer of the best of knights.
(LB, vv. 23254-23258)	

Again we might argue that if one were "excellent in each virtue" that one might also excell in one particular virtue, say, courtesy, but there is no evidence for this either.

It is not exactly a waste of time to consider this point here. We might have stated bluntly that the early literary Gawain is not courteous and have done with it. But since Gawain, if one knows him for anything, is known as the courteous knight, it is worthwhile to note that his courtesy is not a native British attribution. All four pseudo-histories contain, as we shall see, rather elaborate descriptions of court life and manners. It is stated that Arthur's knights are renowned for their courtesy, among other things. Had Gawain been known for his great courtesy, this would have been an excellent place to have singled him out, to have made mention, at least, of his reputation for courtesy. This is not done. We must conclude, then, that these writers did not regard him as a personage renowned for courtesy, and that

his famous reputation originated in another place, at a later time.[53]

9. Gawain's Death

For Geoffrey and the authors of the Welsh Bruts Gawain's death did not appear to be exceptionally significant. They simply record it. "On the same day," Geoffrey writes, "Augusel, King of Albania, and Walgan, the king's [Arthur] nephew, fell, along with innumerable others." (BHG, p. 226.)[54] The Welsh Bruts add but a word or two of judgment: "...many on all sides were killed, and foremost were Aron...and Gwalchmai...." (WB, pp. 497-498); "...many were slain...in particular Arawn...and Gawain...." (BYB, p. 191.) Laȝamon alone lingers a bit to record Arthur's grief over the loss of his favored nephew:

þer wes Walwain aslæȝe:
& idon of life-daȝe.
þurh an eorle Sexisne:
særi wurðe his soule.
þa wes Arður særi:
& sorhful an heorte forþi.
& þas word bodede:
ricchest alre Brutte.
Nu ich ileossed habbe:
mine sweines leofe.
ich wuste bi mine sweuene:
whæt sorȝen me weoren ȝeueðe.
i-slaȝen is Angel þe king:
þe wes min aȝen deorling.
& Walwaine mi suster sune:
wa is me þat ich was mon iboren.
(LB, vv. 28324-28339)

There Gawain was killed and deprived of life day at the hand of a Saxon earl - sorry be his soul! Then was Arthur, the mightiest of all Britons, sorry, and sorrowful in heart because of it; and he said these words: "Now I have lost my beloved swains - I knew by my dream what sorrows were to be given me. Augusel the king, my own darling, is slain, and Gawain, my sister's son. Woe is me that I was born a man!"

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[53] The pseudo-historians, following Geoffrey's lead, appear to have understood the role which chivalry and courtesy ought to have played in the life of the court. See, below, the extended description of the great feast following Arthur's crown-wearing ceremony, cited in § 13 - "Feudal Society". But courteous behavior is given, on the whole, scant attention. See, however, the remarks of W. A. Nitze, "Erec and the Joy of the Court," Speculum, xxix (October, 1954), 692-695, where "...the ethical expressions of knighthood in and by chivalry" are accorded a much greater influence in shaping the pseudo-histories than we have allowed them.

[54] HRB, pp. 497-498.

We do not feel that a great hero has fallen, or that the Britons have suffered an irreparable loss. Their tone is almost precisely that of Einhard who, some three hundred fifty years earlier, "simply noted" the passing of another hero who was destined to become a legendary figure in French literature. Roland is mentioned but once in the Vita Karoli Magni, and the notice is of his death: "In quo proelio [later named the Battle of Roncevaux] Eggihardus...et Hruodlandus Brittannici limitis praefectus [Roland, the Warden of the Breton March] cum aliis conpluribus interficiuntur."[55] Another brave man has been killed in battle: that is all these narratives seem to tell us.

10. Gawain's Reputation

Arthur, of course, is the central figure in the pseudo-histories. Although he dominates the action, among all the other characters presented Gawain is as well thought of as any. He is by no means the outstanding hero. He is regarded, however, as an exceptionally capable knight, and perhaps nothing will illustrate his special achievements more readily than a consideration of what, in general, his companions thought of him.

We have seen what his own retinue thought of him. They considered Gawain impulsive; at least they were quite happy to learn that he was one of three messengers to be sent to Lucius, not because they felt that he would negotiate skillfully, but, instead, because they hoped he would provoke open war. Yet it is even more significant that Arthur in the first place chose him to accompany Boso, counsul of Oxford, and Guerinus Carnotensis on this

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[55] Einhard, or Eginhard, Vita Karoli Magni, ix, 3, ed. H. W. Garrod and R. B. Mowat (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 13. For a most interesting discussion of the site of Charlemagne's disaster, see J. Bédier, Lés légendes épiques, 3° éd. (Paris, 1929), III, 297-303.

mission.[56] Although he was but a youth, Arthur, evidently, regarded him as trustworthy. His leadership too is recognized. For the final battle against Lucius Arthur placed Gawain and Hoel in command of one of his "squares".[57]

Laȝamon adds other notices of the great regard for Gawain. As Arthur departed for Norway, his entire army

wes swiðe ifurðed. For Walwaine þan kene: þe icumen wes to hired. and for his fader Lote: þe iloten wes to kinge. (LB, vv. 23260-23264)	was greatly emboldened, because of Gawain the brave, who had joined the army, and on account of his father, Lot, who was chosen to be king [of Norway].

Against Frollo of France, Gawain, we discover, is in command of a large unit: "Fifty hundred, led by that bold champion, Gawain." (LB, vv. 23808-23810.) And when Arthur defeated Frollo, and wished to disperse the vanquished enemy, it is Gawain to whom he turns: "Where are you, Gawain, dearest of men to me? Command these Romans to depart in peace." (LB, vv. 23995-23998.) Perhaps the strongest indication of Arthur's trust in him is disclosed after the news of Modred's treachery has reached France. Arthur announced that he would entrust France to Hoel and leave at once for Britain; after suppressing the rebellion, as he expected confidently to do, he would return to take up again the march on Rome. This time, he stated, "I shall bestow on my relative Gawain my rightfully won lands." (LB, vv. 28194-28195.)

Other indications of Gawain's reputation, although not given much space, are, nonetheless, significant. In the decisive action of the last battle against Lucius both Hoel and Gawain fight vigorously: both are singled out for praise. Geoffrey hesitates to judge the value of the conduct of each. "Non facile diffiniri poterat," he suggests, "quis eorum alterum excederet."

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[56] HRB, p. 474; BHG, p. 209; WB, p. 474; BYB, p. 180; LB, vv. 26273-26282.

[57] HRB, p. 483; BHG, p. 215; WB, p. 483; BYB, p. 184; LB, vv. 27258-27267.

(HRB, p. 491.) The first Welsh Brut, discussing the qualifications of the men given commands of the separate armies - and we have seen that Gawain was one such commander - states that "...at the head of each army were two nobles, famous and experienced...." (WB, p. 482.) And Laȝamon, finally, explains Modred's position as a reflection of his brother's esteem. All men accepted Modred

for Walwain wes his broðer.
þe alre treoweste gume:
þe tuhte to þan hirede.
þurh Walwain wes Modred:
monnē þa leouere.
and Arður þe kene:
ful wel him iquemde.
(LB, vv. 25486-25492)

because Gawain was his brother:
Gawain, of all men who were in the
army, the truest. On account of
Gawain was Modred the more beloved
by men, and Arthur the bold very
much pleased with him.

In spite of his early death Gawain appears to have earned a most favorable reputation. His peers and his lord think well of him. Arthur knew him to be trustworthy and valiant, a bold fighter who could be entrusted with command assignments. His companions recognized him as a spirited, courageous fighter, a natural leader who inspired his followers. Yet none of these writers elevates him exceedingly above his fellows, none considered him in any way superhuman. Laȝamon, indeed, suggests that Arthur held Hoel in especially high esteem. He committed France to Hoel's care when he returned to Britain to meet Modred's army. He praised him as highly as he ever praised Gawain:

And her ich bileofuen wulle:
me leofuest monne.
Howel minne leofue mæi:
hexst of mine cunne.
(LB, vv. 28184-28187)

"And here I shall leave the man
most dear to me, Hoel, my beloved
relative, noblest of my kin."

This, of course, tempers what has been said about Gawain. But it in no way lowers the estimate of Gawain's reputation. If anything, it makes Gawain more human. More than anything else, it is felt, this notice of Hoel confirms our opinion of Gawain's human character in the four pseudo-histories.

Not an exceptional hero, not a superhuman warrior, and never a supernatural being, Gawain, in these narratives, is quite human. There is nothing further to be learned of his character or actions. And yet, as we turn from Gawain himself to a consideration of the background against which he is portrayed, it is most satisfying to notice that, in the hands of Geoffrey and his immediate followers, Gawain is, in the aspect displayed by the opinions of his companions, a trusted member of the comitatus, an educated, well trained knight, and a good man to have available in a fight; that he is, above all, a quite believable human being.

11. Feudal Warfare

Warfare looms largest in the background against which Gawain is portrayed in these British stories. From the time of his entrance into the pseudo-histories until the moment of his death, we see Gawain at war, or preparing for war. As a matter of fact, the entire Arthurian episode in these narratives is largely one steady record of warfare. If one were to rely on these accounts alone for one's source of information about the Middle Ages, or, specifically, for one's knowledge of the day-to-day activities of the British ruling class throughout the 12th century,[58] one would conclude that the normal feudal baron spent all his time fighting. Actually, he would not be far from the truth. As we consider the events which took place in England, on the continent, and in the Near East during the British reigns of Henry I (1100-1135), Stephen (1135-1154), Henry II (1154-1189), and Richard I (1189-1199), we see at a glance that warfare was indeed the primary activity of the century. Whether he were a member of a contingent

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[58] Geoffrey and the authors of the two Welsh Bruts wrote in the heart of the 12th century; Laȝamon, his Brut finished early in the next century, still is a part of, and represents, the 12th century.

on a Crusade, whether he were contesting some disputed fief at home or on the continent, or whether he were engaged in a local raid, the British knight in the 12th century found constant opportunity to practice his principal trade. Primarily, in this century, it was the function of the knight to fight.

So far, then, Geoffrey, his Welsh followers, and La3amon, since they depict warfare extensively, furnish a realistic reflection of their society. To be sure, other important events took place in England in the 12th century. The Monastic Revival, with all the attendant mixed blessing of monachism, was a significant social phenomenon during the century. England, for example, witnessed the establishment of "...well over two hundred new [monastic] houses...in the reigns of Henry I and his two successors."[59] The softer effects of chivalric behaviour began to appear in England in this century. Hunting, hawking, feasting, and visiting shrines were pastimes of the century for the upper classes. The so-called "Twelfth Century Renaissance" was not without its patrons and practitioners in England. We shall see little reflection of all this. But we do not censure the writer for what he has omitted, if what he has recorded does not violate our sense of reality or distort unduly what he has looked at. Certainly the pseudo-historians are not guilty of such an error, for by and large warfare was the principal occupation of the age, and the armored knight who sat his horse well and was agile with sword, shield, and lance was its undisputed champion.

The pages of these pseudo-histories are filled with accounts of tremendous battles and organized campaigns. From the moment he was raised to the throne until the day he died Arthur was engaged in conquering and consolidating an empire. First the Saxon intruders are expelled; next the entire Northern

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[59] A. L. Cross, A Shorter History of England and Greater Britain, 3d Ed. (New York, 1939), p. 67.

Island territories are invaded and won over; Norway and Jutland fall quickly to the growing monarchy; all France is added; at last, the armed power of Rome is overthrown, and the Roman Empire eyed as a ripe prize. Had it not been for treachery at home, Arthur, we feel, must have succeeded in his grand scheme. In spite of the chronological absurdities inherent in the conception of this strategy, it is not entirely unreasonable to read into it some reflection of actual events which occurred during the reigns of Henry II and Richard I. Yet this is speculation at best; there is no foundation for believing it.

Our wisest course is to state firmly now what we all know. The story is a great fiction; it never really happened. The pseudo-historians do not record true facts, they do not write accurate history. All we seek to establish is that their fictions, once recognized, are presented realistically. Since they are not writing historical novels, that is, presenting Gawain, Arthur, and all other characters in action as they would have behaved in the 6th century, but, instead, are presenting them as contemporary figures in imagined contemporary actions, we need to require only that the actions and characters coincide with probable action and human behaviour as they were observed by these writers in their own day-to-day living. Within the confines of the fiction, then, our question is this: if the actions described had occurred in the 12th century, would the characters actually have behaved as they are represented as behaving? This we take to be our definition of realism: not what is real, but what is probable; not what actually did happen, but what could have happened; not a reliable eyewitness report of actions and human behaviour, but a true-to-life account (verisimilitude) of actions and human behaviour within the limits of a fiction. This is nothing more than what we meet with in all good narrative: the whole is false, many of

the parts are real.[60]

We may test the pseudo-historians' description of warfare by these standards. The first impression one receives from these pages is that one battle is pretty much like any other. Therefore we may concentrate our attention on the greatest battle, Arthur's victory over the forces of Lucius of Rome, and be assured that what is presented here will, in general, hold true for all the other battle descriptions.

Preceding the actual battle with the armies of Lucius of Rome, there are described in the pseudo-histories all the details and events leading to the great clash of arms in the valley near Autun. Armies are raised and equipped; troops are transported; the opponents are brought together. Two preliminary skirmishes, the one occasioned by Gawain's brash behaviour at Lucius' camp and subsequent flight, the other by the Briton's action in escorting prisoners to Paris, are taken as ominous signs of eventual defeat by Lucius. He ordered a withdrawal. Arthur, learning of his movements, disposed his forces, in twelve "square companies", across the route which the Romans had planned to use. Lucius, realizing that he must fight after all, placed his enormous force in battle order and prepared to attack.

"And now the Britons and the Romans stood presenting their arms at one another." (BHG, p. 218.) Since Laȝamon's account of the battle is by far the most detailed,[61] we shall follow the development of this encounter between the armed might of Britain and Rome as it is recorded in the Brut.

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[60] One thinks especially of Marianne Moore's "...imaginary gardens with real toads in them."

[61] The others: HRB, pp. 487-495; BHG, pp. 218-223; WB, pp. 487-495; BYB, pp. 186-189.

þa gon þat folc sturien:
þa eorðen gon to dunien.
bremen þer bleowen:
bonnedon ferden.
hornes þer aqueðen:
mid hæhȝere stefnen.
sixti þusēde:
bleowen to-somne.
ma þer aqueðen:
of Arðures iueren.
þene sixti þusende:
segges mid horne.
þa wolcne gon to dunien:
þa eorðe gon to biuien.
To-somne heo heolden:
swulc heouene wolde uallen.
ærst heo lette fleon to:
feondliche swiðe.
flan al swa þicke:
swa þe snau adun ualleð.
stanes heo lette seoððen:
sturnliche winden.
seoððen speren chrakeden:
sceldes brastleden.
helms to-helden:
heȝe men uellen.
burnen to-breken:
blod ut ȝeoten.
ueldes falewe wurðe:
feollen here-mærken.
wondrede ȝeond þat wald:
iwundede cnihtes ouer al.
sixti hūdred þar weoren:
to-tredene mid horsen.
beornes þer swelten:
blodes at-uren.
strahten after stretes:
blodie stremes.
balu wes on uolke:
þe burst wes unimete.
Swa al swa suggeð writen:
þæ witeȝen idihten.
þat wes þat þridde mæste uiht:
þe auere here idiht.
þeo at þan laste:
nuste nan kempe.
whǣ he sculde slæn on:
and whā he sculde sparien.
for no icneou na man oðer þere:
for unimete blode.
þa hæf þat fiht of þan studē:
þer heo ær fuhten.
and bigunnen arumðe:
ræsen to-somne.
and neouwe ueht biginnen:
narewe i rungen.
(LB, vv. 27440-27495)

When the armies stirred the earth dinned. Trumpets were blown, the hosts were arrayed. Horns resounded with a loud voice: sixty thousand of them blown together. It sounded as if there were more of Arthur's companions than sixty thousand men with horns. The sky dinned, the earth trembled. They charged together [so vigorously that it seemed] as if heaven would fall. First, devilishly, they let arrows fly quickly, as thick as the snow that falls down. Afterwards they caused stones to wind sternly through the air. Then spears cracked, shields shivered, helms rolled. Noble men fell, burnies broke in pieces. Blood flowed out, the fields were made fallow; standards fell. Wounded knights wandered all over the field. Sixty hundred were trodden to death by horses. Barons perished there. Blood ran out: it made the paths flow in bloody streams! The harm to the men was great, the troubles knew no bounds. So as all writings tell which skillfull men have made, that was the third greatest battle that was ever fought here - so that at the last no warrior knew on whom he should smite and whom he should spare, for no man knew one from the other there because of the quantity of blood shed. Then the fight shifted from the place where they first fought, and they rushed together wildly. A new conflict began, closely contested.

As it ought to, to represent a battle properly, Laȝamon's account, from this point of departure, becomes a record of a confused jumble: we get the impression of a sprawling action, one group dashing here, another counter-attacking there. Some semblance of order is introduced by making one encounter become the occasion for the next assault. From a series of close views of the action we are able to form a picture of the battle, to catch a glimpse of the 12th century knight in action, and to estimate the validity of Arthur's tactical plan.

There came, first of all,

...kinges þreo:
of hæðene londe.
of Ethiope wes þa an:
þe oðer wes an Aufrican.
þe pridde wes of Libie:
of hæðene leode.
heo comen to þere uerde:
a þere æste ænde.
& þene sceld-trume brekene:
þe Bruttes þer heolden.
and anā fælden:
fiftene hundred.
baldere þeinen:
of Arðures þeoden.
þa wenden Bruttes:
sone to þa rugges.
(LB, vv. 27498-27513)

three kings of heathen land: one was from Ethiopia, the second was an African, and the third, a heathen too, was from Lybia. They attacked the troop at the east end and broke the shield-wall that the Britons held there, and felled at once fifteen hundred valiant thanes of Arthur's army. Then the Britons turned their backs quickly.

Before the Romans could exploit their penetration, however, Bedvere and Kay's company counter-attacked:

heore Bruttes heo isehȝen:
mid brōden to-hawen.
þer iwurðen to-bursten:
eorles swiðe balden.
mid ten þusend cnihten:
hælden to þan uihten.
amidden þan þrunge:
þer heo þihkest weoren.
and slohȝen Romleoden:
reouliche swiðen.
& ȝeond þan uehte wenden:
after heore iwillen.
(LB, vv. 27514-27529)

They saw their Briton companions hewed to pieces with swords. These boldest earls became enraged, and pressed to the fight with ten thousand knights, in the middle of the throng where it was thickest, and they slew the Roman men grievously, going over the fight at their will.

The Britons did not escape unharmed. In this counter-attack Bedvere

was killed, and Kay, unsuccessful in an attempt to retrieve Bedvere's body, was forced to withdraw. As Kay was retreating, Ridwathlan, Bedvere's nephew, shouted to his five hundred knights, urging them to help him avenge his uncle's death. He rushed directly at Boccus, who had killed Bedvere, and

...braid ut his sweord sone:
and hī to sweinde.
and smat þane king a þene helm:
þat he a twa to-ueol.
and æc þere burne-hod:
þat hit at þe toðen at-sted.
and þe heðene king:
hælde to grude.
(LB, vv. 27626-27633)

drew out his sword at once and struck him and smote the king on the helm so that it severed in two, and also the burny-hood, so that the sword stopped at the teeth, and the heathen king fell to the ground.

In yet another close view of the battle we see Leir of Boulogne strike down the Prince of Babylon, who had killed many Britons that day. Leir

...brædd an his breoste:
þnne sceld bradne.
and he igrap an his hōd:
a sper þat wes swiðe strong.
& his hors muneȝeden:
mid alle his imaine.
and þene admiral hitte:
mid smærten ane dunte.
vnder þeore breoste:
þat þa burne gon to berste.
þat him þer bæfte:
þat sper þurh ræhte.
fulle ane ueðme:
þe ueond feol to grunde.
(LB, vv. 27674-27687)

drew a broad shield to his breast, and he grasped in his hand an exceptionally strong spear; he spurred his horse with all his might and hit the [enemy] leader a smart blow under the breast, so that his burny burst, so that the spear pierced through there behind him a full fathom. The enemy fell to the ground.

His success, however, was short lived. The son of the Babylonian prince, Gecgron, saw his father fall under Leir's blow,

and his spere grap anā.
and smat Leir þene eorl sære:
a þa lift side.
þurh ut þa heorte:
þe eorl adun halde.
(LB, vv. 27688-27695)

and he grasped his spear at once and smote Leir the earl sorely on the left side through the heart. The earl fell down.

At this time the company commanded by Gawain and Hoel entered the fight. We have seen already that they swept everything in front of them to the ground, reaching, at last, the very core of Lucius' army. Here Gawain and Lucius

fought to a draw. Thus the battle continued until just before sunset. Then Arthur shouted to his company, "Let us all now go to them," (LB, v. 27808.) The charge of this company turned the tide of victory. The Roman army broke, turned their backs, and fled. A spear thrown by an unknown warrior killed Lucius. The British pursuit was relentless: those Romans who escaped death in battle, Geoffrey relates, "...dispersed...themselves through fear, some to the by-ways and woods, some to the cities and towns...but were either killed or taken and plundered by the Britons who pursued; so that a great part of them voluntarily and shamefully held forth their hands, to receive their chains, in order to prolong for awhile a wretched life." (BHG, p. 223.)

Geoffrey and the Welsh Bruts differ from Laȝamon's Brut in one important detail. Laȝamon's Arthur does not fight personally. He is the Commander-in-Chief, the director of the battle, not the blooded warrior. He exhorts his men to action, but at the end of the battle we find him in his tent:

Word com to Arðure:	Word was brought to Arthur,
þer he wes on telde.	there where he was in his tent,
þat þe kæsere wes of-slaȝen:	that the Emperor was slain.
(LB, vv. 27844-27846)	

The Welsh pseudo-histories, following Geoffrey, provide a different picture of Arthur. He is the over-all commander, to be sure, but he is also the skilled fighter. When Gawain failed to kill Lucius, the Romans not only rescued their leader but also pressed forward in a new attack. At this crucial moment Arthur committed his own company to action. Words were needed, and Arthur, drawing out "caliburno gladio optimo", provided them:

> What are you doing soldiers? Will you suffer these effeminate wretches to escape? Let not one of them get off alive. Remember the force of your arms, that have reduced thirty kingdoms under my subjection. Remember your ancestors, whom the Romans, when at the height of their power, made tributary. Remember your liberties which these pitiful fellows, that are much your inferiors, attempt to deprive you of. Let none of them escape alove. What are you doing? (BHG, p. 222.)

Leading his troops personally, Arthur assaulted the advancing enemy. And,

like the old Arthur of Mt. Badon fame, "...not a man did he meet but at one blow he laid either him or his horse dead upon the ground." (BHG, p. 222.)[62]

The British victory complete, there was nothing to do but bury the dead. Arthur "...gave orders for separating the bodies of his nobility from those of the enemy, and preparing a pompous funeral for them; and that, when ready, they should be carried to the abbeys of their respective countries, there to be honourably buried." (BHG, p. 224.) Bedvere's bier was taken to Bajocae, his native city,[63] that of Cheudo, Duke of Andegavia, was taken to Camus, and that of Holdin, Duke of Ruteni, was taken to Terivanna in Flanders.[64] Then Arthur "...ordered the country people to take care of the burial of the enemy, and to carry the body of Lucius to the senate, and tell them, that was the only tribute which Britain ought to pay them. After this he stayed in those parts til the next winter was over, and employed his time in reducing the cities of the Allobrages." (BHG, p. 224.)[65]

Laȝamon adds that the bodies of Kai and Leir were transported to suitable burial plots. Where Kai was buried, Arthur "...named it Caen; now and evermore, so it is called there." (LB, vv. 27923-27925.) And "men carried the earl Leir into Boulogne." (LB, vv. 27944-27945.) Subsequently, Laȝamon has it, Arthur

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[62] WB, pp. 492-493; BYB, pp. 188-189.

[63] WB, p. 495 - to the city in Normandy he had built, not named; LB, vv. 27936-27937 - "...to his castle, Bayeux, and there he was buried."

[64] WB, p. 495; WB, p. 495 - "And all other nobles were carried to the nearest churches."

[65] WB, p. 496.

wunede in ana londe.
inne Burguine:
þer him bezst þuhte.
þat lond he al biwuste:
and alle þe castles sætten.
and seide þat he wolde:
him seolue þat lond holde.
And seoððen he his beot makede:
a sumere þat he wolde.
faren into Rome:
& ahnien al þa riche.
and beð him seolf kaisere:
þe Luces wuneden ære.
(LB, vv. 27947-27959)

dwelled in a land that seemed best to him, in Burgundy. He ruled all that land, settled all the castles, and said that he would hold that land himself. And afterwards he made his boast that he would, in the summer, march into Rome and conquer all the kingdom, and himself be Emperor where Lucius formerly dwelled.

The pseudo-historians' representation of warfare may be considered best by directing our attention to the separate actions which comprise their accounts of Arthur's Roman campaign, the conduct of the battle, and the after-battle details. In general it can be said that the entire presentation is quite in harmony with current feudal theory and practice. As a realistic record of warfare in the 12th century the account shows well in kind: it errs only in degree.

To begin with, the two most obvious errors can be accounted for by the authors' necessity to keep to the core of their fiction and their fondness for exaggeration. Lucius of Rome and his Near Eastern allies, a coalition unthinkable in the 12th century, serve the central fiction well. All enemies of Arthur, the Christian champion, are represented as pagans, heathens "most loathsome to God". Exaggeration, a commonplace phenomenon in the Middle Ages, accounts for the fantastic large number of troops employed by both sides. Beyond this, however, Geoffrey, his Welsh followers, and Laȝamon display a creditable familiarity with the warfare of their day. There was no need for them to invent tactics or to imagine impossible military situations. In their lifetime they would have seen and heard enough to enable them to construct a fairly realistic representation of battle. The wonder is, indeed, that, clerics both, Geoffrey and Laȝamon should have possessed as educated an understanding of war as they did.

Nevertheless it is difficult to assess the validity of the accounts of the conduct of the battle. It is, to begin with, an imaginary battle fought by armies which never existed. The number of troops present far exceeds the known size of any 12th century military force. The chief tactical operation, the ambush, moreover, although well known in the warfare of Wales, sounds suspiciously like the tactics employed by Turnus to defend the walls of Latinus' city.[66] But if the strategy and tactics employed by Arthur are obscure, are a mixture of fact and fancy, parts of the battle descriptions are real enough. Arthur, committed to the tactics of ambush, chose a strong defensive position and placed his forces in sound battle array. Lucius' Romans are divided into separate "battles", suited to attack formations.[67] The command positions chosen by the leaders, in the rear of their force, their standards marking a point of refuge or rally, are well suited to the tactical plan.[68] And Arthur's use of a reserve, his plan - executed successfully - to attack the enemy on the flank with his cavalry after his main body had disorganized them, reflects current Norman practice.[69]

The actual conduct of the battle is, of course, not a realistic reporting. E. Faral has, quite correctly, called this portion of Geoffrey's

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[66] Aeneid, XI, 511-519, tr. C. D. Lewis, Doubleday Anchor Books (New York, 1953), p. 275; Tatlock, Legendary History, p. 343, n. 132 cites eight other passages in Geoffrey which he calls "Virgilian reminiscence".

[67] Probably not in a wedge, as Tatlock points out, Legendary History, pp. 334-335, especially n. 83. Geoffrey's term, cuneus, is ambiguous: Tatlock supposes it to be a general term for any formation.

[68] So placed at Hastings and the Battle of the Standard (1138).

[69] A maneuver which enabled Henry I to defeat his brother, the Duke of Normandy, at Tinchebrai in 1106. Cf. Henry of Huntingdon, Chronicle, tr. T. Forester, Bohn Library (London, 1853), p. 242.

narrative "indecise".[70] La3amon, as we saw, makes one assault by one group occasion for a retaliatory attack by another. The pseudo-historians, however, do not attribute fantastic actions to any knight, nor do they forget the general tactical situation they constructed. They err in placing too many troops in a restricted valley, but they compensate for their inaccuracy of logistical detail by providing vivid and true-to-life descriptions of individual combats. Before Geoffrey and La3amon there is no careful military history, and the pseudo-historians were but following the only guide available to them, their knowledge of the individual knight and foot soldier. The result is not history, but the illusion of history.[71]

Arthur's actions after the battle was concluded reflect the contemporary desire of each man to be buried in Church ground, or, if possible, to die under the physical protection of Holy Church. The outstanding example which comes to mind, of course, is the death of Henry II. Although deserted, for all practical purposes, by his vassals and his sons, and robbed even after

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[70] La Legende Arthurienne (Paris, 1929), II, 192. Tatlock, Legendary History, p. 342, concludes that "...legions attack other legions distant from them, known legions are ignored, unknown suddenly appear, masses of men and their positions are disregarded in order to exalt individual heroes...."

[71] For a similar disposition and use of cavalry see the account of the Battle of Lincoln (1141) in Henry of Huntingdon, op. cit., pp. 273-280. All other details are paralleled, so far as one is able to determine, by actual events on the battlefields of the 11th and 12th centuries - see Tatlock's extensive notations, pp. 321-344. Arthur's campaign, especially his final battle in the valley of Siesia, is not, of course, an exact copy of any single historic battle, but every action which takes place in the pseudo-historians' accounts has its counterpart in some actual campaign. One is convinced of this after one has perused the works of the historians William of Malmesbury, Florence of Worcester, Henry of Huntingdon, and Roger of Wendover, and after one has read in the many chronicles of the Crusades. The accounts of Hastings, the Battle of Lincoln, and the Battle of the Standard, plus the many military actions described by William Marshall's biographer, also indicate that, on the whole, Geoffrey and La3amon have constructed a realistic account of 12th century warfare. As we observed earlier, they may err in detail, but in general they knew what they were talking about.

death of his garments, he was, thanks to the offices of William Marshall, buried gracefully before the high altar in the abbey-church of Fontevrault.[72] And William Marshall himself, a patron of Holy Church as well as an exemplary knight throughout his career, was protected by the Church during his last illness and buried honorably by her.[73] It was the universal desire of every fighting man throughout Christendom in the 12th century to be buried as well as were Kei and Bedvere. The lavish preparation of Lucius' bier, however, would appear to be an invention on Geoffrey's part: certainly the proposal to deliver the body of the fallen enemy leader to his countrymen, intended as an insult, was nothing more than Geoffrey's wish to heap more infamy on the enemies of Arthur.

For the pseudo-historians warfare was the chief interest. It is given the most space and attention. On the whole warfare is treated realistically, and what errors there are can be explained, for the most part, by deliberate exaggeration or by a failure to direct sufficient attention to the details of warfare. Tatlock's opinion of Geoffrey's presentation of war is judicious - "...what is perceptible in the background is chiefly the warfare of his own day, Norman and Welsh, learned of mostly from hearsay and the observation of an alert mind, and described with the desire for an exciting, lifelike effect which is his literary purpose throughout the Historia.[74] The same may be said for Laȝamon. The military historian would not turn to the pages of the pseudo-historians for accurate, detailed descriptions of 12th century

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[72] The full account is in Kate Norgate, England under the Angevin Kings (London, 1887), II, 267-272. See, too, Amy Kelly, Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1950), pp. 244-246.

[73] L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal, ed. P. Meyer, vv. 18957-19084.

[74] Legendary History, p. 344.

strategy and tactics, but the general reader will find nowhere else a better presentation of feudal warfare. For a broad description of what it was like to campaign in the 12th century the pseudo-historians' illusion of history is every bit as good as real history.

12. Arms and Equipment

We should like to know what arms and equipment were available for battle, what weapons were used to accomplish the deeds which have been described. Unfortunately, they are given scant attention. Throughout the narratives there are, to be sure, frequent references to spears, shafts, long swords, burnies, helmets; in short, all the weapons and equipment of war are mentioned. Always, however, the tone is familiar, always we are made to feel that the listener would recognize each weapon and piece of equipment, and that no detailed description was considered necessary. Only twice, and only in Laȝamon's Brut, do we find a description of arms and equipment. One is highly fanciful, the other is a workman-like passage describing normal preparation for battle.

The first occurs immediately before the account of Arthur's action at Mt. Badon. When Arthur "...had ordered all his army, and it seemed good to him," we read,

> Þa dude he on his burne:
> ibroide of stele.
> Þe makede on aluisc smið:
> mid aðelen his crafte.
> he wes ihatē Wygar:
> Þe witeȝe wurhte.
> His sconken he helede:
> mid hosē of stele.
> Calibeorne his sweord:
> he sweinde bi his side.
> hit wes iworht in Aualun:
> mid wiȝele-fulle craften:
> Halm he set on hafde:
> haeh of stele.
>
> Then he put on his burny; it was fashioned in steel, made by an elf-like smith, as only the excellent craft of such a one could make it. This crafty wright was named Wygar. He covered his thighs with steel hose. His sword, Caliburn, he hung by his side; it was made in Avalon, wrought with magical craft. A tall steel helm he set on his head.

þer ð Wes moni ȝim-ston:
al mid golde bi-gon.
he wes Vðeres:
þas aðelen kinges.
he wes ihaten Goswhit:
ælchen oðere vnilic.
He heng an his sweore:
ænne sceld deore.
his nom wes on Bruttisc:
Pridwen ihaten.
þer wes innen igrauen:
mid rede golde stauen.
an on-licnes deore:
of drihtenes moder.
His spere he nom an honde:
þa Ron wes ihaten.
þa he hafden al his iweden:
þa leop he on his steden.
(LB, vv. 21127-21160)

There were many precious stones set in it, all encompassed with gold. It had belonged to Uther, the noble king. It was called Goswhit, and there was none other like it. He hung from his neck a precious shield. In the British tongue it was called Pridwen, and, therein [on its inner surface], a precious image of God's mother was engraved in red gold tracings. His spear, named Ron, he grasped in his hand. When he had put on all his weeds, he leaped on his steed.

The second passage makes no mention of "magical craft". Here, as Arthur prepares to invade Ireland, we discover a listing of the normal implements of war. The knights and men went to their lodgings. There

heo ruokedē burnen:
bonnedē helmes.
heo wipeden hors leoue:
mid linnene claðe.
heo sceren heore steden heo scioden:
scalkes balde weorē.
sū scæft horn sum scaft ban:
sum ȝarked stelen flan.
sum makede þwonges:
gode and swiðe strong.
summe beouweden speren:
& beonneden sceldes.
(LB, vv. 22287-22298)

they "rocked" burnies, they prepared helms; they wiped their trusted mounts with linen cloths. They sheared and shod their steeds. The men were confident. Some shaped horn, some shaped bone; some prepared steel darts, some made good strong thongs; some made spears, and some readied their shields.

It appears to be so generally accepted, by the pseudo-historians, that the mere mention of weapons and armor is sufficient to satisfy their audience that we discover little in the way of detailed descriptions of these tools of war. Although an "elf-like smith" made Arthur's armor, there is no doubt that the burny and steel hose are the conventional late 12th century coat

hauberk and chain mail hose.[75] The tall steel helm, the shield, and the lance are also conventional. The many gems set in gold on Arthur's helm are unusual, but by no means fanciful. Arthur's helm, of course, would have been the Norman conical steel cap;[76] sometime after 1200 the flat pot-heaume replaced the Norman helm. There was no need, actually, for the pseuco-historians to invent details of dress, weapons, or armor. They clothed their warriors in the conventional uniform of their day, and armed them with conventional weapons, the sword, the lance, the battle-ax.[77]

13. Feudal Society

Apart from the battle scenes, the most impressive feature of the pseudo-histories is the representation they afford of contemporary manners and actions, of commonplace beliefs and human behaviour, of scene and setting; in short, what, taken together, we regard as feudal society. What these writers observed with their own eyes, or heard with their own ears, forms a large portion of their narratives. It is difficult to decide whether a particular incident, or a certain idea, ought to be included in this category. Some of the descriptions included here might just as well have been used to

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[75] Cf. C. H. Ashdown, Armour and Weapons in the Middle Ages (New York, 1925), pp. 40-42, 53-56; an excellent illustration is found in J. S. Gardner, Armour in England (London, 1897), p. 17, fig. 3; a most careful work on the subject, G. F. Laking, A Record of European Arms and Armour (London, 1920-25), as well as the illustrations in The Bayeux Tapestry Reproduced in Autotype Plates, ed. F. R. Fowkes (London, 1875), indicates too that Laȝamon is describing contemporary armor.

[76] Cf. Gardner, op. cit., p. 21, fig. 7; another clear illustration is in M. Leloir, Dictionnaire du Costume (Paris, 1951), p. 214.

[77] The same can be said for the later authors of the romances. Cf. the conclusion of R. W. Ackerman's "Armor and Weapons in the Middle English Romances," Research Studies of the State College of Washington, VII (June 1939), 104-118.

illustrate warfare or Christianity. The society which fostered these reflections was complex: we cannot expect to find neat distinctions in their representations, and it would be unnatural to force them where they did not exist. We have tried to establish mutually exclusive categories wherever it was possible to do so, but in this discussion of feudal society, as it is reflected by the pseudo-historians, we have to expect something of a heterogeneous complexion to match the living society it shadows forth.

Laȝamon gives much more space to these matters than do Geoffrey and the authors of the Welsh Bruts. Therefore his descriptions will be set down here, and the corresponding passages from the other narratives, as well as any additions or differences noted in them, will be acknowledged in the notes. Now all that was discussed under the heading of Feudal Warfare could be placed here too, as well as the descriptions of Arthur's crown wearing ceremony: the latter, however, because of their definite religious overtones, are placed under the heading of Christian Society. To catch the full flavor of the narratives it will be necessary to follow Laȝamon's development from the time of Arthur's accession. Although we have condensed the account severely, there really is no legitimate short cut now available if we are to perceive that the feudal system, as we should expect in the 12th century, seems quite natural, quite accepted by the people we meet in these narratives. For other than to demonstrate just that, this rather extended rehearsal has little value.

We note first, then, that the nobles and the wisest men of the realm insure the accession of the right man to the crown. At the death of Uther Pendragon, the earls and barons, and "boc-ilarede", met in London, and they decided, in council, to send messengers to Brittany to recall the best youth then alive -

Ærður ihaten:	Arthur, he was named, the best
bezst alre cnihten.	of all knights -

and suggen þat he cumen sone:
to his kinedome.
for dæd him wes Vðer:
al swa Aurilien wes ær.
and Vðer Pendragune:
nefde nenne oðerne sune.
þat mihte after his dazen:
halden Bruttes to laze.
mid wurðscipe halden:
& þisne kinedom walden.
(LB, vv. 19840-19851)[78]

and say to him that he should come to once to his kingdom, for Uther was dead, as Aurelius was before him, and that Uther Pendragon had no other son who might, after his days, hold the Britons to law and rule this kingdom, and command worship and respect.

When Arthur came to Britain to accept the crown, his realm was threatened seriously by the Saxons. His first act shows the qualities of kingship hoped for, and, obviously, which Laȝamon holds up for universal respect. The king convened a huge assembly in London.

þer to weoren ilaðede:
his leond-cnihtes alle.
riche men and hæne:
to hæzen þan king.
þa þe hit wes al icume:
uolc vnimete.
vp aræs Arður:
aðelest kingen.
& lette bringen him biforen:
halidomes wel icoren.
þer to gon cneoli:
þe king sume þrie.
n⁹te noht his ðuzeðe:
what he deme wolde.
Arður heold up his riht hond:
ænne að he þer swer.
þat næuere bi his liue:
for nanes monnes lære.
ne sculden īne Brutene:
Sæxes wurðē bliðe.
londes beon wurðen:
no wurðscipe bruke.
ah he ehom wolde flemen:
for heo weoren iuæid wið him.
slozen Vðer Pendragune:
þe wes Costances sune.
Swa heo duden þene oðer:
Aurilien his broðer.

All his knights attended, powerful and mighty men, to honor the king. When all were come together, a numerous folk, up arose Arthur, noblest of kings, and had the choicest reliques brought before him. At once the king kneeled to them, three times; his people did not know what he would pronounce. Arthur held up his right hand, and there he swore an oath - that never, by his life, for no man's reward, should the Saxons know peace in Britain, nor be landholders, nor enjoy prestige; he would drive them out, for they were enemies to him, because they had killed Uther Pendragon, the son of Constance, as they had killed his brother Aurelius.

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[78] BHG, p. 176; WB, pp. 432-433; BYB, p. 156, which adds that "...God did not make - after the nine men who were made from Adam - a man as complete as Arthur in good fears, and that God gave him as an innate gift."

for þi heo weoren on londe:
laðest alre uolke.
Arður forð rihtes:
nom his wise cnihtes.
weore heom lef weore him lað:
alle heo sworen þene að.
trouliche þat heo woldē:
mid Arðure halden.
& wreken þene King Vðer:
þat Sæxes aqualden her.
(LB, vv. 19966-20003)

Therefore they were the most hated folk in the land. Arthur at once pledged his worthy knights, were it pleasing or distasteful to them, and had them all swear an oath, that they would truly abide with Arthur, and avenge King Uther, whom the Saxons killed here.

The most vigorous king and the most trusted knights, however, are not always successful. Arthur's campaign against the Saxons started well, but, with Colgrim cut off at York, Arthur learned that Childric was moving down from Scotland with a large force to relieve Colgrim. At this dark moment Arthur, like all humans, had to seek the advice of his companions. It was suggested strongly that he withdraw to London. If the Saxons pursued, so much the better - they could be defeated. Arthur approved this plan, and the army moved at once to London.[79] The king, the overlord, always consulted his barons before making an important decision. This is illustrated many times in the pseudo-histories: the council is regarded as the highest feudal institution. Often it is the scene of spirited debate; always it is a prelude to decisions. Nowhere in these narratives is the importance of the barons, their right to speak freely to the king, to advise him, more vigorously represented than in the passage which describes the action of Arthur's court after Lucius' messengers had delivered the Roman challenge.

Lucius' message, demanding tribute and subservience from Arthur, incensed the entire court. The Roman messengers were threatened, but Arthur shouted for order.

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[79] LB, vv. 20383-20410; BHG, p. 178; WB, p. 435; BYB, p. 158.

þa stod Arður him up:
aðelest kingen.
and he cleopede him to:
seouen sune kinges.
eorles and beornes:
& þa þa weoren baldest.
and alle þa wiseste men:
þa wuneden a þen folke.
wended in to ane huse:
þe wes biclused faste.
an ald stanene weorc:
stiðe men hit wurhten.
þer heo gunnen rune:
his red-ȝeuen wise.
wulc andswere he ȝiuen wolde:
Luces þan kaisere.
þa ibo enȝweoren alle:
beaornes to benche.
þa wes hit al stille:
þat wuneden inne halle.
þer wes vnimete æie:
mid mære þan kinge.
ne durste þer na mā speken:
leste þe king hit wolde awreken.
(LB, vv. 24875-24898)

Then Arthur, noblest of kings, stood up and called to him seven sons of kings, earls, barons, and all the wisest men among the people. And they went into a house, fast enclosed, an old stone work which men had made strong. There his wise councillors talked together; they considered what answer Arthur would give to Luces the emperor. When all the barons had taken their seats, then were all the men in the hall quiet; the mighty king was awe inspiring to them all. No man there dared to speak lest the king should punish him for it.

But they do speak up. Cador, as we have noted, announced flatly that he was pleased by the challenge, for the Britons had grown soft during the long peace and a new fight, he felt, would be good for all of them. It was this speech which drew forth Gawain's reply that peace was good because God made it and because it allowed men to perform good works. (LB, vv. 24899-24964.) Arthur cut this short. He spoke eloquently, and at length. We have done much, he said, and have won everything cleanly. I have led you; you are brave knights. The Roman challenge shames us; it is not just. History shows that Julius Caesar conquered Britain, but his invasion was evil and sinful. Actually, we inherit Britain through Belin and Brenne, through Constantine, son of Helen, who was British, and through Maximian, who conquered France. (LB, vv. 24965-25108.) "Now," he continued, "Lucius

...wilneð al: and ich wilni al:
þæt wit beiene aȝeð.
habben hit nu and aȝe:
þe hit æð mæȝen iwine.
for nu we scullen cūne:
whan hit godd unne.
(LB, vv. 25109-25114)

desires everything and I desire all that we both possess. Let him have it now and forever who might the easier win it. For now we shall decide to whom God shall grant it!"

Howel speaks out at once, and we notice especially the tone of his first few words:

Lauerd king hercne me:
alse ich ær dude þe.
(LB, vv. 25124-25130)

"Lord king, listen to me as I before did to you."

You owe it to me, he seems to say, to listen. Whereas no baron would dare speak until after the king had spoken, once the question is put, all feel free to state their views vigorously. Howel, of course, agrees with Arthur and pledges all his aid. (LB, vv. 25131-25180.) But we have the feeling that even had he disagreed he should not have hesitated to say so. Augusel, King of the Scots, announced loudly that he would furnish arms and men to make the Romans suffer for their insult. (LB, vv. 25182-25238.) His pronouncement so agitated the assemblage that Arthur had to command silence. He then announced that he would order the messengers to return to Lucius with his answer - the Britons would never pay tribute, they would attack Lucius, capture and hang him. (LB, vv. 25247-25274.) It is, in all, one of the most spirited passages in Laȝamon's Brut: one feels that he himself regarded the council seriously, that he intended his listeners to regard it seriously.[80]

Frequently the feudal lord was able to win a victory without having to fight a decisive battle. When one was out-maneuvered tactically, or hopelessly out-numbered, he was not obliged to submit to the harsh terms and humility of an unconditional surrender. He was often able to arrange a satisfactory settlement, frequently not too severe for him, in exchange for pledges and hostages. In spite of his vow to allow them no peace, for

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[80] The lord and his barons in consultation - it is a frequent occurence. Further examples: LB, vv. 20753-20784, 22213-22222, 22249-22280, 23080-23131, 24243-24248.

example, the Saxon leaders arrange an armistice with Arthur. Childric and Colgrim simply offered to become Arthur's vassals. They sent twelve representatives to Arthur, who were instructed to state that "now and forever more,

heo biddeð þine ære.
þine men heo wulleð bicumen:
& þine mōscipe hæȝen.
& heo wulle ȝiuē þe:
ȝisles inowe.
& halden þe for laured:
Swa þe beoð alre leofest.
ȝif heo moten liðe:
heonene mid liue.
into heor leoden:
(LB, vv. 20797-20807)

they ask your mercy. They will become your men, and advance your honor. And they will give you sufficient hostages and regard you as their lord, as shall be most pleasing of all to you, if they are allowed to depart hence with their life into their land."

Eager to be rid of the Saxons, Arthur accepted their offer. Childric came from his hiding place to Arthur,

& he his mon þer bi-com:
mid his cnihten alle.
Feouwer and twenti ȝisles:
Childric þer bitæhte.
alle heo weoren icorene:
and hæhȝe men iborenne.
heo bi-tahten heore hors:
and heore burnen.
scaftes & scældes:
& longe heore sweordes.
al heo bi-læfden:
þat heo þer hæfden.
(LB, vv. 20907-20918)[81]

and there, with all his knights, became his man. Childric delivered twenty-four hostages, all noble born, picked men. They turned over to Arthur their horses, their burnies, their spears and shields, and their long swords; they relinquished everything that they had there.

It so happened that Childric broke this pledge: Arthur's fury at Mt. Badon was the result. The Saxon hostages were killed. (LB, vv. 21107-21110.) Yet in spite of this experience, Arthur later accepted the offer of service and hostages from the King of Iceland, from the leaders of Orkney, Jutland, and Winetland, and from the King of Denmark.[82] These agreements proved to

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[81] BHG, p. 179; WB, pp. 436-437; BYB, p. 158.

[82] LB, vv. 22485-22498, 22499-22695, 23279-23354.

be most favorable. The King of Iceland, especially, was well regarded, for he not only swore fealty to Arthur but also gave his own son in hostage. "I shall obey you, as a man shall his master," he promised Arthur, "and I shall become your man and deliver to you my son, named Escol - and you shall reward him and dub him knight, as your own man." (LB, vv. 22491-22498.)

In return for service, of course, the baron could expect some reward from his lord. Such compensation is the very core of the feudal system. The lord was able to maintain his status only if he were supported by a group of loyal barons: the barons would support their overlord so long as he, by gifts of land and money, was able to maintain them. From its roots in the Germanic comitatus, the feudal system expanded to a mutually satisfactory suzerain-vassal relationship. Loyalty and compensation, the twin props of the system, exercised a dual responsibility: both parties, the lord and the baron, felt equally obliged to support each other for their common good. The lord was responsible for the welfare of his barons, and he discharged this responsibility in the form of gifts. The barons were obliged to support the lord, and they discharged their responsibility in the form of service, quite frequently combat service. When all went well, the good lord was munificent, and both lord and baron prospered. In the 12th century, the advantage probably lay with the lord, for, unless one were a William Marshall, the plight of the knight-errant was likely to be less comfortable than that of the baron who enjoyed the fruits of a convenient overlordship. In the 12th, as in the 10th century, the lot of the lordless man was not a happy one. As we might expect, these pseudo-histories contain many passages which illustrate this key concept of feudal society.

Laȝamon has an exceptionally useful description of this relationship. After all the Northern Island territories had fallen, after the defeat of Frollo and the conquest of Paris (LB, vv. 23415-24030), after the capitulation

of Berry, Anjou, Touraine, Alverne, Gascony, Poitou, Burgundy, and Lorraine (LB, vv. 24050-24100), after all France was conquered, Arthur settled the land. He established a just peace: the "folk" enjoyed prosperity. Then, Laȝamon states,

...hehte he þa cnihtes alden:
þa he hafde ȝare at-halden.
þat heo to þan kinge comen:
and heore læn a-fængē.
for heo feole ȝeren:
hafden ibeon his iueren.
Summen he ȝæf lond:
summen seoluer and gold.
summen he ȝæf castles:
summen he ȝaf claðes.
hehte heom uaren an wūne:
and beten heore sunnen.
for-bed heom to berne wapnen:
for ælde heom eode ouenan.
and hehte heom luuien swiðe:
godd in þissen liue.
þat he an ende ful iwis:
ȝefen heom his paradis.
þæt heo mosten bruken:
blisse mid ænglen.
Alle þa cnhites alde:
faren to heore londe.
and þa ȝunge bilæfden:
mid leouen heore kīgen.
(LB, vv. 24105-24128)

he ordered that the old knights whom he had long retained should come to the king to receive their reward, for they had been his companions for many years. To some he gave land, to some, gold and silver; to some he gave castles, to some he gave clothes. He bade them depart in joy and amend their sins; he forbade them to bear weapons, because age went upon them. And he urged them to love God greatly in this life so that He, at the end of their life, surely would give them His paradise that they might enjoy happiness with the angels. All the old knights proceeded to their lands, and the young remained with their beloved king.

For nine years Arthur remained in France. During these years he ruled the land firmly. He also gave rewards to the barons and knights who had served him well.

Hit wes an ane æstere:
þat men hafden iuaste.
þat Arður an æstere dæi hafde:
his aðele men at-somne.
al þat hæhste mon-cun:
þat herden ī to Francen.
& of alle þan londen:
þe þider in læien.
þer he ȝette his cnihten:
all heore irihten.
ælc ane he ȝif æhte:
alse he iærned hafde.
þus hī iquað Arður:
aðelest kingē.
Kæi bisih þe hiderward:

On an Easter which the men had observed - it was on an Easterday that Arthur assembled his noble men, all the people of high degree who belonged to France and all the lands that lay therein. There he gave his knights all their rights; to each he gave possessions as he had earned. Thus Arthur, noblest of Kings, spoke: "Kay, look you here;

þu ært min haxte stiward.
her ich Angou ȝiue þe:
for þire wele-dede.
and alle þa irihte:
þe þider in beoð idihte.
Cneole me to Beduer:
þu art min hexte birle her.
þa while þa ich beo an liue:
luuien ich þe wulle.
her ich ȝiue þe Neustrie:
aneuste mire riche.
þa hehte Neustrie:
þat nu hatte Normandie.
þe ilke tweien eorles weoren:
Arðures deore men.
at rede and at rune:
an æuer ælche tune.
þa ȝet him seide Arður:
aðelst kingen.
Wend þe hider Howeldin:
þu ært mi mon and mi cun.
haue þu Bulune:
and bruc hit on wunne.
Cume ner Borel:
þu art cniht wis and war.
her ich þene Mans þe:
mid monscipe bitæche.
and bruc þu hit on wunne:
for þire wel-dede.
þus Arður þe king delde:
his drihtliche londes.
after heorə iwurhte:
for he heom þuhte wurðe.
(LB, vv. 24143-24190)[83]

you are my highest steward.
Here I give you Anjou, for your
good deeds, and all the rights
that are set therein. Kneel to
me, Bedvere; you are my highest
cup-bearer. While I am alive I
shall love you. Here I give you
Neustrie, the land nearest my
realm." Then called Neustrie,
that land is now called Normandy.
The same two earls were Arthur's
most helpful men at counsel and
advice in every place. Arthur,
noblest of kings, said further:
"Come here to me, Howel; you are
my man and my kin. Have Boulogne,
and possess it in prosperity.
Come close, Borel; you are a wise
and wary knight. Here I deliver
over to you Mans, with honor; for
your good deeds may you possess it
in prosperity." Thus did Arthur
the king deal lands to his lordly
ones, according to their deeds,
for he thought them to be worthy.

For the vassal, although he benefited greatly from the feudal relationship, life seldom could be called his own. He was always subject to the call of his lord. In the case of a very powerful overlord, such as King Arthur is shown to be, such summonses were regarded almost as law: the baron hardly dared disobey them.[84] Occasionally the lord commanded the barons and knights to assemble for peaceful purposes. When Arthur was to be crowned, for example, he

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[83] BHG, p. 191; WB, p. 451; BYB, pp. 166-167. Other passages given over to this important feudal relationship are: BHG, p. 186; WB, p. 444; BYB, p. 163; LB, vv. 21467-21478, 22161-22206, 23237-23246, 24721-24730.

[84] In exceptional cases, a feudal baron might resist his overlord. A. Luchaire describes such a situation. Renaud de Dammartin, Count of Boulogne, assisted by the English, maintained a degree of independence against his enemy the King of France. See Luchaire, La Société Française au Temps de Philippe-Auguste, 2o ed. (Paris, 1909), pp. 267-268.

...nom his sonde:
and sende ȝeōd his londe.
hæhte cumen eorles:
hehte cumen beornes.
hehte cumen kinges:
and æc here-ðringes.
hehte cumen biscoppes:
hehte cumen cnihtes.
hæhte alle þa freo-men:
þa euere weoren an londe.
bi heore life hehte heom beon:
a white-sunedæi at Kærleon.
(LB, vv. 24307-24318)

sent his messengers over his land and ordered that the earls, the barons, the kings, and even the chieftains should assemble; he ordered that the bishops, the knights, and all the free men whatsoever in the land, on pain of their life, should be at Kærleon on Whitsunday.

More frequently, however, the baron could expect a summons to duty, to serve his lord in battle. The call might have been put this way:

Arður his writen sende:
wide ȝeond his londe.
after alle þan cnihten:
þe he biȝiten mihte.
þat heo ful sone:
to þan kinge comen.
& he ehom wolde on londe:
leofliche at-halden.
scipien heom mid londe:
mid seoluere & mid golde.
(LB, vv. 20004-20013)

Arthur sent his writs far over his land, after all the knights that he might obtain, declaring that they should come to the king at once, and that he would maintain them in his land willingly, and reward them with land, with silver, and with gold.

Or, more likely than not, it would be ordered

ȝeond al his kine-þeoden.
þat æuerælc god cniht:
to him come forð riht.
and euerælc oht mon:
comen forð riht anan.
& wa swa bilæfden:
his leomen he sculde leosen.
& wha swa come gladliche:
he sculden wurðe riche.
(LB, vv. 22299-22308)

over all his kingdom that every brave knight and brave man should come to him at once, and that whosoever remained behind should lose his limbs, and that whosoever came gladly should become rich.

In face of these alternatives there was no need for any elaborate machinery to draft men for military service.

Although warfare might well have persisted for the greater portion of a man's life, interludes of peace did exist. And in these times law and order were maintained, where possible, by the overlord. Always it was the threat of reprisals which guaranteed the peace: men were neither better nor worse than

they are today, and some form of police action was necessary. We find a hint of this in the short passage devoted to Arthur's injunction to Lot after he had established Lot as overlord of Norway:

þa spac Arður him wið: and hehte hine halden god grið. and hehte hine luuien: his grið fulle leoden. & þa grið nolden halden: fallen heom to grunde. (LB, vv. 23265-23270)	Then Arthur spoke with him and bade him maintain a just peace and love his peaceful people; and those who would not hold the peace, to fell them to the ground.

The instructions given the defeated Scots are much more explicit:

And þe king for-bæd heom: bi heore bare liuen. þat na mon on worlde: swa wod no iwurðe. no swa ær witte gume: þat his grið breke. and 3if hit dude æi mon: he sculden dō ðolien. (LB, vv. 22067-22074)	And the king warned them, on pain of their very lives, that no one should be so mad, nor any person so unwise, as to break his peace, and that if any man should do it, he should suffer death.

It is after the restoration of York, however, that we discover the full implications of the feudal contract in times of peace. The knights and people, assembled, hear Arthur's stern instructions:

...he hæhte alle cnihtes: demen rihte domes. and þa eorðe-tillien: teon to heore cræften. & æierælcne gume: oðerne igræten. & wulc mon swa wurs dude: þene þe king hafde ibodē. he wolde hine ifusen: to ane bare walme. & 3if hit weore læð mon: he sculde hongie for þon. þa 3et cleope Arður: aðelest kingen. hæhte þat alc mon: þe his lond hafde for-gan. mid wulches cunnes wite: swa he bi-wæiued weore. þat he a3ain come: ful raðe & ful sone. þe riche & þe la3e: and hefde æft his a3en.	...he bade all his knights render just decisions, and the earth tillers tend their craft, and every man to greet his fellows. And whatsoever man who did worse than the king ordered, he would drive him to a 'bare burning'; and if it were a base man, he should hang for it. Arthur, noblest of kings, spoke further; he ordered that each man who had lost his land, no matter by what-ever kind of punishment he had been bereaved, should come quickly to him, both high and low men, and he should have his own again,

bute he weore swa fule biwite:
þ he weore lauerd-swike.
oðer touward his lauers man-swore:
þene þe king demde for-lore.
(LB, vv. 22115-22140)

unless he were so evil that
he were traitor to his lord,
or foresworn against his lord;
these the king should deem lost.

Although Cador preferred war to peace, and although warfare far outweighs times of peace in the pseudo-histories, the realm did prosper in peacetime. We have seen its guarantees. What were its fruits? The pseudo-historians become eloquent when Arthur's reign in peacetime is described; their praise is lavish. Geoffrey and the Welsh Bruts depict a powerful king who, having consolidated his realm during twelve years of peace, became at once the admiration and terror of all Western Europe. The author of Brut Y Brenhinedd put it best.

> And then he had them summon to him praiseworthy and approved men of every country, to increase his retinue and his household. And then his praise, and that of his soldiers, for manners and courtesy and generosity flew until he was renowned over the face of the kingdom from here to Rome, and there was neither king nor lord, neither earl nor baron, who could be compared with Arthur, and until every king was afraid that he would be conquered by him. And for this reason every king had his castles strengthened, and other new ones made, out of fear of him. When Arthur heard that, he thought that he would perfect by his deeds the fame that had come to him by report, and his intention was nothing less than to conquer all Europe - that is, a third of the whole world. And then there was not a king or a lord this side of Rome who was not seeking to school himself in the manners and courtesy of Arthur's court. (BYB, pp. 163-164.)[85]

Such were the feelings and conditions when Arthur ruled.

All this, of course, is an exaggerated fiction. The normal activities of the people in time of peace are described more honestly when these writers turn to their brightest scene, Arthur's crown wearing feast. In detail, once again, Laȝamon's description excells. In response to Arthur's summons,

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[85] BHG, pp. 187-188; WB, pp. 446-447; LB, vv. 22699-22734. Laȝamon's account differs. No mention is made of a scheme of conquest, no other kings are said to fear Arthur. He writes that the realm is prosperous, the people content. Cf. also LB, vv. 22997-23026.

his vassals assembled at Kaerleon. When all the barons and knights had arrived, there one might have seen

þe þer bi-halues weore.
moni seolcuðne mon:
þe isiȝen wes to burhȝen.
and seole cunne tiðende:
mid Arðure þan kinge.
þer wes moni sellic clað:
þer wes moni cniht wrað.
þer weoren herberȝe:
hæhliche awurðe.
þer þa innes weoren:
mid strenðe biwunnen.
þer weorē on uelden:
moni þusend telden.
þer com spic and whæte:
and aten vnimete.
ne mai hit na mon suggen on his tale:
of þan win and of þan ale.
þer com hey þer com gras:
þer com al þat god was.
(LB, vv. 24421-24442)

among those present, many exciting men who had come to the town with all kinds of tidings for Arthur the king. There were to be seen many marvelous garments. There were many headstrong knights. There were splendidly prepared lodgings, there were strong inns - many thousand tents were on the field. Lard, oats, and wheat in unmeasurable quantities were brought there. No one, in his account, is able to describe the wine and the ale [brought there.] Hay and fodder were there. In short, everything that was good was there.

When the coronation service was over, Arthur's great feast commenced. Here we see the upper class of feudal society in their gayest moments.

þa þe masse wes isūgē:
of chircchen heo ðrunge.
þe king mid his folke:
to his mete uerde.
mid mucle his duȝeðe:
drem wes on hirede.
þa quene on oðer halue:
hire hereberwe isohte.
heo hafde of wifmonne:
wunder ane monien.
þa þe king wes isete:
mid his monnen to his mete.
to þan kinge com þæ biscop:
seit Dubriz þe wes swa god.
and non of his hafde:
his kine-hælm hæhne.
for þan mucle golde:
þe king hine beren nalde.
& dude enne lasse crune:
on þas kinges hafde.
and seoððen he gō do:
a þere quene al swo.
Inne Troie þis wes laȝe:
bi neore ælderne daȝe.
þa Bruttes of come:
þe weoren wel idon.

When the mass was sung they thronged from the church. With his people the king went to his board; with his great throng of people he went. All the people were happy. The queen went to her board on the other side of the hall; there was a great number of women with her. When the king and his men were seated before their board, the bishop, St. Dubric, who was a holy man, came to the king and took the splendid crown from his head; then he did the same for the queen. This was the custom in their elders' days, among the Trojans, excellent men, from whom Brutus came:

alle þa wepmen:
at heore mete setē.
sundi bi heom seoluen:
þat heom þuhte wel idon.
and al swa þa wifmen:
heore iwune hafden.
þa þe kig wes isete:
mid al his duȝeðe to his mete.
eorles and beornes:
at borde þas kinges.
þe stiward com steppen:
þe kæy wes ihaten.
hæxt cniht on londe:
vnder þan kinge.
of alle þan hæpe:
of Arðures hirede.
Kay hafde him biuoren:
moni hæh mō icoren.
þer weoren a þusend cnihte bald:
wunder wel italde.
þat þeineden þan kingē:
& his here-ðringen.
ælc cniht hafde þal on:
and mid golde bigon.
and alle heore uingeres:
iriuen mid gold ringes.
þas beorn þa sunde:
from kuchene to þan kinge.
Anoðer half wes Beduer:
þas kinges hæȝe birle.
mid him weoren eorlene sunen:
of aðele cunne iboren.
and þere hehȝe cnihtene sunen:
þa þider weoren icumen.
seouen kingene sunen:
þat mid him quehtē.
Bedeuer a uormest eode:
mid guldene bolle.
after him a þusend:
þrasten to hirede.
mid alle þas cunnes drenche:
þe me cuðe on biðenche.
And þe quene an hire ende:
wifmen swiðe hende.
a þusend hire eode biuorē:
riche men and wel icoren.
to þæinen þere quene:
and þan þat mid hire weoren.
Nes he næuere iboren:
of nane cnihte icoren.
ilæred no læwed:
a nauere nare leode.
þe cuðe hit itelle:
an æies cunnes spelle.
of halue þan richedome:

all the men sat apart at their table by themselves. That seemed to them well done. The women had their place also. When the king was seated at his board with all his people, with the earls and barons at the king's board, then stepped forward the steward, who was named Kay: of all the assemblage of Arthur's people, he was the most exalted knight in the land under the king. Kay had many a well chosen man with him. There were a thousand bold knights, wondrous to tell about, who served the king and his chiefs. Each of these knights was arrayed in cloth and adorned with gold; all their fingers were covered with gold rings. These knights carried the foods sent from the kitchen to the king. In another place stood Bedvere, the king's esteemed cupbearer: with him there were the sons of earls who were born of noble blood, the sons of the knights present who were of noble blood, and seven king's sons who accompanied him. Bedvere marched first, carrying a gold bowl. After him a thousand pressed forward with every kind of drink that men could think of. And at her table, the fairest women attended the queen. A thousand approached, noble and high born women, to serve the queen and those seated with her. No one has yet been born, not any well chosen knight, nor any educated or unlearned man in any land whatsoever who could describe in any kind of speech half the wealth

þe wes inne Kairliune.
of seoluere and of golde:
and gode iwedē.
of hehȝe iborene monnen:
þa inne hirede wuneden.
of horses and of hafueken:
of hunden to deoren.
and of rich iweden:
þa a þan hirede weoren.
& of alle þan folke:
þe wuneden þer on folde.
wes þisses londes folk:
leodene hendest itald.
& al swa þa wimmen:
wunliche on heowen.
and hahlukest iscrudde:
& alre bezst itoȝene.
For heo hafden on iqueðen alle:
bi heore quike liue.
þat heo wolden of ane heowē:
heore claðes habben.
Sum hafde whit sum hafde rød:
sum hafde god grene æc.
and alches cunnes sah clað;
heom wes wunder ana lað.
& elche untuhtle:
heo taldē vnwurðe.
þa hafde Ænglene ard:
þat alre bezste hereword.
and þis leodisce uolc æc:
leofuest þan kinge.
þa wifmen hehȝe iborene:
þa wuneden a þissen londe.
hafden iqueðen alle:
ō heore quides soðe.
þat nan lauerd taken nolde:
inne þissne leode.
nauer nænne cniht:
neore he noht swa wel idiht.
bute he icostned weoren:
þrie inne compe.
& his oht-scipen icudde:
& ifonded hine seolue.
baldeliche he mitte þenne:
ȝirnen him brude.
For þere ilke tuhtle:
cnihtes weoren ohte.
þa wifmen wel idone:
and þa betere biwitene.
þa weoren i Brutene:
blissen inoȝe.
þa þe king iȝetē hafden:
and al his mon-weorde.
þa buȝen ut of burhȝe:
þeines swiðe balde.

that was in Kaerleon - who
could describe the silver and
the gold, the rich clothes, the
noble men among the people
gathered there, the horses and
the hawks, the hounds for hunt-
ing deer, and the sparkling
clothes that the people wore.
Of all the people that lived
there, the folk of this land
was accounted the fairest.
And their women too, comely in
hue, most richly clothed, and
best of all, educated, were
equally well regarded. For
they had all taken a promise,
on pain of their lives, that
they would wear clothes of one
solid color only. Some wore
white, some red, and some,
also, wore a fine green;
variegated cloth of any kind
was hateful to them. And each
unbecoming usage they accounted
unworthy. Then was the fame of
England highest of all, and,
also, were Englishmen, of all
his subjects, dearest to the king.
The women of high degree who
lived in this land had all
declared solemnly that not one
of them would take a lord as hus-
band in this land, no matter what
knight he might be nor however
well formed he was, unless he had
been tried in combat three times,
unless his courage had been made
known, and himself approved; then
might such a one boldly ask for
a bride. As a result of that
custom the knights were brave, and
the women were excellent and the
better behaved. Then in Britain
there was happiness! When the
king and all his people had eaten,
then the bolder retainers went
out of the town:

alle þa kinges:
and heore hereþringes.
alle þa biscopes:
amd alle þa clærckes.
alle þa eorles:
and alle þa beornes.
alle þa þeines:
alle þa sweines.
feire iscrudde:
held ȝeond felde.
Summe heo gunnen ærnen:
summe heo gunnen urnen.
summe heo gunnen lepen:
summe heo gunnen sceote.
summe heo wræstlede:
and wiðer-gome makeden.
summe heo on uelde:
pleouweden vnder scelde.
sume heo driue balles:
wide ȝeond þa feldes.
Monianes kunnes gomen:
þer heo gunnen driuen.
& wha saw mihte iwinne:
wurðscipe of his gomene.
hine me ladde mid songe:
at-fore þan leod-kinge.
and þe kig for his gomene:
ȝæf him ȝeuen gode.
Alle þa quene:
þe icumen weoren þere.
and alle þa lafdies:
leoneden ȝeond walles.
to bihalden þa duȝeðen:
and þat folc plæie.
þis ilæste þree dæȝes:
swulc gomes & swulc plæȝes.
(LB, vv. 24549-24720)[86]

all the kings and their chieftains, all the bishops and all the clerks, all the earls and all the barons, and all the thanes and swains, handsomely dressed, dispersed over the fields. Some rode horses, some raced on foot; some leaped and some shot; some wrestled and engaged in bouts; some 'played under shield' in the field; some drove balls far across the field. They played many kinds of games there, and whoever happened to win the honor in his game was led by singing men to the sovereign, and the king rewarded him with valuable gifts for his skill. All the queens present, and all the ladies, leaned over the walls to watch the men and their play. Such games and such play, all this lasted three days.

Among these people, accustomed as they were to this sort of activity in times of peace, and fit for war as we have seen, it is surprising to discover that the chivalric ideal of knightly behaviour on the battlefield is almost unknown. Chivalry to Geoffrey and the authors of the Welsh Bruts is nothing more than a physical aggregation of mounted warriors. The softer, idealized actions we associate with chivalry do not appear in their pseudo-histories. For them the influence of Holy Church and Lady Service on the behaviour of the

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[86] BHG, pp. 194-195; WB, pp. 457-458; BYB, p. 171.

knight is non-existant: Geoffrey and the Welsh writers simply do not describe any chivalric action. Laȝamon appears to be a bit more familiar with the ideal. Yet he has but two passages which approach the chivalric ideal, and one of these is certainly a tongue-in-cheek account.

The first situation occurs at the close of the campaign against the Irish. Led by King Gillomar, the Irish, poorly clad and equipped, are routed. Arthur pursued and captured Gillomar.

he nom bi þan honde:
þene king of þan londe.
Arður þe hæȝe:
herbeorwe isohte.
an his mode him wes þa söe:
þat Gillomar him wes swa neh.
Nu dude Arður:
aðelest kingen.
swiðe muche freondscipe:
at-foren al his folke.
he lette þene king scrude:
mid ælchere prude.
and æc bi Arðure sat:
and æc mid him seolue æt.
mid Arðure he win dronc:
þat him wes mucheles unðonc.
Naðeles þa he isahe:
þat Arður wes swiðe glad.
þa cleopede Gillomar:
and his horte him wes sær.
Laured Arður þi grið:
(LB, vv. 22355-22375)

He took the king of the land by the hand. The noble Arthur sought a suitable lodging. Arthur was now so disposed that it made him pleased to have Gillomar close by him. Now Arthur, noblest of kings, performed an act of greatest friendship before all his people. He caused the defeated king to be clothed richly and seated beside himself. He ate and drank wine with Arthur. All this was quite unthinkable to him. Nevertheless when he saw that Arthur was happy, although he himself was sad in his heart, Gillomar said, "Lord Arthur, your peace!"

The Irish king surrendered everything. He promised to give Arthur hostages, holy reliques, gold and silver, if Arthur offered him his grace. "I shall give you," he added, "all my horses with all their trappings, my hawks and my hounds, and my rich treasures; I give you in hand all my land." (LB, vv. 22395-22400.) Graciously, Arthur accepted half this offer.

Somewhat further from the code of ideal chivalry, however, is Arthur's conduct at the close of the continental campaign. When Arthur was informed that Lucius had been killed, he ordered his men to erect a tent in the middle of a broad field, and the emperor's body to be carried there. The body was

then clothed in gold colored robes. A guard was mounted for three full days. An ornate coffin, covered with gold, was prepared, and the body of the brave Roman Emperor was placed in it. Arthur also ordered that the bodies of all the Romans of high station were to be buried "with all due ceremony". Thus far the victorious commander behaved magnificently. But Laȝamon seems unable to resist a last taunt. For then Arthur

...þreo kinges he lette bere:
[to] Luces þan kaisere.
and lette makien beren:
riche and swiðe maren.
and heom sōe:
senden to Rome.
And grette Rom-weren alle:
mid grætē ane huxe.
and seide þat he heom sende:
þat gauel of his londe.
and efte wolde heō alswa:
senden heom gretinge ma.
ȝif heo ȝirnen wolde:
of Arðures golden.
(LB, vv. 27874-27887)

ordered a bier made, ornate and extremely lofty, and commanded three kings to carry the body of Lucius the Emperor in it; they were sent to Rome at once. They said that thus Arthur sent them the tribute of his land, and would again do the same and send them further greetings like this if they were to yearn again after Arthur's gold.

If chivalric behaviour is not regarded highly, two other feudal conventions are honored scrupulously. The lesser of the two, the importance and immunity of messengers, is illustrated briefly in Laȝamon's Brut. When Lucius' twelve messengers had finished delivering the Roman Emperor's challenge to Arthur's court, the barons and knights were so incensed that they would have killed the Romans had not Arthur jumped to his feet quickly and shouted,

Bilæueð bilæueð swiðe:
þas cnihtes on liue.
ne sceollen heo on mine hirede:
nene harm þolien.
heo beoð hider iriden:
ut of Rom-leoden.
swa heore lauerd heom hehte:
Luces is ihaten.
Ælc mon mot liðen:
þer his lauerd hine hateð gan.
naht na man demen:
errendes-mon to dæðen.
bute he weoren swa ufele biwiten:
þet he weore lauerd-swike.
(LB, vv. 24851-24864)

"Quickly now, quickly, leave these knights alive! They shall not suffer any harm in my court. They have ridden here from the people of Rome as their lord, who is named Lucius, has ordered them. Each man must go where his lord has bid him. No man has a right to sentence a messenger to death unless that one behaved so evilly that he has become a traitor to his lord."

Somewhat later, once Arthur's reply had been decided, the king ordered that these same messengers

...scruden:
mid ælchere pruden.
mid þan hæxte scrude:
þa he hafde on bure.
and hehte heō faren sone:
to Luces of Rome.
and he cumen after wolde:
swa raðe swa he mihte.
þas twælfe heore wai ferdē:
touward heore londen.
(line missing)
mid seolure and mid golde.
cnihtes swa iscrudde:
no þurh al swa wel idihte.
þus Arður heom dihte:
al for heore worde.
(LB, vv. 25367-25382)

be dressed richly in the best garments that he had available; he ordered them to go to Lucius of Rome at once. He said that he would come after them as quickly as he was able to. These twelve went their way toward their land. [Never were] knights so bedecked with silver and gold and, in all things, so well arrayed! Thus Arthur treated them in spite of the message they had brought.

The more important attitude, with which we are to conclude this survey of feudal society as it is reflected in the pseudo-histories, is treason, the worst crime this society knew. As Gawain illustrates loyalty to the lord, his brother Modred stands for treason and treachery to the lord. Appropriately, Laȝamon's passage is intense, for treachery must lead to the destruction of society. Loyalty brings prosperity; treason brings ruin. The full terror of treason is seen as Laȝamon comments on Arthur's decision to entrust the management of Britain to Modred while he engaged Lucius.

Modred, it is pointed out, was well regarded because he was Gawain's brother. Although he was of royal blood, he was proud. Only the queen trusted him. Arthur, then,

...nom al his kinelond:
& sette hit Moddræd an hond.
and Wenhauer his quene:
wurðlukest wiuen.
þa þe in þissere leode:
wunede an londe.
Arðure bi-tahte:
al þat he ahte.
Moddrade and þere quene:
þat heom was iqueme.
(LB, vv. 25493-25502)

delivered over his entire kingdom to Modred, and to Wenhaver his queen, the most worthy woman who then lived in this land. Arthur gave all that he possessed to Modred and the queen; that was pleasing to them.

But it was not pleasing to the author. La3amon interjects an almost pathetic note. "What an evil thing," he complains,

þat heo iboren weoren.
þis lond heo for-radden:
mid ræuðen uniuo3en.
and a þan ænden heom seoluen:
þe wurse gon iscenden.
þat heo þer for-leoseden:
lif and heore saulen.
and æuer seoððe laðen:
an auer ælche londe.
þat nauer na mā nalde:
sel bede beoden for heore saule.
for þan swike-dome:
ȝ he dude Arðure his eme.
(LB, vv. 25503-25516)

that they were ever born! They brought about numerous sorrows and destroyed all this land, and, finally, so disgraced themselves that they lost their lives and their souls. And afterwards they became loathsome in every land, so that never would any man offer a decent prayer for their souls, because of the treachery that Modred did to Arthur, his uncle.

Surely the most heinous crime, treason was probably the only act which would dissever the guilty one from the sympathy of his fellows, which would lead the rest of feudal society to damn the soul of the sinner.

We have now a varied picture of feudal society. When they are not showing us Gawain and his companions at war, the pseudo-historians describe scenes and events which properly may be called feudal. We have been able to isolate ten types of information, either an incident, an attitude, or a general situation, which reflect contemporary feudal theory and practice. Five are so obviously representations of 12th century custom that they hardly require authentication. It is, therefore, quite easy to show that in the 12th century (1) the important lords and barons were consulted when a new king was to be elected, (2) the same lords were called upon to advise the king, (3) the lord-vassal relationship was stimulated by the award of gifts and the fulfillment of services, (4) the vassal was obliged to present himself when his lord summoned him, and (5) that the crime of treason was regarded as the most serious social offence. The other five, while they are accurate reflections of contemporary society, are not quite so commonplace. Nonetheless, we can demonstrate that in the 12th century (1) armistices were common,

and that hostages were given, (2) law and order probably was maintained under sanction of some threat of reprisal, (3) recreation was not unknown, (4) the spirit of chivalry was in its infancy and had not yet stirred men's minds, and (5) that messengers were granted freedom to travel on their errands. Geoffrey and Laȝamon certainly did not invent these details of daily living: they had only to look about them for models to copy.

One of the chief characteristics of feudal society was the right of the important lords and barons to have a voice in the preparation of all decisions which were likely to affect their own welfare. The king, indeed, was but another lord, and when the baronage was assembled all were, to a large extent, peers. The choice of a new king would be a matter of great concern: naturally the lords and barons would not support a man distasteful to them. The pseudo-historians, when they state that the council at London decided to recall Arthur to succeed his father, are representing actual practice. In much the same spirit it is stated in the Peterborough Chronicle, 1100, that, after William Rufus had been buried, "...those of the witan who were near at hand elected his brother Henry king."[87] And thirty-five years later, when Henry died, Stephen was elected king.[88] If the lords and barons of the realm had not wished it, neither Henry I nor Stephen could have succeeded to the throne except by force of arms.

Given such a king and such lords and barons, it was only natural that the king should have sought the advice of his lords and barons before he made

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[87] The Peterborough Chronicle, tr. H. A. Rositzke (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1951), p. 135; cf. Henry of Huntingdon, Chronicle (London: H. G. Bohn, 1853), p. 240.

[88] See the discussion of the election of Stephen in Freeman, History of the Norman Conquest, Rev. Am. Ed., V, 162-163.

any important decision. We are accustomed today to a bureaucratic government, and we accept tremendous staffs and special cabinet advisers as a necessary part of government. The 12th century lord, king or lesser baron, had his staff of advisers too: the difference is one of degree, not of kind. In the pseudo-histories Arthur time and time again asks his barons for advice. So too did Henry and Stephen, and any other lord of the 12th century. Each vassal owed his lord "court service", and in response to a summons the baron appeared at the court of his feudal lord, prepared, at times, to sit with his peers as a jury, or, at other times, to render his lord advice. "The efficient conduct of the business of the fief was a subject of mutual interest to both lord and vassals," states Professor Painter, "and the former was expected to seek the latter's counsel before taking any important decision."[89] For the king, whose fief was the realm, in effect, the same condition existed. The history of the 12th century is studded with important councils. The many meetings between Henry II and Philip Augustus at Gisors, where, each backed by the opinion and might of his vassals, the two kings sought to settle their differences, illustrate rather well that the king sought and acted upon advice from his lords and barons.[90] Geoffrey and Layamon are especially scrupulous about this point: Arthur never fails to

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89 Mediaeval Society (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1951), p. 21; see F. L. Ganshof, Feudalism (London, 1952), pp. 83-84, where, s. v. Consilium, there are recorded the words of Charles the Good of Flanders to his vassals in 1122, desiring them to give him good advice.

90 It is possible to multiply such incidents, particularly from the accounts of the Crusades. An especially vigorous description of Richard asking for advice from his barons is found in the Estoire de la guerre sainte of Ambroise, tr. M. J. Hunt, The Crusade of Richard Lion-Heart (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1941), pp. 328-330; see, too, John of Salisbury, Policraticus, IV, 6, tr. J. Dickinson (New York, 1927), pp. 24-31, who suggests that a prince ought to retain wise counsellors and educated priests to advice him.

ask for the advice of his barons. The same may be said of any feudal lord in the 12th century. It was the baron's duty and privilege to advise his lord.

To judge from the pseudo-histories, the most apparent indications of the lord-vassal relationship are the vassal's obligation to serve his lord when summoned and the lord's grant of lands and other gifts to his vassal either in return for service or to secure it. There is no need to develop fully this obvious reflection of 12th century feudal practice. It is enough to point out that the rights to land were the keystone of the feudal system, and that the award of fiefs to the vassal in return for service, and additional gifts, stimulated in part by honest generosity and in part by a quite human desire to retain the good will of one's vassals against a time of need, are the natural overt acts of such a system. Nothing which we read in the pseudo-histories would have struck a 12th century audience as more normal than this honest attention given to the lord-vassal relationship.[91]

We have had occasion to observe that a healthy relationship between the lord and the vassal was the principal support of feudal social structure, and that any failure of the one to support the other was likely to result in hardships for both. Even so, to understand properly Gawain's indignation caused by Modred's and Guinevere's treason it is necessary to distinguish between minor acts of treason and a major defection. Given the almost constant warfare of the day, it should not be surprising that many men would "change sides", always hoping to better their position. Political intrigue

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[91] The subject is covered thoroughly, and most conveniently, in two recent works: Sidney Painter, Mediaeval Society, op. cit., Ch. I, and F. L. Ganshof's excellent monograph, Feudalism, op. cit. The reader will not find a better introduction and discussion of the subject than that in these two remarkably lucid essays.

was not unknown: we have only to mention the curious position of Henry II, who, as lord of Anjou was the vassal of the king of France, but who, as king of England, was also the bitter enemy of Philip. It was only to be expected, then, that minor acts of treason or revolt against one's lord would be excused or ignored. If a knight were to renounce his oath of loyalty to his lord and take up arms against him, or to swear allegiance to another lord, it is not likely that he should be denounced as a traitor. Excepting his first lord, other knights would not detest him.[92] But a major act of treason was regarded everywhere as a heinous crime. Especially was treason against the king held to be most loathsome. The legists of the day speak out against it.[93] As early as Alfred's reign there is recorded a strong feeling against the traitor: "if anyone plot against the king's life, of himself, or by harbouring of exiles, or of his men, let him be liable in his life and in all that he has."[94] Although there is no recorded statute which defines treason prior to the famous Statute of 1352, acts of treason against the king were always regarded as the most serious offence.[95] In the 12th century any man found guilty of treason against the king was sure to lose his life and have

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92 Tatlock, Legendary History, p. 303 takes this position. He carries it too far, however, when he concludes that "...treason, like perjury, might be frivously called a favorite medieval indoor-sport."

93 Bracton, De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae (Rolls Series), II, 256-258; Glanville, De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Regni Angliae, ed. G. E. Woodbine (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1932), I, 2; XIV, 7.

94 W. Stubbs, Select Charters of English Constitutional History, 8th Ed. (Oxford: The Clarenden Press, 1895), pp. 62-63.

95 For general descriptions of the feudal attitude concerning treason see T. F. T. Plucknett, A Concise History of the Common Law, 2nd Ed. (Rochester, New York, 1936), pp. 393-395, 479-480; W. S. Holdsworth, A History of English Law, 3d Ed. (Boston, 1923), II, 48, 449-450; III, 287; Pollock and Maitland, The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge: The Univ. Press, 1952), II, 500-509.

his lands forfeited to the king. The hideous and cruel penalties exacted for treason are a fair measure of the contemporary contempt for the traitor and his deed. Because the traitor sinned against God and man, because he was guilty of the crime of Judas, the usual sentence for treason declared that the traitor should be drawn, hanged, disembowelled, and quartered.[96] Lazamon is right when he says that no man would pray for Modred's soul. In the 12th century any man might make excuses for most crimes, but no man would condone treachery against the king.[97]

The 12th century, too, was a century of unrest. Warfare, as we have noted, was almost constant. But men cannot fight forever, and it is therefore no surprise for us to observe that, in their life as well as their literature, war was interrupted frequently by short periods of peace, either a truce or an armistice. Apart from the so-called "Truce of God", never

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96 Concerning the idea that treason was likened to the sin of Judas see Holdsworth, op. cit., III, 287 and Pollock and Maitland, op. cit., II, 503. The usual punishment for treason is described by Pollock and Maitland: "The malefactor was laid on the ground and tied to a horse which dragged him along the rough road to the gibbet.... The law in time demanded drawing, hanging, disembowelling, burning, beheading, quartering." (II, 501.) Barbarous death penalties and punishments for treason were common in England until the reforms of the mid-19th century. Cf. L. Radzinowicz, A History of English Criminal Law and the Administration from 1750 (New York and London, 1948), who treats the subject thoroughly: e. g., the case of Harrison in 1660, who "...cut down alive from the gallows and his body opened, ...raised himself up, gave the executioner a blow on the ear, and saw his bowels thrown into the fire." (p. 223, n. 80.) See, too, the discussion of other crimes which called forth horrible death penalties in J. R. Reinhard's "Burning at the Stake in Mediaeval Law and Literature," Speculum, XVI (April, 1941), 186-209.

97 A hundred years later, in 1305, William Wallace, the Scotch patroit, betrayed to the English, was executed as a traitor by order of Edward II. These events are described in Bk. XII, Ch. V of The Actis and Deidis of Schir William Wallace, Facsimile Reproduction, STS, 3d Series, No. 12, by arrangement with Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, New York, 1940. In his preface to the 1594 Ed., Henry Charteris wrote that Wallace, betrayed by Sir John Monteith, was taken to London, "...quhair, at the command of the Tyran, he was cruelly tormentit and slaine, and his quarters send to sundrie townis in Scotland and Ingland (as the supponit) to his schame." (Ed. cit., Sig. **j.)

effective in the 12th century, other periods of truce were frequent. Usually the commander of the force who asked for an armistice was obliged to give hostages to the commander of the opposing force to demonstrate his intention to abide by the terms offered him. It was a quite ordinary event. If the attacking knights, for example, were unable to breach a wall, and if the besieged knights were unable to execute a successful sally, the attacking force could hope to starve the defenders out. The defender of a castle in a situation such as this might well ask for an armistice, or truce, to enable him to send some message to his lord. He would be asked, no doubt, to send a hostage to the leader of the attacking force as a guarantee that any terms agreed to by both sides for the duration of the truce would be strictly observed. If the terms were violated, the hostage was forfeited to the opposing party, and he would be lucky to escape with his life. Such an experience actually occurred to young William Marshall: when but a boy he was abandoned by his father, as a hostage to Stephen.[98] Owing only to Stephen's gentle nature, William was returned to his father, but had he been put to death when his father broke the pledge he had made to the king, no one would have raised a complaint. The plight of the Saxon hostages, described vigorously by both Geoffrey and Laȝamon, would have shocked no male member of a 12th century audience.

There can be little doubt, either, that such a society, so frequently at war, so frequently at odds with its neighbors, put little faith in orderly methods for maintaining peace. Police forces, as we know them today, did not exist. If the king were to carry his rule into Wales, say, he had to force his way into that territory, and, once there, he could maintain his laws only by force of arms. When he withdrew, only the threat of strongest reprisals

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98 L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal, ed. P. Meyer, vv. 399-524.

could be counted upon to preserve the laws and order in the newly won lands. Laȝamon's feeling, as he describes Arthur's warning to his assembly at York, is almost a distant echo of John of Salisbury's complaint that because too many knights lacked courage, and because they put their faith in heavy armor instead of aggressive action, the border enemies dare to disrupt the countryside and ravage England. The only law recognized by the Welsh, John hints, was force. How ought the king to impress his will and laws on the unruly Welsh? Imitate Duke Harold, who, dispatched by Edward, routed the Welsh and saw to it that they caused no further trouble. John describes the actions of Harold vigorously:

> And so he reached Snowdon, the Hill of Snows itself, and wasted the whole country, and prolonging the campaign to two years, captured their chiefs and presented their heads to the king who had sent him; and slaying every male who could be found, even down to the pitiful little boys, he thus pacified the province at the mouth [sic] of the sword. He established a law that any Briton who was found with a weapon beyond a certain limit which he set for them, to wit the Foss of Offa, was to have his right hand cut off by the officials of the king. And thus by the valor of this leader the power of the Britons was so broken that almost the entire race seemed to disappear and by the indulgence of the aforesaid king, their women were married to Englishmen.[99]

Apparently only reprisals such as these could be relied upon to maintain law and order in conquered territories. Arthur's threats accomplished their purpose: we hear no more in the Historia and the Brut of unruly Scots or sullen York men.

The pseudo-historians were interested chiefly in the victories which Arthur won. His achievements in war so fill the pages of Geoffrey and Laȝamon that only once are we afforded a glimpse of the court in a peaceful setting. Following the triumphant crown-wearing scene we have described for us the brilliant three day feast which is brought to a close with the arrival

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[99] Policraticus, VI, 6, tr. J. Dickson, op. cit., p. 195.

of the messengers from Lucius. La3amon's passage, following Geoffrey almost "word for word", is a faithful representation of the chief form of entertainment known to the upper level of feudal society. The sumptuous feast in the hall, the games on the field outside the wall - these were the delight of the 12th century noble class. Some of the details are quite accurate. The removal of the heavy crowns, the function of Kei and Bedvere as steward and butler, and the method of serving the guests are accurate descriptions of late Norman custom.[100] Some exaggeration, of course, is evident. Numbers are elusive: there probably never were a "thousand" knights and ladies available to act as servers. The women most likely would have not been seated apart from the men.[101] A lady probably could not afford to set such strictures as La3amon describes upon a prospective groom. But the general scene is an accurate one. The games on the field are well known exercises of the day.[102] Any socially prominent member of a 12th century audience would recognize everything in the passage, would no doubt feel that Geoffrey and La3amon must have attended such a feast.

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[100] Tatlock, Legendary History, pp. 272-273, states that if "...a historian wishes accurate depiction of a twelfth-century crown wearing and all its festivities, it is doubtful if he can find it anywhere so vivid as here in the Historia." This is true, too, of La3amon's passage, since he repeats Geoffrey's account. The discussion of the duties of steward and butler in Sister Imogene Baker's dissertation, The King's Household in the Arthurian Court from Geoffrey of Monmouth (Washington, D. C., 1937) confirms this opinion of the accuracy of the pseudo-histories.

[101] Cf. Tatlock, Legendary History, p. 273, who discusses the incident thoroughly.

[102] Races, both foot and horse, leaping, shooting, wrestling, and sword play are certainly the familiar pastimes of the day. All, of course, are illustrated in J. Strutt, The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England (London, 1898). See, too, A. Schultz, Das höfische Leben zur zeit der Minnesinger (Leipzig, 1889), I, 501, 530 ff.; II, 200.

In spite of the desire of the ladies at Arthur's court to marry only those knights who had distinguished themselves at least three times in battle, and in spite of their taste in dress, the manners of the age, as described by the pseudo-historians, cannot be called chivalrous. It could be argued that such ladies would demand chivalrous conduct of their men. But there is little in the accounts of Geoffrey and Laȝamon that can be called chivalrous. Arthur's behaviour following his easy victory over the ill-clad Irish is motivated more by a spontaneous surge of sympathy and generosity than by a deep seated tradition of chivalric conduct. Sympathy and generosity are part and parcel of the 12th century: chivalry was in its infancy in England. Some of the outward signs appear,[103] to be sure, but the spirit of self-sacrifice, or of selflessness, or the account of a deed such as that which the Black Prince performed in honor of his eminent prisoner, the king of France, is foreign to the behaviour of the men in the pseudo-histories. And this appears to be true of 12th century behaviour. William Marshall could spare the life of Richard and kill his horse,[104] he could "rescue" Eleanor,[105] but by and large actions such as these were not ordinary; they do not reflect usual practice. Another century must pass before Englishmen respond wholeheartedly to the softer spirit of chivalry. The pseudo-histories show us the first blush of English chivalry, and in so doing they reflect a fair view of the 12th century in England. To Geoffrey and Laȝamon chivalry meant a group of mounted knights fit to fight. That is also what it meant

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[103] Tatlock, p. 302, for example, lists Arthur's single combat with Frollo, the crown-wearing feast, and the dress and conduct of the ladies and knights.

[104] L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal, ed. P. Meyer, vv. 8802-8849.

[105] Ibid., vv. 1653-1690.

to Stephen and Henry II.[106]

The last example of contemporary feudal custom is related to the growing concept of the king's law. Messengers on their lord's errands were accorded unrestricted travel privileges. It is not difficult to understand why: there was no other communication system. If the king wished to send any notice to anyone, that message had to be hand carried. In order that the conduct of affairs of state might proceed, or for that matter, any business, it was absolutely necessary that all messengers be permitted to travel unmolested to their destination, and to return safely. Thus the messenger, and in later times the herald, enjoyed a special social and political status. Often, no doubt, messengers were men of high rank, but any messenger was permitted to travel to and from his destination. The position of the king's messengers, furthermore, apparently was buttressed by law. Prior to the Treason Statute of 1352 treason was not defined closely: according to Plucknett, however, its early definition "...was certainly wide, including the murder of royal messengers."[107] No man wished to risk the charge of treason, because if he were convicted his lands were forfeited to the king. Messengers, therefore, were no doubt allowed to travel freely while they were performing their duties. Arthur jumps quickly to his feet to stop his barons when they threaten Lucius' messengers. Surely he speaks

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[106] In France the spirit of chivalric behaviour was felt long before it was in England. Richard I, a hero to later generations, spent his youth participating in tournaments conducted in France. His accession to the English throne did not noticeably stimulate the growth of chivalric behaviour in England. We wait until Edward I was crowned before chivalry assumed significance in the daily conduct of the English knight.

[107] T. F. T. Plucknett, A Concise History of the Common Law, op. cit., p. 393; cf. U. T. Holmes, Jr., Daily Living in the Twelfth Century (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1952), pp. 54, 233, 320, n. 30, where the messenger is noted very briefly.

for the 12th century when he states that the messenger must go where his lord bids him go, and no man may molest him. Were this not true, all affairs of state, all business, would have ceased.

It is not a broad social canvas which the pseudo-historians paint. Feudal society at peace, for Geoffrey and Laȝamon, is almost an anomaly. But the short glimpse of it which we are given is largely an accurate one. It is not anachronistic: the events are described as if they were taking place at the time the authors wrote them down. It is not fanciful: nothing described by the pseudo-historians would have surprised their 12th century audiences. It is exaggerated, but not unduly: the top level of feudal society is shown in its best light, to be sure, but no serious distortions are recorded. The passages devoted to feudal society, then, are in fact realistic representations of contemporary feudal practice and custom. So frequently is one's attention directed to Geoffrey's "fancy", or to Laȝamon's "invention" - qualities undeniably present in their works - that it is a refreshing experience for one to note also that both writers were capable of accurate observation. Like all writers, the pseudo-historians were a part of their time, and, when their narrative situation called for it, they were able to write down vividly what they had seen and heard with their own eyes and ears.

14. Dreams and Astrology

A distinctive part of a society is its beliefs. General credence on the part of a people in one God, for example, marks them as different from a people who believe in many gods. What a people puts stock in, then, is as real as the clothes they wear or the houses they live in. And literature which reflects the beliefs of the society out of which it springs is as

realistic as it is when it depicts actions and characters which are common to its society. Such beliefs, moreover, are to be distinguished from the ideals of a society. We have seen already that in the 12th century loyalty and courage, to name a few, were regarded highly. These are ideals. We shall now consider two things that the people of the same society believed: they believed in dreams and in the efficacy of the astrologer to foretell correctly future events. Now neither dreams nor astrology is given especially significant attention. We should never claim that either was always on the minds of the people. Both are, however, presented as natural, quite ordinary beliefs. Of the two, dreams are given more space.

The first dream occurs as Arthur's fleet, on the way to France, is "...sailing joyfully with a brisk gale." At about midnight, Arthur fell into a sound sleep, and in a dream saw

> ...a bear flying in the air, at the noise of which all the shores trembled; also a terrible dragon flying from the west, which enlightened the country with the brightness of its eyes. When these two met, they began a dreadful fight; but the dragon with its fiery breath burnt the bear which often assaulted him, and threw him scorched to the ground. Arthur, upon awakening, related his dream to those that attended about him, who took upon them to interpret it, and told him, that the dragon signified himself, but the bear, some giant that should encounter with him; and that the fight portended the duel that would be between them, and the dragon's victory the same that would happen to himself. But Arthur conjectured it portended something else, and that the vision was applicable to himself and the emperor. (BHG, p. 204.) [108]

One other dream is recorded, and this by La3amon only. On the night before Arthur heard from a messenger of Modred's insurrection at home, he dreamed of terrifying events. The next morning, appearing outwardly troubled, his companions inquired after the cause of his concern, and Arthur told them about his strange dream.

Me imette þat mon me hof:	"I dreamed that men raised me
uppen are halle.	up upon a hall;

[108] WB, pp. 468-469; BYB, p. 177; LB, vv. 25549-25634.

þa halle ich gon bi-stridē:
swulc ich wolde riden.
alle þa lond þa ich ah:
alle ich þer ouer sah.
and Walwain sat biuoren me:
mi sweord he bar an honde.
þa com Moddred farē þere:
mid unimete uolke.
he bar an his honde:
ane wiax stronge.
he bigon to hewene:
hardliche swiðe.
and þa þostes for-heou alle:
þa heolden up þa halle.
þere ich iseh Wenheuer eke:
wimmonen leofuest me.
al þere much halle rof:
mid hire honden heo to-droh.
þa halle gon to hælden:
and ich hæld to grunden.
þat mi riht ærm to-brac:
þe seide Modred haue þat.
Adũ ueol þa halle:
& Walwain gõ to ualle.
and feol a þere eorðe:
his ærmes brekeen beine.
& ich igrap mi sweord leofe:
mid mire leoft honde.
and smæt of Modred is hafd:
þat hit wond a þere ueld.
And þa quene ich al to-snaðde:
mid deore min sweorede.
and seoððen ich heo adun sette:
in ane swarte putte.
And al mi uolc riche:
sette to fleme.
þat nuste ich under criste:
whar heo bicumen weoren.
Butē mi seolf ich gon atstondē:
uppen ane wolden.
& ich þer wondrien agon:
wide ȝeond þan moren.
þer isah gripes:
& grisliche fuȝeles.
þa com an gulden leo:
liðen ouer dune.
deoren swiðe hende:
þa ure drihten makede.
þa leo me orn faren to:
and iueng me bi þan midle.
& for hire gun ȝeongen:
& to þere sæ wende.
And ich iseh þæ uðen:
i þere sæ driuen.
and þe leo i þan ulode:
iwende wið me seolue.

I sat the hall as if I would ride it. All the lands that I possess I over-looked there. And Gawain sat in front of me; he carried my sword in his hand. Then Modred approached there with a great host of people; he carried a sturdy battle axe in his hand. He started to hack vigorously, and he cut to pieces the posts that supported the hall. I also saw Wenhaver there, the dearest of women to me. With her hands she drew down the entire tremendous roof of the hall. The hall crumbled, and I tumbled to the ground, and broke my right arm in pieces. Then Modred said, 'Have that!' The whole hall collapsed, and Gawain fell to the ground, breaking both his arms. And with my left hand I grasped my good sword, and struck off Modred's head, so that it rolled across the field. And with my good sword I cut the queen all in pieces and afterwards threw her down a black pit. And all my trusted people fled away, so that I knew not under Christ where they had gone. But I myself stood upon a field; and there I wandered wide over the moors. And there I saw [gripes?] kites and grisly fowls. Then a golden lion approached across the field, the fairest beast that Our Lord ever made. The lion ran towards me and, seizing me around the middle, moved off and went to the sea. And I saw the waves driving in the sea, and the lion, with me, went into the ocean.

þa wit i sæ comen:
þa vðen me hire binomen.
co þer an fisc liðe:
and feredē me to londe.
þa wes ich al wet:
& weri of sorȝen and seoc.
þa gon ich iwakien:
swiðe ich gon to quakien.
þa gon ich to biuien:
swulc ich al fur burne.
And swa ich habbe al niht:
of mine sweuene swiðe iþoht.
for ich what to iwisse:
agan is al mi blisse.
for a to mine liue:
sor enȝich mot driȝe.
wale þat ich nabbe here:
Wehauer mine quene.
(LB, vv. 28018-28093)

When we were out in the sea, the waves took her from me, but a fish approached there and brought me to the land. Then was I all wet, and weary with sorrow, and sick. When I awakened I shook all over; then I trembled as if I were burned all over with fire. And so I have thought much of my dream all night, for I know surely that all my happiness is gone; for the rest of my life I must suffer sorrow. Oh, that I do not have Wenhaver, my queen, here."

Closely allied with his belief that dreams portend coming events is the 12th century man's conviction that the stars in the heavens exerted tremendous influences on man's action, and that, when gauged properly by the trained astrologer, they were steadfast signs which foretold correctly events to take place in the future. There is one short passage illustrating this belief, found only in Laȝamon's Brut. At the time of Arthur's coronation, it was said that in Kaerleon there was

...moni sel mon.
caunes þer weoren:
þe cuð weoren widen.
þer wes moni god clarc:
þe wel cuðe a leore.
muchel heo ferden mid þan crafte:
to lokien in þan leofte.
to lokien i þan steorren:
nehȝe and feorren.
þe crafte is ihate:
Astronomie.
wel ofte heo þan kīge:
seide of feole þinge.
heo cudde him on leoden:
what him sculde ilimpē.
(LB, vv. 24288-24302)

many a good man there, canons there were, who were extremely learned; there was many a good clerk who was skilled in learning. Often they used the craft of searching the sky, to look at the stars, both far and near; the craft is called astronomy. Very often they told the king about many things. They made known to him what should happen to him in the land.

The importance attached to dreams throughout the Middle Ages is so well established that there is little need to rehearse it here. The mere recollection of Boethius or Macrobius's Commentary on Scipio's Dream, and the

tremendous popularity they enjoyed,[109] is sufficient to indicate the widespread belief in the dream as, among other things, a valid means for forecasting future events. Arthur's two dreams foretell important events. Geoffrey and Laȝamon, actually, exhibit a certain amount of restraint in limiting their use of this obvious narrative device. The 12th century view, the general belief of the audiences which listened to or read Geoffrey's and Laȝamon's work, is stated best by John of Salisbury. Five chapters of the second book of John's Policraticus are devoted to dreams and their interpretation. Stating at the outset that "...at times God forearms our ignorance by the warning of signs...,"[110] John proceeds to the standard opinion of his age: some dreams are false, many are true.

A similar moderation is evinced in John's opinion regarding the concludions reached by astrologers. The stars and other heavenly bodies at times are signs which can be interpreted intelligibly. At times astrologers can forecast future events.[111] Too frequently, says John, the astrologer abused his power, too frequently the caster of horoscopes destroyed knowledge.[112] John of Salisbury, however, represents the sensible via media of his age. It is certain that the average man in the 12th century put much more stock in astrology - and in dreams - than did the wise Bishop of Chartres. The

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[109] Macrobius' commentary on the Somnium Scipionis, for example, exists in at least forty-eight MSS. A thorough discussion of Macrobius' influence is found in W. H. Stahl's introductory remarks to his tr. of the Commentary (New York: Columbis Univ. Press, 1952), pp. 39-55. One has only to think of Chaucer to realize how lasting was the influence of Boethius and Macrobius.

[110] John of Salisbury, Policraticus, tr. J. B. Pike (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1938), p. 74.

[111] Ibid., pp. 98-99.

[112] Ibid., p. 98.

pseudo-historians are but echoing popular belief when they write favorably of dream interpretations and astrological lore.[113]

15. Christian Society

One does not have to prove that in 12th century England Christianity was the established religion. The pseudo-histories, when they show references to religious matters, always reflect a perfectly familiar Christian tone. If they were found to reflect, say, the religion of Mohammed, to suggest that the normal Englishman of the day believed in Mohammed, then we should state categorically that, in matters of Faith, the pseudo-histories were not realistic. But we shall see that they demonstrate that the Christian religion is the accepted belief, the religious belief and practice which operated familiarly in society as we expect they would have. One general reservation may be pointed out. It is not intended at all to suggest that 12th century English society is Christian to a greater or lesser degree than any other society, or to suggest that the English were or were not more pious than any other people. No comparative distinctions whatsoever are implied: the narratives themselves suggest none. On the other hand, every reference in the pseudo-histories to religious matters has been accounted for. They all demonstrate that the writers of these narratives, in describing the religious beliefs of their society, were convinced that the Christian religion, for the 12th century Englishman, was a natural and comfortable experience.

The notices are scattered throughout the pseudo-histories. From the election of Arthur, when it was proposed "...to Dubricius, Archbishop of

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[113] We know from Chaucer that as late as the close of the 14th century astrological lore was an important adjunct to the medical science of the day. Chaucer's description of the Doctor of Physic contains a realistic account of the practice of medicine in the Middle Ages.

Legions, that he should consecrate Arthur..." (BHG, p. 176), to the denomination of Modred's army, where we read that it, "...taking pagans and Christians together, amounted to eighty thousand men" (BHG, p. 227), references to Christian structure and organization, as well as to beliefs and practices, occur as commonplace social phenomena. There is no need to reproduce them all; a selection will suffice.[114]

Laȝamon provides the clearest evidence. A very noticeable feature of his Brut are the frequent oaths and prayers of the several characters. Surely this is a clear sign of the pervasive and familiar quality of the religion of the society. In the Christian era, and in a Christian locality, what a man swears by and prays to is his God and faith, elements of his religious environment which have become custom and habit. We find frequent utterances like this: "Lord Christ, God's son, be in aid to us now, so that I might follow God's laws while I live." (LB, vv. 19894-19898); or like this: "Never, so help me God who governs all events, shall I ever become his man, nor he my sovereign." (LB, vv. 23575-23578) Such prayers and oaths can have come only from a Christian background: the literature which contains them can reflect only a Christian society. Since the fostering society in this case we know to have been Christian, we are justified in concluding that these oaths and prayers, taken as indexes, are realistic.

We find, also, another kind of Christian reflection. Geoffrey relates well an interesting episode. Just before the British assault at Mt. Badon,

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[114] The complete references to Christianity are as follows: BHG, pp. 176, 179, 180-181, 182, 184, 185-186, 191-192, 223-224, 227; WB, pp. 432-433, 438, 439, 442, 444, 452-453, 455-456, 459, 495; BYB, pp. 156, 157, 159, 160, 161-162, 167, 168, 169-170, 172, 189, 190; LB, vv. 19894-19899, 20653-20656, 21073-21092, 21238-21240, 23383-23384, 23575-23586, 23733-23754, 24903-24926, 25219-25222, 25559-25574, 26462-26463, 28204-28217, 19858-19865, 20258-20263, 21149-21156, 21856-21956, 22095-22114, 22401-22412, 24117-24124, 24279-24303, 24367-24376, 24445-24554, 26139-26146, 27316-27331, 27908-27945.

the Britons were encouraged to fight vigorously. Arthur spoke of the justice of their cause. Individual leaders urged their men to fight bravely. But it seems to us that the most effective exhortation was delivered by the Archbishop. "St. Dubricius, Archbishop of Legions," Geoffrey states,

> ...cried out: "You who have the honor to profess the Christian faith, keep fixed in your minds the love which you owe to your country and fellow subjects, whose sufferings by the treachery of the pagans will be an ever lasting reproach to you, if you do not courageously defend them. It is your country which you fight for, and for which you should, when required, voluntarily suffer death: for that itself is victory, and the cure of the soul. For he that shall die for his brethren, offers himself a living sacrifice to God, and has Christ for his example, who condescended to lay down his life for his brethren. If, therefore, any of you shall be killed in this war, that death itself, which is suffered in so glorious a cause, shall be to him for penance and absolution of all his sins." (BHG, pp. 180-181.)

That the Archbishop should be present and speak as he did is a rather convincing demonstration of the fact that the Christian religion was a natural part of the lives of the people whose actions are portrayed in the pseudo-histories. In the 12th century Holy Church took an intimate interest in feudal warfare.

There are other indications of the extent of Christian influence. Arthur complies with the request of the Scotch clergy to grant clemency to the defeated Scotch and Picts (BHG, p. 184; WB, p. 442; BYB, pp. 161-162; LB, vv. 21855-21956), he insists that the churches of York be restored (BHG, pp. 185-186; WB, p. 444; BYB, p. 162; LB, vv. 22045-22114), and he includes among the body of his closest advisers high ranking members of the clergy (BHG, p. 178; LB, vv. 20258-20263). By far the most colorful event, however, is Arthur's crown wearing ceremony. Since Laȝamon provides the fullest account we shall use his description.[115]

Kaerleon, one of the three archbishoprics in the country, was the city

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[115] The others: BHG, pp. 193-194; WB, pp. 455-456; BYB, pp. 169-170.

Arthur chose as the site for the ceremony. It contained two monasteries, St. Aaron's and St. Julian's. On the designated Whitsunday,

...comen þa biscopes alle:
biuoren heore kinge.
and þa ærchebiscopes þreo:
biuoren Arðure.
and þene kine-helme nome:
þa him wes icunde.
and setten uppen his hafde:
mid heȝere blisse.
swa heo hine gūnen lede:
al mid godes rede.
Seint Dubric eoden biuorē:
he wes criste icoren.
þe ærchebiscop of Lundene:
eode an his riht honden.
and bi his luft side:
þe ilke of Eouerwike.
fiftene biscopes biuoren:
of feole londen icoren.
heo weoren bi-hangen alle:
mid þalle swiðe balde.
þe weoren alle ibrusted:
mid barninge golde.
þer feouwer kinges eoden:
biuoren þan kaiseren.
heo weȝe on heore honde:
feower sweord of golde.
þus hehte þa an:
þe wes a swiðe duhti mon.
þat wes Cador þe king:
Arðures deorling.
þe oðer of Scotlonde:
sweord he weide an hond.
& þe king of Norð Walles:
& þe king of Suð Wales.
& þ⁹ heo gunnen leden:
þe king to chirechen.
þeo biscopes gunnen singe:
biuoren þā leod-kinge.
bemen þer bleowen:
bellen þer ringede.
cnihtes gunnen riden:
wifmē forð gliden.
To iwissen hit is isaide:
and soð hit is ifūden.
þat no isæh no mon nauer ær:
mid eorð liche monne her.
half swa hahne ricchedom:
a nauer nane hepen.
swa mid Arðure was:
aðeles cunnes.

all the bishops came before their king. And the three archbishops came before Arthur, and, taking the crown that was his by right, set it upon his head with great bliss. Thus they lead him, all according to God's counsel. St. Dubricius went in front - he was chosen by Christ - the Archbishop of London walked by his right side, and the Archbishop of York walked by his left side. Fifteen bishops, chosen from many lands, proceeded them. They were all clothed in the most noble garments, embroidered with burning gold. Four kings walked there in front of the emperor. They carried in their hands four swords of gold. Thus was named one of them: Cador, an exceedingly brave man, a king, well loved by Arthur. One of the others, the King of Scotland, bore a sword in his hand. And the King of North Wales and the King of South Wales. And thus they lead the king to church. The bishops sang before the monarch. Trumpets were blown, bells were rung, knights rode, the women glided forth. For a certainty it is said, and it is found to be true, that no man ever before saw here among earthly men half so great a show of pomp in any assembly as there was with Arthur, he of noble race.

Into chirchen bicom:
Arðure þe riche mon.
Dubri þe arche-biscop:
drihten him wes ful god.
of Rome he wes legat:
and of þan hirede prelat.
he sung þa hali masse:
biuoren þan leod-kinge.
Comen mid þere quene:
wifmē wel idone.
þere rich chere mōne wif alle:
þe wunede on lōde.
and þere hehere monnen dohtere:
þa quene hafden isohte.
al swa þe quene hafde ihate:
bi hire fulle wite.
I þere chireche i þere soð halue:
sat Arður þe king him seolf.
bi þere norð side:
Wenhæiuer þe quene.
þer comen hire bi-foren:
feouwer quenen icoren.
ælc bar on luft honde:
enne beh of rede gold.
& þreo snau-white culueren:
settē an heore sculderen.
þat weoren þa feouwer quenē:
þere kingen wifen.
þa beren an heore heonden:
þe feouwer sweordes of golde.
biuorē Arðure:
aðelest kingen.
Moni mæide child wes þere:
mid mære þere quene.
þer wes moni þal hende:
on faire þā uolke.
of monies cunnes lōde:
þer wes muchel onde.
for ælc wende to beon:
betere þene oðer.
Feole cnihtes anen:
comen to þere chirechen.
sūme for guðinge:
summe for þan kinge.
summe to bihalden:
þa wifmen þat weoren balde.
Songes þer weoren murie:
þa ilaste swiðe longe.
ich weone 3if hit weore:
ilast seoue 3ere.
þa 3et heo weolden mare:
þe þer at weoren.
þa þe masse wes isūge:
of chircchen heo ðrunge.

Arthur, the noble man, came into church. Archbishop Dubricius - the Lord was especially good to him and he was Legate of Rome and Prelate of the people - sang the holy mass before the monarch. The fairest women came with the queen, all the wives of the noble men who dwelled in the land and their daughters. The queen had sought them out and had ordered them [to attend] on pain of paying the fullest penalty. In the south half of the church sat Arthur, the king himself; in the north side, Wenhaver the queen. There came before her four selected queens. Each carried a scepter of red gold in her left hand; three snow-white doves sat on their shoulders. These were the four queens, wives of the kings that carried in their hands the four gold swords before Arthur, noblest of kings. There was many a maiden there with the noble queen. There was many a rich garment on the fair folk. There was a great amount of envy on the part of others from various lands, for each desired to be better [dressed] than the other. And then many knights came quickly to the church; some to seek personal gain, some for the king's sake, and some just to behold the noble women. There were cheerful songs that lasted very long. I think that if it had lasted seven years, yet would those that were there wish it might have lasted longer. When the mass was sung, they thronged from the church;

þe king mid his folke:	the king, with his great following,
to his mete uerfe.	went to his feast - the people
mid mucle his duȝeðe:	were joyous.
drem wes on hirede.	
(LB, vv. 24445-24554)	

As we have noted already, there is no real need to "prove" that the pseudo-historians depict a Christian society quite accurately. The oaths and prayers, the presence of members of the clergy on the battlefield, the references to churches, the selection of important clergy as advisers to the king - all this quite obviously reflects contemporary practice. We shall take the great crown-wearing feast at Caerleon on Whitsunday, where the religious ceremony is described by Laȝamon so vigorously and, following Geoffrey's mood, so fondly, as an indication of the pseudo-historians treatment of religious detail. Arthur's crown-wearing is the brightest passage in the pseudo-histories. Geoffrey, purporting to make history, and Laȝamon, wishing to add glory to anything which he considered to be native British, would hardly invent the details of this important ceremony. Their audiences would demand a certain amount of accuracy. Some elaboration would be expected and condoned, but by and large the account of the ceremony would have had to ring true. And that, of course, is exactly what we find. Some of the details are distorted, but, on the whole, the passage is accurate.

Geoffrey would have known about the coronation of Henry I, and he might have witnessed that of Stephen. Laȝamon might well have had in mind the splendid ceremony at Winchester in 1194, when Richard I, upon his return to England, wore his crown before his assembled barons. His description, however, follows Geoffrey's rather closely. Roger of Hovedon has described Richard's appearance at Winchester: excepting minor differences of detail, Roger's words read very much like the accounts of the pseudo-historians. "On the seventeenth day of the month of April 1194 , being the Lord's day, and the octave of Easter," we read,

there being assembled in the church of Saint Swithin, Hubert, archbishop of Canterbury, John, archbishop of Dublin, Hugh, bishop of Durham, Hugh, bishop of Lincoln, Richard, bishop of London, Gilbert, bishop of Rochester, William, bishop of Ely, Sefrid, bishop of Chichester, Henry, bishop of Exeter, William, bishop of Hereford, and the bishops of Worcester, Saint David's and Bangor; and, many of the abbots, clergy, and people being there present, Richard, king of England, arrayed in royal robes and having a crown of gold on his head, proceeded from his chamber, carrying in his right hand the royal sceptre, on the top of which was a representation of the cross, and in his left hand a wand of gold, on the top of which was the figure of a dove. On his right hand walked William, bishop of Ely, his chancellor, and on his left Richard, bishop of London. A procession also preceded them in due order, of archbishops, bishops, abbots, monks, and clerks. The earls also, and barons, and knights, and a great multitude of the common people, followed the king. A canopy of silk, supported on four lances, was carried over the king, by these four earls, Roger Bigot, earl of Norfolk, William, earl of the Isle of Wight, the earl of Salisbury, the earl of Ferrers. Three swords also, taken from the king's treasury, were borne before the king, one of which was carried by William, king of the Scots, while Haneline, earl of Warenne, carried another, and Ranulpf, earl of Chester, carried the third; in the middle of them walked the king of the Scots, with the earl of Warenne on his right hand, and the earl of Chester on his left. And thus, wearing the crown, he was led into the metropolitan church of Saint Swithin up to the altar; where, falling on his knees, he devoutly received the benediction from Hugh, archbishop of Canterbury, and was then led to his seat. Eleanor, the queen's mother, was seated with her maids of honor on the northern side of the church, opposite the king. The archbishop of Canterbury also celebrated the mass; and the king was led by the before-mentioned bishops to the offertory, and was then re-conducted to his seat. After the celebration of the mass, the king was re-conducted to his chamber, the procession going before him in the order above stated.[116]

The slight differences in detail are no more than we might expect. Laȝamon's account would be accepted by his audience as an authentic crown-wearing scene. Geoffrey's version differs in one respect: he described two churches, one for the men, and the other for the ladies.[117] Laȝamon, rightly,

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[116] Annals of Roger de Hovedon, tr. H. T. Riley (London: H. G. Bohn, 1853), II, 321-322.

[117] Tatlock, Legendary History, pp. 273-274, has discussed Geoffrey's separation of the sexes. He suggests that Geoffrey, to add an exotic touch, may have drawn upon reports of the splendid events and customs then in vogue in Constantinople. He cites Anna Comnena, The Alexiad, III, 8; XV, 8 - pp. 86 and 413 in the Dawes tr.

has seated the ladies in the same church. Both Geoffrey and Laȝamon state that the queens who marched with Guinevere bore white doves. Tatlock shows that this error may be owing to some misunderstanding on Geoffrey's part, that "...it is probably due to the sceptre topped with the image of a dove (signifying mercy) mentioned among the regalia from the Richard I account down."[118] The pseudo-historians state that four kings bore swords before Arthur, whereas actually lords of the realm, not necessarily kings, carried swords before the king. But these are minute differences. In tone, as well as in general outline, Geoffrey and Laȝamon deserve Tatlock's commendation: "If a historian wishes accurate depiction of a twelfth-century crown-wearing and all its festivities, it is doubtful if he can find it anywhere so vivid as here in the Historia."[119] The scene marks Arthur's greatest moment in the pseudo-histories: in keeping with the general scheme of the pseudo-histories, it is realistic as well as vigorous.

16. Natural Description

The quality of the natural description in a narrative usually is an accurate guage of that narrative's realism. Natural description, whether it is a direct representation or an indirect reflection, as seen in metaphor or figurative language, is realistic when its terminology is drawn from

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[118] Legendary History, p. 272.

[119] Legendary History, pp. 272-273; Kate Norgate, England under the Angevin Kings, II, 321 offers a useful suggestion concerning Richard's crown-wearing. To reassert his authority, after his ransom, Richard, Miss Norgate proposed, assembled his barons and obliged them to witness the impressive ceremony. Arthur, too, after an absence of nine years, held his crown-wearing, and probably for the same reason. Tatlock, however, covers the matter most thoroughly. Although he speaks only for Geoffrey, we may add Laȝamon's account safely for, except as noted, it is identical with Geoffrey's. The festivities Tatlock mentions are discussed above under Feudal Society.

nature as a result of the writer's own accurate observation of his natural environment. It is not likely that the mediaeval audience was as sensitive to natural description as we are; they probably did not miss it. Or, if the natural description were artificial and commonplace, they probably did not consider the narrative in any way spoiled. Geoffrey and the authors of the two Welsh Bruts did not write with an eye for nature. They frequently state that Arthur or one of the knights rushed upon the enemy "like an enraged boar" or "like a wild lion", but they never show us that they observed nature closely. A boar they might have seen; they surely never saw a lion. And both similes, moreover, are commonplace descriptions. They simply give no place in their narratives to natural description. In this respect their narratives are suited to the average mediaeval audience. In Laȝamon's Brut, however, we do find a few passages which reflect an accurate observation of nature. He is not entirely satisfied with the "wild lion" and the "enraged boar". Although he gives us no extended description of a natural setting, he does show a fresh power of observation when, metaphorically, he describes certain human actions. He shows, in a few passages, a sensitive response to natural description equal to ours.

Two things may be said of Laȝamon's use of natural description. First, it is always applied to battlefield actions, and, second, it does not occur frequently. Nevertheless, his figures are just: they reflect realistic description made possible by accurate observation. Since they are few, we may look at all the passages.

The king himself, angered, attacks the enemy. How does he conduct himself?

...Arður....
...go to rusien:
swa þe runie wulf.
þenne he cumeð of halte:
bi-honged mid snawe.
and þencheð to bihten:
swulc deor swa him likeð.
(LB, vv. 20120-20126)

Like the howling wolf when he comes from the wood all hung with snow and thinks to bite any animal he chooses to, so Arthur rushed.

And the enemy, fleeing, will sound like

...þe hæȝe wude.
þene wind wode:
weið hine mid mæine.
(LB, vv. 20133-20135)

the tall wood when the furious wind lashes it with its strength.

The best passages, however, are those with describe the plight of the defeated enemy. Routed by the Britons, some

...heo gunnen wondrien:
swa doð þe wilde cron.
i þan moruenne:
þenne his floc is awemed.
& him haldeð after:
hauekes swifte.
hudes i þa reode:
mid reouðe hine imeteð.
þene nis him neouðer god:
no þat lond no þat flod.
hauekes hine smiteð:
hundes hine biteð.
þenne bið þe kinewurðe foȝel:
fæie on his siðe.
(LB, vv. 20162-20175)

wandered like a wild crane in the moor-fen when his flight is impaired and swift hawks pursue him, and mischievous dogs meet him in the reeds. Then neither the land nor the water is good to him: the hawks strike him and the dogs bite him. Then the royal fowl is doomed to death.

Childric, who had attempted to destroy Arthur, is himself forced to surrender to Arthur. Wisely describing Childric's reversal of fortune, Arthur says of him:

Ah of hi bið iwurðen:
swa bið of þan voxe.
þene he bi baldest:
ufen an þe walde.
& hafeð his fulle ploȝe:
& fuȝeles inoȝe.
for wildscipe climbið:
and cluden issacheð.
i þan wilderne:
holȝes him wurcheð.
fare wha swa ouere fare:
naueð he nauere næne kare.
he weneð to beon of duȝeðe:
baldest alre deoren.
Ah þene siȝeð him to:
segges vnder beorȝen.
mid hornen mid hunde:
mid haȝere stefenen.
hunten þar talieð:
hundes þer galieð.
þene vox driueð:
ȝeond dales & ȝeond dunes.

But the same thing has happened to him as it has to the fox when he is boldest in the field and has things as he likes them and plenty of fowls. Daringly he climbs and seeks the rocks, and in the wilderness he prepares holes. No matter who fares forth he has no care; he is secure in his own power, and he thinks that he is the boldest of all animals. But when men come upon him under the hills, with their horns and hounds, and when with loud cries the hunters shout out there and the hounds bark, then they drive the fox over dales and downs.

he ulih to þa holme:
& his hol isecheð.
i þa uirste ænde:
i þan holle wendeð.
þenne is þe balde uox:
blissen al bideled.
and mon him to-delueð:
on ælchere heluen.
þene beoð þer forcuðest:
deoren alre pruttest.
(LB, vv. 20839-20870)

He flies to the holm and seeks his hole. Then is the bold fox deprived of all happiness while men dig to him on every side. Then the proudest of all animals is there the most wretched.

When we recollect the many references in mediaeval literature to Fortune, her wheel, and the fall of man from high estate to low, even when we recall the fine rhetoric of Troilus' canticus - "Al stereless withinne a boot am I /Amydde the see...", we appreciate all the more the fresh, vigorous language of Laȝamon. There is one more passage. Colgrim, cut off by the Britons, is desperate: Arthur, confident, predicts victory. He says of Colgrim:

For ȝerstendæi wes Colgrim:
monnen alre kennest.
nu him is al swa þere gat:
þer he þene hul wat.
hæh uppen hulle:
fehteð mid hornen.
þenne come þe wulf wilde:
touward hire winden.
þeh þe wulf beon ane:
bute ælc imane.
& þer weoren in ane loken:
fif hundred gaten.
þe wulf heom to iwiteð:
and alle heom abiteð.
Swa ich wulle nu to dæi:
Colgri al fordemen.
ich am wulf & he is gat:
þe gume scal beon fæie.
(LB, vv. 21299-21316)

"Although yesterday Colgrim was the bravest of all men, now he is exactly like a goat who guards a hill. High upon a hill he fights with his horns when a wild wolf approaches him. Even though the wolf were alone, without any herd, and there were five hundred goats in the fold, the wolf goes to them and bites them all. So today I shall now destroy Colgrim - I am the wolf and he the goat; that man shall die!"

Laȝamon's passages are the most vigorous and accurate natural description to appear in British literature since the best of the Old English natural description was written - the poet's description of the route to the den of Grendel's dam, The Seafarer, The Ruin. He too can write about ravens, wild lions, and boars, but at his lowest level he never descends beneath this: "...as enraged as a wild boar when he meets many swine in the beechwood." (LB,

vv. 21261-212164.) Unfortunately, there is no more of it. But we have enough to conclude that when he did turn his eyes to his natural environment, Laȝamon was gifted with the ability to report vigorously and accurately what he had seen. It is this skill, as much as anything else, which sets him apart from his predecessors who still had to operate, as it were, inside the folds of the Anglo-Norman cloak introduced by the Conqueror. It is this skill, furthermore, which marks the return to English literature.

17. The Marvelous

The most striking feature about the marvelous in the pseudo-histories is its relatively frequent but arbitrary occurrence. We are still far from the world of romance: the pseudo-historians, although they have constructed a monstrous fiction, wrote as if they were recording facts, as if they were compiling a sober chronicle. There is little fantasy in their narratives. What does occur is either simple exaggeration - the number of men, for example, said to have been killed by Arthur - or vestiges of folk-lore. Only one incident is recorded which appears to be pure fantasy.

Arthur's deeds at Mt. Badon, already eulogized and exaggerated by Nennius, are described soberly by Geoffrey. Near the close of the second day of fighting, "...Arthur, provoked [sic] to see the little advantage he had yet gained, and that victory still continued in suspense, drew out his Caliburn, and, calling upon the name of the Blessed Virgin, rushed forward with great fury into the thickest of the enemies' ranks; of whom (such was the merit of his prayers) not one escaped alive that felt the fury of his sword; neither did he give over the fury of the assault, until he had with his Caliburn alone killed four hundred and seventy men." (BHG, p. 182.)[120]

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[120] WB, p. 493; BYB, p. 160; LB, vv. 21257-21260. Laȝamon provides no number; he writes, instead, "all that he struck at was destroyed at once."

Three natural marvels are described. All are lakes. Loch Lomond [stagnum lumoni] "...contains sixty islands, and receives sixty rivers into it, which empty themselves into the sea by no more than one mouth. There is also an equal number of rocks in these islands, as also of eagle's nests in those rocks, which eagles flocked together there every year, and, by the loud and general noise which they now made, foreboded some remarkable event that should happen to the kingdom." (BHG, p. 183.)[121] But even Loch Lomond and its "Capitoline-like" eagles pales when compared with other lakes. Howel, viewing Loch Lomond, thought the lake "miraculous". Then Arthur told him

> ...of another pond in the same province, which was yet more wonderful. For not far from [sic] thence was one whose length and breadth were each twenty feet, and depth five feet. But whether its square figure was natural or artificial, the wonder of it was, there were four different sorts of fishes in the four several corners of it, none of which were ever found in any other part of the pond but their own. He told him likewise of another pond in Wales, near the Severn, called by the country people Linligwan, into which when the sea flows, it receives it in the manner of a gulf, but so as to swallow up the tide, and never be filled, or have its banks covered by it. But at the ebbing of the sea, it throws out the waters which it had swallowed, as high as a mountain, and at last dashes and covers the banks with them. In the meantime, if all the people of that country should stand near with their faces towards it, and happened to have their clothes sprinkled with the dashing of the waves, they would hardly, if at all, escape being swallowed up by the pond. But with their backs towards it, they need not fear being dashed, though they stood upon the very banks. (BHG, pp. 184-185.)[122]

It is with Arthur's conquest of the giant on Michael's Mount, however, that we encounter the only pure note of fantasy in these narratives. When Arthur landed at Barfleur, on his way to engage Lucius, he was informed that a giant "...of monstrous size was come from the shores of Spain, and had forcibly taken away Helena, the niece of Duke Hoel, from her guard, and fled

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[121] WB, pp. 441-442; BYB, p. 161; LB, vv. 21737-21786.

[122] WB, pp. 443-444; BYB, p. 162; LB, vv. 21989-22048.

with her to the top of that which is now called Michael's Mount, and that the soldiers of the country who pursued him were able to do nothing against him." (BHG, p. 205.) None of the writers describes the size of this giant exactly, but we can infer from a portion of La3amon's account that it was a tremendous monster. He was big enough, we read, to carry on his back

burðene grete.
þat weore twælf swine:
iteied to-sōme.
mid wiðen swiðe gȝte:
y-wriðen al to-gadre.
Adū he warp þe dede swin:
& hī seolf sæt þer bi.
his fur he beten agon:
& muchele treowen læidē on.
þa six swin he to-droh:
...
he droh ut his gleden:
his flæsce he gon breden.
and þa six swin he gon æten alle:
ær he arise of selde.
al biwaled on axen:
(LB, vv. 25970-25989)

a tremendous burden, twelve swine, trussed up with huge twigs twisted together. He threw the dead swine down and sat close by; he mended his fire, laid great trees on it, and tore six of the swine in pieces....then he drew out his embers, roasted the meat, and ate all the six swine before he rose from his seat, completely smeared with ashes.

Arthur decided to chastise this giant. Taking Kay and Bedvere with him, Arthur climbed to the top of Michael's Mount. Kay was able to learn that Howel's niece was already dead, the nurse about to die. Arthur, alone, sought out the giant, and found him just as he finished the meal of swine. The giant at once seized "...his club which two strong men could hardly lift from the ground." (BHG, p. 207.) Arthur wounded the giant in the leg, the giant seized Arthur, but was unable to crush him; at last, Arthur "...struck [his sword] up to the very back through his skull." (BHG, p. 207.) Arthur laughed and ordered Bedvere to strike off the giant's head and have it exposed to public view in the camp. This, Arthur informed his companions, was his second best fight. He "...had found none of so great strength, since he killed the giant Ritho, who had challenged him to fight upon the mountain Aravius. This giant had made himself furs of the beards of kings he had killed, and had sent word to Arthur carefully to fleece his beard and send it to him; and then,

out of respect to his preeminence over other kings, his beard should have the honour of the principal place." (BHG, pp. 207-208.) After killing this giant, Arthur added, he took all the furs as well as the giant's own beard.[123]

Geoffrey has no further marvelous details or episodes. The Welsh Bruts contain one small addition. Guinevere's father, they state, was a giant. Arthur, we read, "...sought as his wife Guinevere the daughter of Ogvran the giant; and her mother was descended from the nobles of Rome." (BYB, p. 163.)[124] Laȝamon adds four details. He declares that Arthur's birth was extraordinary, he tells how and why the Round Table was constructed, he writes a few words concerning the "lies" about Arthur, and he discusses the so-called Hope of Britain.

When Arthur was born, Laȝamon writes,

sone swa he com an eorðe:
aluen hine iuengen.
heo bigolen þat child:
mid galdere swiðe stronge.
he ȝeue him mihte:
to beon bezst alre cnihten.
he ȝeuen him an oðer þing:
þat he scolde beon riche king.
heo ȝiuen hi þat þridde:
þat he scolde longe libben.
heo ȝifen him þat kine-bern:
custen swiðe gode.
þat he wes mete-custi:
of alle quike monnen.
þis þe alue him ȝef:
and al swa þat child ipæh.
(LB, vv. 19252-19269.)

as soon as he came on earth,
elves took him and enchanted the child with the strongest magic.[125] They gave him the strength to be the best of all knights; they provided for something else, that he should be a powerful king; they gave him a third gift, that he should live for a long time. They gave to him, the prince, the very best virtues, so that he was the most generous man alive. All this the elves gave him, and thus the child thrived.

Although it was often held during the late Middle Ages that Arthur's

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[123] Arthur's fight with the giant does not occur in WB; BYB, pp. 177-174; LB, vv. 25651-26146.

[124] WB, p. 445; not in BHG or LB.

[125] Cf. Summary, Ch. III, where a similarity may be noted between Lancelot's Sea Fairy and Arthur's Elves. Laȝamon, however, does not construct the complete enfance of Arthur.

Round Table really did exist - we have the Winchester table, for example, to witness - there can be no doubt that the table which Laȝamon describes is a pure invention of his own imagination. No other table in the world, before or since, is quite like it. Going much beyond Wace's bare original account, Laȝamon states that the table was constructed "in four weeks time" by a Cornish "weorc-mon" to prevent any further violence over the question of precedence at the king's board, and which knight should be served first after the king. This marvelous carpenter told Arthur that he could work wonders with trees, and that he could make for him

a bord swiðe hende.
þat þer maȝen setten to:
sixtene hundred & ma.
al turn abute:
þat nan ne beon wið ute.
wið uten and wið inne:
mo to-ȝæines monne.
whenne þu wult riden:
wið þe þu miht hit leden.
and sette hit whar þu wulle:
after þine iwille.
and ne dert þu nauere adrede:
to þere worlde longen.
æuere æine modi cniht:
at þine borde makie fiht.
for þer scal þe hehȝe:
beon æsne þan loȝe.
(LB, vv. 22912-22928)

an extremely handsome board which would seat sixteen hundred men, and more, so that all are seated around it, none is left out; some on the outside, some on the inside, one next to the other. And when you ride out, you will be able to carry it with you, and set it up wherever, according to your will, you may wish. And you need never fear, to the end of the world, that any ill-tempered knight will ever cause a fight at your board, because there shall the high be even with the low.

The syntax of the fourth through the seventh lines is abscure, but the sense of the passage, surely, is as it has been translated. We may picture the table as doughnut-shaped.[126] Arthur, needless to say, was quite pleased to accept it.

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[126] For another suggestion see Jessie L. Weston's interesting remarks in "A Hitherto Unconsidered Aspect of the Round Table," Melanges...offerts a M. Maurice Wilmotte, II, (Paris, 1910), 883-894, where she concludes that the table might have been a revolving table, not unlike a gigantic "Lazy Susan". Prof. Sherman Kuhn has suggested to the writer that the table might have been round but with a curved, undulating circumference, "weaving in and out between the seats of the knights - as though one were to take a corkscrew and bend it into a circular shape."

This is the table, Laȝamon continues, "...that Britons boast of, and tell many kinds of lies about Arthur the king." (LB, vv. 22954-22956.) All men will exaggerate the deeds of those whom they love; this is the nature of friendship. Also, men will tell lies about their enemies, even though they might have been the very best men who ever lived; this is human nature. Everything that the minstrels say about Arthur is not wholly true, or false, "... but this is the truth concerning Arthur the King:

Nes næuer ar swulc king:
swa duhti þurh alle þing.
for þat soðe stod a þan writen:
hu hit is iwurðen.
ord frō þan ænden:
of Arðure þan kinge.
no mare no lasse:
buten alse his laȝen weoren.
Ah Bruttes hine luuedē swiðe:
& ofte him on liȝeð.
and suggeð seole þinges:
bi Arðure þan kinge.
þat næuere nes iwurðen:
a þissere weorlde-richen.
inoh he mai suggen:
þe soð wule uremmen.
seolcuðe þinges:
bi Arðure kinge.
(LB, vv. 22975-22996)

never before was there such a king, so powerful in all things. For it stands true in the writings, how everything happened, from the beginning to the end, of Arthur the king, no more, no less, than his deeds were. But Britons loved him greatly and often told lies about him, and they tell many things about Arthur the king that never happened in this world. He may say enough, who tells the truth, marvelous things, about Arthur the king.

It is not certain whether Laȝamon would have us believe everything about Arthur that he has told us. But of the end of Arthur there is little doubt: it is a mystery which no one can solve. Laȝamon introduces Merlin into his narrative but once for the express purpose of relating the events which will take place when Arthur passes on. "Yet Merlin told further of an even greater marvel:

þat sculde beon vnimete care:
of þas kinges forð-fare.
And of þas kinges ende:
nulle hit na Brut ileue.
buten hit beon þe leste dæth:
at þe muchele dome.
þenne ure drihte:
demeð alle uolke.
Ælles ne cunne we demē:

that there should be unmeasureable sorrow over this king's departure. And of this king's death, no Briton will believe it, unless it be the final death, at the Last Judgment when Our Lord judges all people. Other than this, we cannot tell

of Arðures deðen.
for he seolf sæide:
to sele his Brutten.
suð inne Cornwale:
þer Walwain wes for-faren.
and him seolf wes for-wuded:
wunder and swiðe.
þat he uaren wolde:
into Aualune.
in to þan æit-londe:
to Argante þere hende.
for heo sculde mid haleweie:
helen his wunden.
and þene he weore al hal:
he wolde sone come ham.
þis ilefde Bruttes:
þet he wule cumen þus.
& lokieð a whenne:
he cume to his londe.
swa he heom bihahte:
ar he heonne wende.
(LB, vv. 23049-23080)

of Arthur's death, for he himself said to his good Britons, in south Cornwall where Gawain was killed and he himself wounded grievously, that he would go into Avalon, into the island, to the fair Argante, for she should heal his wounds with balm. And when he was all whole, he would come home at once. This the Britons believe, that he will come thus, and they always look for the time when he will come to his land, as he promised them before he went hence.

There is no further notice: this concludes the analysis of the Arthurian material found in the pseudo-histories. We have displayed Gawain's character and actions as they were conceived by the pseudo-historians, and we have observed the feudal background against which they portrayed him. Gawain could hardly be called the hero: he has, actually, a minor role. Nevertheless, we have learned quite a bit about him. We have seen that he is a human personage who acts in the world of men, we have seen that he is a representation of the 12th century fighting knight, and we have seen him, at last, in the proper perspective from which he must be observed if we are ever to form an accurate estimate of him as he was portrayed in British literature. This is the mid-point in his British literary development. We saw earlier that the Primitive Gawain, if, indeed, he is knowable, was hardly more than a barbarian echo of a warrior from the dim past. We see the Early Literary Gawain as a real knight. Always he is human. One of the more interesting developments, as we turn to the Late Literary Gawain, will be our observation of his growth, from these rather simple origins, into the sophisticated fashion-plate of the 14th and 15th centuries.

Chapter III

The Late Literary Gawain, ca. 1375 - ca. 1475

The following abbreviations are used throughout: complete references are listed in the Bibliography.[1]

GGK - Sir Gawain and The Green Knight, ed. Gordon & Tolkein.

GCC - Sir Gawayne and The Carle of Carlile, ed. R. W. Ackerman.

AKA - The Avowynge of King Arthur, Sir Gawain, Sir Kaye, and Sir Bawdeyn of Bretan, ed. J. Robson.

AA - The Aunters of King Arthur at the Tarnewathelan, ed. F. J. Amours.

GG - The Knightly Tale of Golagros and Gawain, ed. F. J. Amours.

WG - The Weddynge of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell, ed. Laura Sumner.

TG - The Turk and Gowin, ed. Hales & Furnivall (Percy Folio MS).

1. Gawain's Family Relationship

In the romances Gawain's family relationship is much the same as it was in the pseudo-histories. None of the romances, however, affords a complete biography of Gawain from birth to death, and the number of references to his family are therefore not very great. Nevertheless, some new information is

[1] These abbreviations are adapted from Ackerman and Miss Blout's. Cf. R. W. Ackerman, "An Index of the Arthurian Names in Middle English," Stanford University Publications, Univ. Series, Language and Literature, X (1952), xvii-xvix.

added. In Sir Gawain and The Green Knight we find Gawain seated in the hall

> ... Gwenore bisyde,
> And Agrauayn a la dure mayn on þat oþer syde sittes,
> Bothe þe kynges sister sunes....
> (GGK, vv. 109-111)

> (...next to Guinevere, and, next to her on the other side, sits Agravain of the Strong Hand; both sons of the king's sister....)

Not Modred, but Agravain, is said to be Gawain's brother. His uncle and mother remain the same, Arthur and his sister. Gawain, in this same romance, speaks directly to Arthur as his uncle: "Bot for as much as 3e ar myn em I am only to prayse." - I am worthy only because you are my uncle. (GGK, v. 336.)[2] We read, too, of a new aunt, two wives, and a son. The Green Knight told Gawain that the very old lady in the castle was really Morgan le Fay, and that, moreover, "Ho is euen þyn aunt, Arþure3 half-suster." - She is your aunt, Arthur's half-sister. (GGK, v. 2464.) Morgan le Fay is said to be the daughter of the same Duchess of Tintagel, "...upon whom dear Uther afterwards begot Arthur." (GGK, v. 2466.) The wives appear in different romances. The Carl of Carlile, convinced of Gawain's courtesy and good nature, invited Arthur to join Gawain and himself at dinner. Gawain and the Carl's daughter sit next to each other. The next morning, "...when hit was day lyght,/ Sir G[awain] weddyid þat lady bryght,/ That semely was to se." (GCC, vv. 634-636.) Dame Ragnell, as soon as she was married to Gawain, became a beautiful lady, much loved by her husband. Here we read that Gawain "...gat on her Gyngolyn,/ That was a good knyght of strengthe and kynn,/ And of the Table Round." (WG, vv. 799-801.)

There is nothing further. Gawain still remains the favorite nephew of Arthur, but he has acquired, in various adventures, two different wives, a

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[2] Other notices of this uncle-nephew relationship are: GGK, vv. 371, 543; GCC, vv. 583-584; TG, vv. 151-153.

son, and an aunt. Two of these people, Morgan le Fay and Dame Ragnell, are extraordinary people. One is a powerful magician, the other had been enchanted. Neither of them, however, in any way affects Gawain's essential humanity. Of his mother and father, nothing is said in these romances.

2. Gawain's Fighting Skill

The knight is still a fighter. Although warfare in the romances receives much less attention than it did in the pseudo-histories, simply because so many other activities fill their pages, when the occasion demended it, Gawain is still a strong, skilled fighter. With one sword stroke he can cut off the Carl's head,[3] and, of course, he has no trouble decapitating the Green Knight. (GGK, vv. 417-429.) Tilting against Sir Menealfe, to fulfill the terms of Kay's ransom, Gawain, lance extended,

> ...stroke him sadde and sore,
> Squithe squonut he thore,
> The blonk him a-boute bore,
> Wiste he neuyr quedur!
> (AKA, st. xxv.)
>
> struck him so viciously that
> Menealfe swooned at once;
> his horse carried him about
> he knew not whither.

And, returning from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with Arthur, Gawain engaged and defeated a splendid fighter, Golagros.[4] It is his fight with Galeron, however, which displays the fighter at his best.

Arthur and the important members of his court journeyed to Carlisle to hunt close by "The Terne Wahethelyne". Delayed by unusual weather, they arrive at Randolf Hall just before dark and proceed to dinner. They are interrupted by the sudden appearance of an armed knight who, in reply to

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[3] Sir Gawain And The Carl Of Carlisle: In Two Versions, ed. A. Kurvinen (Helsinki, 1951), v. 397. This episode is not contained in the Ackerman edition.

[4] GG, vv. 908-1126.

Arthur's questions, states that he is Sir Galeron and that he seeks combat with a knight of Arthur's court because the king had awarded his lands unjustly to Gawain. The knight and his lady are advised to spend the night with the court, that in the morning he will be matched. After the knight and his lady are cared for, Gawain accepts the challenge. In the morning the lists are prepared, the knights are armed, the spectators are seated: the judicial combat begins.

> The beryns broches þaire blonks to þair sydes bledis.
> Aythire freke appone felde has fichede thaire spere;
> Schaftis of schene wode þay scheuerede in schides;
> So jolyly those gentille mene justede one were!
> Schaftis thay scheuer in schydes fulle schene;
> Sythene, with brandes fulle bryghte,
> Riche mayles thay righte;
> Thus enconterde the knyght
> With Gawayne one grene.
> (AA, vv. 499-507.)

> (The knights spurred their mounts until their sides bled. Both knights on the field readied their lances; shafts of gleaming wood they splintered to bits; so beautifully those two gentle-born ones jousted in combat! They splintered shafts into glittering splinters; then, with gleaming swords, they rip splendid coats-of-mail; thus the knight encountered Gawain on the field.)

> Gawayne was graythely graythed one grene,
> With griffones of golde, Engrelede fulle gaye;
> Trayfolde with trayfoles, and trewluffes by-twene.
> One a stirtande stede he strykes one straye:
> þat oþer in his turnaying he talkes in tene:
> "Whi drawes þou þe on dreghe, and makes siche deray?"
> He swapped him yne at þe swyre, with a swerde kene,
> That greued sir Gawayne to his dep day.
> The dyntes of þat doughety were doutwis by-dene;
> Fifte mayles and mo,
> The swerde swapt in two
> The canel bone also,
> And clef his shelde shene.[5]

> (Gawain was prepared on the field properly, showing gold Griffons, indented brightly, ornamented with

[5] vv. 512-520 have been supplied from Douce MS.

trefoils intertwined with wrought true-love knots. On a spirited mount he prances about. The other, annoyed while tourneying, speaks: "Why do you draw away and make this delay?" He struck Gawain on the neck, a sharp sword blow that bothered Gawain until the day he died. The blows of that bold knight were fearful, one after the other. The sword cut more than fifty links of mail in pieces, cracked Gawain's sparkling shield, and nicked his collar-bone too.)

Gawain struck back quickly, however, and "...cut through his brightly burnished coat-of-mail." (AA, v. 529.) Galeron was now wounded too, and his lady, in the stands,

> ... scrilles and scrykes,
> Quenne the balefulle birde blenked on his blode.
> Other lordus and lades thayre laykes welle likes,
> Thonked God of his grace, for Gawan the gode.
> (AA, vv. 536-539.)

> (...screamed and shrieked when she, unhappy lady, saw his blood. But the other lords and ladies were pleased by this turn in the fight, and thanked God's grace for the good knight Gawain.)

Galeron recovered and struck back viciously, inflicting heavy damage, for, altering the course of the combat from that moment on, he "smote of Gauan stede heued, in styd quere he stode." - struck off the head of Gawain's horse, right there on the spot. (AA, v. 541.) Gawain screamed at the loss of Gringolet, the horse that had served him well so many times. Infuriated, he charged Galeron on foot, but was unable to catch him, for Galeron, amazed at the sight of the enraged Gawain running at him, "...brochet his blonk opon the bente bare." - spurred his horse around [and around] the open field. (AA, v. 563.)

> "Thus may we dryue furthe the day," quod Gauan, "to dirke ny3te:
> The sun is past the merke of mydday and more."
> In myddes the lyist on the lawunde this lordes doun ly3te;
> A-gayn the byrne with his brand, he busked him 3are:
> Thus to batelle thay boune with brandis so bry3te;
> Schene schildus thay shrede,
> Welle ryche mayles wexun rede,
> And mony du3ty hadum drede,

So fursely thai foȝtun!
(AA, vv. 564-572.)

("We can carry on like this all day and into the dark night," said Gawain; "the sun is already past the mark of midday." The knight jumped to the ground in the middle of the lists; he rushed against his foe with his sword. Thus they rush to battle with their bright swords; glittering shields they shred, their splendid coats-of-mail turn red. And many a hardy on-looker was fearful, so fiercely they fought.)

Gawain struck Galeron so severely that the knight was forced to draw away from him and stand still. But he recovered and struck back. And so they fought on, trading blow for blow. They

... on helmis...heuen,
Betun downe berels, in bordurs so bryȝte,
That with stones iraille were strencult and strauen,
Frettut with fyne gold, that failis in the fiȝte.
With schildus on ther schildurs schomely thay shewen,
Stythe stopuls of stele thay stricken doune streȝte.
Thenne byernes bannes the tyme the bargan was bruen,
That euyr these duȝti with dyntus so dulfuly were diȝte.
(AA, vv. 586-593.)

(hacked at helms, and beat down berylls, glittering on the rims of breastplates, which had stones set (?) unevenly in them, and which, also, were adorned with pure gold - all this was beaten off in the fight. They carried shields high on their shoulders; they struck off strong steel staples. Than all the knights rued the time that bargain was made, that ever these two bold knights were so dolefully set to blows!)

All the spectators fear for Gawain: Guinevere weeps. But the break arrives. Gawain struck suddenly: "Alle the cost of the knyȝte he keruys doune clene." - he slashed down the whole side of that knight's body. (AA, v. 603.) The sword ripped through the coat-of-mail, and Galeron went "grovelling to the ground." Ordinarily this would be the end. Galeron's lady would faint, and Gawain would walk from the lists the victor. Galeron, however, is not quite finished. Although wounded severely, he managed to rise and strike, with his left hand, a wild blow. Recovering,

He etyllede withe a slynge hafe slayn hym with sleghte;
The swerd sleppis on slant, and one the mayle slydys,

And Sir Gawayne be þe colere clekis the knyghte.
(AA, vv. 616-618.)

(he aimed a stroke which would have killed him with cunning; the sword slipped aslant, and slid off the mail, and Sir Gawain seized the knight by the collar.)

At this Galeron's lady did cry out. She begged Guinevere to intercede for her knight who, wounded so grievously, was in such a poor condition. Guinevere, moved either by the lady's entreaty or by her own concern for Gawain,[6] appealed to Arthur, asking him to stop the fight. (AA, vv. 625-637.) But before Arthur could accept or decline Guinevere's plea, the knights in the lists decided the issue. Galeron spoke to Gawain:

"I wende no wy in this werlde were haluendelle so wyght;
Here I make the relese in my rentis, by þe rode!
And by-fore thiese ryalle resynge the my righte;
And sythene I make the manredene, with a mylde mode,
Als to mane in this medilerthe makles of myghte."
He talkes to-warde þe knyghte, one heghte þere he stode,
He bedde þat burely his brande, þat burneschede was bryghte.
"Of renttis and reches I make the relese."
Downe knelis þat knyghte,
And carpis thies wordes on highte;
(AA, vv. 639-648.)

("I did not think any man in this world were half so powerful; By the Holy Cross! Here I give up my lands to you. And before these assembled nobles I resign my rights to you; and, too, I do homage to you, in good conscience, as to the most powerful man on earth, without peer." Thus he spoke up to the knight there where he stood over him. He offered the bold knight his brightly burnished sword. The knight kneeled and repeated these words aloud: "I turn over to you my lands and my wealth.")

Arthur stood up at once and ordered the peace.

Mounted, armed with lance and sword, and protected by sturdier armor than his 12th century counterpart, the 14th century knight was still a formidable fighter. By the end of this century the long bow and the infantryman will have vanquished the heavy armored knight on the battlefields of Europe,

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[6] See "Late Literary Gawain", Section 11, where the Guinevere - Gawain relationship is discussed.

but in single combat in the lists the mounted knight presented a fearsome threat, to be overcome only by another armored cavalryman of superior courage, strength, and skill. Two such knights could have been brought together face to face in the lists in the 14th century for a variety of reasons, but none would have seemed more familiar to a 14th century audience than the type of conflict which brought Galeron and Gawain to the lists on the field outside the walls of Randolph Hall.

Contention over rightful possession of certain lands was a common enough occurrence. Although such a dispute might have been argued in a civil law suit, two knights might well have chosen, with their lords' permission, to settle their differences once and for all in single combat, the victor to attain possession.[7] Obviously more in keeping with the tone of courtly romance, the judicial combat a outrance, and not a civil law suit, was selected by the author of Aunters as the proper vehicle to show Gawain in a familiar role, the skilled fighter hacking out an impressive victory. Judicial combats, of course, were conducted in England during the 14th century, and Gawain's action in this fight can be matched by the vigorous

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[7] Eustace the Monk, one hundred years earlier, refused to accept the judgment of a trial by combat. When his champion was defeated, Eustace declared to his lord, the count of Boulogne, that he was not satisfied and that he would continue to seek revenge for his father's death. Legally, however, Eustace could not appeal the verdict of the combat. Cf. Wistasse le Moine, ed. W. Foerster und J. Trost (Halle, 1891).

experience of real men.[8] So too can the other details of this combat be matched with actual events. The armor worn, the duration of the fight, the presence and behaviour of the spectators, the decision of the king - all this would have appeared as quite correct and familiar to a late 14th century audience. The fury of the fight, including the fatal stroke given to Gawain's horse, might perhaps have surprised 14th century spectators, had they seen this combat.

The protective body armor of the period was fashioned to withstand repeated blows. Plate armor was not yet used widely, but a steel covering for the head and neck, heavy chain mail under a surcoat, and metal protection for joints and limbs, such as Gawain and Galeron are said to be wearing, was

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[8] Clephan cites two interesting accounts from Holinshed's Chronicles of judicial combats. One, occurring on June 7, 1380 (Chronicles, II, 727), and the other, between the Dukes of Hereford and Norfolk, in 1398 (Chronicles, II, 844). Trial by Combat, including references to actual combats, is covered thoroughly by R. C. Clephan in his The Tournament (London, 1919), pp. 146-168, and App. E, F, G, and H. An interesting account of the Judicial Duel, written about 1360, is to be found in the De Bello, De Represaliis et De Duella of Giovanni da Legnano, a professor of Civil and Canon Law at Bologna. Although a duel fought for the "compurgation of an accusation" was forbidden by "... divine law, the law of nations, canon law, and civil law, as a general rule," the Lombard law, nonetheless, recognized twenty cases in which the duel of compurgation was permitted. Either the tenth case - "...if it is said that a man has wrongfully possessed a movable or immovable thing for thirty years" - or the seventeenth case - "...a duel for investiture, as when one man says that he was invested first, and was ejected from possession, and another says the same" - might have been applied to Galeron's contention. Cf. De Bello, ed. T. E. Holland and tr. J. L. Brierly, The Carnegie Institution of Washington (Oxford Univ. Press, 1917), pp. 341-345. In France the Judicial Combat was becoming unpopular in the late 14th century, but the custom persisted for many years elsewhere. See R. L. Kilgour, The Decline of Chivalry, pp. 36-37, 146.

the customary late 14th century protective armor of the knight.[9] The author, actually, does not mention helmets or metal head coverings, but only because he is so preoccupied with the number of links of chain mail cut off by the sword blows. Add to this defense a shield, and we have equipment designed to protect a knight in hard combat for a considerable length of time. Galeron and Gawain fight from shortly after daylight to early in the afternoon. As a matter of fact, the combat could continue all day, until one knight emerged victorious; the only apparent limits to the duration of such a combat were the strength and defensive skill of the combatants.[10]

The judicial combat, not much unlike a tournament, was also a great show. The spectators, naturally, would favor the knight whose cause appeared to be just, or who represented their party. Arthur, the queen, and the entire court are anxious that Gawain should not be hurt. This is normal human behaviour. All accounts of actual trials by combat include notices of the spectators.[11] Although the conduct of the ladies observing this combat is conventional, it is certainly human and possible. And the king, of course,

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[9] See the excellent illustrations in J. S. Gardner, Armour in England (London, 1897), pp. 27-44. The splendid effigy of the Black Prince, Canterbury Cathedral, which is shown in a picture on p. 37, is quite likely a more ornate armor than that worn by ordinary knights, and its details are not the same as those of the armor which Gawain and Galeron wear. The armor worn by Gawain and Galeron is "studded" or splinted-armor. Cf. R. W. Ackerman, "Armor and Weapons in the Middle English Romances," Research Studies of the State College of Washington, VII (June, 1939), 106.

[10] Clephan, op. cit., p. 150, states that the combat "...was to continue from sunrise to sunset."

[11] In addition to all the accounts which Clephan cites, we have Froissart's reports of trials by combat, especially the famous combat between James le Gris and Sir John de Carouges. Froissart states that the King of France, as well as the Constable and the Dukes of Berry, Burgundy, and Bourbon, attended this duel, and that "...in order to have a good view of the combat, the lords had scaffolds erected for them on one side. The crowd of people was truly wonderful." (Chronicles, tr. T. Johnes, Rev. Ed. (New York, 1901), I, 379.)

here acts as Marshall: it was within his power to stop the fight at any moment he chose.[12]

The poet, of course, exaggerates somewhat. Gawain, well matched in this fight, is shown to advantage. His strength and perseverance are outstanding. In all probability such a combat would have been concluded more quickly. But Galeron is a strong fighter; Gawain must extend himself. Other details of the combat, the number of links of mail cut away, the terrifying spectacle of Gawain, on foot, chasing Galeron, the wounds taken and given, all this must have delighted the 14th century audience. And it takes but a small amount of imagination on our part to find it utterly real, quite believable. One detail appears to be somewhat barbaric for the late 14th century. The spectators and the Marshall would probably have been infuriated if, in an actual trial by combat, one knight had slain the other's horse. In this romance Gawain, as we have seen, is more than infuriated. Although there is no rule or law governing the conduct of trials by combat which actually prohibit such an act, it appears to have been considered unfair and "unchivalrous" deliberately to have killed the horse of one's opponent. Galeron's act would have earned him open scorn.

In broad outline the scene is quite realistic. Its function is to display Gawain's fighting skill, and it certainly does that. Yet we cannot fail to observe that, in contrast with the 12th century conception of Gawain the fighter, the hero almost loses this fight. In the pseudo-histories Gawain was never equalled on the field of combat. The author of the Aunters not

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[12] See, in Clephan, p. 156, Holinshed's account of the combat between the Dukes of Hereford and Norfolk in 1398. Many of the details are similar to those in the combat between Gawain and Galeron. Thus, the king is present and acts as Marshall, the peers of the realm are among the spectators, and the armor and armorial decorations are every bit as splendid as those shown by Galeron and Gawain.

only shows a more human knight, one who can almost be beaten, but also adds stature to his hero by showing that he conquered another knight of great valor. The scene is the master stroke of the romance.

It might be well to pause a moment here to deal with one objection which may be raised. Some readers would see in this account of the combat a possible reference to Gawain's reputed mythical strength, said in certain tales to wax in the forenoon and wane in the afternoon. Galeron, it will be recalled, gallops his horse about the field after he has killed Gawain's horse. Gawain pursues on foot, and, never able to overtake him, cries out, somewhat in desperation, "We can carry on like this all day and into the dark night. The sun is already past the mark of midday." (AA, vv. 564-565.) Galeron jumped to the ground at once, the fight continued. If Gawain's strength did indeed decrease after the sun had passed "the mark of midday", and he surely was aware of this peculiarity, he would be anxious to meet his opponent, on even terms, prior to noon, knowing that his chances of victory would be slim after noon. So some readers would interpret these lines. But this seems a most unlikely interpretation. To begin with, the poet does not appear to have been aware of this phenomenon. The fury of the fight increases after Galeron dismounts, and Gawain fights more vigorously than he did before. Second, Gawain's remark is surely motivated by his anger: he is enraged because Gringolet was killed, and he wishes to avenge that death at once. Infuriated because he cannot catch Galeron, he says no more than "Come to me like a man and fight." Eagerly, and with increasing strength and vigor, he carried the fight to Galeron. Third, Gawain was wounded in the morning, when presumably he was strongest, and escaped harm in the afternoon, when presumably he was weakest. Finally, had it been common knowledge that Gawain weakened as the sun passed on into the west, it is not likely that Galeron should choose to wait until Gawain was weakening before he avoided him.

Nowhere else in all the native British literature is Gawain's strength likened to the rise and fall of the sun; in view of the more likely interpretation of these verses, a perfectly normal and structurally reasonable explanation, there is little justification for regarding them as an isolated survival of "solar" characteristics. As in all his other fights, Gawain's chief advantage in this one is his superior skill and tremendous, perfectly natural strength.

Although the 14th century knight engaged in a much greater variety of activities than did the 12th century knight, he was still a fighter. Sir Gawain in the romances is every bit the fighter that the Gawain of the pseudo-histories was. When called upon to fight he is still the champion.

3. Gawain's Courage

Not only as a fighter does Gawain show his courage. His willingness to face danger, to encounter the unknown, or to defend those placed in his trust, these too show that he is a courageous man. The true knight must never reveal a faint heart. Gawain, as we see him now in the romances, is always bold-hearted, sometimes rash and reckless. As far as courage is concerned, he is the knight without peer.

His first words in Sir Gawain and The Green Knight are unforgettable. The monstrous Green Knight has made his challenge: not a man stirs or answers it. "'What, is þis Arþure3 hous?'" (GGK, v. 309.) Bursting into laughter the Green Knight taunts the court: you, the boldest knights, tremble with fear at the words of a single man who has not struck one blow! Stung sharply, Arthur spoke up. He would himself grant the strange boon; he grasped the tremendous axe, the Green Knight awaited the blow. At that moment,

> Gawan, þat sate bi þe quene,
> To þe kyng he can enclyne,
> 'I beseche now with sa3e3 sene
> þis melly mot be myne.'

'Wolde ȝe, worþilych lorde,' quoþ Wawan to þe kyng,
"Bid me boȝe fro þis benche, and stonde by yow þere,
þat I wythoute vylanye myȝt voyde þis table,
And þat my legge lady lyked not ille,
I wolde com to your counseyl bifore your cort rych.
For me þink hit not semly, as hit is soþ knowen,
þer such an askyng is heuened so hyȝe in your sale,
þaȝ ȝe ȝourself be talenttyf to take hit to yourseluen,
Whil mony so bolde you aboute vpon bench sytten,
þat vnder heuen, I hope, non hyȝerer of wylle,
Ne better bodyes on bent þer baret is rered.
I am þe wakkest, I wot, and of wyt feblest,
And lest lur of my lyf, quo laytes þe soþe,
Bot for as much as ȝe ar myn em I am only to prayse,
No bounte bot your blod I in my bode knowe;
And syþen þis note is so nys, þat noȝt hit yow falles.
And I haue frayned hit at yow fyrst, foldeȝ hit to me,
And if I carp not comlyly, let all þis cort rych
bout blame.'
(GGK, vv. 339-361.)

(Gawain, who sat by the queen, turned to the king;
"I ask plainly now that this contest be mine. Were
you, worthy lord," Gawain said to the king, "to bid
me rise from this table, and stand beside you there -
that I might leave the table without rudeness, and
that my liege lady were not displeased - I would come
to your aid before your noble court. For, if the
truth be known, it seems to me very unseemly that
such a request is made so much of in your hall - even
though you yourself desire to meet this challenge -
while so many bold men sit about you on the bench.
There are none under Heaven, I say, of greater spirit,
nor none who are better men on the field where a fight
is started. I am, I know, the weakest, and the feeblest
of wit, and, were the truth known, the least would be
lost with my life. I am worthy only because you are
my uncle: I know no nobility in my body other than your
blood. And since this adventure is so fruitless it
does not belong to you. I have asked it of you first;
give it to me. Let this noble court [decide] freely
if I have not spoken fairly.")

A gentle speech, not, perhaps, without a little pride in seizing the dramatic moment to speak, but words, nonetheless, which are charged with the courage of the man who knows quite well what he is about to undertake. It is this same courage, quiet but persistent, which sustains Gawain, on his way to the Green Chapel, far from his friends "...wonde þer bot lyte/ þat oþer God oþer gome wyth goud hert louied." - where few men lived who loved

either God or men of good heart. (GGK, vv. 701-702.)[13]

It is a dominant characteristic. In all seven romances Gawain's courage is seldom in doubt. In company with Arthur, Kay, and Baudwin to kill an especially ferocious boar, Gawain is the first to comply with Arthur's request that they all join him in taking vows. Arthur vows to kill the boar:

> Then vnsquarut Gauan,
> And sayd godely a-gayn
> "I a-vowe to Tarnewathelan,
> To wake hit alle ny3te."
> (AKA, st. ix.)

> Then Gawain answered him at once, "I vow to stay awake all night beside Tarnewathelan."

He promised, that is, to ride to the mysterious lake to await anything that might happen there that night. This is perhaps the boldest courage: to encounter the unknown, to agree to meet no one knows what.

We see this same trait again. Gawain speaks directly to the point. Having accepted the Turk's offer to accompany him, Gawain adds,

> ... "my truth I plight,
> I dare goe with thee full right,
> & neure from thee flye;
> I will neure flee from noe adventure,
> Iusting nor noe other turnament,
> whilest I may liue on lee."
> (TG, vv. 42-47.)

Further, while accompanying the queen, Gawain literally "jumps to his feet" to defend her. A terrifying sight startled the pair - the wretched ghost of Guinevere's mother. Startled, Gawain nevertheless shook his sword at the apparition and, invoking "Christ's name", he called out, "Thou spirette, saye me the sothe, whedir þat þou salle,/ And whi þat þou walkes thies woddis withe-inne?" - "You, spirit, tell me truly: what do you intend to do, and why do you come this way, in this wood?" (AA, vv. 135-136.)

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[13] See, too, GGK, vv. 714-735, 2090-2160, 2315-2330. His courage, actually, may be said to subsume all his actions in this romance. The examples cited, however, are the most revealing.

Conventional courage is ascribed to him on two occasions. Twice Gawain asks to be allowed to accept another knight's challenge, and twice his request is granted.[14] Both times Gawain wins his fight. Non-conventional courage quite similar to that required of him when he bowed his neck to the Green Knight is demonstrated by his plea to the Turk to give him his blow so that he might depart in peace. The episode is left unfinished, but the Turk and Gawain had agreed to exchange blows. Gawain, having accompanied the Turk and now anxious to return, asks him,

> but one thing I wold thee pray,
> giue me my buffett & let me goe my way,
> I wold not longer be hereatt.
> (TG, vv. 110-112.)

At no time is Gawain weak or faint-hearted. He knows fear and doubt, as we shall see, but he always carries out his mission, he is never defeated because he lacked courage. If we assume that one of the knight's primary virtues is courage, as we really must - for his other virtues would surely fail him if he lacked courage - then we may conclude that, in these romances, Gawain is well fitted for knighthood. His courage is unquestionable. Behind every action, subsuming every motive, we can put our finger on courage. It, perhaps more than anything else, is the one quality that raises him above his fellows: it is the primary virtue which never failed him. In this regard he may be more than real. Certainly not all knights were courageous, and many who were brave undoubtedly experienced moments of weakness. Gawain is the ideal. Yet we have not noticed one trace of supernatural assistance in these romances.[15] His courage is therefore exaggerated or idealized, but it

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[14] AA, vv. 464-472 - Galeron's challenge; GG, vv. 788-791 - Golagros' challenge.

[15] The protection afforded him by the lady's lace is considered later; cf. "The Marvelous". Here it is sufficient to suggest that Gawain did not know surely that the lace would help him. His act of acceptance was, therefore, at once a gamble and a lapse into human weakness.

is also human.

4. Gawain's Common Sense

The last thing we should expect of the knight in the romances is that he should, in a very ordinary situation, offer a practical suggestion to solve a commonplace problem, that he should possess, in other words, common sense. We are so accustomed to the headstrong action, or the rash, impetuous decision, that a sensible, simple declaration surprises us almost as much as a revolving castle may be presumed to have startled the romance hero. It is a distinct mark of his humanness, therefore, that Gawain displays, occasionally, a level head. Unfortunately, it is not a predominant trait; in truth, there are but two incidents which reflect Gawain's common sense.

While chasing a deer, Kay, Bishop Bawdwin, and Gawain become separated from the rest of Arthur's hunting party. As the daylight faded a mist came up. Kay and Bawdwin suggested that the three of them ride on and seek shelter for the night, even though they were lost in the middle of a wood. Gawain, however, counseled otherwise.

> "All' þis labur ys in wayne,
> For certen trowe hit me.
> The dere ys passyde out of our' sy3t,
> We mete no mor' wtt hym to-ny3t.
> Hende, herkon' to me:
>
> "I reede þt we of our hors a-ly3t,
> And byde in þis woode all' ny3t,
> And loge vndur þis tree."
> (GCC, vv. 128-135.)

Such would have been the sensible course of action. Gawain, however, was over-ruled, and the three rode on, eventually to find shelter and dangerous adventure at the lodging of the Carl of Carlile.

When Arthur, at his wits' end, turns to Gawain for advice as to how he might find a suitable answer for Sir Gromer's question concerning the secret

desire of all women, Gawain suggests at once a practical solution.

> "Ye, Sir, make good chere;
> Lett make your hors redy,
> To ryde into straunge contrey;
> And euere wher-as ye mete owther man or woman in faye
> Ask of theym whate thay therto saye.
> And I shalle also ryde a-noder waye,
> And enquere of euery man and woman, and gett whatt I may,
> Of euery man and womans answere,
> And in a boke I shalle theym wryte."
> (WG, 182-190.)

Naturally the plan does not work: Arthur must find the answer through other means. Common sense eventually becomes the death blow of mediaeval romance, yet this very sparse incidence evinces further Gawain's essential humanness.

5. Gawain's Generosity

The good knight was generous. When he was in a position to do so, he was expected to make liberal grants to his vassals. In these romances we find Gawain only once so established that he was able to dispense largesse. Galeron, a knight of the north, came to Arthur's court near Carlisle to challenge a knight of the Round Table, hoping to win back, in judicial combat, lands of his which Arthur, so he claimed, had awarded to Gawain. Gawain engaged and defeated Galeron: Galeron relinquished all his rights to the disputed land to Gawain and swore to become his man. Some time later, when both knights had recovered from their wounds, Arthur bestowed on Gawain even larger territories. Gawain then stepped close to Galeron and announced,

> "Now, and here I gyffe hym...with owttyne any gyle,
> Alle þe landes and þe lythes, fra Lowyke to Layre,
> Commoke and Carrike, Conyghame and Kylle,
> Als the cheualrous knyghte hase chalandchede als ayere;
> The lebynge, the lowpynge, þe leveastre Ile,
> Bathe frythes and forestes, frely and faire.
> Vnder your lordeship to lenge here a while,
> And to þe rounde table to make repaire,

I shall refeff him in felde, in forestes so faire."[16]
(AA, vv. 677-685.)

("Here and now I give him without deceit all the lands and the leases from Locher Water (?) to Ayr (?), Cumnock and Carrick, Cunningham and Kyle, the very ones the chivalrous knight challenged earlier; [v. 681 is corrupt; Lomond, Lennox, Lothian Hills;][17] freely and fairly, both the enclosed woods and the open forests. So that he might remain here under your lordship for a time, to stay with the Round Table, I shall enfeoff him with lands and good forests.")

This is not simply conscientious retribution. Gawain defeated Galeron in judicial combat, and Galeron swore to become Gawain's man. The two knights therefore stand in the relationship of lord and vassal, and it is Gawain's privilege to treat Galeron as he pleases. It is sheer generosity on Gawain's part, then, to restore the lands he had won legally.[18]

Generosity, of course, had been a desirable social virtue long before the 14th century. The Germanic war chief rewarded the members of his comitatus with liberal gifts, as did the Anglo-Saxon chiefs and rulers: "Heorot... beahsele beorhta" is almost as familiar to the readers of Beowulf as are the deeds of its hero. Throughout the feudal age liberality was esteemed. Certain groups of society, indeed, were dependent upon the generosity of the lords and barons. Minstrels, in fact all entertainers, for example, would have starved but for gifts of food and money. By the last quarter of the 14th century, when this description of Gawain's generosity was written, any English lord or knight would have been aware of his duty, an obligation of his social role, to award gifts generously whenever he was in a position to do so.

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[16] vv. 683-685 have been supplied from Douce MS.

[17] So F. J. Amours conjectures; note to v. 681.

[18] See, too, AA, v. 697.

Chaucer speaks for the age when he writes of the knight that "...he loued chiualrie,/ Trouthe and honour, fredom (liberality, generosity) and curteisie."[19]

Gawain's generous behaviour may seem excessive. Perhaps no knight ever did return a prize he had won, even if he were, as in Gawain's case, the feudal lord of the man to whom he gave the prize. Gawain retained control of the lands, if we think of the gift as nothing more than the award of a fief. It seems clear from the context of the romance, however, that Gawain, naturally pleased by the impressive grants he had just received from Arthur, was moved, by his generous nature, to award the prize lands to Galeron. Obviously the act becomes Gawain, and the poet has succeeded in one of his purposes, to show Gawain in the best possible light as an outstanding knight, in this instance generous in the highest tradition. For to be a superior knight, Gawain, among other things, must practice largesse. The Black Prince, for example, admired by his contemporaries and judged by all to have been an outstanding knight, was known far and wide for his generosity: indeed, his lavish gifts must have embarrassed his father.[20] We must admit that Gawain's generosity is doubtless a purposive exaggeration. Yet it is a becoming human trait, and a quality his age admired.

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[19] It is at this time, however, that Eustache Deschamps complained that lords and knights frequently gave no thought to generosity, whereas the knights of old were "...always accompanied by generosity." (Cited in Kilgour, p. 93.) Complaints of this kind, of course, always grow from a wish to see the old order preserved. See, for example, the early 13th century Roman des eles, where Raoul de Houdenc pictures Chivalry as a dove, one of whose wings is largece, the other courtoisie. And in the late 14th century, the popularity of Chaucer's translation of the Roman de la Rose, where one of the five "good" arrows of Love's bachelor is fraunchise (generosity), suggests that generosity was still a much admired virtue.

[20] Painter, French Chivalry, p. 43, prints a partial list of the Prince's gifts taken from the Register of Edward the Black Prince to demonstrate "... how largesse was practiced by one whom his contemporaries admired as a paragon of chivalry."

6. Gawain's Chivalric Behaviour

As distinct from courteous conduct or "correct" knightly deportment in all situations, chivalric behaviour is here restricted to those infrequent occurrences of extreme fair play which, since they deviate from the expected pattern of conduct, not only call attention to themselves but also bestow especial credit upon the individual responsible for the action. Twice, in these romances, Gawain deports himself in such a manner.

In a very curious situation, we discover Gawain engaging with a strange knight to ransom Kay, whom the knight has defeated. This knight, Sir Menealfe, is accompanied by a lady he had captured. Gawain, on the first course, knocks Menealfe from his horse. Kay, of course, was highly pleased, but Gawain assists Menealfe back into his saddle. Menealfe then speaks up:

"Delyueryt hase thou Kay,
With thi laa hase made him leyce,
Butte him is lothe to be in pece,
And thou was aye curtase,
And prins of iche play;

"Wold thou here a stowunde bide,
A-nother course wold I ride,
This that houes by my side,
In wedde I wold hur lay!"
(AKA, st. xxvi.)

"You have delivered Kay. Your lance has set him free, unless he is loathe to go in peace; you were courteous throughout and always had the upper hand. If you would tarry here a moment, I should like to ride another course against you, to make the prize the lady here at my side."

Gawain did not hesitate to offer the defeated knight a second chance.

Then vnsquarut Gauan
Sayd godely a-gayn,
"I am wundur fayn,
For hur for to fi3te."
(AKA, st. xxvii.)

And again he unhorses his opponent. There is no third chance. Menealfe and the lady are sent to Guinevere; when Gawain returns to court he speaks in Menealfe's favor to the queen. "He is, madam,

... as God me spede,
... du3ti of dede,
A blithe burne on a stede
And graythe in his gere."
(AKA, st. xxxvi.)

...so God help me,...a bold opponent: a good man on his horse, ready with his weapons."

The champion having spoken for him, Menealfe is made a member of the Round Table.

It is Gawain's behaviour on the field in combat with Golagros, however, which sets him apart from all other knights as the epitome of chivalry. Fighting in full view of spectators standing on the wall of Golagros' castle, Gawain, after a vicious struggle, knocked Golagros to the ground. Leaning over his fallen opponent, Gawain demended that he yield. But Golagros refused, saying he preferred death to disgrace. Gawain pleaded; he promised Golagros that Arthur would treat him nobly, even restore him to power. Golagros replied,

"Than war I woundir vnwis,
To purchese proffit for pris,
Quhare schame ay euer lyis
All my leuing."
(GG, vv. 1073-1076.)

"Then I should be most unwise
to purchase profit at the expense
of honor, for shame would be
mine all the rest of my life."

No man, he continued, should shrink from honor, or love life so dearly that he give up his honor. Gawain, noticeably perplexed, asked him, "How may I succour the sound, semely in sale,/ Before this pepill in plane, and pair nought thy pris?" - "How may I spare your life, so that those in your hall might think it proper, in view of the people here?" (GG, vv. 1092-1093.) "That you may do," Golagros answered,

"Wold thou denye the in deid to do my deuis;
Lat it worth at my wil the wourschip to wale,
As I had wonnyn the of were, wourth and wis;
Syn cary to the castel, quhare I have maist cure.
Thus may thou saif me fra syte;
As I am cristynit perfite,
I sall the kyndness quyte,
And sauf thyn honoure."
(GG, vv. 1094-1102.)

("if you will give yourself over and do what I have planned. Let it be my choice to choose the honor; allow me to have the honor, as if I had overcome you honorably in battle; you then follow me to the castle where I have the greatest concern. Thus you may save me from disgrace. As I am truly a Christian, I shall repay your kindness and save your honor.")

"So may I prosper," replied the knight, "that is a hard thing to do. An especially dangerous action it is,

> partenyng grete plight,
> To soner in thi gentrice, but signet or sele,
> And I before saw the neuer, sikerly, with sight;
> To leif in thi laute, and thou war vnlele,
> Then had I cassin in cair mony kene knight.
> Bot I know thou art kene, and alse cruell;
> Or thow be fulyeit fey. freke, in the fight,
> I do me in thi gentrice, be Drightin sa deir!"
> (GG, vv. 1103-1111.)

> (pregnant with trouble, to trust so in your courtesy, without any signet or seal from you, especially because, in truth, I never in my life saw you before this. Should I put trust in your good faith, and you were disloyal, then I should cast many a brave knight into sorrow. But I know you are brave and valiant: otherwise, knight, you should have been killed, utterly destroyed in battle. By the dear Lord, I submit to your honor!")

And, allowing Golagros to rise, Gawain pretended to fight with him. He lowered his arms quickly, turned, and followed Golagros off the field, as if he had been defeated. Because Golagros had shown himself to be a brave knight, Gawain assumed he was also trustworthy. What greater act of chivalry could occur?

To assist one's opponent to regain his mount so that he might have a second chance; to pretend that one's opponent has won the fight so that he might not lose honor in sight of his people; these are surely acts of great chivalry. They represent, as surely, excessive chivalric behaviour. We will search the records in vain for any chivalrous deed which will match Gawain's behaviour. The poets, once again, have exaggerated on purpose. We are able now to state certainly that a pattern exists: all the knightly qualities which Gawain is said to possess are, in him, exaggerated. His fighting skill and generosity exceeded normal expectations; we see now that his chivalric behaviour exceeds the behaviour of any man; we shall see shortly that his courtesy cannot have been matched in real life. Froissart, the 14th century's great

apologist for chivalry, has no tale to tell of chivalrous conduct which can match these two deeds of Gawain's. The two incidents which Froissart does relate which come to mind as the most outstanding chivalrous deeds - the blind King of Bohemia, led sufficiently far forward at the Battle of Crecy so that he might strike one blow with his sword, and the Black Prince's service to his royal prisoner, King John, at Poitiers[21] - are examples of true chivalric behaviour. Yet Gawain's deeds outshine even these. The ideal shines forth vigorously in Gawain's behaviour: no man quite equalled his achievement.

7. Gawain's Loyalty

One quality very much admired throughout the entire feudal period was loyalty. The very structure of society, as we have observed, depended in large measure for its survival upon close ties between individuals. It was essential that the lord be able to count upon the support of his barons, that the barons, in turn, could feel secure that their lord would not desert them. The knight, therefore, who was dependable, who was trustworthy and obedient, who had a strong sense of duty, who was, in a word, loyal, was certain to find high regard from his peers and superiors. In these romances Gawain's loyalty is unquestionable. And because loyalty was undoubtedly a more characteristic mark of a man during the 14th and 15th centuries than chivalric behaviour was, we find much more attention given to it.

The outstanding illustration, of course, is to be found in Sir Gawain and The Green Knight. Certainly the "love-test" at the Green Knight's castle is more a test of loyalty than it is a trial of Gawain's virtue.[22] The source

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[21] Froissart, Chronicles, op. cit., I, 41, 63.

[22] See the remarks of Kittredge, Study of Gawain and the Green Knight, p. 76 and J. R. Hulbert, "Syr Gawayn and the Grene Kny3t," MP, XIII (April, 1916), 118, who both contend that loyalty, not chastity [Hulbert], is the virtue tested.

of Gawain's inhibition is not his superior moral character or virtuous nature. His goodness, to be sure, is illuminated, but what really prevents him from taking action, or advantage of the situation, is his over-powering sense of duty and obligation. It would not be right to wrong his host. He is much more concerned about his relationship to his host - and temporary lord - than he is about the condition of his soul, and any explanation of the "love-test", taken within or without the confines of the Courtly Love tradition, which overlooks this relationship is, we feel sure, bound to fall wide of the mark.[23]

Gawain reveals his trustworthiness when he explains to the lord of the castle why he was, in the first place, journeying at that difficult time of the year. He must find the Green Chapel, he states, and he has but a short time left.

> "Forþi, iwysse, bi 3owre wylle, wende me bihoues,
> Naf I now to busy bot bare þre daye3,
> And me als fayn to falle feye as fayly of myyn ernde."
> (GGK, vv. 1065-1067.)
>
> ("Therefore, indeed, by your good will, it behooves
> me to move on. I have now at my disposal barely
> three days, and I should just as soon fall dead as
> fail in my errand.")

Only after the host assures Gawain that he will set him on the way to the Green Chapel in time does Gawain consent to remain as his guest. The man who prefers death to failure will do anything to keep his word. Once this man accepts the hospitality which the lord of the castle offers he will endure anything to avoid wronging his host.

In all but two of these romances[24] Gawain's loyalty is illustrated. The

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[23] All of "Fytte" three, less the hunting scenes, is applicable.

[24] GG and TG. And in these two romances Gawain's loyalty is implicit, although it is not made a major concern.

"spear-test" and "love-test" which the Carl imposes upon Gawain are tests, actually, of his obedience and trustworthiness.[25] Gawain's willingness to fight with Menealfe in order to ransom Kay is, in a very real sense, an indication of his loyalty to a brother knight. Kay had told Menealfe that Gawain would be quite willing to meet him, and Gawain's prompt acceptance of the offer to fight is a vindication of Kay's trust in him.[26] It is shown, further, that Gawain is the queen's knight. It is he who is entrusted with the mission of accompanying and guarding the queen. Obviously, only the most loyal knight would be given this assignment. And, unlike Lancelot who later replaces Gawain as the queen's escort, Gawain, in these romances, never violates Arthur's trust. When the court journeyed to Carlisle, "Syr Gawane, gayeste one grene,/ Dame Gayenoure he ledis." (AA, vv. 12-13.) He and Guinevere move away from the main party to rest in the shade while Arthur and the others hunt. The queen was taking her rest, when, suddenly,

> The daye woxe als dirke
> Als it were mydnyghte myrke,
> Ther of sir Gawane was irke,
> And lyghte one his fote.
> (AA, vv. 75-78.)
>
> The day grew dark as if it were midnight; Gawain, disturbed by that, leaped to his feet.

He is, thus, alert, responsible, and aware of his obligation to protect the queen: at this obvious sign of danger he jumps to action.[27] The most impressive example of unqualified loyalty to his lord, however, occurs in The Weddynge of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell.

Arthur, to save his life, actually, has had to promise a most loathsome hag that Gawain will marry her. Heavy-hearted, the king returned to court.

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[25] GCC, vv. 379-402, 439-504.

[26] AKA, sts. xxii, xxiv.

[27] The entire episode: AA, vv. 75-104.

The first person he meets is Gawain. Arthur, forced to tell him the sad news at once, breaks out into a cry of anguish - I would rather die than see you agree to the frightful bargain I have made. Gawain, naturally puzzled, interrupts the king: what is this all about, what can I do to help you? "Gawain," the king begins,

> ...I mett today withe the fowlyst lady,
> That euere I saw sertenly;
> She sayd to me my lyfe she wold saue,
> Butt fyrst she wold the to husbond haue,
> Wherefor I am wo begon,
> Thus in my hartt I make my mone."
> "Ys this alle?" Then sayd Gawen,
> "I shalle wed her and wed her agayn,
> Thowghe she were a fend,
> Thowghe she were as foulle as Belsabub,
> Her shalle I wed, by the rood;
> Or elles were nott I your frende.
> For ye ar my kyng withe honour,
> And haue worshypt me in many a stowre
> Therefor shalle I not lett;
> To saue your lyfe, lorde, itt were my parte,
> Or were I false and a great coward.
> And my worshypp is the bett."
> (WG, vv. 336-353.)

Exaggerated, of course, yet the ideal is shown. The knight cannot fail his lord in time of need; that would be "false". "For your love I will spare nothing," Gawain adds. (WG, v. 371.) "God have mercy on you, Gawain," Arthur replied;

> "Of all knyghtes thou berest the flowre,
> That euere yett I fond;
> My worshyppe and my lyf thou savyst for-euere
> Therefore my loue shalle nott from the dyssevyr,
> As I am kyng in lond."
> (WG, vv. 372-377.)

The reward for loyalty is great: the king will never withhold his love and favor. Obviously a most important virtue in feudal society, loyalty cemented the entire social structure together.[28] Of all the knights, none

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[28] There can be no question that loyalty was a very real quality admired by feudal society. Without it the society would collapse. Little could be gained by citing sources to "prove" this.

is more loyal than Gawain,[29] and none, therefore, is more highly regarded in these romances.

8. Gawain's Courtesy

Something more than polite behaviour, courtesy in speech and deportment appears, in feudal society, to have been regarded as the outward expression of the refined, disciplined man. Speech and manners, to be sure, are the manifestations of the "court mode" which are most easily noticed, but courtesy implies, almost, a way of life. The courteous knight, just because his speech and manners are so disciplined, is also the knight who is least likely, even under stress, to lose his temper or resort to barbarian tactics. As a social virtue, it was undoubledly bound closely to the other feudal virtues, such as generosity, chivalric behaviour, and loyalty, which we have observed already. It is difficult to say which might be said to subsume all the others: we know only that where we find one we are most likely to find the others. But there can be little doubt that, in man's progress from savage to gentleman, the knight who felt a sense of urgency in the codes of chivalry and courtesy stands well beyond the mid-point. And of all the means of expression by which such a knight shows himself to us, his courtesy is usually the one most frequently displayed: it is, as well, often the most impressive.

Courtesy, to come closer to it, is a measure of man's deportment. It so tempers one's behaviour that one avoids the extremes of scandalous action and overweening flattery. The courteous knight does not think evil of his foes and he acts vigorously to defend his friends against accusation; the courteous knight is as interested in bettering the lot of his vanquished enemy as he is

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[29] See, too, in WG, vv. 144-151, 214-224, 381-389, 397-401, 303-305, 533-538.

in seeking recognition for his own victory; the courteous knight knows what action is appropriate in every situation, and he conducts himself accordingly. When one has acquired courtesy one can move in any social circle, being equally at ease in the king's castle and the woodsman's hut. Courtesy dictates that one never takes advantage of any situation to better oneself unfairly. In speech, the courteous knight is gentle; in action, the courteous knight is just; in matters of dress and manners, the courteous knight is correct. Courtesy is, in truth, a "state of mind" which is manifested by good manners, gentle speech, and right conduct. Spenser, who picked out what was best in feudal society, has described it as well as anyone can: "For a man by nothing is so well bewrayed,/ As by his manners;" (F. Q., VI. iii. I.) and, hitting the mark squarely, he states that the true nature of courtesy is "...to beare themselues aright/ To all of each degree, as doth behoue." (F. Q., VI. ii. I.) Had he known as much as Chaucer, he would have modeled Sir Calidore after Gawain.

The instances of Gawain's courtesy are legion. The greatest difference between the Gawain of this late period and the earlier Gawain is his courteous behaviour. So complete is the change that Gawain is remembered by most readers, if for nothing else, as the courteous knight: courtesy, indeed, becomes, until the time of Malory, synonymous with Gawain. In each of these seven romances Gawain's courtesy is a natural characteristic. To put it more emphatically, he is never discourteous. Other knights may at times be rude, or too bold, or boastful, but Gawain is always considerate, kind, mindful of others' feelings. He is, as Chaucer perceived, the very model of courtesy.[30]

The outstanding episode which comes to mind, as illustrating these general

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[30] Sq. T. vv. 89-97. The Poetical Works, ed. F. N. Robinson (Cambridge, Mass., 1933).

remarks, occurs in Sir Gawain and The Green Knight, where, after Gawain has disclosed his name to his host, the lord's retainers, visibly impressed, speak to each other about their guest. "Now," one of them says,

> ...schal we semlych se sle3te3 of þewe3
> And þe teccheles termes of talkyng noble,
> Wich spede is in speche vnspurd may we lerne,
> Syn we haf fonged þat fyne fader of nurture.
> God hat3 geuen vus his grace godly for sope,
> þat such a gest as Gawen graunte3 vus to haue,
> When burne3 blype of his burpe schal sitte
> and synge.
> In menyng of manere3
> þis burne now schal vus bryng,
> I hope þat may hym here
> Schal lerne of luf-talkyng.'
> (GGK, vv. 916-927.)
>
> (...we shall see courteous turns of behaviour, and the blameless forms of noble talking; we may learn without asking what profit there is in speech since we have taken as our guest that fine father of nurture. God has indeed shown us His Grace, who grants us to have such a guest as Gawain, on account of whose birth men sit and sing for joy. This hero will now teach us what distinguished manners are; I think that those who hear him will learn how to make love!")

In practice, his actions justify this high praise. Examples of his courtesy are so numerous that it were otiose to attempt to reproduce them all. One or two will suffice.

Quite frequently in these romances we find Kay's rude behaviour contrasted with Gawain's courtesy. We have seen already, for example, that Gawain ransomed Kay, and that it was Gawain, not Kay, who was courteous to Sir Menealfe. In another situation Arthur's army, in need of food and other stores, halts in view of a large castle. Kay is dispatched to the lord of the castle to request supplies for the army. A poorer choice could not have been made. He behaved rudely in the castle and was obliged to retire without having accomplished his mission. He advised Arthur to forget this castle, to move on, that no provisions could be obtained there.

Than spak schir Gawane the gay, gratious and gude:
"Schir, ye knaw that schir Kay is crabbit of kynde;
I rede ye mak furth ane man, mekar of mude,
That will with fairnes fraist frendschip to fynd.
Your folk ar febill and faynt for falt of thair fude;
Sum better boid-word to abide, vndir wod lynd."
"Schir Gawyne, graith ye that gait, for the gude rude!
Is nane sa bowsum ane berne, brith for to bynd."
(GG, vv. 118-125.)

(Then the blythe, gracious and good Sir Gawain spoke:
"Sire, you know that Sir Kay is, by nature, cranky.
I suggest you dispatch another man, more mild in
disposition, who will seek honestly to obtain friend-
ship. Your army, dispersed under the trees, feeble
and weak for want of food, await a better message."
"Sir Gawain, by the Holy Cross, you prepare to under-
take that mission. There is no other man so courteous
as you, to smooth over anger.")

Gawain, needless to say, is successful. Yet we may observe his great skill and courteous deportment as he accomplishes a truly awkward mission. The lord of the castle has been insulted by Kay: how will he receive another messenger from Arthur? Let us listen. "Our sovereign lord, Arthur," Gawain begins,

Gretis the with honour,
Has maid ws thre as mediatour,
His message to schaw.

"He is the riallest roy, reuerend and rike,
Of all the rentairs to ryme or rekin on raw.
Thare is no leid on life of lordschip hym like,
Na nane sa doughty of deid, induring his daw.
Mony burgh, mony bour, mony big bike,
Mony kynrik to his clame, cumly to knawe,
Maneris full menskfull, with mony deip dike,
Selcouth war the sevint part to say at saw.
Thare anerdis to our nobill, to note quhen hym nedis,
Tuelf crovnit kingis in feir,
With all thair strang poweir,
And mony wight weryer,
Worthy in wedis."
(GG, vv. 399-414.)

(greets you honorably; he has commissioned us three
as mediators, to disclose his message to you. He is
the most royal king, revered and powerful, of all the
landholders that one could possibly enumerate. There
is no man alive among rulers like him, nor any as
brave in deeds during his day. There belong to him

many towers and towns, many pleasant kingdoms, many noble manors surrounded by deep moats: it would be a marvel to tell you the seventh part of all he owns. In addition to all this, to call on when he needs to, there are our nobles, twelve crowned kings in all, with all their great power, besides many bold knights skilled in arms.")

The lord of the castle could hardly fail to be impressed. Gawain speaks the language he understands: to the feudal lord another lord who is more powerful than himself is not to be trifled with. Thus far Gawain speaks with the force of Arthur behind him. Had he said no more we should be disappointed, for these words are not the words of courtesy. But this is the prelude. He continues:

"It has bene tould hym with tong, trow ye full traist,
Your dedis, your dignite and your doughtynes,
Brevit throu bounte for ane of the best
That now is namyt neir of all nobilnes,
Sa wyde quhare wourscip walkis be west.
Our seymly souerane hym self, forsuth, will noght cese,
Quhill he haue frely fangit your frendschip to fest;
Gif payment or praier mught mak that purchese,
For na largese my lord noght wil he neuer let,
Na for na riches to rigne.
I mak you na lesing,
It war his maist yarnyng
Your grant for to get."
(GG, vv. 415-427.)

("He has been told, you must know, of your deeds and dignity, and of your bravery. It is mentioned near and far, so that you are renowned, because of your valor, as one of the best [knights], in every form of nobility; so your worth spreads abroad. Our noble sovereign will not cease until he has managed to secure your friendship; if payment or entreaty can make that purchase, my lord will not be hindered by any prize of gifts or riches. I speak the truth - it is his greatest desire to obtain the grant of your friendship.")

There is more to this than simple flattery. Gawain was sent to smoothe over a dispute. He did so by adding to his outline of Arthur's force some indication that the lord of the castle himself is a man of worth and reputation. The method reminds us of flattery, but Gawain probably spoke sincerely,

and, for all we know, the truth. The speech shows tact as well as a perfect understanding of the feudal relationship. Its blend of the harsh and the soft tone illustrates the refined and disciplined nature which we have adduced as the mark of courtesy. It is a careful address, one which, if by some magical agency they might have been favored to hear it, would have expertly taught the young men in the Green Knight's castle what they were most anxious to learn.

We shall take our last estimate from the testimony of his wife. Gawain, to save Arthur, as we have seen, married a loathsome hag. To his complete bewilderment, and great joy, on their wedding night she was transformed into the most lovely lady alive. As a last test she asked Gawain to make what must have been an impossible choice: would he prefer her lovely in the night or during the day, since she could retain her loveliness but half of each day. Gawain, wisely as well as courteously, allowed her to make the choice. That was the decisive step: since she had won the sovereignty of the best knight, since, that is, she had gained domestic supremacy, she was released from a spell, she would be lovely always.[31] On the next day everything is explained to the surprised and now delighted court.

> Ther she told the kyng fayre and welle,
> Howe Gawen gaue her the souereynte euery delle,
> And whate choyse she gaue to hym;
> "God thank hym of his curtesye,
> He savid me from chaunce and vilony,
> That was fulle foulle and grym.
> Therefore, curteys knyghte and hend Gawen,
> Shalle I neuere wrathe the serteyn,
> That promyse nowe here I make, -
> Whilles that I lyve I shal be obayysaunt,
> To God aboue I shalle itt warraunt,

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[31] It was a popular story, told also, of course, by Chaucer (The Wife of Bath's Tale) and Gower (the tale of Florent, Conf. Am. i, vv. 1407 ff.). Cf. G. H. Maynadier, The Wife of Bath's Tale, Its Sources and Analogues (London, 1901).

And neuere withe you to debate."
"Garamercy, lady," then sayd Gawen,
"With you I hold me fulle welle content,
And that I trust to fynde."
He sayd, "my loue shalle she haue,
Thereafter nede she neuere more craue,
For she hathe bene to me so kynde."
(WG, vv. 775-792.)

His courtesy in this situation was rewarded handsomely. Of course it is an extreme presentation. It does, nevertheless, illustrate the especial quality of Gawain's character. Time and time again in these romances his courtesy is emphasized:[32] as we have observed before, he is never discourteous. He deserves his reputation. From these romances one concludes first of all that Gawain is "golden-tongued", that he is the outstanding literary example of the courteous knight. In him the ideal is shown at its highest pitch. In older and wiser words, we may say of the Late Literary Gawain, always, that although

... he were worthy, he was wys,
And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.
He neuere yet no vileynye ne sayde
In al his lyf vnto no maner wight.

Courtesy, this last of the knightly social virtues taken from Gawain's conduct, is the most difficult to isolate and describe. As we have observed, it is related closely to chivalric behaviour and the other feudal virtues already described. Many writers make little distinction between courtesy and the other virtues.[33] An attempt has been made here - in all probability not

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[32] His courtesy is the subject of the following passages: GGK, vv. 366-371, 811-812, 838-839, 1037-1041, 1960-1965, 3407-3413; GCC, vv. 163-174, 184-186, 271-273, 328-330, 337-354, 380-381; AKA, sts. xxv, xxvi, xxvii, xxix, xxx; AA, vv. 439-442; GG, vv. 118-125, 135-143, 389-427, 1201-1219; WG, vv. 775-792; TG, vv. 19-33, 320-331.

[33] e. g., A. T. P. Byles, "Mediaeval Courtesy Books and the Prose Romances of Chivalry" in Chivalry, ed. E. Prestage (London, 1928), pp. 183-206, especially p. 204, where Gawain's courtesy appears to be regarded as the motivation for his generosity to Galeron; Painter, French Chivalry, pp. 32-34, where courtesy would seem to account for chivalric behaviour.

successful - to separate courtesy from generosity, chivalric behaviour, and loyalty. Perhaps it is an idle gesture to attempt to demonstrate that courtesy is the real foundation for all the other virtues. Yet Gawain's behaviour in these romances would seem to suggest that courtesy was in fact a discipline, and that because he was courteous - actually, it is more impressive to put it in negative terms: because he was never discourteous to any man - he was able to be loyal, chivalrous, and generous. All this makes something more of courtesy than a polite social grace which pleases a certain kind of society. It suggests that courtesy, in the minds of the authors of these romances who fashioned a social ideal from Gawain's behaviour, was indeed a way of life, and that it is primarily courtesy which marks out a good man from a mean one. Unfortunately, such an hypothesis might lead one to conclude that manners and morals are equivalents, or, worse, that manners ultimately might supersede morals. But there is little of the Lord Chesterfield in Gawain, and the ideal knight was not permitted to jump to this conclusion. Good manners, properly understood, are more likely to lead to honest moral conduct than not, and in the 14th century, all who saw in Gawain the ideal, and who might wish to pattern their life after his, would have practiced courtesy with something like religious zeal.[34]

9. Gawain's Personal Appearance

Only once do we find attention given to Gawain's appearance. It is a short passage of only eleven verses. It is noteworthy for what it fails to tell us. It is a characteristic of mediaeval romance that, in general, detailed,

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[34] These remarks about courtesy constitute an hypothesis which cannot be proved. Painter, op. cit., pp. 44-64 has developed a somewhat similar theory, although he probably would not make courtesy a discipline, or a "way of life".

minute descriptions of what a person looks like do not occur. We, for example, should very much like to know the color of Gawain's eyes, of his hair; how tall he was; what was his frame and build; and the other minutiae which would provide a picture of him. We never feel that we really know a person, or character, until we know all the little things about him that make him an individual. Such information, unfortunately, is always withheld. What little personal description there is is always conventional or general. This notice of Gawain's appearance, for example, is directed towards the general impression he created in the minds of others.

Admitted to the Green Knight's castle, Gawain is provided with a change of clothes. The transformation thus effected is most impressive:

> Sone as he on hent, and happed þerinne,
> þat sete on hym semly wyth saylande skyrteȝ,
> þe ver by his uisage verayly hit semed
> Welneȝ to vche haþel, alle on hwes,
> Lowande and lufly alle his lymmeȝ vnder,
> þat a comloker knyȝt neuer kryst made
> hem þoȝt.
> Whepen in worlde he were,
> Hit semed as he moȝt
> Be prynce withouten pere
> In felde þer felle men foȝt.
> (GGK, vv. 864-874.)

> (As soon as he took one [bleaunt] and was wrapped in it, one that fit him well with flowing skirts, truly it seemed to every man that he was like the springtime in appearance, his limbs beneath the cloak all glowing, and delightful all in colors. It seemed to them that Christ never made a more handsome knight. Wherever in the world he might be it seemed that he ought to be a prince without peer in any field where brave men fight.)

Under his bleaunt Gawain wore tight-fitting varicolored hose. Thus, in his wardrobe, Gawain so strikes the men about him. He is handsome, but we still do not know what he looks like. From our modern point of view this is a defect in the romance: from the point of view of the mediaeval audience one knight probably looked pretty much like any other knight. At any rate,

we have to move ahead considerably in the world of literature before we find that what a character looked like is regarded as interesting narrative material.

10. Gawain's Human Behaviour

It appeared desirable to establish a separate category where there might be gathered together all the passages which illustrate especially Gawain's human reactions and behaviour. Nothing has been set down thus far about the Late Literary Gawain which could be described as superhuman or supernatural, it is true, but here are collected those episodes and character revelations which appear to indicate that these writers, in these instances, particularly regarded Gawain as a real man subject to human emotions and limitations. In other words, here we shall enumerate the more than casual references to Gawain's basic humanity which do not fall easily under any of the heretofore established categories, and which, at the same time, emphasize the principal contention of this study, namely, that the writers of these romances regarded Gawain as a man.

Sometimes there is nothing more than a few lines to show that he is curious, as, in a most peculiar situation, he inquires of the ghost of Guinevere's mother after the fate of knights who wrest lands and riches from other men by the force of their arms.[35] Or we encounter a line or two which reveal that he is afraid, that he is subject to that human emotion. The Turk, for example, leads Gawain into a mysterious country, and the knight is afraid.[36] It may be a short passage, on the other hand, which appears to have been intended to illustrate a knightly virtue, but which, actually, shows us Gawain's

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[35] AA, vv. 261-308.

[36] TG, vv. 68-70, 213-214.

humanity as well. Take the scene at the Carl's stable. Of the three guests, only Gawain displays concern for the colt: he brings it inside, wipes it dry. The Carl compliments him for his courtesy,[37] but he might have acknowledged as well Gawain's care for the animal, the natural concern of the human knight whose very life, often, depended upon the condition of his mount. By and large, however, it is in the superior romance, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, that we find the most obvious, and, at the same time, the most frequent indications of Gawain's humanity. In no small measure, as we shall see, it is our ever-present awareness that Gawain is but a splendid representative of the human race which accounts for its superiority.

Very early in the romance we find our first indication of Gawain's humanity. After the Green Knight has learned Gawain's name, he informs Gawain that, as a part of the bargain they have agreed to, he must search by himself for the Green Chapel, wherever in the world he might think it is located. The conventional hero surely would have boasted, "Yes, certainly, I shall find you; let us get on with our game." But Gawain shows us a real human concern. "Where shall I find you," he asked,

> ... 'where is þy place?
> I wot neuer where þou wonyes, bi hym þat me wro3t,
> Ne I know not þe, kny3t, þy cort ne þi name.
> Bot teche me truly þerto, and telle me howe þou hattes,
> And I schal ware alle my wyt to wynne me þeder,
> And þat I swere þe for sope, and by my seker traweþ.'
> (GGK, vv. 398-403.)
>
> ("where is your place? By Him that made me, I do not know at all where you live. No, I do not know you, knight, your court, not even your name. If you will tell me truly the way there, and what you are called, I shall use all my wits to find my way there: that I swear to you truly!")

They are significant words. They inform us at once that the hero, splendid as he may appear, is an honest man, sincerely engaged in a strange adventure,

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[37] GCC, vv. 331-354.

completely aware of his own human capabilities, and, understandably, aware of his limitations. They prepare us for what otherwise would be an incongruous act, Gawain's eventual acceptance of the lady's green lace. Equally significant, moreover, is his reply to the knights whose long faces and sober words betray their concern as Gawain prepares, a year later, to leave on his journey. His companions are especially bitter that the king should have allowed a Christmas game to get so out of hand that the best knight of all should now be forced to set out on a mission which is bound to lead to his destruction. But Gawain

> ... mad ay god chere,
> And sayde, 'Quat schuld I wonde?
> Of destines derf and dere
> What may mon do bot fonde?'
> (GGK, vv. 562-565.)
>
> (remained calm, and said, "What
> ought I to shirk? Against a
> strange and terrible destiny
> what can a man do but try?")

These are perhaps the most stirring words in the entire romance; certainly they form the remarks of an honorable man who easily will win our sympathy.

There are many more passages which illustrate Gawain's humanity, but none are more intense than the two we have just considered. One instance is certainly more popular: Gawain's acceptance of the lady's lace. Although it must be allowed that it is a brief show of weakness, it is, nevertheless, a clear indication of human behaviour.[38] Only a human being would succumb to what may be called a "last straw" opportunity. Revealing, too, are his actions on the eve of his departure from the Green Knight's castle (GGK, vv. 1979-1986; and, especially, vv. 2006-2010), his idealized, yet human, remarks to the Green Knight after he has been told the truth (GGK, vv. 2369-2388), and his behaviour upon his return to Arthur's court (GGK, vv. 2498-2512). There can be no doubt

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[38] Cf. n. 15, *supra*.

about Gawain's humanity in this romance. From beginning to end he is regarded by his unknown author as a human being.[39] Not once do we find a trace of the superhuman or the supernatural in him. He is not an average man, to be sure, but we do not expect him to be. The poet is extolling, not the average, but the chief glory of his age. Insofar as 14th-15th century writers have left a record of the attitude of their age, Gawain, in this romance, represents the peak of human capacity for good, the very summit of human behaviour. The creation of this view of Gawain is a tribute to the age, actually, and worth a moment's reflection.

When we consider Cuchulainn, Beowulf, or Roland; or, to turn in another direction, Achilles or Aeneas; or, to move forward again, a Sgt. York or Wyat Earp, does the 14th-15th century ideal suffer by comparison? How do we rate Gawain? Certainly he invokes a more sympathetic response than the part man - part God heroes simply because he is a man: surely he equals or excells the other men. We may consider 14th-15th century England a strange, completely remote world, but when we consider that one of its chief literary heroes is a representation of a real man who, in his actions and demeanor, shows us a fair view of our own human potential for wise and good behaviour, his age, surely, is united to ours by a common bond of humanity. Among the many charms to be found in literature certainly this is one of the most appealing.

It is not in this one romance alone, however, that we find Gawain portrayed as a real man. His humanity is common to all seven romances. Not once do we discover any superhuman or supernatural characteristics ascribed to him, nor can we uncover any trace of earlier non-human abilities said to be inev-

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[39] Gawain's humanity is the subject especially of these passages in GGK: vv. 394-403, 463-466, 536-549, 556-565, 1855-1867, 1885-1892, 1979-1986, 2006-2010, 2037-2042, 2126-2139, 2258-2283, 2315-2330, 2369-2388, 2429-2438, 2498-2512.

itably a part of his nature. The reader will search in vain, in these seven romances, for any reference to increasing and waning strength as the sun advances to and passes beyond its zenith, to a sword of light, or to Gringolet, Gawain's horse, as anything but an ordinary mount for his rider. The Late Literary Gawain, as these British writers viewed him, is always a man, never a god. It is not amiss to emphasize this point further. Those who look for traces of the "solar-hero complex" in these romances, or those who believe that they exist, will be hard put to adduce supporting evidence.[40]

11. Gawain's Reputation

Nothing so establishes the reputation of a character, we suppose, as the fact that familiar epithets, applicable to him, are used conventionally by a group of writers to describe him. As we think of the Iliad, for example, we are soon aware that the important characters, those who have earned a reputation, are frequently identified by a personal, short epithet. Thus we are quickly made familiar with "Gray-eyed Athene", or "Fleet-footed Achilles". Only those characters considered to be of great stature are so honored. In these seven romances we discover that Gawain is frequently identified by a short epithet. The convention is not quite identical with the epic epithet, for several short descriptive phrases are used rather indiscriminately, and often we feel that they occur only to satisfy the demands of rime or other metrical exigencies. Nevertheless, these epithets are never applied to

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[40] If Gawain himself is human, nevertheless, one suggestion runs, it is more than coincidence that he was selected as the hero of romances which contain so great an amount of the supernatural, especially as the hero to encounter the Green Knight. It is a specious argument. Here it is enough to say that association with the supernatural is not self-contaminating, is hardly sufficient to destroy Gawain's humanity.

inferior characters, and even if they have assumed commonplace proportions, they always indicate stature. Only a man who has earned a reputation is identified, in these romances, by a short epithet.

Gawain's short epithets, moreover, are invariably complimentary. The most frequent is "Gawayn þe gode". Among others are "Gawane the Gay", "Gawan þe hende", the "luflych lede", "þe bolde mon". Sometimes an entire line is given over to the epithet: "schir Gawane the gay, gratious and gude," (GG, v. 118) or "schir Gawyne the gay, gude and gracious." (GG, v. 389) Occurring only once is the broad statement, "that worthy kny3t of bryttayne." (GCC, v. 404) Quite obviously these epithets are intended to distinguish the man as one of stature, as one who has earned the respect of his companions.[41]

As significant as they are, however, it is not the epithets alone which establish Gawain's reputation. The esteem in which he is held, the general regard that others have for him, also fix his reputation firmly. We have observed his actions, we have analyzed his character, we have judged his worth: we have concluded that Gawain has few peers. It is interesting, as well as revealing, to consider now what his companions thought of him.

In each romance friend and foe alike regard Gawain as the best of all the knights. The King of Man expressed what may be taken as the general opinion. Having captured Gawain, the king boasts that he has already killed many brave and worthy knights.

> "I haue slaine them thorrow my mastery,
> & now, Gawaine, I will slay thee,
> & then I haue slaine all the flower;
> (TG, vv. 226-228.)

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[41] In all, fifty-two instances have been noted: GGK, vv. 109, 405, 666, 674, 1110, 1179, 1213, 1263, 1469, 1750, 1813, 1926, 1961, 2043, 2118, 2149, 2214, 2364, 2491; GCC, vv. 127, 401, 404; AA, vv. 12, 68, 153, 157, 313, 439, 494, 539, 598, 601, 638, 697; GG, vv. 118, 135, 146, 337, 389, 788, 903, 959, 1025, 1124, 1142, 1196, 1198, 1248, 1267, 1319, 1330, 1353; WG, v. 502.

The "Flower of Knighthood" is Gawain. That is the common opinion. It is expressed even more vigorously by Arthur himself. When it appears that Gawain has been defeated and taken prisoner by Golagros, Arthur exclaims:

> "The flour of knighthede is caught throu his cruelte!
> Now is the Round Tabill rebutit richest of rent,
> Quhen wourschipfull Wawane, the wit of our were,
> Is led to ane presoune;
> Now failyeis gude fortoune!"
> (GG, vv. 1135-1139.)

> ("Through the other's fierce action the Flower of Knighthood is taken prisoner! Now is the Round Table, that best group of knights, repulsed, when most deserving Gawain, the chief of our force, is led to a prison. Now good Fortune fails us!")

And even the Green Knight acknowledges the common opinion when, learning the name of his opponent, he exclaims, "By Gog! Sir Gawan, my lykes/ þat I schal fange at þy fust þat I haf frayst here." ("By Gog! Sir Gawain, it pleases me that I shall receive from your fist what I have asked for here." - GGK, vv. 390-391.) The Flower of Knighthood, a worthy opponent: that is Gawain's reputation.

There are many other passages which might be cited, but they offer nothing beyond this.[42] Gawain is well regarded by all, and almost all the others express concern about him. One relationship might be commented upon. It is sometimes suggested that Gawain, not Lancelot, was Guinevere's original lover. The writers of these romances know nothing of this. Gawain and the queen are linked on several occasions, to be sure. We have seen already that it was Gawain who attended the queen and protected her while the court journeyed to Carlisle,[43] and that Guinevere expressed deep concern when it appeared that

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[42] Gawain's reputation and the concern of others for him are illustrated in the following passages: GGK, vv. 386-391, 631-665, 672-686, 908-927, 1031-1036, 1981-1982, 1987-1988, 2091-2125, 2140-2151, 2362-2368; GCC, vv. 1-9, 13-15, 46-48; AKA, sts. v, xxxiv; AA, v. 615; GG, vv. 804-811, 1135-1139; WG, vv. 137-140, 142, 279-286, 539-547, 566-568, 685-687, 700-702; TG, vv. 224-231.

[43] Cf. "Late Literary Gawain", Section 3, Gawain's Courage, <u>supra</u>.

Gawain might be injured seriously by Galeron in their judicial combat.[44] We note, too, that at the great Christmas feast Gawain and his brother are seated, on either side, next to the queen. (GGK, vv. 109-11.)

In only one of these romances, however, is it stated that Gawain is the queen's knight. After having defeated him, Gawain ordered Menealfe and his lady to report to the queen,

> And say that Gawan hur kny3te,
> Send hur this byurde bri3te.
> (AKA, st. xxix.)

And before Guinevere, Menealfe does report that he had been sent to her by "Gawan 3our kny3te." (AKA, st. xxxiv.) The queen, obviously relieved, exclaims, "Now...God Almy3te ⅋ Saue me Gawan, my kny3te." (AKA, st. xxxvi.) Nothing further is recorded. There is no hint of love, no trace of an affair between Gawain and the queen. These writers apparently regarded Guinevere's concern for Gawain as another indication of his stature, for it is simply stated that Gawain was good enough, the best knight, to be entrusted with the mission of escorting and protecting the queen. Naturally, the queen would show concern for her escort. Therefore, when Guinevere prays that God protect her knight, we have no justification for concluding that she is praying for her lover, or that, necessarily, this passage echoes an earlier tradition that Gawain might have been her lover. All that is clear is that she is expressing a normal concern for the best of Arthur's knights, the one who has been assigned, because of his stature, as her escort and protector. And as we think further of it, is it not to be expected that Arthur would assign his best and most trusted knight to this honored post?

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[44] Cf. "Late Literary Gawain", Section 2, Gawain's Fighting Skill, supra.

We now have before us all that is to be learned about Gawain. He is infinitely more complex in these romances than he was in the earlier pseudo-histories. He is, for example, capable of such extreme chivalric behaviour, so curious an act, that we are hardly able to believe that it ever could have happened. And yet he also possesses eminent good sense, the only one in these romances credited with common sense. He is said to be the only knight fit to carry on his arms the sign of the pentangle, to be the only man whose character is distinguished by the "five-fold virtues" it symbolizes. Yet we have seen that his reputation is established on a much firmer foundation than mere allegorical representation. In spite of these apparent contradictions, however, he remains always a human being. He is, for his age, a great man. All the virtues his society admired are found in him: his courage, loyalty, generosity, fighting skill, chivalric behaviour, and courtesy are unquestionable. He represents the ideal, of course, and it is not likely that any man ever equalled his performance. But his humanity is never in question, and we may regard his portrayal as realistic because nowhere has he been represented as violating the bounds of humanity, nowhere has he been translated to a god or superman. It may be that his achievement is unlikely, but it is not humanly impossible.

We have assembled, furthermore, all that is known of what may be called the "native British" Gawain. The most striking observation, of course, is his development from a semi-barbarian, obscure person to the very fashion-plate of 14th-15th century society, the embodiment of the highest in human ideals. GGK, for example, appears to have been constructed to show that Gawain represents, within the limits of human nature, the ideal man. Almost as impressive is our observation that nowhere in this long process are super-human or supernatural characteristics ever ascribed to him. It is a very curious literary achievement. If Gawain ever were a Celtic god - and that

still has to be proved - British writers from the very first, as far as extant documents show us, chose to ignore any god-like characteristics he may have had to concentrate on his human qualities. They have shown us throughout a man, and at their best they have shown us a splendid man whose character and behaviour have established an inspiring model of human capability for good. It is a remarkable accomplishment. Casting about for a character to represent human capabilities, the British writers seized upon Gawain, and, ignoring potential primitive characteristics, as well as later French duplications of possible Celtic god-like traits, they produced a human hero who at once could entertain and inspire their age. Perhaps it is not farfetched to suggest that they intended Gawain to act as a foil to Arthur, that they intended Gawain to represent, as Arthur's patently impossible achievements could not, a probable model of human achievement. Of course we could never prove that such an intention was present in the minds of a group of unknown writers, but since the effect is so widespread, and therefore something more than coincidental, it is suggestive to think that the "impossible uncle - probable nephew" construction was a deliberate creation of a steadily increasing conscious narrative art. But whether deliberate or accidental, the fact remains that the British Gawain is a human hero - is, always, a man.

12. Gawain's Horse: Gringolet

Very little attention is devoted to Gawain's horse. He is known by name, he is a large, strong animal; nowhere, however, is it intimated that Gringolet is anything but a favorite mount, a well trained war horse. Aside from the unadorned statements that Gawain possessed a horse,[45] the passages

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[45] GGK, vv. 579, 695, 748-749, 777, 822-823, 2062-2064, 2160, 2176, 2479-2480; AA, vv. 27-28; TG, vv. 50, 51, 77-84, 114-118.

are chiefly of interest because they illustrate the normal concern for his mount we expect a knight to show. His horse, after all, was not only the knight's means of transportation, but it was also his surest stay in battle. Naturally such a mount would be maintained in the best possible condition. That, of course, explains Gawain's relief and gratification when, leaving the Green Knight's castle, he observes that Gringolet had been given excellent care:

> Thenne watȝ Gryngolet graybe, þat gret watȝ and huge,
> And had ben soiourned sauerly and in a siker wyse,
> Hym lyst prik for poynt, þat proude hors þenne.
> þe wyȝe wynneȝ hym to and wyteȝ on his lyre,
> And sayde soberly hymself and by his soth swereȝ:
> 'Here is a meyny in þis mote þat on menske þenkkeȝ;
> (GGK, vv. 2047-2052.)
>
> (Then was Gringolet, the huge and strong one, ready,
> who had been kept skillfully in the surest manner.
> The proud horse, in splendid condition, longed to
> feel the spur. The knight approached him, noticed
> his coat, said to himself soberly and swore truly,
> "Here in this castle is a company mindful of
> courtesy." [i. e., who knew how to look after a
> horse well.])

The same concern for his horse explains, too, Gawain's action at the Carl's castle. Gawain left the hall to look after his horse, and, discovering the small foal out in the rain, he cared for it too. (GCC, vv. 337-354.) It is the cause, as well, of Gawain's sharp outcry when, in combat with him, Galeron killed Gringolet:

> "Greselle," quod Gauan, "gone is, God ote!
> He was the burlokkest blonke, ther euyr bote brede!
> By him that inne Bedelem wasse borne for oure bote,
> I schalle reuenge the today, and I con ryȝt rede."
> (AA, vv. 547-550.)
>
> ("Grissell,[46] God knows, is dead! He was," said Gawain,
> "the stoutest horse ever bred to a bit. I promise
> you, by Him who was born in Bethelehem for our
> salvation, that I will avenge you today.")

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[46] Grisselle [OF gray horse] is a substitute for Gringolet. As pointed out by Ackerman, Index of Arthurian Names, p. lll, it occurs only in the three AA MSS.

No other references to Gawain's horse occur. Gringolet is not considered as a part of a Sun god' apparatus. He is a large, strong battle horse, a respected and well maintained item of the knight's battle equipment. The emotion shown for his horse by Gawain is that of any normal horseman, exaggerated by the feudal concept of the battle-ready knight who knows that his mount is often the difference between victory and defeat.

13. Feudal Society

Far more than the pseudo-histories, these romances show forth a truly broad picture of feudal society. No longer are we confined to warfare only. The romances, in a sense, are society, or courtly, literature. As the mediaeval man found more leisure his literature, if it were realistic, would reflect his wider curiosity about the daily concerns of living. It is a marked characteristic of these romances that they do contain passage after passage which reflects an interest in the routine facts of daily living. Thus we find serious attention given to the details of architecture, to clothing, to amusements, to the ideals of the 14th-15th century, to what, in general, provides information concerning how the top stratum of society lived. The bulk of the evidence is so large actually, that we cannot hope to reproduce it all. Some of the information, moreover, assumes such large proportions that it has been separated from the rest and set aside in individual categories: Hunting and Love, thus, are discussed separately following this broad view of feudal society.

The castle, and the activities connected with it, is a convenient point of departure. Seen from a distance a castle, or fortified town, is an imposing sight. Arthur, leading his men on a pilgrimage, finds his stock of food low. Searching for a new source of supply he is heartened to see an imposing structure:

As thay walkit be the syde of ane fair well,
Throu the schynyng of the son ane ciete thai se,
With torris and turatis, teirfull to tell,
Bigly batallit about with wallis sa he.
The yettis war clenely kepit with ane castell;
Myght none fang it with force, bot foullis to fle.
(GG, vv. 40-45.)

(As they walked beside a good spring, they saw, gleaming in the sun, a town with so many towers and turrets it would be tedious to tell of their number, and strongly embattled with very high walls. The gates were guarded securely by a fortified tower; unless he were a bird able to fly, no one could enter it by force.)

Seen from a closer vantage point the castle might well have resembled what Gawain found as he viewed the Green Knight's castle. Gawain turned his horse into

... þe chef gate,
þat broȝt bremly þe burne to þe bryge ende in haste.
þe bryge watȝ breme vpbrayde,
þe ȝateȝ were stoken faste,
þe walleȝ wer well arayed,
Hit dut no wyndeȝ blaste.

þe burne bode on bonk, þat on blonk houed,
Of þe depe double dich þat drof to þe place;
þe walle wod in þe water wonderly depe,
And eft a ful huge heȝt hit haled vp on lofte
Of harde hewen ston vp to þe tableȝ,
Enbaned vnder þe abataylment in þe best lawe;
And syþen garyteȝ ful gaye gered bitwene,
Wyth mony luflych loupe þat louked ful clene:
A better barbican þat burne blusched vpon neuer.
And innermore he behelde þat halle ful hyȝe,
Towres telded bytwene, trochet ful þik,
Fayre fylyoleȝ þat fyȝed, and ferlyly long,
With coruon coprounes craftyly sleȝe.
Chalkwhyt chymnees þer ches he innoȝe
Vpon bastel roueȝ, þat blenked ful quyte;
So mony pynakle poyntet watȝ poudred ayquere,
Among þe castel carneleȝ clambred so þik,
þat pared out of papure purely hit semed.
(GGK, vv. 778-802.)

(...the main approach, that soon brought the knight quickly to the bridge-end. The bridge was lifted securely, the gates locked fast; the walls were well arrayed, they feared no blast of wind! The knight who sat on his horse stopped on the bank of the deep

> double ditch that, stretched out, separated him from the structure. The wall sank in the water to a great depth, and again it towered aloft a tremendous height. [It was] of hard hewn stone up to the projecting cornice moulding, decorated in the best manner with figures of horn-work under the battlements; and above this, splendid watch towers were spaced along, with many good loop holes showing cleanly. A better barbican that knight never looked upon. And further within he beheld the high hall, with towers set thickly about, and fair and enormously high pinnacles with cunningly devised carved tops. He saw plenty of chalk-white chimneys that gleamed all white on the battlements. So many pointed pinnacles were set everywhere, built so thickly among the crenellations of the castle, that it appeared truly to be cut out of paper.)

Both descriptions, that of the walled town and the castle, are quite realistic. By the last quarter of the 15th century, when the description of the fortified town was composed, the walled city was a familiar sight to travellers to the continent. Perhaps the author of Golagros and Gawain had seen such a city, or heard of one like it. Commencing in the 11th century, when towns appeared all over Europe, there developed gradually a scheme for enclosing a number of dwellings inside strong walls. Usually located at naturally strong defensive sites, and perhaps starting as additions to castles already situated at such a site, the fortified town became an impressive fort. How such a city must have looked to the 15th century traveller can be seen at Carcassonne today. The strong walls gleaming in the sun, the towers and turrets - "too tedious to tell of their number," and the well guarded gates would have seemed real enough to anyone in the late 15th century who had travelled abroad.[47] The castle itself, seen looming up in front of one as Gawain saw it, was also an imposing sight. Rising from the moat the stone

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[47] Facing p. 20 in Lewis Mumford's The Culture of Cities (New York, 1938) there are two excellent photographs, the one of Verona, the other of Segovia. The many towers and turrets, the strong walls, and the fortified gates may have looked very much like what one sees in these remarkable pictures.

wall rose to a great height: decorated and capped by formidable watch towers, such a wall was a massive symbol of the security which the age desired. In keeping with the times, the last quarter of the 14th century, in this instance, the wall was strengthened defensively by the addition of a barbican. The tops of the main structures inside the wall were visible to Gawain, and the whole pile, presented to him in a flat aspect, and seen in the light of the sun on a crisp winter day, might well have "appeared to be cut out of paper."[48] The descriptions are quite accurate. The poets did not invent architectural details: they have perhaps described constructions which did not exist, but the structures are probable and correct for their age.

Inside the castle we might find what Kay found when he

> ...hynt to ane hie hall
> That wes astalit with pall;
> Weil wroght wes the wall,
> And payntit with pride.
>
> The sylour deis of the deise dayntely wes dent
> With the doughtyest in thair dais dyntis couth dele;
> Bright letteris of gold blith vnto blent,
> Makand mencioune quha maist of manhede couth mele.
> ...
> The renk raikit in the saill, riale and gent,
> That wondir wisly wes wroght with wourschip and wele.
> The berne besely and bane blenkit hym about;
> He saw throu ane entre
> Charcole in ane chymne;
> Ane bright fyre couth he se
> Birnand full stout.
> (GG, vv. 62-78.)

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48 Gollancz, in his notes in his edition of GGK (EETS, No. 210, London, 1940), suggests that the castle description represents an imitation of Caernarvon Castle. See his notes to vv. 802, 930, pp. 108, 109. Tolkein and Gordon, in their note in their edition (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1930), conclude that the poet "...is evidently describing the latest thing in the castle architecture of his own time." Cf. note to vv. 794 ff., p. 95. For excellent illustrations and concise descriptions see E. Viollet-Le-Duc, Dictionnaire Raisonné de L'Architecture Française du XI^e au XVI^e Siècle (Paris, n.d.), I, 386-392, figs. 34-40; IV, 384, fig. 10; IX, 160-169, figs. 61, 67. These illustrations show well how the Green Knight's castle must have looked.

(...entered a high hall that was hung with rich cloth; the walls were decorated handsomely, and painted in a great display. The lush dais canopy was adorned daintily with pictures of the bravest men who, in their day, dealt blows; bright gold letters blended gaily among them making mention of those who could best speak of their manly deeds....The knight passed on into the beautiful royal hall which was decorated marvelously with pomp and glory. Busily, the knight promptly looked about him; through a doorway he saw charcoal in a fireplace, he could see a bright fire burning vigorously.)

The dais elsewhere is described in similar terms. At the great Christmas feast, Guinevere is seated at a table which had been raised on

...þe dere des, dubbed al aboute,
Smal sendal bisides, a selure hir ouer
Of tryed tolouse, of tars tapites innoghe,
þat were enbrawded and beten wyth þe best gemmes
þat myȝt be preued of prys wyth penyes to bye,
in daye.
(GGK, vv. 75-80.)

(...the rich dais, completely adorned all about: fine silk at the sides, a canopy over her of precious cloth of Toulouse, and tapestries of Tars, that were embroidered and set with the best gems that money could buy.)

More comfortable, undoubtedly, would have been the quiet seat by the fire prepared for Gawain in the Green Knight's castle:

A cheyer byfore þe chemne, þer charcole brenned,
Wat3 grayþed for Sir Gawan grayþely with cloþe3,
Whyssynes vpon queldepayntes þat koynt wer boþe.
(GGK, vv. 875-877.)

(A chair beside the fireplace, where charcoal burned, was prepared for Sir Gawain, richly appointed with cloths, and fine cushions on counterpanes.)[49]

The lady's chamber was frequently the scene of various activities. Actually it must have served much the same function as the modern parlor, or upstairs sitting room. In the romances it often becomes the rendezvous for lovers, or for those who play Love's game. Gawain's guest-chamber in the

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[49] Gawain and his host sit together by the fireside several times. Cf. vv. 1402-1403, 1666-1668.

Green Knight's castle is probably the most famous bedroom in mediaeval literature. It, in keeping with the sumptuous appearance of the entire castle, was a

> ... bry3t boure, þer beddyng wat3 noble,
> Of cortynes of clene syłk wyth cler golde hemme3.
> And couertore3 ful curious with comlych pane3,
> Of bry3t blaunmer aboue embrawded bisyde3,
> Rudele3 rennande on rope3, reg golde rynge3,
> Tapite3 ty3t to þe wo3e of tuly and tars,
> And vnder fete, on þe flet, of fol3ande sute.
> (GGK, vv. 853-859.)
>
> (...bright bower; the bedding therein was pure silk curtains with clear gold hems, and curious coverlets with handsome borders, adorned above with bright fur. There were curtains hanging on ropes threaded through red gold rings; tapestries of Toulouse and Tars hung on the walls, and under foot on the floor stuff of same pattern.)[50]

The castle provided space for religious services too. An important or powerful lord retained chaplains to conduct such services. At the Green Knight's castle, in the evening,

> Chaplayne3 to þe chapeles chosen þer gate,
> Rungen ful rychely, ry3t as þay schulden,
> To þe hersum euensong of þe hy3e tyde.
> þe lorde loute3 þerto, and þe lady als
> Into a cumly closet coyntly ho entre3.
> Gawan glyde3 ful gay and gos þeder sone;
> þe lorde laches hym by þe lappe and lede3 hym to sytte,
> ...
> And Seten soberly samen þe seruise quyle.
> þenne lyst þe lady to loke on þe kny3t,
> þenne com ho of hir closet with mony cler burde3.
> (GGK, vv. 930-942.)
>
> (Chaplains led the way to the chapels, and rang loudly, as they should, to the melodious evensong of the high time. The lord turns thither, and the lady also. Daintily she entered a handsome compartment. Proceeding joyfully, Gawain turns in that direction at once; the lord takes him by the mantle and leads him to his seat...and they sat together soberly throughout the service. Then the lady desired to see the knight, and she came from her compartment with many lovely maidens.)

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[50] See, too, GGK, vv. 1178-1181, 1476; GCC, vv. 445-447.

The interior of the castle, to judge from these descriptions, was expansive, richly furnished. These scenes, it will be remembered, are set in the great lord's castle, and they represent the dwelling and surroundings of the wealthy, powerful feudal lord, not the manor of the average feudal baron. The room Kay entered could be matched in any substantial castle, and perhaps surpassed in the great castles, such as the Chateau Gaillard, Pembroke Castle, or Caernarvon. The description is probably too lush. Ordinarily tapestries would be hung only if some important event were scheduled, and not all walls, of course, were painted; murals were not common. The raised dais, however, is not extraordinary.[51] The seat by the fireside and the chapel, on the other hand, are ordinary.[52] The guest chamber, like the rest of the interior, seems excessively ornate, although a great lord could well afford to furnish such a bed chamber. The interior of the normal castle in the 14th - 15th centuries was no doubt more drab than these romances suggest. The exaggeration noted here, however, is not a major distortion: the romances simply add color to the gray walls, a note of splendor to the ordinary.

Inside the castle there is pictured a bustling, happy life. Just as we find no attention whatsoever devoted to ordinary people and their affairs, so too we find no mention of the commonplace, day-to-day activities of life. We do not enter kitchens and stables, we do not observe servants washing clothes or sweeping floors: these people and their occupations must wait a century or more for their entrance into literature. The romances were designed to entertain the lord and lady, and their close circle of companions and peers. And since we are always entertained by what pleases us, the romance shows the top

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[51] Cf. T. Wright, A History of Domestic Manners and Sentiments in England during the Middle Ages (London, 1862), pp. 153-154.

[52] See the illustrations in Viollet-Le Duc, III, 196-210; 439-442.

social stratum at its brightest moments, always to their advantage. Thus we find the large banquet, the feast, or the sumptuous dinner in the hall presented as the most frequent occurrence in the castle. Typical, therefore, is the reception afforded Arthur by the Carl of Carlisle.

First, the hall had to be made over into the dining room:

> Be þt tyme her soper was redy dy3t.
> The tabullys wer hovfe vpe an' hy3t,
> I-cowert they wer' full' tyte [quickly].
> (GCC, vv. 355-357.)

The king and his party are met and made welcome: all proceed to their places.

> When þe kynge to þe halle was brought,
> Nothynge þer' ne wantyd nought,
> That any man kowde deuyse.
> The wallys glemyd as any glasse,
> Wt dyapir [variegated] colour' wrou3te hit was,
> Of golde, asur', and byse [dark gray].
> Wt tabernacles [canopied high seats] was the halle abou3te,
> Ther' cowde no man hem preyse.
>
> Trompettys trompid vp in grete hete,
> The kynge lete sey grace & wente to mete,
> And was i-seruyde wt-oute lette.
> Swannys, fesauntys, & cranys,
> Partrigis, plouers, and curlewys,
> Before þe kynge was sette.
> The carle sayde to þe kynge, "dothe gladly.
> Here get ye no nopir curtesy,
> As i vnderstonde."
> Wt þat come yn bollys [cups] of golde so grete,
> Ther was no knyght sat at þe mete,
> Myghte lyfte hem wt his on honde.
>
> The kynge swore, "by seynte myghelle,
> This dyner lykythe me as welle
> As any þat euyr y fonde."
> (GCC, vv. 604-627.)

Dame Ragnell, before she is disenchanted, provides an amusing contrast to the usual custom at the board. The ugly hag, at her wedding feast,

> ... began the highe dese,
> She was fulle foulle and nott curteys,
> So sayd they alle verament.
> When the seruyce cam her before,
> She ete as moche as vj. that ther wore,
> That mervaylyd many a man;
> Her mayles were long ynches iije.,

Therewithe she breke her mete vngoodly,
Therefore she ete alone.
She ette iije. capons and also curlues iije.,
And greatt bake metes she ete vp, perde,
Al men therof had mervaylle;
Ther was no mete cam her before,
Butt she ete itt up lesse and more,
That praty fowlle dameselle.
Alle men then that euere her sawe,
Bad the deville her bonys gnawe,
Bothe knyghte and squyre;
So she ete tylle mete was done,
Tylle they drewe clothes and had wasshen,
As is the gyse and maner.
Meny men wold speke of diuerse seruice,
I trowe ye may wete inowghe ther was,
Bothe of tame and wylde;
In kyng Arthours courte ther was no wontt,
That myghte be gotten withe mannys hond,
Noder in fforest ne in feld.
(WG, vv. 599-627.)[53]

These people did not confine their revelry to eating, although it must be admitted that they appear to have taken great pleasure at the table. The castle hall was also the scene of other entertainment. Most readers are familiar with the very joyful passage which begins the narrative section of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: the fifteen day feast at Camelot, the tournaments during the day, the dancing and "careless mirth" in the hall at night.[54] Perhaps somewhat less familiar is the more revealing passage which described the Green Knight's efforts to entertain Gawain a year later.

þe lorde luflych aloft lepeȝ ful ofte,
mynned merthe to be made vpon mony syþeȝ,
Hent heȝly of his hode, and on a spere henged,
And wayued hom to wynne þe worchip þerof,
þat most myrþe myȝt meue, þat Crystenmas whyle -
'And I schal fonde, bi my fayth, to fylter wyth þe best,
Er me wont þe wede with help of my frendeȝ.'
þus wyth laȝande loteȝ þe lorde hit toyt makeȝ.
For to glade Sir Gawayn with gomneȝ in halle
þat nyȝt.
(GGK, vv. 981-990.)

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[53] See further GGK, vv. 60-73, 109-129, 481-486, 884-900, 995-1009, 1016-1019, 1648-1654, 1952-1958; AA, vv. 339-342; GG, vv. 209-221, 1142-1160, 1330-1349.

[54] GGK, vv. 37-53.

(The lord leaped up joyously many times and saw to it that the gay spirit never faltered. Gayly he snatched off his hood and hung it on a spear, and urged the company to win it as a prize - he to have it who could make the most mirth that Christmas time. "And, by my faith, I shall try to compete with the best, before I lose my clothing to the best of my friends." Thus, in a gay spirit, the lord makes merry to entertain Gawain with games in the hall that night.)[55]

Although the minstrel is not a prominent feature of the Gawain literature, we find one hint of his function, and, too, of his means of livelihood. After Arthur knighted the Carl,

A ryche feste had he i-dyght,
That lasted holy a fortenyght,
Wt game, myrthe, and playe.
The mynstrellis had yeftys [gifts] fre,
To spende many a day.
(GCC, vv. 640-645.)

One might have found at a late 14th century feast that all three episodes just described could very likely have occurred at one place on the same night. The great hall of the castle or manor would surely have been transformed into a dining hall. Fixed tables and chairs were quite rare: benches and tables were formed simply by placing planks across two trestles.[56] The host and guest of honor would, if the host were a man of means, be seated at a fixed table, covered with a white cloth, raised on a dais. Grace said, the sound of trumpets and music announced the start of the formal service, and the

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[55] See, too, GGK, vv. 1020-1026, 1083-1087, 1372-1373; GCC, vv. 280-297, where the exaggerated gold cups serve as a gauge of the Carl's size. Langland describes a game much like that the Green Knight played. Cf. Piers the Plowman, B Version, Passus V, where Gluttony watches Clement the Cobbler and the others make a wager over their garments. [Piers the Plowman, ed. W. W. Skeat, 10th Ed. Revised (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1945), Passus V, vv. 327 ff.]

[56] See the very clear illustrations in T. Wright, A History of Domestic Manners and Sentiments in England During the Middle Ages (London, 1862), p. 139, figs. 96, 97. All the illustrations in this interesting book were drawn and engraved by F. W. Fairholt.

steward, followed by servants, marched to the table and placed the course before the guests.[57]

If a vassal entertained his king, and if the vassal were sufficiently wealthy, he would have prepared a sumptuous feast for his royal guest. The Carl's bill of fare and the fare offered Dame Ragnell are typical of the splendid feasts of the day. The three course dinner served towards the close of the 14th century to a distinguished guest would astonish and perhaps sicken a modern gourmet. One menu contained the following items:

First Course

Browet farsed, and charlet, for pottage.
Baked mallard. Teals. Small birds. Almond milk served with them.
Capon roasted with the syrup.
Roasted veal. Pig roasted "'endored' and served with the yolk on his neck over gilt." Herons.
A "leche." A tart of flesh.

Second Course

Browet of Almayne and Viaunde rial for pottage.
Mallard. Roasted rabbits. Pheasant. Venison.
Jelly. A leche. Urchynnes (hedgehogs).
Pome de orynge.

Third Course

Boar in egurdouce, and Mawmene, for pottage.
Cranes. Kid. Curlew. Partridge. (All roasted.)
A leche. A crustade.
A peacock endored and roasted, and served with the skin.
Cockagris. Flaumpoyntes. Daryoles.
Pears in syrup.[58]

The aristocracy of the day enjoyed eating, and the Carl's feast, as well as Dame Ragnell's repast, are fair indications of what was offered to satisfy the appetite of the day.

Following dinner the guests remained at the board, and the dining hall

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[57] See figs. 106, 107, 111, and 112 in Wright, pp. 151, 153, 160, 161.

[58] Wright, p. 351.

was transformed to the entertainment hall. Impromptu contests similar to that initiated by the Green Knight may well have taken up the evening hours. It is more likely, however, that the professional entertainer, the minstrel, would have made his appearance.[59] His songs or lays were admired, and his efforts were usually well rewarded. And so the evening passed; the guests gradually tiring, and anxious to be off to sleep, the hall lost its gaiety, and, quieted, may well have become a dormitory.

The castle hall was the center of the baron's social world. We have seen already that it served as dining room and recreation parlor, as well as the seat of local government. A messenger, as was Gawain when he sought supplies for Arthur's army, discussed his errand with the lord in his hall. Before town and cities displaced the influence of the castle, the castle hall was the scene of all important affairs. Dame Ragnell, for example, anxious to be assured that Gawain would indeed marry her, urged Arthur to order him to appear before the knights assembled in the hall, there to pledge his troth.[60] One feels sure that when the knight was in the castle, awake, he would most likely be found in the hall.[61]

Out of the castle, however, warfare is still a dominant concern, and the knight must be prepared to fight. The romances, to be sure, show us a

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59 "In those days," Jusserand writes, "no one thought of rejoicing without minstrels; there were four hundred and twenty-six musicians or singers at the marriage of the Princess Margaret, daughter of Edward I. Edward III gave a hundred pounds to those who were present at the marriage of his daughter Isabella...." English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages, tr. Lucy T. Smith, 5th Ed. (London, 1897), p. 196.

60 WG, vv. 524-529.

61 Entrance to the castle and hall, and departure therefrom, are frequently occasions for displays of courtesy as well as precaution. The evidence in these romances, however, is slight. Cf. GGK, vv. 807-815, 1975-1990, 2045-2046; GCC, vv. 175-183, 512-513. But for gracious reception in the hall, cf. GGK, vv. 815-837.

different concept of battle action. Gone are Arthur's tremendous campaigns which so captured the imagination of Geoffrey and La3amon. In their place we find single combats and the siege of a castle. In this sense the romances reflect a narrower, more local interest: the international flavor of the pseudo-histories is present in just one of the romances, and a pilgrimage is the source of its over-seas appeal.[62] Although the mediaeval audiences were delighted to hear of men and events from other lands, we may regard the close-to-home atmosphere of the British Gawain romances as one more mark of their realism, for they present, frequently, scenes and actions which their authors could have known about as a result of their own observation and first hand experience.

Of the causes of combat the disputed fief would appear to take first place. We have observed already that Gawain's combat with Galeron was caused by Galeron's declaration to Arthur that his lands had been awarded wrongfully to Gawain.[63] And Arthur's heartbreaking promise to Dame Ragnell can be traced to a similar cause. It was the Hag who provided the right answer to the question which Sir Gromer asked of Arthur, and Arthur needed the answer to avoid a dangerous and unfair combat. He met Sir Gromer, in the first place, in a very awkward situation. As the king, having shot and pursued a deer to a clump of bushes,

> ... was withe the dere alone,
> Streygthe ther cam to hym a quaynt grome [man],
> Armyd welle and sure;
> A knyghte fulle strong and of greatt myghte,
> And grymly wordes to the kyng he sayd:
> Well i-mett, Kyng Arthour!
> Thou hast me done wrong many a yere,
> And wofully I shalle quytte the here;

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[62] GG.

[63] AA, vv. 408-433.

I hold thy lyfe days nyghe done;
Thou hast gevyn my londes in certayn,
Withe greatt wrong vnto Sir Gawen.
What sayest thou, kyng alone?
(WG, vv. 49-60.)

Never more surprised in his life, Arthur avoids an unequal combat, he dressed for hunting and the knight fully armed, only by promising to return alone either to satisfy the knight by telling him what women most desire or to fight him. In a society which valued land holdings in return for service, no man would stand by idly while another was given a fief which he regarded rightfully his own. And in lieu of authoritative, respected courts, combat was a normal institution for settling such disputes.

The details of Galeron's dispute with Gawain afford an excellent illustration. We have seen already the vigor of their fight: here we witness the preparations for combat and the disposition made after Gawain had forced Galeron to yield. Galeron appeared before Arthur to challenge a knight because Arthur had awarded Galeron's lands to Gawain. Gawain accepted the challenge. Thus it was arranged that, on the following morning, a Judicial Combat between the two should settle the issue: that Galeron, should he defeat Gawain in single combat, would have his lands restored to him, but, should he lose, the lands would be declared the rightful property of Gawain. Although it seems a strange concept of justice to us, quite as late as the 15th century it was believed widely that single combat between two disputants was a proper method of arriving at a just decision, that the victor was, by nature, right, the loser, wrong. God, apparently, would not will it other-

wise.[64] So we read that, on the very next day, at dawn

...
þe doughti were dighte,
And herdene matens and masse, erly one morne.
By þat on plumtone land a palais was pi3te,
Were neuer freke opone folde had fou3tene biforne.
þei settene listes by lyne one þe lo3 lande.
Thre soppes de mayne
þei broughte to sir Gawayne,
For to confort his brayne,
þe king gared commaunde.

The king commaunded krudely, þe erlis sone of Kent,
Curtaysly in þis case take kepe to þe kni3t,
Withe riche daynetethe þat day, he dynede in his tente,
Withe birdes bakene in brede, of brynt golde bryghte;
And sythene vn-to dame Waynour fulle wyesely he wente,
And lefte withe hir in warde his worthily wyghte.
And thane thies hathelles fulle hendely þaire horsses hase hent.
At the lycence of the lorde, þat lordely gune lyghte,
Alle bot thir beryns, bouldeste of blode.
The kynges chayere was sette
A-bowne on a chasselett;
And many a gaylyarde grett
For Gawayne the gude.

Gawayne and Gallerone dyghtis thaire stedis,
Alle of gleterande golde, fulle gaye was þaire gere;
Twa lordes be-lyfe to thaire lystes thayme ledis,

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[64] The most famous account in Western European literature, of course, occurs in the Chanson de Roland. The defeat of Ganelon's champion, Sir Pinabel, is taken as a clear sign that Ganelon is guilty as charged, and he pays for his "crime" with his life. It is worth remembering, in this regard, that Dante placed Ganelon in Hell (Inf. xxxii. 119), Roland in the fifth sphere of Heaven, Mars (Par. xviii. 40), and Modred in Hell (Inf. xxxii. 59). An excellent account of the Judicial Combat, or trial by combat, is R. L. Kilgour, The Decline of Chivalry As Shown in the French Literature of the Late Middle Ages ("Harvard Studies in Romance Languages," XII [Cambridge, 1937]), 36-37, 146. According to Kilgour, the Judicial Duel was in disrepute in France at the end of the 14th century, "...but prevailed till much later in other nations." (p. 37.) Professor Kilgour cites the late 14th century Quinze joyes de mariage to illustrate that often "...it happens that the one who is in the right is defeated and the one who is in the wrong triumphs." (p. 146.) In this regard it is revealing to contrast Froissart's account of the Judicial Combat in Paris, 1387, between Sir John Carouges and James le Gris (Chronicles, tr. T. Johnes, Ch. XVI) with the opinion of Honore Bonet, published in the same year, that it "...is not a good and lawful thing..." for a man to enter the lists to prove his right by his body (L'Arbre des Batailles, tr. G. W. Coopland (Cambridge, Harvard Univ. Press, 1949), Pt. III, Ch. I).

Withe many sergeauntes of mace; it was the manere.
(AA, vv. 473-498.)[65]

(...the bold knights were prepared, and heard mass and matins early in the morning. By that time an enclosure for the spectators was erected on Plumpton Land, where never before men had fought on the open field. They laid out the trace of the list along the level ground. To comfort his mind, they brought three strengthening draughts to Sir Gawain - the king had ordered it.

The king kindly [krudely?] ordered the Earl of Kent's son to look courteously after the needs of Galeron. That day he ate dainty foods in his tent: baked fowl in bread, of a bright burnt gold color. And then, wisely, he went to Guinevere and left his honored lady in her care. And these knights, the two of them, boldest of blood, fairly have taken their horses with the permission of the king, who, in a lordly manner, dismounted. The king's chair was set above on a high seat. And many a lusty man wept for Gawain the good.

Gawain and Galeron prepared their horses; their equipment, in glittering gold, was beautiful. Two lords, and many attendants, as was the custom, led them to their places in the list.)

Both knights, it will be remembered, were wounded; Galeron, more seriously hurt, yielded. Arthur, perceiving that Galeron had given over,

...commandis þe pese, and cryes one highte,
And Gawayne was gudly, and lefte for his sake;
And þane to þe lystis þe lordis leppis fulle lyghte,
Sir Owayne fyteȝ-Vryene, and Arrake, fulle rathe,
Marrake and Menegalle, þat maste were of myghte.
Bathe þase trauelde knyghtes trewly þay taghte;
Vnnethes myghte those knyghtes stande vp ryghte;
þay were for-bett, and for-blede, þaire wedis wexe blake,
Here blees were brosed, for beting of brondes.
Withe dighte there thiere semblyng,
By-fore þat comly kynge,
And helde vpe þaire handes.
(AA, vv. 651-663.)

(...shouted aloud and ordered the peace; and Gawain was pleased, and ceased fighting for his sake. And

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[65] vv. 473-484 supplied from Douce MS.

> then several lords rushed quickly to the lists: Sir Ywaine Fitz-Urien and Erec, very quickly, and Marrok and Meneduke, the most powerful knights. They supported both labored knights carefully; those knights were scarcely able to stand erect. They were beaten all about, and, for loss of blood, their armor was paled, and their faces were bruised from the sword blows. With no further delay, they were brought together there, and before the worthy king they raised their hands.)

The disposition made by Arthur, however, is undoubtedly not true to actual practice. Because this romance appears to have been intended, among other things, to illustrate Gawain's generosity and courtesy, Arthur rewards Gawain handsomely, giving him gold and additional lands, plus the promise of a dukedom if he releases the contested lands to Galeron. (AA, vv. 664-676.) Gawain, accordingly, gives the overlordship of the disputed lands to Galeron, and, later, when both knights have recovered from their wounds, and both have been raised to dukedoms, he graciously accepts Galeron's hommage. (AA, vv. 677-702.) Had this been an actual judicial combat, Galeron, of course, would have been discredited thoroughly, if, indeed, he had escaped with his life.

In the account of Sir Menealfe's behaviour to Kay and Gawain we perceive another cause for combat. At the root of the matter here is the position of women in feudal society. Were a woman to come into possession of a valuable holding, as she might if her husband were killed, and, further, were such a woman without a champion to fight for her, it is doubtful that she could long maintain control of her fief or her person. The primal law of feudalism, that one could hold what he could defend, would operate against such a woman. Such is the plight of the weeping lady accompanying Menealfe when Kay meets them. Kay's chivalric code demanded that he challenge Menealfe: the chivalrous knight was supposed to come to the aid of ladies in

distress.[66] Kay does challenge Menealfe, and Menealfe accepted the bid. (AKA, st. xix.) Menealfe, in response to Kay's questions, states how he captured the lady:

"And this lady sum I the telle
I fochet hur atte Ledelle
Ther hur frindus con he felle
As foes in a fi3te
...
And all a-3amus thayre awne will,
There wan I this wi3te."
(AKA, st. xx.)

"And this lady, I tell you now, I seized her at Ledelle, where her protectors fell as enemies in a fight....And against the will of all of them I won this lady."

Kay, his valor not equal to his chivalry, is vanquished, but, as we have seen, Gawain rescued both Kay and the lady, and sent them all to the queen, Menealfe a prisoner, the lady to be kept in the queen's charge.

Organized warfare occurs but once. Arthur, chagrined that Golagros would not submit to him peacefully, ordered his men to seize his castle fortress by force of arms. The siege of a castle was no light adventure. A maximum combat effort was required to reduce a fortress as strong as Golagros'.

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[66] Cf. Sidney Painter, French Chivalry (Baltimore, 1940), pp. 95-107 for discussion of position of women. Urban II issued at Clermont (1095) an injunction which must have gone a long way towards setting the tone for future knightly relationships with ladies when he declared that every noble youth at the age of twelve ought to swear before a bishop that "...he would defend to the uttermost the oppressed, the widow and the orphan; and that women of noble birth should enjoy his special care." (Cited by Hearnshaw, "Chivalry: Its Place In History," op. cit., pp. 8-9.) See, too, the earlier statement in Wulfstan's Sermon To The English (1014) in which he complained that "...the laws of the nation have lapsed unduly...widows wrongfully forced to marry...." (A. S. Cook and C. B. Tinker, Select Translations From Old English Prose (Boston, 1908), p. 195.) John of Salisbury, Policraticus, Bk. V, Ch. VI, points out the duty to protect widows and women. (tr. J. Dickinson, "Political Science Classics," [New York, 1927.]) Of course by the end of the 14th century the position of women was perhaps better than the plight of Menealfe's captive would suggest. A widow, for example, was assured possession of at least one-third of her husband's estate. Pollock and Maitland, II, 420-436; Holdsworth, History of English Law, 3d Ed., III, 189-191, 520-533. Even so, an unprotected widow in 1400 was an insecure vassal; she could be easily ejected from her land. Ideally, any good knight in the 14th century, as well as in the 12th century, would be expected to act as Kay did.

We sense this as we observe the preparations made for the assault.

Than thai schupe for to assege segis vnsaught,
Ay the manlyest on mold, that maist of myght moght.
Thair was restling and reling, but rest that raught,
Mony sege our the sey to the cite socht;
Schipmen our the streme thai stithil full straught,
With alkin wappyns, I wis, that wes for were wrought.
Thai bend bowis of bras braithly within;
Pellokis paisand to pase,
Gapand gunnys of brase,
Grundin ganyeis thair wase,
That maid ful gret dyn.

Thair wes blauing of bemys, braging and beir;
Bretynit doune braid wod, maid bewis full bair;
Wrightis weiterand doune treis, wit ye but weir,
Ordanit hurdys ful hie in holtis sa haire,
For to greif thair gomys, gramest that wer,
To gar the gayest on grund grayne vndir geir.
Thus thai schupe for ane salt, ilk sege seir;
Ilka souerane his ensenye schewin has thair;
Ferly fayr wes the feild, flekerit and faw
With gold and goulis in greyne,
Schy scheirly and scheyne;
The sone, as cristall sa cleyne,
In scheildis thai schaw.

Be it wes mydmorne and more, merkit on the day,
Schir Golagros mery men, menskful of myght,
In greis and garatouris, grathit full gay,
Seuyne score of scheildis thai schew at ane sicht;
Ane helm set to ilk schield, siker of assay,
With fel lans on loft, lemand ful light.
Thus florit thai the fore front, thair fays to fray,
The frekis, that war fundin ferse and forssy in fight.
Ilk knyght his cunysance kithit full cleir;
Thair names written all thare,
Quhat berne that it bare,
That ilk freke quhare he fare
Might wit quhat he weir.
(GG, vv. 456-492.)

(Then they prepared to besiege hostile men, the manliest on earth who were capable of mighty deeds. There was noise and bustle that went on continually; the boatmen array themselves all along the river; many men crossed the stream, seeking the walled town, with every kind of weapon, I think, made for war. Vigorously they bend brass bows inward; there were heavy cannon balls and gaping brass guns; they sharpened darts - all this raised a great noise.

There was blowing of trumpets, sounding of horns; they cut down broad wooded areas, stripped the boughs bare;

> wrights, you may be sure, rolled down trees. They prepared tall palisades in the open fields to vex their enemies who were most angry, to cause the best man among them to groan in his armor. Thus they prepared for an assault, each separate man. Each leader showed his ensign there; the field was a marvelous sight, spotted and variegated with gold, gules, or green, shining clearly and brightly. Like a clear crystal the sun shone in those shields.
>
> By that time it was past mid-morning, marked on the day. Sir Golagros' spirited men, noble and powerful, were arrayed in good fashion on the steps and watchtowers; seven score shields could be seen, a helmet with each shield, certain of use, and fierce lances raised high, gleaming clearly. Thus they decked out the exposed front to fight their foe, these men who were fierce and strong in battle. Each knight showed forth his armorial bearing clearly, all their names written there, what man it was who bore it, so that wherever he moved every man might know who it was.)

Unfortunately, the assault is not what we expect: in lieu of meeting a mass attack, Golagros chose to send champions out to battle challengers from Arthur's army. Seven knights from each side engage in these combats, but the victories are not decisive. Golagros himself then rode out alone to meet one of Arthur's knights. Gawain engaged and defeated him; that was the decisive action. The writer of this romance allows us a glimpse of the preparations for the siege, but, because he is more interested in showing us Gawain's skill and courtesy, he does not let us see the army in action.

Although we are disappointed because we are not shown the castle under direct assault, this romance does contain two interesting passages which reveal, first, a professional tactical insight, and, second, a commonplace situation, the behaviour of spectators. To consider the second of these first, it is a romance convention to describe the reaction of spectators at either a single combat or a general assault. Since Golagros' plan of defense called for individual combats before the castle wall, it is only natural that the inhabitants of the castle should place themselves at a vantage point on the wall from which they could watch the action. Their human curiosity and

relative safety would lead them there. Further, it is quite reasonable that they should show great concern when their champion was in distress. Thus we read, when Gawain unhorses Golagros, that

> Lordinges and ladyis in the castell on loft,
> Quhen thai saw thair liege lord laid on the landis,
> Mony sweit thing of swore swonit full oft,
> Wyis wourthit for wo to wringin thair handis.
> (GG, vv. 1051-1054.)
>
> (the lords and ladies high on the castle wall,
> when they saw their liege lord lying on the ground,
> many a "sweet-necked" lady swooned, and men, struck
> with woe, wrung their hands.)

We may close our observations of feudal warfare, as reflected in these romances, by giving attention to what appears to be a very practical suggestion for individual combat. Sir Spinagros, cautioning Gawain about Golagros' valor, urges Gawain, when the two encounter on the field, to

> "... merk to hym evin,
> And bere ye your bright lance in myddis his scheild;
> Mak that course cruel, for Crystis lufe of hevin!
> And syne wirk as I wise, your vappins to weild.
> Be he stonayt, yone sterne, stout beis his stevin,
> He wourdis brym as ane bair, that bydis na beild;
> Suppose his dyntis be deip dentit in your scheild,
> Tak na haist vpone hand, quhat happunys may hynt;
> Bot lat the eiche man rage,
> And fecht in his curage,
> To swyng with suerd quhil he suage;
> Syne dele ye your dynt.
>
> When he is stuffit, thair strike, and hald hym on steir,
> Sa sal ye stonay yone stowt, suppose he be strang;
> Thus may ye lippin on the lake, throu lair that I leir;
> But gif ye wirk as wise, you wourthis that wrang."
> (GG, vv. 817-833.)
>
> ("...aim straight at him, and thrust your gleaming
> lance in the middle of his shield; for the love of
> Christ in Heaven make that course a good one! Then
> work and wield your weapons as I advise you. When
> that stern knight is astounded at your rush his
> voice will be loud; he will become as fierce as a
> boar who will not stay in his shelter. Don't be
> upset at his deeds, which are noble to mention.
> Suppose his blows dent in your shield deeply - don't
> act hastily, whatever might happen, but let that
> courageous man rage on, and fight furiously, and

> swing his sword until he exhausts himself; then strike your blow. When he is exhausted, then strike, and keep him on the move; so you may astound the bold knight, even though he is strong. Thus you may have confidence in the issue of the fight as a result of the advice I give you. Unless you work wisely, you deserve to lose.")

It may strike us as strange that Gawain should need this advice, but nevertheless we must agree that it is sound.

Warfare was not the major concern of our authors. Nevertheless, the romances indicate that warfare was a normal experience, and that every knight in the 14th-15th centuries could expect to spend part of his time fighting. Apart from participation in an organized campaign, two things, we read, were most likely to lead to a fight. One might contest possession of certain lands, or one might champion the cause of a lady. The first is real enough: we have seen how Gawain met Galeron's challenge.[67] Kay's experience, although it is a common romance motif, was probably not a frequent adventure in life. It is certainly true that women were carried off, and that other knights, either by chance or design, rescued them. William Marshall, we know, fought valiantly one day to hold off the attack of a party of knights who had attempted to ambush Eleanor: the Countess escaped, and William was rewarded handsomely.[68] But certainly the major occupation of the 14th - 15th century knight was not to rescue ladies in distress. Such rescues could and did happen, but the romances exaggerate their frequency.

One detail of the warfare seems almost unbelievable. Would the garrison of a strong castle stake everything on the outcome of a series of jousts, finally on a single combat between the leader of the defenders and a champion

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[67] See, supra, "Late Literary Gawain," No. 2: "Gawain's Fighting Skill."

[68] L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal, ed. P. Meyer, vv. 1623-1690.

from the sieging host? In the 12th century such behaviour would have been unthinkable, and it does not seem a likely action at the end of the 15th century, when this episode from Golagros and Gawain was composed. But in the 14th century such conduct was not unknown. Froissart states that the defenders of Bourdeilles skirmished daily with members of the besieging force, and won their praise; he relates the offer of the Duke of Bourbon to the Earls of Cambridge and Pembroke to allow fifty from each side to settle the issue in combat; he rejoices over the deeds of the brave Scottish knight who leaped over a barrier to fight with some of the enemy.[69] Painter, noticing Froissart's great relish in describing arranged combats, adds that it "... was not unusual to settle such questions as the possession of a castle by an affair of this sort."[70] This is the spirit which the author of Golagros and Gawain imitates: he looks backwards, and he displays his heroes against a background not found in his age. We, at least, can find no evidence which suggests that, in the late 15th century, the possession of a castle was determined by such a combat.

The other details are certainly a fair reflection of contemporary practice. For a joust in any age, the advice of Spynagros is sound. The presence of the spectators on the wall is not unusual:[71] they may be likened to the audience at a tournament. Arthur's instructions for the preparation of the lists are in keeping with current practice.[72]

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69 Chronicles, tr. T. Johnes, Rev. Ed. (New York, 1901), I, 122, 131, 133.

70 French Chivalry (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1940), p. 58.

71 See the illustration in Edith Rickert's Chaucer's World (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1948), facing p. 298. This is a reproduction from a late 14th century MS. The spectators are shown prominently.

72 Cf. R. C. Clephan, The Tournament (London, 1919), p. 160: "The kinge shall finde the feeld to fight in and the listes shall be made and deuised by the Constable...."

Warfare, on the whole, is treated fairly. The balance between realism and romanticism is rather even. No superhuman deeds are recorded: men are clearly their own masters in these combats. War, in keeping with the temper of the time, is seen as a means for obtaining glory. Gawain shows well in battle, and some of his fights are, as a part of their purpose, designed partly to add to his reputation. All the descriptions of warfare are not realistic, but none are serious distortions.

If we recall, for a moment, the vast battle scenes of the pseudo-histories, we cannot fail to notice the softer aspect of the romances. The difference is unmistakeable. Gone are the panoramic campaigns, the cruel delight of the fighters, the semi-barbaric worship of the strong right arm, and the fields running in blood. In their place we find praise for individual prowess, evinced in single combat, and, somewhat paradoxically, chivalric restraint. Also, the romances provide a somewhat less realistic view of warfare. The signal achievements of The Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), the decline of the knight, whose armor was no match for the yeoman's long bow, and the inevitable failure of the castle-fortress to withstand cannon, are not touched upon.[73] Anachronistic, however, is not quite the proper term for describing the romance warfare scenes.[74] Perhaps the insistence upon a more

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73 Only once are cannon mentioned, and then not as a functional weapon. It is stated simply that "...a gun was fired, and it flashed like lightning." (AKA, st. lxv.) The discovery of gunpowder and the consequent emergence of artillery as an effective siege weapon were not regarded at all by the authors of these romances.

74 Cf. A. L. Cross, A Shorter History of England, p. 144, where it is conjectured that artillery did not become an effective weapon until long after it was first employed by Edward III, probably at Calais. Oman gives 1450, the Battle of Formigny, as earliest use of artillery in the field, when the Count of Clermont defeated an English relief army. Clermont's troops "...consisted of 600 lances garnis (i. e., 3,000 combatants), two small pieces of artillery, and some local infantry." (The Art of War In the Middle Ages, rev. and ed. by J. H. Beeler (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1953), p. 140.) Not until the early 16th century did artillery become a familiar battle weapon. But see Kilgour, Decline of Chivalry, pp. 325-326, where Jean de Bueil's Le Jouvençal (1466) is shown to evince a thorough familiarity with cannon.

gentle, or humane, conduct on the field of battle was felt to be more in keeping with the general tone of behaviour which the romances hold up for admiration.

We are able to arrive at a fair estimate of the behaviour which this society admired by considering what, obviously, they disliked. Only a bad knight, for example, would take advantage of his opponent, would, like Sir Gromer, threaten to kill an unarmed man. The basis of Arthur's plea that he be spared is not so much a cowardly regard for his life as it is the thought of what Gromer's action would seem to be to others. Gromer, fully armed, surprises Arthur, dressed for hunting, and threatens to kill him. Arthur urges him to hold his hand. "Ah! Sir Gromer," he said

> "... bethynk the welle,
> To sle me here honour getyst thou no delle,
> Be-thynk the thou artt a knyghte,
> Yf thou sle me nowe in thys case,
> Alle knyghtes wolle refuse the in euery place,
> That shame shalle neuere the froo; [be away from you]
> Lett by thy wylle and folowe wytt,
> And that is amys I schalle amend itt."
> (WG, vv. 64-71.)[75]

Sir Gromer, had he taken advantage of Arthur, would have been a false knight. The desirable, although understandably foolhardy, conduct is illustrated by Gawain's refusal to kill Golagros after he had knocked him down and by his willingness to assist Menealfe to regain his mount.[76] Yet if Gromer's intended action illustrates a false knight, the reputation of Golagros may be taken as the obverse. In the words of the ubiquitous Sir Spynagros, Golagros is eulogized as the ideal. Speaking to Gawain and two other knights, Spynagros declares that Golagros, whom he knows well, enjoys

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[75] See, further, WG, vv. 79-83, 455-463, 811-816, where Gromer's lack of gentility is made clear.

[76] Cf. "Late Literary Gawain", Section 6, Gawain's Chivalric Behaviour, supra.

wide respect. "And the three of you, who have often conquered in battle," he adds,

> "War al your strenthis in ane,
> In his grippis and ye gane,
> He wald ourcum yow ilkane;
> Yone sterne is sa strang.
>
> And he is maid on mold meik as ane child,
> Blith and bousum that berne as byrd in hir bour,
> Fayr of fell and of face as flour vnfild
> Wondir staluart and strang, to striue in ane stour."
> (GG, vv. 345-353.)

> ("were the strength of all of you in each, and you to go into his grip, he would overcome each of you, so strong is that knight. And [yet], in his daily living, he is as meek as a child; that knight is as cheerful and courteous as a maiden in a bower. He is as fair in complexion and appearance as an undefiled flower. Yet he is marvelously stalwart and strong, to fight in a battle.")

His battle prowess and strength are listed first, it is true,[77] but his gentle deportment is also singled out for praise.

A more inclusive indication of the highly regarded achievements is found in a short passage which occurs in the beginning of The Avowynge. The author introduces us to the Round Table:

> ȝe wote wele of the Rowuntabulle,
> Of prest men, and priueabulle,
> Was holdun in prise;
> Cheuetan of chiualry,
> Kyndenesse of curtesy,
> Hunting fulle warly,
> As wayt men and wise.
> (AKA, st. ii.)

Able fighters, chivalrous, courteous men; skilled hunters; bold and intelligent men; these are the men the age admired, and this their quality.

Foremost is trustworthiness, or loyalty. The man who can be trusted, the man who has the reputation of keeping his word, must be admired universally.

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77 Cf. AKA, st. i., where the battle tested knight is also praised.

At any rate we found it true for the 12th century, and we shall see now that it was true for the 14th-15th centuries.[78] The most obvious illustration, of course, is Gawain's pledge to the Green Knight. He will seek him out. If Gawain had not been portrayed as trustworthy, had he not kept his word, the romance would never have been written. Arthur too shows that he is a man of his word. His promise to Dame Ragnell is kept: Gawain is married to the Hag. Arthur is quite scrupulous about the matter, although it is most distasteful to him. When the Hag reminds him of his promise - "You may not go back on it." - Arthur replies at once. "No, lady, that I you hyghte I shalle not faylle." (WG, v. 503.)[79] It may be stated as a general observation: all "good" characters in these romances are trustworthy, all "bad" ones are not. If we were to choose the one quality most admired in these British romances we should pick loyalty, or trustworthiness. As we observed in our discussion of loyalty as it is reflected in the pseudo-histories, everything depends upon it. When it was present in real life, feudal society flourished: if it were absent in the romances, the narratives would collapse.

There are many more reflections of contemporary feudal life. To give to each the attention which we have directed to the others discussed already would, however, extend this phase of our study unduly and delay our consider-

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[78] For, undoubtedly, the same reasons. Cf. "Early Literary Gawain", Section 13, supra.

[79] He does, however, attempt once more to persuade her to give up her scheme before he resigns himself finally to her bargain. (WG, vv. 506-517; vv. 106-120 also illustrate this quality.) We must not overlook either the character of Sir Baudwin. The entire romance (AKA), actually, is designed to evaluate Baudwin's knightly qualities. He made a threefold vow before Arthur, Gawain, and Kay (1) never to be afraid, (2) never to be jealous of his wife, and (3) never to refuse hospitality to any man, and, in practice, it is determined that he possessed these three virtues. Physical possessions which the age admired are enumerated by the ghost of Guinevere's mother: game, crops, gold, rich cloth, ploughed land and parks, towns and towers, castles, "crags and ravines too". (AA, vv. 144-150.)

ation of more meaningful details still to be enumerated. Furthermore, a large part of what remains in this category quite obviously finds its ultimate source in the direct observation of the writers. All descriptions of clothing, arms, and equipment, for example, are of this nature and do not require authentication beyond that which is available in the notes of the standard editions of these romances. The writers do not manufacture details of dress: they copy the fashion of the day. Thus we may feel sure that when Guinevere is described as wearing "...a brilliant dress, which glittered beautifully, trimmed with colorful ribbons, according to those who understood it correctly, and decorated with rubies in a splendid design" (AA, vv. 15-17), or when it is reported that his companions "...put the sabatons upon [Gawain's] feet, lapped his legs in steel with fair greaves, to which were attached well polished poleynes fastened about his knees with knots of gold" (GGK, vv. 574-577), that the writers had seen such a dress, had seen armor like Gawain's.[80] Other details are either commonplace representations of feudal society or conventional descriptions. In this class may be placed all notices of female beauty and ugliness,[81] the wish of Dame Ragnell to have a grand wedding in the presence of all the lords and ladies (WG, vv. 557-562, 578-580), the familiar listing of the court retinue - the king and queen, the dukes and bold knights[82] - and the nostalgic attachment to the

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80 Other descriptions of dress, arms, and equipment are as follows: King's clothes - AA, vv. 352-359; male attire - GGK, vv. 151-164, 860-863, 878-881, 1928-1931; female attire - GGK, vv. 1736-1741; GCC, vv. 416-426; AA, vv. 15-26, 365-377; WG, vv. 590-594; arms and equipment - GGK, vv. 151-172, 566-591, 597-604, 605-622, 666-669, 2015-2022, 2025-2029; GCC, vv. 80-84, 97; AA, vv. 378-396; GG, vv. 884-898; TG, vv. 49-50.

81 GGK, vv. 74-84, 943-969; GCC, vv. 362-372; WG, vv. 225-251, 300, 306-307, 521-523, 546-556, 595-597, 642-654.

82 AA, vv. 3-5, 10-11. But note the anachronistic tone here - as if Arthur were alive and riding to Carlisle today, and the presence of what appear to be the Twelve Peers of France [ducheperes]. Otherwise this description of the court "array" is typical.

Battle Trophy (GGK, vv. 477-480). Occurring, too, although much less frequently than in the pseudo-histories, are vows and oaths which reflect a familiar contact with day-to-day reality, not so much because of what a man swears he will or will not do, but because they represent accurately the frame of mind of the confident, somewhat self-assured knight.[83]

Even yet we have not exhausted the supply of information. It would appear that in the 14th and 15th centuries, as in the 12th, the barons still advised their overlord. Arthur seldom acts or makes a decision without first seeking the advice of his lords. After Galeron had presented his challenge, for example,

> The kynge in to concelle hase callede his knyghtis so kene;
> Sayes: "Lukes nowe, 3e lordyngs, oure lose be noght last;
> Who salle enconter withe 3one knyghte, nowe lukes vs by-twene."
> (AA, vv. 461-463.)
>
> (The king called his bold knights to council. "Look now, lords," he said, "that our honor be not lost; who shall engage this knight? Let us decide among us.")

It is a typical situation.[84] So too, we imagine, is the behaviour which compells one man to swear allegiance to another. We have seen Galeron swear to serve Gawain as his man. More impressive are Golagros' words to Arthur. "Because of that bold knight who conquered me," he tells the king,

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[83] The structure of AA, for example, depends upon Baudwin's vows; cf. sts. ix, as well as sts. viii, xxx, xxxvi, lxvi. Other examples: GG, 267-273, 292-298; WG, vv. 90-91. This last, incidentally, is somewhat different: Arthur must swear upon Sir Gromer's sword to return with the answer to his question. A commonplace motif, swearing on a sword has its roots in the primitive custom which dictated that one swore 'on' or 'by' some powerful or sacred object which, it was presumed, would serve as guaranty of the swearer's sincereity. The subject is discussed cogently by A. E. Crawley, "Oaths; Introductory and Primitive," Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. J. Hastings (New York, 1951), IX, 431.

[84] See, further, GGK, vv. 362-365; AA, vv. 464-472; GG, vv. 314-336, 1168-1193, 1220-1249, 1250-1251; WG, vv. 291-298.

"All that I haue vndir hewyne, I hald of you haill,
In firth, forest, and fell, quhare euer that it standis,
Sen vourschipfull Wawane has wonnyn to your handis
The senyory in gouernyng,
Cumly conquerour and kyng,
Heir mak I yow obeising,
As liege lord of landis.

And syne fewte I yow fest, without fenyeing,
Sa that the cause may be kend, and knawin throw skill;
Blithly bow and obeise to your bidding,
As I am haldin, to tell treuly, thair till."
(GG, vv. 1316-1327.)

("all that I possess on earth, of wood, forest, or moor, I hold of you completely, wherever it stands. Because worthy Gawain has won the right for you to govern, brave conqueror and king, here I pledge allegiance to you, as liege lord of these lands. And now I pledge fealty to you, without deceit, so that the cause may be known, and its reason known; cheerfully I bow and yield to your will, as I hold of you, truly, for all time.")[85]

We shall finish our analysis of these reflections of feudal society by giving our attention to what appear to be two disparate observations: a consideration of the ideal behaviour of a messenger and the sincerely human behaviour of several members of the court. Yet, disjoint as the

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[85] The entire passage runs from v. 1272 to v. 1329. Not so realistic is the climax of this situation. When Arthur departs for home, out of the kindness of his heart, apparently, he restores to Golagros all his possessions. These two incidents, illustrating the oath of fealty, or homage, and the practice of offering advice to one's lord, are commonplace. Even at the close of the Middle Ages the historians, like the chroniclers of the 12th century before them, make much of conferences, and they, too, lay stress upon the practice of the lord's advising the king. Cf. Polydore Vergil's English History, an early tr., ed. H. Ellis, The Camden Society, No. XXIX (London, 1844), p. 1; Grafton's Chronicle (London, 1809), I, 413; useful, too, is H. S. Bennett's Life on the English Manor (Cambridge: The Univ. Press, 1937), pp. 154-192, where the management of the manor estate is seen to require considerable advice and counsel from subordinates. Homage, the act of swearing loyalty to the king, is obviously a contemporary custom. Cf. Polydore Vergil's English History, op. cit., p. 3: "...so at one instant they went to the Dolphin, submitting themselves and all that they had to his protection...." and "After this oration ended, Henry was proclaymed King of Englande and Fraunce by common consent of them all, and the lordes there present were commaunded to swear homage unto him, and the residue throughout the whole realme were bounde to take the same othe."

experiences are, taken together we see them as forming a symbol of the mediaeval man who occupied a high station in life. On the one hand he was obliged to act according to form, to fit his actions, always, into an acceptable pattern of behaviour. We may think of it as punctilio. We see this in the advice given to Arthur when he returns, as he promised he would, to force Golagros to submit to him. One of the knights suggests that a messenger be sent to the castle:

> "I rede ane sayndis-man ye send to yone senyeour,
> Of the proudest in pall, and haldin of prise,
> Wise, vailyeing, and moist of valour."
> (GG, vv. 326-328.)
>
> ("I suggest you send to that lord a messenger, one dressed in finest silk, a man of great honor, who is wise and valiant.")

The messenger on this mission must be a man of considerable stature, and he must be dressed appropriately. Yet this is not alone sufficient. He must also, when in the presence of the châtelain, choose words which will not offend him. When one addresses his superior, he must follow advice such as this:

> Thairfore meikly with mouth mel to that myld
> And mak him na manance, bot al mesoure,
> Thus with trety ye cast yon trew vndre tyld
> And faynd his frendschip to fang with fyne fauour.
> It hynderis neuer for to be heyndly of speche;
> (GG, vv. 354-358.)
>
> (Therefore speak discreetly to that gentle born man, and do not threaten him, but speak with moderation. Thus by speaking well you may win that true man to our camp; try to obtain his friendship with your courteous behaviour. It is never a hindrance to be courteous in speech.)

This behaviour is not instinctive; neither does it suggest insincere flattery. We are aware of the long years of training which lay behind it. But it is the accepted pattern of behaviour, and the knight who fails to achieve it cannot expect to win the praise or esteem he seeks. Courteous

deportment, especially in heated debate, always strikes us as unnatural. Yet, upon a moment's reflection, we realize that men do act in this manner: in our age the diplomatic attaché is seen as a distant copy of this feudal ideal. We may take the ideal as a form, or mould, which, impressed upon the individual, fitted him for specific actions. The knight, so trained - and it ought to be emphasized that one was trained, not born, by virtue of some mysterious element of "blood", to behave courteously - was less a free agent than an implement of manners and policy. Surely all this forms the familiar, long recognized representation of the feudal knight. Less frequently acknowledged, however, is his spontaneous, human behaviour.

It may therefore appear surprising to realize that the knight is also shown to possess quite ordinary human feelings, and, although infrequently, to speak directly, or unguardedly. The reception of the Green Knight in Arthur's hall is most revealing. The knights were struck dumb with amazement; they had seen many marvels, but they had seen nothing like the monstrous Green Knight. And when the Green Knight spoke, to inquire who the leader was, like any other normal human beings,

> ...to answare wat3 ar3e mony apel freke,
> And al stouned at his steuen and stonstil seten
> In a swoghe sylence þur3 þe sale riche;
> As al were slyppen vpon slepe so slaked hor lote3
> in hy3e -
> (GGK, vv. 241-244.)

> (...many a noble warrior was slow to answer, and all were astonished at his voice and sat stone still in deep silence in the stately hall. Their voices sank as if suddenly they had fallen asleep.)

They were, if possible, even quieter when the Green Knight made his request known (vv. 301-302), and were quite sure they had lost their senses when he picked up his head (vv. 442-443). A year later they speak their minds freely. As Gawain departs, certainly, they believe, to meet his death, they exclaim,

> "Who knew euer any kyng such counsel to take

As kny3te3 in cauelacioun3 on Crystmasse gomne3!"
(GGK, vv. 682-683.)

("Who ever knew any king to take such counsel as to suffer knights to be so tricked for a Christmas game!")

So, we imagine, we would ourselves have acted had we been present. The behaviour is sincerely human. Admittedly the incidence of the formalized behaviour is far more frequent; but we cannot discount the human behaviour as altogether insignificant. Do not the two form the whole coin, the one the obverse of the other? It would seem that the analogue is just, and that it is appropriate to call attention at this time to the seldom shown under side. All too frequently we have had our attention directed to the formalized character of the romance knights. As we look back over the extensive reflections of contemporary feudal society gleaned from these British romances, and as we consider their realistic representation, it appears to be quite fitting that we should be aware of the human qualities of the characters who sustain the romance action. Beneath the show and the glittering trim it is comforting to know there stands a real man. Now of course we find no true character development. The romance writers have not learned the skill of the sagaman: realistic character development lies beyond them. But they were sufficiently sensitive to realize that their audience would appreciate realistic representations of men in action. We should be equally sensitive: we should not pass over distinctly human behaviour, no matter how slight, wherever and whenever it occurs.

14. Hunting

One of the clearest distinctions noted between the early and the late literature is the total lack of hunting in the pseudo-histories and its rather significant representation in the romances. Men surely hunted in Britain in

the 12th century, as they have in every century, but the pseudo-historians found no place for descriptions of the hunt in their grandiose fiction of Arthur's empire. On the other hand, the romances, more realistically depicting the upper class of feudal society at leisure, contain many vivid hunting scenes. Only two of them, Golagros and Gawain and The Turk and Gowin, do not contain hunting episodes. In all the others hunting is clearly the favored pastime.[86]

There is no need to record each instance in detail: two will suffice. Arthur's organized hunt near Carlyle and the Green Knight's conquest of the wild boar illustrate adequately the principles of venery as practiced in the late Middle Ages.[87] The organized hunt was a considerable enterprise which called for careful planning and rather extensive preparations. We see this in the description of Arthur's hunt. We may call it a stationary hunt to distinguish it from the action of the individual who, in pursuit of his game, must be prepared to combat his quarry. Such an action is shown vividly in the Green Knight's encounter with the boar.

As the action of the organized hunt opens we find that Arthur himself supervises the disposition of the hunters. Here is the full description:

> Sir Arthure, with his Erles, fulle ernestly rydis,
> To teche þame to þaire tristis, trewely to telle.
> To þaire tristis he þam taughte, who þat righte trowes,
> Ilke a lorde, with owttyne lett,
> At his triste was he sett,
> Withe bowe and with Barcelett,
> Vndir þose bewes.
>
> Vndir þose bewes þay bode, þose beryns so bolde,

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[86] Oddly enough, Falconry is never mentioned.

[87] Hunting is described elsewhere in the following passages: GGK, vv. 1126-1177, 1319-1371, 1412-1467, 1561-1573, 1601-1618, 1688-1730, 1893-1923; GCC, vv. 20-23, 29-33, 103-127; AKA, sts. ii. - xvii., less 20 vv. of sts. viii. and ix., a total of 249 vv.; WG, vv. 19-48.

To bekire at þose barrayne, in bankis so bare.
Thay keste of þaire coppilles, in clyffes so calde;
Thay recomforthed þaire kenettis, to kele þame of care;
þare myghte hirdmene, hendely forsothte, herdis by-halde,
Herkyn huntynge with hornnes, in holtis so hare.
Pay fellede downe þe femmales, fulle thikke folde,
Withe fresche hundis, and felle, felonosly þay fare.
(...a line is missing.)
þay questede and quellys,
By frythis and fellis,
þat þe dere dwellys,
And darkys and dorys.

Alle darkis the dere, and to downe schowys,
And, for þe dowte of þe dede, drowpys the daa,
And by þe stremys so strange, þat swyftly swoghes,
þay wery þe wilde swyne, and wyrkkis þame waa.
Thay hunte and halowes, in holttis and hillys,
And tille þaire riste raches relyes one þaire raye;
Thay gafe no gamene, no grythe, þat one grownde growes,
Grete hundis fulle gladly gane gaa.
Thus þies gomes þay ga, in grevys so grene,
And boldly blowes rechayse,
And folowes faste one þe trase,
With many sergyaunts of mace,
Swylk solauce to sene.

Thus with solauce þay semelede, the prowdeste in palle,
And sew to þe soueraygne, in cleues so clene.
(AA, vv. 33-67.)

(Eagerly, to tell the truth, Sir Arthur rides ahead with his earls to place them at their hunting stations. He took them to their hunting stations, you may truly believe that. Without fail, each lord was placed at his station, with a bow and a hound, under those boughs.

Under those boughs they waited, those bold knights, to attack the non-bearing hinds on the bare banks. They released their coupled hounds on the cold cliffs, and, to relieve their concern, they encouraged their kennets [small dogs]: there, to speak truly, might the nobles behold the herds and, in the gray wood, listen for the hunting horns. They killed many does; with the eager and fierce hounds they hunted cruelly. They hunted in full cry and killed in the small wood and moor where the deer dwells, and lurks and trembles.

The deer lurk, and push on to the hills, and, because they fear the action, the does lie hid. And so by the rapid streams which rush swiftly, they fight and injure the wild boars. They hunt and shout out in the wood and hills until their hounds rally in their

tracks at their resting place; they gave no quarter,
no peace whatsoever; the great hounds eagerly went.
Thus the knights went on, in the green groves, until
the rechase blows loudly, when they follow quickly
on the trace with many sergeants-at-arms. It was
such a comfort to see it.

And so they assembled joyfully, the boldest in cloth,
and followed the king through bright ravines.)

The organized hunt appears here to be pure relaxation and enjoyment. Far more vigorous and dangerous is the pursuit of an enraged, vicious animal. The boar was a formidable adversary, and no man with a faint heart could ever hope to kill one. On the second day of Gawain's visit to his castle, the Green Knight and his hunting party raise a boar and give it chase. Backed, at last, into a hole in a river bank, the animal, at bay, presented his ugliest aspect. A foam frothed in his mouth, he whet his white tusks.

with hym þen irked
...
Alle þe burneȝ so bolde þat hym by stoden
To nye hym on-ferum, bot neȝe hym non durste
for wope;
He hade hurt so mony byforne
þat al þuȝt þenne ful lope
Be more wyth his tusches torne,
þat breme watȝ and braynwod bothe,

Til þe knyȝt com hymself, kachande his blonk,
Syȝ hym byde at þe bay, his burneȝ bysyde;
He lyȝtes luflyche adoun, leueȝ his corsour,
Braydeȝ out a bryȝt bront and bigly forth strydeȝ,
Foundeȝ fast þurȝ þe forth þer þe felle bydeȝ.
þe wylde watȝ war of þe wyȝe with weppen in honde,
Hef hyȝly þe here, so hetterly he fnast
þat fele ferde for þe freke, lest felle hym þe worre.
þe swyn setteȝ hym out on þe segge euen,
þat þe burne and þe bor were bope vpon hepeȝ
In þe wyȝtest of þe water; þe worre hade þat oþer,
For þe mon merkkeȝ hym wel, as þay mette fyrst,
Set sadly þe scharp in þe slot euen,
Hit hym vp to þe hult, þat þe hert schyndered,
And he ȝarrande hym ȝelde, and ȝed ouer þe water
ful tyt.
A hundreth hounde3 hym hent,
þat bremely con hym bite,
Burneȝ him broȝt to bent,
And dogge3 to dethe endite.
(GGK, vv. 1573-1600.)

(It was not pleasant for all the bold hunters that stood about him to approach him even distantly; to go near him, none dared for fear of injury. He had hurt so many before, that then all seemed loath to be more torn up by the tusks of that savage and crazed beast.

When the Green Knight himself came up, urging on his horse, and saw the boar bide at bay near his men, he jumped down lightly, left his mount, drew a bright sword, and strode forward boldly, hurrying fast through the stream where the fell one awaited. The wild creature was aware of the man with weapon in hand, and he heaved his hairs aloft; he snorted so fiercely that many feared for their lord, lest the worse befall to him. The swine rushed directly at the knight, so that man and boar were both in a heap in the wildest part of the water. But the boar had the worse, for the knight marked him well as they first met and skillfully set his point exactly in the slot, piercing him up to the hilt so that his heart split; he gave way squealing and quickly slipped down into the water. A hundred hounds siezed him and fiercely bit him. Men brought him to land and the dogs finished him.)

In the last quarter of the 14th century, when these descriptions of the hunt were composed, men hunted chiefly to obtain meat. They also hunted for the same reason men hunt today: it was a sport and an entertainment. A third incentive was the appeal which hunting exerted on all vigorous men: the courage and skill with weapons which were called forth by the hunt were qualities greatly admired by a society still influenced tremendously by the warrior class. All three motivations are illustrated by these two examples.

Before the advent of the meat-packing industry, wild game supplied the tables of our ancestors with meat. Skilled hunters were therefore a necessity to society. The thrill of the hunt, or of the chase, called the aristocracy to the field. Arthur's organized hunt filled the double purpose of providing meat to eat, and of providing entertainment for the members of the court. We have in this description of the hunt taken from the Aunters a fairly realistic representation of the favorite pastime of the aristocracy of the day. By the end of the 14th century the procedures of the hunt were well

established. An excellent set of instructions, as well as a rule book for hunting, is The Master of Game, written between 1406 and 1413 by Edward, Second Duke of York.[88] Taking Edward's book as an indication of normal procedure, we have found that the account of Arthur's hunt appears to be irregular in only one respect. In the romance Arthur himself assigns stations to his companions and conducts them to their trysts. The Master of Game, apparently, would have arranged all these details before the king and his party arrived on the scene.[89] Apart from this slight deviation all else in the romance account is perfectly normal. The actions of the hounds, the bowmen, and the attendants comprise a description of a stationary hunt which would have seemed quite real to a late 14th century audience. All who heard or may have read the romance would have concluded that its author must have participated in such a hunt.

A much different matter was the chase. The courage and skill with weapons which the age admired were called upon by any man who chased a wild boar. It was a dangerous adversary.[90] The Green Knight, here in the role of a real

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[88] Ed. W. A. and F. Baillie-Grohman (London, 1909).

[89] The Master of Game, p. 189: "And early in the morning the Master of the Game should be at the wood to see that all be ready, and he or his lieutenant or such hunters that he wishes, ought to set the greyhounds and who so be teasers [small hound to tease forth or put up the game] to the King or to the Queen, or to their attendants....And then the master forester or parker ought to show him a fewterer, or attendant who let loose the greyhounds the King's standing if the King would stand with his bow, and where all the remnant of the bows would stand." To show that Arthur knows the procedure of the hunt, the author, no doubt, states that the King himself directed and ordered the hunt.

[90] Edward writes that it "...is the beast of this world that is strongest armed, and can sooner slay a man than any other. Neither is there any beast that he could not slay if they were alone sooner than that other beast could slay him, be they lion or leopard, unless they should leap upon his back, so that he could not turn upon him with his teeth. And there is neither lion nor leopard that slayeth a man at one stroke as a boar doth, for they mostly kill with the raising of their claws and through biting, but the wild boar slayeth a man with one stroke as with a knife, and therefore he can slay any other beast sooner than they could slay him. It is a proud beast and fierce and perilous, for many times have men seen much harm that he hath done. For some men have seen him slit a man from knee up to the breast and slay him all stark dead at one stroke...." (The Master of Game, p. 47.)

man, demonstrates that he well deserves the esteem of his men which he enjoys. When the bow, which made it possible for men to kill at a distance, was not used one had to kill one's adversary, man or beast, in hand-to-hand combat with either a spear, a sword, or a knife. Seldom could a man display greater courage than to dismount and, holding his sword firmly, receive the direct lunge of an enraged boar. Great skill is evinced too: the Green Knight brings it all off with a certain amount of unconcern, as if he had done that sort of thing before. A somewhat more conventional boar killing is pictured in two of the admirable miniatures which adorn one of the most famous hunting treatises produced during the Middle Ages, the Livre de la Chasse by Gaston Phoebus, Count of Foix,[91] who is known to many readers as Froissart's entertaining host. Reproduction number fifty-seven, "Comment on doit chascier et prendre le sangler," shows the hounds, their attendants - armed with cross bow and short lance - and two mounted hunters armed, the one with a sword and the other with a long lance, pursuing a boar through a wood. Number fifty-eight, "Comment on doit ferir le sangler," shows a boar lunging at a rider, who thrusts his sword into the charging animal, while another rider thrusts his sword into the animal's hind quarter. An attendant is also seen thrusting a short spear through a charging boar. But as often as not the hunter would be dismounted, either intentionally or thrown from his mount, and forced to meet the boar face to face. The Green Knight's experience could probably be matched by the experience of many hunters in the 14th century.

The hunting scenes, in short, are a realistic representation of a common mediaeval activity. In real life hunting was a pleasant, although often dangerous, interlude for the aristocracy. In the romances the hunting episodes

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[91] C. Couderc, ed. Reproduction Réduite des 87 Miniatures du Manuscrit Français 616, Bibliothèque Nationale, Department des Manuscrits (Paris, 1918).

serve another function: they provide a reasonable diversion for some other action, they take certain people away from the immediate scene so that other people can carry on their activities. We shall consider this function in more detail later on. For the moment we are satisfied to note that the hunting scenes are described realistically, that they are vigorous episodes, and that they would have been regarded with pleasure by their contemporary audience as an accurate portrayal of a very real, very familiar experience.

15. Love

As the Britons, drawn out in full array before Golagros' fortified walls, contemplate the coming action, a clear horn blast is heard, sounding from within the castle. Arthur inquires about it, and Spynagros, who appears to know everything, replies,

> "... the suth sall I say.
> Yone is a freik in his force, and fresch in his flour,
> To se that his schire weid be sicker of assay;
> He thinkis provese to preve, for his paramour,
> And prik in your presence, to purchase his pray."
> (GG, vv. 535-539.)
>
> ("I shall tell you the truth. Yonder is a strong man, a youth fresh in the flower of manhood, who, to see that his gleaming armor is trustworthy in combat, intends to prove his prowess for his lady-love by riding forth in your presence to add to his esteem.")

It is a familiar situation. A knight, eager to impress his lady, seeks glory on the battlefield. Apparently the knight was made more noble as a result of such an experience, thereby becoming more deserving of his lady's favor. Such behaviour is held to be a product of the ideal of Courtly Love, a complicated, highly artificial set of rules of conduct for members of the two sexes who sought to find a satisfactory advent to the pleasures of physical love where the individual's situation and position forbade the

attainment of a natural union. The mediaeval romances abound with situations like that which Spynagros described. Courteous behaviour, also, is highly regarded by the lady, and the knight who sought the favor of a lady was sure to practice courtesy. As we recall Gawain's reputation for courage and courtesy, as we think of his armorial standard on the field against Galeron - gold griffons and trefoils intertwined with true-love knots (AA, vv. 508-510) - it is not difficult to understand why he is also said to have earned a reputation as a lover.

Yet in these British romances, at least, we do not find that Gawain's behaviour especially marks him out as a great courtly lover. In the first place, Gawain is seen as a lover in only three of the seven romances,[92] and in none is he the conventional servant of love, a Lancelot who does anything for love and the will of his lady. Furthermore, seeking to become ennobled through love, or the desire to be love's servant, the sine qua non of the Courtly Love motif,[93] is never the cause of Gawain's action in love. On the contrary, the motivation for all Gawain's actions which embroil him in the love situation is loyalty, or a test of his loyalty. Gawain is attracted by the Green Knight's wife and is pleasant to her, but he does not wish to serve her as a paramour. Her pursuit and Gawain's refusal, in themselves the very opposite of the conventional order of action, are the direct results of the Green Knight's desire to test Gawain's loyalty and worth. His marriage to Dame Ragnell is the result of his loyalty to Arthur: his very brief tenure as a representative of Love's servant in this romance is a secondary motif.

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92 GGK, GCC, WG.

93 An excellent, concise statement of the nature of Courtly Love and its relationship to the fin' amors of the troubadours is the first two paragraphs of A. J. Denomy's "Courtly Love And Courtliness," Speculum, XXVIII (January, 1953), 44.

And his flirtation with the Carl's wife and subsequent marriage to his daughter are the results of the Carl's scheme to test Gawain's obedience and loyalty. Love for the sake of love, a desire to exalt the ideal of Courtly Love, and a wish to portray Gawain as an ideal servant of Love do not appear to have been among the intentions of the British writers. What the particular conception of love is which motivates the love scenes in these romances we may ascertain by pausing, for a moment, to look at each one.

The affair at the Carl's castle is almost a parody of Courtly Love. The Carl, it will be remembered, killed all visitors who did not obey him. Therefore all visitors were subjected to trial, to a test of their obedience and loyalty to their host. Among the tests to which Gawain is subjected is one which we have called the Love Test. Seated opposite the Carl's wife at supper, Gawain was infatuated with her beauty: he was unable to eat or drink. The Carl, noticing Gawain's behaviour, reprimanded him. "Gawain," he called out, "take comfort there,

> For synn ys swete, & þt i se,
> Serten i the hete.
> Sche ys myn' þu woldyst wer thynn,
> Leve seche þo3ttys & drenke þe wynne,
> For her' þu schalt nott geytt."
> (GCC, vv. 409-414.)

To the eminently sensible Carl the very idea of one man seeking to please another man's wife is ridiculous. His next move, however, is rather crude. When all were ready to retire for the night, Gawain was brought to the Carl's chamber, undressed, and asked to go to bed there. "Now, Sir Gawain, take my wife in your arms and, here in my sight, kiss her!"

> Syr Gawain ansswerde hym anon,
> "Syr, þi byddynge schall' be donne,
> Sertaynly in dede,
> Kyll' or sley or laye a-doune."
> To the bed he went full' sone,
> Fast and that good spede.
> For softnis of þt ladys syde
> Made Gawain do his wyll' þt tyde,

Ther of Gawain toke þe carle goode hede.
Uhen Gawaine wolde haue donn þe prevey fare,
Then seyd þe carle, "whoo ther'!
That game i the for-bede."
(GCC, vv. 454-468.)

It is, of course, a preposterous situation. The knight, to be sure, demonstrates the extreme of unhesitating loyalty and obedience, but he is hardly a man: he is a means for the author. Yet there is more. As a reward for his behaviour, the Carl informed Gawain that he should have the pleasure of sleeping with his daughter. Although the text is obscure on this point, it would seem that this too was to be a test, for the Carl, while ordering his daughter to go to bed with Gawain, tells her to warn him "...nott to playe." (v. 477.) Yet, in another breath, he complicates the situation by telling the two of them, as he leaves them,

"My blessynge i gefye yow bouthe to,
And play to-geydor all' þis ny3t."
(GCC, vv. 485-486.)

It is hard to believe that the author understood what he was doing, but, nevertheless, with this sanction, and with the daughter well pleased, the night passes. In the morning, after mass, Gawain kissed the girl; several days later he married her. (v. 635.)

If we do not wish to insist that elements of parody or burlesque are present, we are within reasonable bounds if we conclude that the entire episode comprises a negation of Courtly Love. Gawain's mechanical obedience may make him seem, as we have observed, less a man, but his undeniable pleasure as a result of his obedience makes the tone of the action unmistakably human. The situation is coarse, but the love is earthy and human. There is not a hint of spiritual ennoblement. Life Rauf Coil3ear, the Carl apparently wants to teach a lesson: love, he would seem to say, is always earthy, never courtly.

Loyalty, also, is the cause of Gawain's marriage to Dame Ragnell. His promise to Arthur seals the union. Here, of course, the situation is com-

plicated. Once married to the Hag, Gawain's function in the romance changes slightly. He is transferred from a symbol of devoted loyalty to a symbol of ideal submission to the lady. Both symbols arise, however, as the result of placing a representation of a human being in an extreme situation, the second part of the situation, moreover, being a direct product of the first. This structure allowed the unknown author to include, as a secondary motif, that tenet of the Courtly Love code which demanded submission to the lady. Thus Gawain, who is not the ideal lover, is changed into a temporary image of Love's servant. The two figures clash; the romance does not blend them successfully. As a matter of fact, Gawain, in the latter role, becomes a satisfied, happy husband, an impossible circumstance for the knight who would play Love's game.

His very brief service to Love, however, is conventional. On their wedding night, the Hag asks him at least to kiss her. Gallantly he replies,

> "... I wolle do more
> Then for to kysse, and God before!"
> He turnyd hym her vntille;
> He sawe her the fayrest creature,
> That euere he sawe withoute measure.
> (WG, vv. 638-642.)

Like Niall, soon to be the High King of Ireland, Gawain's amazement and chagrin almost overcame him. His now beautiful wife, however, puts him to a greater test. She will be beautiful, she tells him, for only half of each day, and he must choose whether he prefers her to be lovely during the day or during the night. Much perturbed at this turn, he gives the choice to her, telling her that he will submit to her will in all matters. That was all she had hoped for. Having won this submission from her knight, she informed a delighted Gawain that the spell placed upon her earlier was lifted; she would retain her beauty, day and night, as long as she lived.

For a time Gawain fell victim to Love's debility. Like Erec,

As a coward he lay by her bothe day and nyghte,
Neuere wold he haunt justyng aryghte,
Ther-att mervayled Arthoure the kyng.
(WG, vv. 808-810.)

Beyond this subservience to the Courtly Love code the poet does not go. His last word on the matter indicates that Gawain is to be regarded as a tender loving husband. There is the ring of human sincereity in his description:

She lyvyd withe Sir Gawen butt yerys v.,
That grevyd Gawen alle his lyfe,
I telle you, securly.
In her lyfe she grevyed hym neuere,
Therefor was neuere woman to hym lever,
...
Gawen was weddyd oft in his days,
Butt so welle he neuere lovyd woman always.
(WG, vv. 820-833.)

The passages show Gawain as a lover, but he is a mixture of the conventional and the sincere. This romance is late: one could speculate, in light of the statement that Gawain was often married, that perhaps other stories added to his reputation as a lover, and, further, that perhaps monkish influences account for the sincereity of this marriage. But these are gusses. The evidence provided by these two romances does not suggest that the British writers regarded Gawain as an ideal Courtly lover. One, indeed, negates Courtly Love, and the other presents a mixed view, the courtly element being definitely secondary. What of the third romance which places Gawain in the love situation?

The attitude of the author of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is considerably more complex. We have seen that the young retainers in the Green Knight's hall were especially delighted to learn the true identity of their visitor, for from Gawain, they felt sure, they were certain to learn correct manners, and to hear polite "love-talking". (GGK, vv. 924-927.) And Gawain's behaviour at his first meeting with the lady suggests strongly that their wish will be granted. For, after evening services, when Gawain glanced at

the lovely lady and her companion, he excused himself from his host and

> ... went hem a3aynes;
> þe alder he haylses, heldande ful lowe,
> þe loueloker he lappe3 a lyttel in arme3,
> He kisses hir comlyly, and kny3tly he mele3.
> þay kallen hym of aquoyntaunce, and he hit quyk aske3
> To be her seruaunt sothly, if hemself lyked.
> (GGK, vv. 971-976.)

> (...went towards them. The elder he saluted, bowing low; the lovelier he took a little in his arms, kissed her sweetly, and, in a knightly manner, thus greeted her. They welcomed him, and he asked, at once, to be their servant, if it pleased them.)

Such behaviour is a model of perfection. Courteous as well as charming, conventional as well as probable, it would appear that Gawain was admirably suited to play Love's game. Moreover, this impression is strengthened when, on the following day, Gawain, seated next to the lady at the Christmas feast, so ignores the festive activities that the poet must interpose his observation that

> ... I wot þat Wawen and þe wole burde
> Such comfort of her compaynye ca3ten togeder
> þur3 her dere dalyaunce of her derne worde3,
> Wyth clene cortays carp closed fro fylþe,
> þat hor play wat3 passande vche prynce gomen,
> in vayres.
> (GGK, vv. 1010-1015.)

> (...I know Gawain and the lovely lady took comfort in each other's company, in the choice play of their sharp wits, and the clean courtesy of their modest talk; their disport, indeed, surpassed that of any royal game.)

It is behaviour such as this, "gentle" actions which indicate social intercourse on the most elevated plane, which marked out the courteous knight and lady. There is not a hint of indecency, of crude or lusty behaviour. Nevertheless, these actions clearly establish an atmosphere fit for the conduct of Love's game: the lady is willing, the knight is eager to please.

It is only when we recall the total structure of the romance that we perceive the true nature of this behaviour. Gawain, not knowing it, is to

be tested, and the lady's conduct prior to the test is regarded by the poet, almost certainly, as a means of motivating the test. So, at any rate, it strikes us. The test, of course, is to be a test of Gawain's loyalty: as a guest in his castle, it would be a heinous act of disloyalty to his host to make love, including intercourse, to the host's wife. The test is conducted skillfully. In the first place, the wife is partner to the plan, and is, therefore, permitted to employ her greatest talents and utmost charms. Second, the temptation is designed to strike at a man's weakest point, his very natural sexual impulses and desire. It should be emphasized at this point that only a human character is fitted to play this role, for were Gawain represented as in any way extra-human, the test conditions would surely collapse. Third, the poet derives maximum benefit from Gawain's reputation for courtesy, a quality which he was careful to establish prior to the test. Gawain, as a result, is subjected to tremendous pressure. On the one hand, loyalty to his host demands that he refuse the wife's advances, and, on the other, his natural courtesy demands that he not be rude or summary in behaviour. Complementing these opposing forces is his human disposition and his strength or weakness for good or evil action. It is under these unusual conditions that the test is conducted.

If we have understood the test correctly, Gawain's behaviour, before, during, and after the temptation, is best explained in other than Courtly Love terms. Before the test the lady is encouraging - we should be tempted to call her a "flirt" - because she intends to establish the proper antecedent atmosphere which will make plausible to Gawain her subsequent behaviour while her lord is absent. Gawain's response, of course, is conventional: his behaviour is that expected of any courteous knight. Complicating the pre-temptation behaviour, however, are the broad implications of Courtly Love conduct. According to Love's code, the lady and the knight might well behave

as these two do. Before the test, then, the reader is not sure that Gawain and the lady are not commencing seriously to play Love's game. This, we think, quite in spite of the subtle hint which the Green Knight himself provides when he arranges the terms of his bargain with Gawain, the agreement to exchange what each might win. (GGK, vv. 1105-1112.) It is a clever technique which results in sensitive ambiguity and structural suspense.

During the course of the actual temptation, however, there can be little doubt about the motivation of Gawain's behaviour. The inspired servant of Love, if he did not faint, completely overwhelmed at the prospect of achieving what he had so long sought, would welcome wholeheartedly the opportunity the lady presented. Actually, the true servant of Love almost never had such an opportunity. According to Andrew the Chaplain, who ought to know, love easily won was despicable, and love was dear only when it was difficult.[94] For the passionate human lover, the easy conquest is no such obstacle: there are more Tristans than Lancelots in the world of real men. Thus the very nature of the temptation almost precludes the conduct of the affair according to the code of Courtly Love.

Its actual conduct, moreover, is more a battle of wits than it is a love affair, Courtly or real. The Lady leads, Gawain feints; the lady is amorous and willing, Gawain is courteous and unwilling. The pattern is unvaried for each of the three days. Generally the attack strikes at vanity. The lady's advantage is Gawain's reputation. If, she demands again and again, you are indeed the courteous Gawain I have heard so much about, why do you not demonstrate it? For the lady, courteous behaviour and amorous behaviour are almost synonomous. And always Gawain parries the thrust. Although we are

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[94] Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love, tr. J. J. Parry (New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1941), p. 185. This is Rule XIV.

not sure that Gawain can resist for three days, the lady, apparently, at the close of the first day's trial is less uncertain. "Although I were the most beautiful of all women," she admits to herself,

> 'þe lasse luf in his lode' - for lure þat he soȝt
> boute hone,
> þe dunte þat schulde hym deune,
> And nedeȝ hit most be done.
> (GGK, vv. 1283-1287.)
>
> ("he would show me little love" - because of the danger that he seeks unreproachfully, a blow that may kill him, but which must be given.)

As we know, however, the lady's surmise is correct. Gawain does resist. His behaviour is exemplarary, especially so on the third day when the lady's attack is strongest. Perhaps the bounds of reality are stretched a bit, but the determined knight stands firm, physical charms notwithstanding. He refuses, even, to exchange Love tokens. If all other evidence fails, this is the death blow to Courtly Love: since there is no pretense of Love's service, there is no need for tokens, no need to recall the beloved, for the beloved does not exist. As any human being would, however, he does accept the lace.

It might be worth a moment's notice to return to the second day. We mentioned that Gawain was subjected to tremendous pressure. The events of the second day illustrate this exceptionally well. The action commences with a kiss and ends with a kiss. The discourse which transpired between the two instances of physical contact, however, is more revealing. All the doctrines of knight service to a lady which urge compulsion, and to which, by virtue of his reputation, Gawain ought to subscribe, are forced upon him. Showing a skill and wit equal to the Fiammetta of the Questioni, or to Marie of Champagne herself, the lady probes Gawain's weakest defense. She speaks at length. Why have you, who are so young, so courteous, so renowned as a knight, not spoken once of love? Is it not strange, she inquires, that you are silent, when everyone knows that the chief action of chivalry which everyone praises

is the royal game of Love? Many of the great feats of arms, she reminds him, were accomplished in the service of Love, and were rewarded with "blysse in boure". Why, then, Gawain, do you not take advantage of this opportunity? "Certainly," she adds,

> "...ȝe, þat ar so cortays and coynt of your hetes,
> Oghe to a ȝonke þyn ȝern to schewe
> And teche sum tokeneȝ of trweluf craftes."
> (GGK, vv. 1525-1527.)
>
> ("you, who are so courteous and steadfast in your vows, ought willingly to show and teach to a young girl some tokens of the art of true love.")

It is a major assault. If ever a man were torn between two masters, Gawain certainly was. He escapes by resorting to courteous modesty. It is a source of great pleasure to me, he replies, to think that so worthy a lady as you should take pains with so poor a man as I. It were folly, he states, to tell you, who knows so much more than I of love, about true love. But I am anxious, nonetheless, to serve you. Thus Gawain maintains his honor to his host and lady alike. He knows the rules of the Love game, but chooses not to play: he carries the burden of Love's reputation, but he elects honor and loyalty. It is a curious paradox, but one, nevertheless, which the poet, by constructing the pattern of stress so skillfully, makes quite believable as well as structurally functional.

The post-test love discussion is motivated entirely by feelings seldom found within the tradition of Courtly Love. They represent, almost, a retraction, or denial of Love's code. After the Green Knight has explained why his wife behaved as she did, Gawain speaks bitterly of love. The true servant of Love, in moments of despair, may speak out against love, but he always returns to serve his lady. Gawain's attitude is altogether different. Of course, it is largely determined by his guilt-complex. He is angry, not at the lady, but at himself because he, in a moment of human weakness, accepted

the lace. Although his complaint echoes the conventional lament, it is nevertheless true to human nature. He seeks to excuse himself by claiming that he had been deceived. So, he insists, were Adam, David, and Samson: it is woman's nature to deceive. "These men," he declares,

> ...wer forne the freest, þat folȝed alle þe sele
> Excellently of alle þyse oþer, vnder heuenryche
> þat mused;
> And alle þay were biwyled
> With wymmen þat þay vsed.
> þaȝ I be now bigyled,
> Me þink me burde be excused."
> (GGK, vv. 2422-2428.)

> ("of the ancients were the best, the most fortunate, and excellent above all others under Heaven. They were beguiled by women they consorted with; if I am now deceived, I think I might be excused.")

It appears to be significant that the last word about love is a strong denunciation of women, almost a denial of Love's code, and that the hero, although admittedly seeking to excuse his action, reflects a strong human feeling. He is indignant because he feels, in some obscure way, that he has been cheated.

Much has been written about Gawain's conduct with the lady of the castle. We should like to add this important observation. Nothing shows us quite so well Gawain's human characteristics as the Loyalty Test in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. He is not the servant of Love: he is a very troubled young man caught between two strong forces. As it happens, duty prevails over desire, and he passes his test. His behaviour in the other two romances which portray the hero in love makes us believe even more strongly that Gawain is represented as a human being caught up in a strange love situation. A somewhat unusual conclusion is thus given validity: Gawain, as the British writers portrayed him, is not a Courtly lover. Some of the formalities of Courtly Love are present, to be sure, but by and large Gawain is shown to us as a man, not as a docile servant of Love. To put it another way, if the British

writers had ever considered Gawain to have been nothing more than a symbol of all knightly virtues, or to have been in any way a superhuman or supernatural being, the love situation would have afforded an excellent opportunity for demonstrating such attributions. But, in love as in war, the British Gawain is human.[95]

Good sense would perhaps call a halt here, to say no more of love. But a strong temptation exists to push on further, and, at the risk of appearing foolish, to state what seems to be a truth of the British Gawain romances. Put boldly, Courtly Love is evil, a sin;[96] married love alone is good. We do not wish to make Gawain a saint; he is too much a man for that. Nevertheless, in each of these romances where love is presented Gawain is made to reject the code of Courtly Love, and that is a significant fact. With the Green Knight's lady he will not dally; with Dame Ragnell he achieves happiness after he is married, and the mental tortures which plagued him, and which were resolved so happily on his wedding night, would suggest that marriage is a goal worth struggling for; with the Carl's daughter Gawain does indeed play, but that entire situation is a burlesque of Courtly Love. Now it is true that loyalty, not love, is the real ideal which is demonstrated by each of the three love situations, and that rejection of Courtly Love is perhaps but a secondary objective, perhaps realized unconsciously by the authors of the romances. Yet the fact remains, the ideal British literary knight will have nothing to do with Courtly Love.

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[95] Love is described in the following passages: GGK, vv. 970-980, 1010-1015, 1178-1318, 1472-1507, 1508-1557, 1657-1663, 1733-1871, 2413-2428; GCC, vv. 373-375, 406-415, 472-495, 505-510, 533-556, 565-570, 634-636; GG, vv. 535-539; WG, vv. 638-642, 646-655, 667-684, 805-810, 820-824, 832-833.

[96] As adultry always has been. C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1936), pp. 13-14, 17-18, 40-41, 179, 194 and A. J. Denomy, The Heresy of Courtly Love (New York, 1947) both acknowledge this obvious fact.

We are led next to a conclusion much closer to the point which has been pursued from the beginning of this study. Courtly Love is artificial, and Gawain, a representation of a real man, is not a fit hero for its code. We can, with profit, compare him with Troilus. Chaucer has carried art as far as it can reach when art is confined by an unnatural conflict between convention and reality. When Troilus is most a man, he is struck down by convention; when convention is about to submerge him, Troilus, the man, struggles to the surface. It is on the tide of this very struggle that the reader is carried, book by book, to the inevitable resolution of the "double sorwe". And what of the poet? Chaucer all along is plunged into the depths of Troilus' woes, for what he obviously does not believe in, he is committed to express. The result is a hero, Troilus, half man, half subconscious projection. And how could it be otherwise? The artificiality of the convention, the irresolvable conflict it necessitates, and the constant flux it imparts to its hero dooms him, from the beginning, to a literary half life, half death. Placed beside the visible bones and flesh of Gawain, Troilus is a shadow, and, understandably, an unhappy one.

The Gawain poets and Chaucer all represent their society. Chaucer alone appears to have been reluctant to displease his audience. He gave them what he knew they would enjoy.[97] The authors of the British Gawain romances, on

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97 It does not seem necessary to account for the rise and popularity of the Courtly Love tradition. The "hard facts" of feudal society, the position of women therein, and the frequent marriages of convenience are sufficient reminders to establish the fact that a happy feudal marriage was the exception to the general rule, and that extra-marital amusements and affairs were the natural escape for the unfortunate ladies of the castle. Of course, the code of Love was for members of the aristocracy only. Just how far the poets, over the centuries, were able to drive a wedge between love and marriage is still a question to be answered, but their great effect on the mores of the time constitutes one of the more curious social phenomenon of the Middle Ages. These remarks ought in no way to be taken as a denial of the positive social advantages and value of the Courtly Love tradition, especially its stimulation of a movement to create a better social position for women.

the other hand, felt no compulsion to abide by the restrictions imposed by the code of Love. Gawain, as a result, is able to fend for himself, and, more important, to engage our sympathy as he does so. What we may call "bedroom poetry" can be turned to a number of uses, not the least of which is to show a man to advantage. There is a certain humor in this suggestion, but if we were to contrast Troilus in bed with Gawain in bed we should observe that Gawain has the better moral position, and that, as a man able to act freely, he is seen to represent the ideal man, as he was conceived in the minds of British writers, free of continental influences, who turned away from artificiality and convention, who stands on his own feet, an honest man struggling valiantly to uphold the code of honor he happened to believe in. It is to the credit of British literature, we think, that he succeeded.

Gawain, the ideal knight, the representation of an honest man, is now seen as a guide to be followed by those of the society he represented who wished to bridge the gap created by Courtly Love between religion and love, between deceit and honest living. At its worst, Courtly Love was a fraud; at its best, a pleasant deception. Sir Gawain, in these romances, represents the reaction against it. We prefer to think of this reaction as the victory of a real man over the shadow of a man.[98]

16. Christian Society

It was observed that the pseudo-histories reflected accurately the religious belief and customs of 12th century British society. It is likewise true that the romances reflect the established Christian belief and customs of the

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[98] Probably more questions have been raised by this discussion than have been answered. The heavy hand of morality may have been over-played. But there is no doubt that a real question exists: Why is Gawain not portrayed as a Courtly Lover? The answer proposed seems, at the moment, to be a reasonable one, although, admittedly, a somewhat shaky one.

English people in the 14th and 15th centuries. The reservations noted for the early category, moreover, apply here. Christianity is seen as the habitual, the normal conviction: there is no indication that British society is any more or less devout than any other society. Also, it is again an obvious notation. Not so self-evident, however, are some of the observations made manifest as a result of a consideration of the Christian tone evinced in this literature.

To begin with, there is more of it than we might at first suspect. It was something of a surprise, for example, to discover that, in the seven romances, a total of 509 verses were devoted to Love, 602 verses to Hunting, only 484 verses to Combat, but that 636 verses were given over to Christianity. Now this is, we recall, courtly literature, designed to entertain the lord and lady in the hall. It appears certain that the British ruling society in the 14th and 15th centuries did not object to having their entertainment sprinkled with generous doses of Christian reminders. The conclusion is obvious: Christianity was so much an accepted habit of daily living that its liberal inclusion in vehicles of entertainment was accepted as a matter of course. Our second observation reinforces this estimate. Christianity is so comfortable that it accepts very strange bedfellows. Magic, supernatural phenomena, and Fortune are intertwined with traditional religious belief easily, almost gracefully. No intellectual disturbance is ever recorded. Gawain and Guinevere are disturbed, to be sure, when they first see the ghost of the queen's mother (AA, vv. 83 ff.), but they converse at length, and at ease, with it. Again we conclude that the habit and forms of faith are so natural, so much a part of the individual, that events which to us appear incongruous must, to the 14th and 15th century man, have appeared quite normal. At any rate, the over-lapping of what we regard as disparate phenomena never precipitated an intellectual crisis as it most certainly would today. Our final observation must be stated as a negative assertion.

Only once do we find a hint of anti-clericalism, or Lollardry in any form. It is a very short passage: the King of Man speaks out against Bishop Baudwin. Except for this brief notice the activities of Wyclif find no echo in the romances. The religious and social injustices which stirred the very soul of Langland must have been directed at deaf ears: it is hard to believe that the audience who welcomed the romances - and they did so throughout the 15th and 16th centuries[99] - gave much attention to The Vision of Piers The Plowman. It is a matter of record, for example, that the relatively slight concern of Chaucer for heartfelt religious and social reform is countered emphatically some fifty years later by Pecock's Repressor. Nor do we forget that Sir David Lyndsay, some one hundred fifty years after Chaucer, felt compelled, in his Monarche, to lament "the miserabyll estait of the world." Yet we would be in error to conclude that the romances are unrealistic because their religious tone does not reflect an awareness of religious and social abuses. There is a simple explanation. The audience to whom these romances were addressed were the very people, the nobles, the lords and ladies in the hall, the baron in his weakening but yet secure castle, who supported and were supported by the clergy, who would stamp out Lollardry, if they could, or, if they could not, would prefer to ignore it. The absence of complaint, then, is actually a realistic reflection of the upper class attitude, of the state of mind which preferred to believe that the habit and forms of the

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[99] See H. L. D. Ward, Catalouge of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum (London, 1883), I, 268-406, where MSS. of romances in the "British and English Traditions" are listed. The dates of some of these MSS. are as late as the 17th century, but the majority are of the 14th-16th century. The popularity of Malory's Morte D'Arthur, printed first by Caxton in 1485, next by Wynken de Worde in 1498, and at least five more times by 1650, attests to the "survival" of romance.

Christian religion were still comfortable and placid.[100]

It is not difficult to illustrate these general observations. The last, of course, is obvious. The one short passage, to be sure, is vigorous. Gawain and the Turk, unwelcome in the King of Man's court, are greeted by abuse. The king's ire is directed chiefly at

> ...that Bishopp Sir Bodwine
> that will not let my goods alone,
> but spiteth them euery day.
>
> He preached much of a crowne of thorne;
> he shall ban the time that he was borne
> & euer I catch him may;
> I anger more att the spiritually
> in Englond nor att the temporaltie,
> they goe soe in theire array;
>
> And I purpose in full great ire
> to brenn their clergy in a fire
> & punish them to my pay:
> (TG, vv. 154-165.)

In spite of its feeling the passage is not typical. It is the only notice of religious abuse in these seven romances. Moreover, it occurs in the latest romance - surely not earlier than 1475 - and in the one which contains the fewest religious overtones. By and large the passage must have been ineffectual, and it is to be doubted that the romance audience gave it any attention whatsoever.

The validity of our first observation, the surprisingly large number of references to Christian belief and forms, is made apparent by a glance at almost any page. AKA, for example, commences with a Christian invocation and ends with a Christian commendation. Of the others, all but AA end with the Christian commendation, and the longest delay in introducing the first

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[100] The reader also will find no mention of monachism. For the same reason that the romance audience was not interested in Lollardry it also was not interested in asceticism or monastery life.

Christian reference occurs in TG, where the first is noted in verse 130.[101] AA and TG excepted, we might almost strike a formula for the romance writer: it is, in general, customary to begin and end with a plea for Christian approbation. Between the beginning and the end, however, references to Christianity are so numerous that one hesitates to list them all. On the other hand, they are so casual and unobtrusive that a reader might put down one of these romances and not realize that the Christian tone fairly permeates the narrative, so easily and comfortably has the matter of Faith been assimilated into the structure of the romance. And it is just that which we seek to demonstrate: to show that the society for which the romances were composed accepted Christianity as a comfortable, familiar faith, as a natural and unobtrusive part of day-to-day existence. Thus the reader will find that the romances are filled with oaths and prayers, with references to the clergy, and with notices of the forms and ritual of the Roman Catholic church and service.[102]

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[101] In the other five romances, the first Christian reference occurs as follows: GGK, v. 37; GCC, v. 25; AA, v. 75; GG, v. 3; WG, v. 42.

[102] The list of all references to Christianity is awesome, but, nonetheless, necessary: its very length demonstrates the validity of our first observation. Thus: GGK, vv. 37, 51, 283, 323, 326, 370, 399, 471, 500, 502, 532, 536, 549, 596, 625, 642-650, 674, 683, 692, 696, 701-702, 724, 734-739, 750-763, 773-775, 813, 838-839, 869, 907, 920-921, 930-932, 940, 985, 995-996, 1022-1023, 1036-1038, 1055, 1063, 1064, 1097, 1110, 1135, 1245, 1256-1258, 1268, 1279, 1292, 1307, 1414, 1535, 1548, 1558, 1644, 1690, 1776, 1778, 1836-1838, 1876-1884, 1938, 1942, 1967, 1998, 2056-2057, 2067, 2073-2074, 2119, 2120, 2122-2123, 2138-2139, 2149, 2156-2159, 2185-2195, 2205, 2239, 2250, 2414-2419, 2429, 2441-2442, 2470, 2472-2473, 2529-2530; GCC, vv. 27-28, 143, 149-150, 214, 220-221, 276-278, 311, 493, 505-511, 518, 527, 529-531, 547-549, 559-561, 571-575, 583-584, 589-590, 614, 625-626, 649-660; AKA, 49 vv. from sts i, v, viii, xiii, xiv, xv, xvii, xviii, xxxiii, xxxiv, xxxvi, xlix, liii, lxv, lxviii, lxix, lxxii; AA, vv. 83-265, 274-329, 471-472, 474, 539, 547, 703-708; GG, vv. 3-4, 58, 97-98, 163, 265, 269, 278, 302, 578-582, 697-699, 791-798, 808-809, 819, 953-957, 1004-1011, 1045, 1057-1063, 1100-1101, 1111, 1223, 1233-1237, 1304; WG, vv. 42, 73, 79, 95, 112, 149, 213, 223, 291, 332, 346, 387, 458, 463, 474, 476, 487, 536, 572, 577-578, 584, 587, 638-639, 644, 657, 684, 691-692, 709, 733, 753, 763, 778, 785, 795, 838-852; TG, vv. 154-165, 186, 215, 283-285, 292-294.

Our other general observation requires a word of caution. It is true, as we shall demonstrate, that there does exist, in certain passages, an easy juxtaposition of religion, magic, supernatural phenomena, and Fortune. To state it more precisely, traces of magic, supernatural phenomena, and Fortune have been assimilated by a Christian society with no apparent disturbing effects other than initial surprise or shock. It is a strange situation. Leaving Fortune aside for the moment, because its presence must be explained at greater length, it will be to our advantage first to point out the instances of magical and supernatural occurrence.[103]

We have, as a matter of fact, but two classes of unnatural actions to account for. There is, in the first place, the appearance of the ghost of Guinevere's mother. Any Christian, of course, might see a ghost, and he could choose to believe or not to believe what he saw. Guinevere and Gawain, after recovering from their initial shock, accept the ghost as quite "real", and they regard it as if it were an ordinary moral instructor. What ought to be far more disturbing to the man of Faith, however, is the second class of unnatural events. Unearthly transformations, wrought by magical spells, ought to shake the very foundation of Christian Faith. God, after all, might permit us to see a ghost, but He is seldom the agent for phenomena which are clearly magical. Yet four times Gawain is placed in situations where he must act in concert with people who have been transformed,[104] and always he returns to us a perfect Christian knight. The eerie Green Knight, the monstrous Carl of Carlisle, the revolting Dame Ragnell, and the deserving Turk affect his faith not a bit. It never occurred to the writers, or their audience, that Gawain

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[103] Each is analyzed in some detail below; see § 19, "The Marvelous". Here it is sufficient to enumerate them.

[104] GGK, GCC, WG, and TG.

should inquire into the ultimate causes of the magical phenomena he encounters, or that he should wonder how, in a universe ruled by a benign, omnipotent God, such events could happen. In the 14th and 15th centuries, Faith was not easily disturbed.

It appeared desirable to point out each instance of magic at this time because they all are bound closely with normal religious phenomena. The Hag, the Carl, and the Turk, all victims of magic, utter pious ejaculations when their spell is broken. Bernlak, the agent of magic, has no cause to praise God, but he too exhibits a conventional Christian deference as he invites Gawain to return to his castle, swearing,

> 'And I wol þe as wel, wy3e, bi my faythe,
> As any gome vnder God for þy grete trauþe.'
> (GGK, vv. 2469-2470.)
>
> ("And, for your great truth, I like you as well,
> knight, by my Faith, as any man under God.")

We have sought to demonstrate that Christianity, magic, and supernatural phenomena are elements of a natural, easy alliance. Normal religious phenomena, quantitatively, far outweigh the magical and supernatural: therefore we asserted that Christianity accepted the other easily, as a sturdy oak might be said to shelter mildly parasitic weeds. One other thought has suggested itself. It is sometimes held that magic and religion are, in the mediaeval romances, confused, or, a somewhat different thing, placed in conflict. That is not true of these romances.

We have recorded each instance of the magical art. At no time has a conflict between magic and religion been observed: at no time is any character confronted by two sets of instructions, one magical, the other religious. The two phenomena are kept separate and distinct, and no crisis ever arises because of conflicting injunctions. Because the two are always presented as separate, distinct phenomena, we are quite sure that religion and magic are

never confused. To put it in other terms, the British writers appear to have known the difference between magic and religion, and they have presented them as separate phenomena.[105] The two are juxtaposed, but they are never confused or in conflict. We find additional support for this conclusion by noting that, in the first place, the juxtaposition of magic and religion never results in loss of Faith, that, after the initial shock has been dissipated, nothing interferes with the normal processes of Faith. Furthermore, magic, or the agent or victim of the magical art, is never the primary motivation or controlling idea in any of these romances. Finally, the presence of magic and the supernatural is accounted for best by what seems to be a fairly obvious observation: it is a structural necessity. In each instance magic is never introduced for its own sake, or to indicate that magic and superstition are regarded as either normal or extraordinary habits of mind, but always to motivate, always to serve functionally in the structure of the romance.

That Fortune should enter the romances causes no surprise. Although it seems illogical that men should believe in or give much account to chance in a Christian society ruled, ultimately, by an omniscient God to whom nothing can be unknown, we know that logic seldom rules our everyday activities. And

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[105] In so doing they appear to have had a somewhat less confused view of the nature of religious experience than that of certain modern anthropologists. Frazer, for example, writes that there is a clear distinction between magic and religion, whereas other anthropological philosophers can find no such distinction. Cf. Sir J. G. Fraser, The Golden Bough, 2nd Ed. (London, 1900), I, 76 ff., where the basis for the distinction is discussed. Eventually Fraser held that man sought through magic to control the forces of nature and, through religion, to propitiate them. More recently, however, the studies of Malinowski, Susanne Langer, and E. Cassirer indicate that Fraser's distinction, implying as it does that religion superseded magic, is not tenable. Cf. Susanne Langer, Philosophy In A New Key, Mentor Books (New York, 1948), pp. 129 ff., and, especially, Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man, Doubleday Anchor Books (New York, 1953), pp. 97-142, where, among other items, he argues that a belief in the efficacy of magic is not inimical to the development of religious thought, and, indeed, accompanies it.

we know that the mediaeval man was no different from us in this respect. It is being true to human nature to blame fate or chance, Fortune, for some misfortunes which occur.[106] One has only to recall the tremendous popularity of Boethius' Philosophiae Consolatio throughout the Middle Ages to judge the impact of the Goddess of Chance on a Christian society. The tales of Chaucer's Monk, Troilus, or The Kingis Quair of James I of Scotland, moreover, illustrate in English literature the ease with which Fortune was assimilated by a Christian audience. Actually, we are surprised that chance plays as minor a role as it does: there are but two passages which show Fortune's influence.

The first is found in the reply of the ghost of Guinevere's mother to Gawain after he had asked her to reveal, if she would, what lay ahead for knights who waged war. Her answer is straightforward:

> Maye no man stere him of strenghe, whilles þe whele standis;
> Whene he es in his mageste hegheste, and maste es of myghte,
> He salle lighte fulle lawe, appone the see sandis.
> Thus 3oure chevalrous kynge chefe schalle a chaunce;
> False fortune in fyghte,
> That wondirfulle whele wryghte,
> Mase lordis lawe for to lyghte;
> Takes witnes by Fraunce.
> (AA, vv. 266-273.)

> (While the wheel stands still, no man, no matter how strong, can move; when he enjoys his strongest position, and is most powerful, he shall alight most low on the sea strand. Thus shall your chivalrous king arrive there through chance. In battle, False Fortune, that marvelous wheelwright, causes lords to tumble low - take witness of France.)

Chance, not a man's ability or lack of it, nor his tenacity of Faith or lack of it, accounts for failure and misfortune. The tumble from high estate

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106 See H. R. Patch, The Goddess Fortuna (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1927), pp. 8-34 for a thorough summary of the impact of Fortuna on mediaeval man. Almost accepted as a matter of belief, Patch concludes that "...what was substantially positive in this (belief in Fortune as a positive force), and what was in harmony with her own truth, Christianity made her own."

to low usually is caused by Fortune.

More impressive, however, is Golagros' explanation to his court of his failure to vanquish Gawain. Because it is human to offer excuses, we feel genuine pathos in Golagros' remarks. "It was not cowardice that caused me to bargain with Gawain," he informed his men. "Since Fortune directs the course," he continued,

> "... throu hir quentys,
> I did it noght for nane dreid that I had to de,
> Na for na fauting of hart, na for na fantise;
> Quhare Criste cachis the cours, it rynnis quently;
> May nowthir power nor pith put him to prise.
> Quhan on-fortone quhelmys the quheil, thair gais grace by;
> Quha may his danger endure or destanye dispise,
> That led men in langour ay lestand inly,
> The date na langar may endure an Drightin deuinis.
> Ilk man may kyth be his cure,
> Baith knyght, king and empriour,
> And muse in his myrrour,
> And mater maist mine is."
> (GG, vv. 1218-1232.)

> ("I did what I did not because I was afraid to die, nor because of any lack of courage, nor because of any cowardice, but because of her cunning. Where Christ directs the course, things run directly; neither power nor force can contend against Him. When ill fortune turns the wheel, then grace is useless. He who can endure defeat, or despise destiny which makes men always faint of heart, cannot endure that fate longer than God decrees. Every man, knight, king, or emperor can prove from his own experience, and by his own case, what I say, and look on me as a mirror, since this is entirely my affair.")

Many men have been humbled by chance, Golagros pointed out: Hector, Alexander, Julius Caesar, David, Joshua, Judas, Sampson, and Solomon - all felt the sting of Fortune. For it is a general fact of experience, he concludes, that

> "Quhen fortune worthis vnfrende, than faillieis welfair,
> Thair ma na tresour ourtak nor twyn hir entent,
> All erdly riches and ruse is noght in thair garde;
> Quhat menis fortoune be skill,
> Ane gude chance or ane ill,
> Ilkane be werk and be will
> Is worth his rewarde."
> (GG, vv. 1239-1245.)

> ("when Fortune becomes unfriendly, then welfare fails. Then no amount of treasure can overtake or serve her intention; it is useless to look to earthly riches and fame - they are as nothing. Whatever Fortune may mean in her ways, whether good or bad luck, a man deserves his reward according to his work and his will.")

There is a strong hint in all this that Fortune and Christ are in opposition - grace is useless when "ill fortune" turns the wheel. Yet it is God who decrees, apparently, how long man must endure what chance may bring about. And there is a note of complaint too - a man ought to be rewarded according to "his work and will". Although the entire speech is, after all, an excuse, its reasonableness nevertheless appeals to our humanity.

We hear no more of Fortune. The two passages indicate, however, that the Goddess of Chance was still remembered, and that, when a reasonable excuse or explanation was needed, Fortune was held to be responsible. The passages show, too, that Christianity could accept Fortune's influence. Golagros is not less a Christian knight because he enlists Fortune's aid in explaining an embarrassing situation: he shows us, simply, that he is human, and that his society, perhaps more broad-minded than we ordinarily suppose, accepted his explanation as a reasonable accounting of the facts. Gawain, similarly, accepts the ghost's answer as a perfectly reasonable prophecy: his experience would have told him that men in high estate could fall to a low station. Were he asked, he too very probably should reply that Fortune caused the fall. Significantly, both Gawain and Golagros continue their normal life as good Christian knights. No stigma is attached to either knight, no peculiar reaction is recorded for either knight. As it could embrace magic and supernatural phenomena, Christianity also could contain the Goddess of Chance without revealing the slightest strain at its seams.

We have come at the Christian tone and the reflections of a Christian society as they are portrayed in these romances in a roundabout fashion, but

it seemed desirable, when considering what is, after all, a rather obvious feature - that the romances are Christian - to point out, as precisely as was possible, certain aspects of the Christian fabric which otherwise might be overlooked simply because the general observation is so obvious. The extent of the Christian tone, the absence of anti-clericalism, the easy alliance with magic and supernatural phenomena, and the relationship with Fortune deserve the attention given them. These romances are Christian, as we should expect them to be. But when we speak of them as Christian literature, we should, at the same time, be aware of the true breadth and depth of their Christianity, and, especially, of the apparently incongruous phenomena which their Christianity embraces.

17. Geography and History

When one recalls that Caxton found an audience for his Image du Monde in 1481, one is not surprised to find that the least reliable information in this literature is the geographical and historical data. The authors of the romances appear to have given little concern to the requirements of location and time. This is not, actually, a fault, for the structure of the romance does not demand accuracy of setting or historical reference. The romance actions could happen anywhere and, within limits, at almost any time. In each romance, to be sure, specific place names are recorded, and in all but two of them, GG and TG, references are made to events which occurred in the past. Yet, in each instance, the geographical locations are nothing more than pegs to tie down, as it were, a corner of the action, and the events alluded to are always pseudo-historical.

The geography of the romances is a key to their structure. There are, in fact, two geographies, and it is most important to distinguish them. In

the first place, there are accurate references to well known locations. These may be quite casual, as in the case of AKA, WG, and TG, where we discover no more than the barest mention of certain localities - "...in all England..." (TG, v. 187), or "Go we home nowe to Carlyll..." (WG, v. 127), or "To Carlele thay take the waye..." (AKA, st. xxxiv.), for example.[107] The references may, on the other hand, be more extended - "The yle of brettayn' icleppyde ys,/ Betwyn' skotlond & ynglonde, iwys." (GCC, vv. 16-17), or, to take the list of gifts awarded Gawain:

> Glamorgans landis....
> Þe wirchippe of Wales....
> ...Gryffons castelle....
> Wayfurthe, and Wakfelde....
> Twa baronrys in Burgoyne....
> (AA, vv. 662-666.)[108]

Only once, however, do we find a serious effort to point out a specific route. In what is perhaps the most famous example of romance geography, we are told how Gawain, leaving Arthur's court, traveled through Logres - England south of the Humber - approached North Wales, and, "keeping the Isles of Angelsey on his left", crossed a ford at Holy Head, arriving in the "wilderness of Wirrel". (GGK, vv. 691-701.)[109]

The mention of these localities, however, is not to be taken too seriously. If one were, for example, to look for the Green Chapel, or for anything but deer in Ingleswood Forest, one would return as shame-faced as the chagrined Wace, after he had come back from a "...sentimental journey to Broceliande,

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[107] Others: AKA, sts. ii, v, ix, xxii, xxx, xxi, xxiv, lviii - 10 vv. in all; WG, vv. 16, 132, 216, 227, 326, 356, 385, 518, 696, 765, 827, 836; TG, vv. 3, 7, 129, 160, 317, 320.

[108] Others of this kind: GCC, vv. 19-20, 22; AA, vv. 1-3, 30, 405-407, 675-676, 694, 717; GG, vv. 2, 302, 310, 1312-1313, 1345.

[109] Cf. GGK, p. 93, where, in their note to these lines, Gordon and Tolkein point out the difficulty of reconstructing Gawain's actual route.

disappointed to find there only the common daylight and nothing of the Faerie."[110] The place-names serve only to fix the outer limits, or the line of departure, so to speak, of the romance action. Once they have been mentioned, once these limits have been established, they may be forgotten. For more important than the outer, real geography is the inner, indefinite geography. In each instance an imaginary boundary line is established between the real world and the romance world in which the key action takes place. It may be an obvious terrain feature, such as the mysterious mound into which Gawain and the Turk disappear (TG, vv. 66-68), or an inconspicuous line of brush where a strange knight lurks, waiting to snare Arthur (WG, vv. 44-45). Whatever its nature, this boundary exists, and the hero must cross it to reach his goal. We may think of the area of action as comprising two concentric circles. A point on the outer circumference is located definitely: Arthur's court at Camelot, Carlisle, and the like. The inner circumference is never identified accurately: it is the imaginary boundary line. We may further represent the inner circle as the area of the primary action. The hero, then, leaves from a point on the outer circumference, travels towards the center, and crosses, on the way, the inner circumference, or boundary line between the outer geographical world and the inner world of the romance action. Thus there are two kinds of geography in the romances. One is realistic and definite, the other is, on purpose, obscure.

Somewhat complementing the duality of the romance geography is the sense of history inherent in these romances. History is always pseudo-history, and time is generally confused. The most striking device is the transposition of Arthur from the 6th to the 14th-15th centuries. Instead of writing what we should call historical novels, that is, describing the action of Arthur

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[110] W. P. Ker, Epic And Romance, p. 30.

and his companions in their 6th century surroundings, the writers of these romances place Arthur and his knights in what was to them a contemporary, present day situation. Although no writer in the Middle Ages possessed what today we should call historical perspective, the romance authors realized that Arthur must be placed somewhere in the past. The typical solution is a confused spatial and temporal relationship: Arthur is from the past, but the action is presented as if it were going on "right now". In WG, for example, it is stated at the outset that

> Of alle kynges Arture berythe the flowyr,
> And of alle knyghtod he bire away the honour,
> Where-so-eure he wentt.
> In his contrey was nothynge butt chyvalry,
> And knyghtes were belovid [by] that doughty,
> For cowardes were euermore shent.
> (WG, vv. 7-12.)

Yet this is hardly a romantic view of the past, for in the following lines Arthur is a chief actor in a situation presented as if it were taking place today. Nowhere in the romances are we told that "all this happened long ago"; neither do we ever begin with "once upon a time".

Moreover, when events which occurred in the past are alluded to, those events are always legendary. What might be history is always pseudo-history, usually taken from Geoffrey or other chroniclers who followed him. To the familiar opening and closing verses of GGK, where a rapid summary of the British descent from Brutus is presented,[111] we may add passages such as this: Bawdwin explains his behaviour by recalling, to Arthur, an event which

> ...be-felle in 3our fadur tyme,
> That was the kyng of Constantyne,
> Puruayed a grete oste and a fyne,
> And went in-to Spayne.
> We werrut on a Sawdan.
> (AKA, st. lviii.)

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[111] GGK, vv. 1-26, 2521-2528.

No British king ever waged war against a Sultan in Spain. But to the writer of this romance it was a perfectly reasonable action to explain Bawdwin's strange behaviour. Without exception, each event we read about which was supposed to have occurred in the past never did occur. History, in the romances, is always pseudo-history.[112]

The structure of the romance, it may be repeated, does not require exact geographical references or accurate historiography. A dual geography and pseudo-history are sufficient. Actually, they complement each other, and, together, help to create the atmosphere of romance, that half hazy - half clear, half fixed - half floating, half lucid - half confused milieu which we have come to accept as one of the outstanding characteristics of romance. There simply is no place for verisimilitude of geography and history within the inner circle of the romance action. On the outer circumference of the romance arena we may have any number of accurate geographical and pseudo-historical references, but inside the imaginary boundary line we find no such references. As we penetrate to this heart land, we discover suddenly that we both know and do not know where we are. Essentially it is still true that romance "...is there where thou art not."

18. Natural Description

We saw previously that only Laȝamon, of the early writers, possessed an accurate view of nature. On those occasions when he chose to embody in his narrative an observation from nature, it was always an accurate, first-hand experience which formed the basis of his passages. There were not, however, many passages in the Brut which reflected such accurate natural observation

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[112] Other pseudo-historical references are: GCC, vv. 10-12; AKA, st. ii.; AA, vv. 274-312.

and description. The other pseudo-histories contained none. Taken as a whole, the romances are, in the matter of natural description, much like the pseudo-histories, for, excepting the hunting scenes, there is far less of it than we should at first suspect. In two of them, WG and TG, there is none, and GGK contains twice as much as the remaining four. Moreover, only GGK contains natural description proper; all the rest appears in metaphor.

The metaphors which draw upon a first-hand observation of nature are not nearly as fresh and vigorous as Laȝamon's. They all run to the commonplace. A gold cup - "as anny sonn' hit schon'" (GCC, v. 282); the flash of a gun "...lemet as the leuyn" - flashed like lightning (AKA, st. lxv.); a lady's complexion is "...reddere in rode þan rose in þe rayne" (AA, v. 161); the will and wealth of a man who goes to war just for pleasure "...sall be licht as leif of the lynd lest,/ That welteris doun with the wynd, sa wauerand it is." - shall be as light as the smallest leaf of a linden tree bowed down by the wind, so wavering is it (GG, vv. 289-290).[113] There is little in all this which suggests that the romance writers gave any thought to nature. Certainly they do not draw upon their observation of it to enhance their narratives.

The "Gawain poet", however, had a keen eye for nature, and the natural description of his romance stands head and shoulder above that of any other. All readers of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight recognise this: Schofield, perhaps, is but speaking what all readers feel when he declared that the "...poet shows keen sensitiveness to nature in all its English moods, the

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113 Chaucer, too, liked this comparison. Cf. Clerk's Tale, Robinson Ed., v. 1211. Other examples of this class of natural description: GCC, vv. 4, 73-75, 121, 236-237, 254-255, 262-264, 280-282, 399, 418, 424-426, 607 - v. 607, "the walls gleamed like glass", is, actually, un-natural description; AA, v. 188; GG, vv. 523-524 (?), 822, 852-855, 943-945, 960-961, 973-978, 1001-1002 - vv. 960-961 are a commonplace "fierce lion" metaphor.

dreary as well as the glad; he describes English landscapes of different sorts with striking vividness."[114] Every reader, for example, will recall the clear, accurate description in the passage which marks the passing of the year;[115] the "dreary" and the "glad" are present. The "dreary", however, draws out the most intense feeling. Of the many passages, two will suffice to illustrate the poet's sensitive perception.

Traveling alone, Gawain suffers more from the winter than he does from combat. The verses are especially vigorous:

> For werre wrathed hym not so much, þat wynter was wors,
> When þe colde cler water fro þe cloude3 schadde,
> And fres er hit falle my3t to þe fale erþe;
> Ner slayn wyth þe slete he sleped in his yrnes
> Mo ny3te3 þen innoghe in naked rokke3,
> þer as clateranде fro þe crest þe colde borne renne3,
> And henged he3e ouer his hede in hard iisse-ikkles.
> (GGK, vv. 726-732.)

> (But warfare did not try him nearly so much as the winter - it was worse; cold, clear water shed from the clouds, and froze before it could fall to the barren earth. Nearly killed by the sleet, he slept in his armor on naked rocks more nights than he ought to have, where, clattering from a crest, a cold stream ran, and hung, high over his head, in hard icicles.)

Again in the dead of winter Gawain sets out. With his guide, he rides out to meet the Green Knight. They rode, together,

> ... bi bonkke3 þer bo3e3 ar bare,
> þay clomben bu clyffe3 þer clenge3 þe colde.
> þe heuen wat3 vp halt, bot vgly þer-vnder;
> Mist muged on þe mor, malt on þe mounte3,

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[114] W. H. Schofield, Chivalry In English Literature (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1912), pp. 111-112. He continues: "...his festival and hunting scenes are surrounded with the national atmosphere of mirth." (p. 112) This is a very apt observation. Although we did not call attention especially to gaiety and mirth when the feasts and hunts were discussed, it is worthwhile now to include Schofield's remarks in the record.

[115] In the beginning of the second "fytte", vv. 498-533.

Vch hille hade a hatte, a myst-hakel huge.
Broke3 byled and breke bi bonkke3 aboute,
Schyre schaterande on schore3, þer þay doun schowued.
Wela wylle wat3 þe way þer þay bi wod schulden,
Til hit wat3 sone sesoun þat þe sunne ryses
þat tyde.
þay were on a hill ful hy3e,
þe quyte snaw lay bisyde;
(GGK, vv. 2077-2088.)

(...by banks where boughs are bare; they climbed beside cliffs, where the cold clings; the clouds were high, but it was ugly beneath them; mist hung in the moor, but evaporated on the hill tops, although each hill yet had a hat, a huge cloak of mist; brooks boiled and broke from their banks, shattering sheer on the banks, where they showered down. Dreary was the way where they traveled by a wood, until, all at once, the sun appears - they were on a high hill, the white snow about them.)

Both descriptions are vivid and accurate; they indicate clearly that the poet had observed nature and written down what he remembered having seen. Always, when he turned to nature for an image or description, the "Gawain poet" produced a fresh, invigorating passage.[116]

It must be admitted, however, that natural description is not an important part of these romances. Were it not for the hunting scenes, we should have little evidence to suggest that, when they were out-of-doors, the authors ever opened their eyes. GGK, of course, is an outstanding exception. The relative paucity of accurate natural description hardly argues that the

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116 Other passages in GGK are: vv. 740-749, 764-772, 1998-2005, 2160-2183, 2199-2204. (The author of GGK has frequently been called the "Pearl poet" because MS. Nero A. x. contains, in addition to GGK, Pearl and two other poems. When we say "Pearl poet", however, we probably assume a common authorship of all four poems. Although the question has no bearing on the problem at hand, it may not be amiss to suggest that the different tone of the natural description in the four poems indicates that one author may not have composed all four poems. At any rate, it does not seem likely that the accurate observer who wrote GGK would descend to commonplace descriptions in the other three poems, although it is, of course, possible that he might have. For that reason, for what it may be worth, "Gawain poet" has been substituted in place of "Pearl poet".)

romances are realistic. Yet, as we look back at the romances, we realize - and it is something of a surprise - that a very large part of their action takes place indoors, or within the conventional limits of the lists. Both settings, incidentally, would have been taken for granted by any 14th-15th century audience. Unlike the heroes of our own contemporary romances, the cowboy in the Western story, the romance hero never restricted his actions to out-of-door adventures. So it is, after all, perhaps not unusual that we find so little accurate natural description.

19. The Marvelous

We take up now a consideration of what, for most readers, appears to be the principal characteristic of romance. It is a fair assumption that the average reader would suggest that the romances are different from other forms of narrative chiefly because a large part of each of them is given over to fantastic or marvelous elements. There is some justification for this view: the marvelous is an essential element of romance. We think, however, that its function has seldom been understood properly, and that its extent is frequently exaggerated. We shall, therefore, isolate the marvelous occurrences in these seven romances and say a word about their function.

Oddly enough, two of them, AKA and GG, contain no marvelous elements whatsoever. In the first, Baldwin's vows, and the circumstances which account for them, are obviously exaggerations of normal human behaviour. In the second, Gawain's chivalric behaviour is undoubtedly highly exaggerated. In neither romance, however, will the reader discover anything resembling the marvelous: there are neither ghosts, giants, nor dragons, nor any super-natural phenomena. All castles stand firmly on solid foundations, all swords are ordinary steel blades, and the men are all very real men. In this respect

these two are the least "romantic" of the British romances.

In the other romances, however, events do occur which defy rational explanation. To all of these we have given the name, The Marvelous. Of them all, undoubtedly the most astonishing are the transformations which occur when Gawain, in the right place at the right time, carries out specific instructions given by a person who has previously, as well as discreetly, been victimized by a magical spell. The complete circumstances include, first, the enchantment, second, life as a misshapen creature, and, third, release from the spell by an act of disenchantment. We witness the second and third steps: the actual enchantment, never presented as it occurs, is usually related by the victim after he has been released from the spell.[117] Transformations are the core of the marvelous in three of the romances. The Carl, the Loathsome Hag, and the Turk were all transformed, and the circumstances surrounding their transformations form the marvelous elements in the three romances. They are distinguished conveniently according to the nature of the disenchantment employed. Release from a spell by decapitation is the motif in GCC and TG. Although the details of the beheading disenchantment are as ancient, apparently, as folk literature itself, the event, wherever it occurs in literature, is always startling. Surely Gawain, were it possible for him to step from these pages, would admit that nothing more astonishing ever happened to him. To be handed a sword and asked to decapitate an acquaintance is a fearful experience. And to see the result of such a blow is to witness the most extreme instance of the marvelous. In two of the

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[117] See Sir Walter Scott's interesting remarks in his introduction to The Young Tamlane in Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, ed. T. F. Henderson (Edinburgh and London, 1932), II, 300-387, where, in his long discussion of fairies and enchantment, he calls attention (pp. 377, 387) to a variety of disenchantments, or releases from Fairyland.

romances Gawain is placed in this situation.

When Gawain asked the Carl for permission to leave, the Carl announced that they would dine first. After dinner,

> ... the sooth to say,
> The carle tooke Gawaine to a chamber gay
> Where were hanginge swords towe.
> The carl soone tooke one of tho
> And sayd to the knight then,
> 'Gawaine, as thou art a man,
> Take this sword and stryke of my head.'
> 'Nay,' said Gawaine, 'I had rather be dead,
> For I had rather suffer pine and woe
> Or euer I wold that dede doe.'
> The carle sayd to Sir Gawaine,
> 'Looke thou doe as I thee saine,
> And thereof be not adread
> But shortly smite of my head.
> For if thou wilt not doe itt tyte,
> For sooth they head I will of-smyte.'
> To the carle said Sir Gawaine,
> 'Sir your bidding shall be done.'
> He stroke the head the body froe
> And he stood vp a man thoe
> Of the height of Sir Gawaine,
> The certaine soothe withouten laine.[118]

The sword blow accomplished the disenchantment: before Gawain's very eyes the monstrous Carl turned into a normal human being.

The Turk, Gawain's most faithful companion, also asked Gawain to take a sword and strike off his head. An extra detail is added: the Turk's blood must be caught in a gold basin. Gawain, understandably, is reluctant, but the Turk assured him he had nothing to fear. Agreeing then to perform the deed, Gawain

> ...drew forth the brand of steele
> That in batell bite wold weele,
> & there stroke of his head.
>
> And when the blood in the bason light,
> He stood vp a stalwortht knight
> That day, I undertake.
> (TG, vv. 286-291.)

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[118] MS. Br. Mus. Addit. 27 879, ed. Kurvinen, vv. 379-400.

Disenchantment by a kiss, the fier baiser, is the motif employed in WG, although it is confused with the request and grant of domestic supremacy. The author, moreover, mismanages the situation, for the actual disenchantment takes place before the kiss and embrace. The foul Hag, it will be recalled, obtained Gawain as a husband. On the wedding night Dame Ragnell reminded her husband that he might, at least, kiss her. Gawain replied that he would do more, and, turning to her,

> He sawe her the fayrest creature
> That euer he sawe withoute mesure.
> (WG, vv. 641-642.)

The transformation ought to have taken place as he kissed her, not before. The now beautiful wife prolongs Gawain's torment by telling him that she will remain beautiful only half of each day, and that he must choose whether he will have her ugly during the day or during the night. When Gawain answers that he will allow her to choose, and, further, that she is to rule in all domestic affairs, Dame Ragnell announces that she has, with his pronouncement of submission, been freed from a spell, that she will retain her own beautiful shape both day and night, as long as she lives. The episode is not managed as a single disenchantment by a kiss, but, obviously, the fier baiser is the basic motif.

Transformation is also the key to the marvelous elements in GGK. The case of the Green Knight, however, is complicated by two unusual circumstances. In the first place, when decapitated by Gawain, the Green Knight does not resume his normal shape; instead, to the utter amazement of Arthur's court, the headless body retrieved its head, held it by its hair, mounted, and, turning in its saddle, pointed the head to the dais,

> And hit lyfte vp þe y3e-lydde3 and loked ful brode,
> And meled þus much with his muthe;
> (GGK, vv. 446-447.)
>
> (and it lifted up the eyelids, looked straight out,
> and spoke thus much with its mouth;)

"Gawain," it warned, "take care that you are ready, as you promised." Second, the knight who delivers what ought to be the disenchanting blow, Gawain, is himself being tested. Furthermore, the Green Knight, as Morgan le Fay's agent, changes his shape at will to meet the requirements of the test. A year later we meet him as the host of the castle, in his normal shape, and, a week hence, as the Green Knight again, his head fixed firmly on his neck. The Green Knight explains everything: Morgan le Fay sent me in this guise to test the Round Table; she prepared this marvel for me. (GGK, vv. 2456 ff.) It is an exceptionally clever development. As Kittredge suggested long ago,[119] the author of GGK employed several motifs in developing his narrative: certainly one of them was, originally, disenchantment by decapitation. As we have it in the romance, however, there is no disenchantment, no return to normal shape, as a result of any action on Gawain's part.[120] Nevertheless, it is clear that Bernlak's transformation and decapitation are the outstanding elements of the marvelous in this romance.

In AA the only occurrance of the marvelous is the appearance of a ghost. Admittedly less shocking than a transformation, the ghost of Guinevere's mother

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[119] A Study of Gawain and the Green Knight, pp. 113-118.

[120] It is unfortunate, however, that Kittredge should have suggested a possibility of transformation at this point in the romance. He wrote, guardedly, to be sure, that we are "...at liberty to imagine, if we wish, that Bernlak vaulted over the brook again after the final blow, returned to the cave, and came forth in his proper guise. But this is a detail of which nobody can be certain; for immediate transformation before the face and eyes of the hero is a common incident in unspelling stories." (Ibid., p. 117, n. 1.) But we are not at liberty to suppose this, for Bernlak does not return to the cave, and, furthermore, it is stated quite clearly that, after embracing, Gawain and Bernlak part, Gawain riding to Arthur's court, "and the knight in bright green wheresoever he wished." (GGK, vv. 2477-2478) In other words, Bernlak is still the Green Knight, not the host. Actually, the structure of the romance makes it necessary that Bernlak be in his guise of Green Knight when he first meets Gawain and when he sees him for the last time.

does, nevertheless, create quite an initial disturbance. Gawain and the queen, resting while Arthur and the other knights are hunting, are alarmed when the sky darkens and a storm blows up. They are more than amazed, however, when

> Thare come a lowe one the loughe, in lede es noghte to layne,
> In the lyknes of Lucyfere, layetheste in helle,
> And glyddis to dame gaynoure the gatis fulle gayne,
> 3ollande 3amyrly, withe many lowde 3elle.
> It 3ellede, it 3amede, withe vengeance fulle wete,
> And saide, ofte syghande fulle sare:
> "I am the body þat þe bare,
> Allas! now kyndyls my kare,
> I gloppyne and I grete!"
> (AA, vv. 83-91.)
>
> (there came a light on the lake - no one could deny it -
> in the likeness of Lucifer, the most hateful in
> Hell; quickly it approached Guinevere, yelling and
> lamenting loudly, and, often sighing sorrowfully,
> it said, "I am the body that bore you; alas! now
> my cares grow, I cry and I am downcast.")

The ghost warned Guinevere and Gawain of the torments of hell which awaited all who lived in sin. In all respects the episode is a moral sermon, were it not that a ghost, not a human, was the speaker. In the rest of this romance there is no other marvelous occurrence.

Unearthly transformations and the appearance of a ghost are the principal structural elements of the marvelous in these romances. They are hubs to which all the other marvelous incidents are attached. It is convenient to regard the marvelous in this manner, moreover, for its very large extent might otherwise create confusion. Yet if we bear in mind that, for example, all the marvelous incidents in TG - the giants at the court of the King of Man; the weird tennis ball, so big that "...noe man in all england/ were able to carry it...." (vv. 188-189); the clothes that rendered the Turk invisible; the strange mound with a passage leading to the underworld - serve to draw attention to the Turk who is to be decapitated, we are able to reduce to order what otherwise might appear, at first sight, to be a bewildering maze of non-

rational objects and actions. Once the key to the marvelous is identified, we can account for the long descriptive passages, to take another example, given over to establishing the nature and appearance of the Green Knight, or of the Loathsome Hag. So too may we fit into their proper perspective the Carl's fantastic pets, or his odd behaviour.

We must identify the marvelous, for if we are to understand the point of view suggested in the romances, it is quite necessary to start with an accurate observation of the nature and extent of the marvelous elements they contain. In view of the widespread opinion that the romance is filled with fantastic, supernatural situations and objects, it is helpful, to say the least, to realize that all instances of the marvelous in the five romances where they occur can be related directly either to a transformation caused by an enchantment or to the appearance of a ghost. As a matter of fact, only about ten per cent of the narratives is devoted to the marvelous.[121] It is, however, a very important ten per cent, and its identity must be clear. These are strange situations. The "Gawain poet" understood his material and his hero, yet he felt obliged to interject, early in his narrative, his personal opinion of what he was setting out to do:

> Forþi an aunter in erde I attle to schawe,
> þat a selly in si3t summe men hit holden,
> And an outtrage awenture of Arthure3 wondere3.
> (GGK, vv. 27-29.)
>
> (Therefore I intend to tell about an adventure [which took place] in this world which, even among the many wonders of Arthur, some men count as a marvel indeed.)

If we are to form a just estimate of an extremely complicated narrative pattern which represents marvels as occurring in this world we need a solid foundation upon which such an evaluation can be made. Surely an accurate identification

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[121] 696 of the 7645 verses: 9.11%.

of the marvelous elements in these romances is the correct place from which to start.[122]

A word might be said, further, about the nature of the marvelous in the five romances where it occurs. There is a large class of narratives which is filled with marvels or marvelous deeds (i. e., mirabile: a miracle; marvelous deed.) One of our romances, TG, belongs to this class. There our interest and wonder are stimulated by the fantastic objects which Gawain sees at the court of the King of Man and the superhuman deeds performed by the Turk. No reader is deceived by these objects and deeds. We recognize them as a part of the non-real world, necessary paraphernalia of the romance world where unusual, non-rational adventures are designed to test some particular quality of the hero. Yet, as we have shown, all these marvels are subservient to the principal action, the disenchantment by a sword blow. In the other four

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[122] The following citation of all marvelous elements completes this identification. GGK - First description of Green Knight, vv. 132-150; details of his appearance and his horse, vv. 151-216; lace attached to axe, vv. 217-220; Green Knight's proposal, vv. 283-300; Green Knight's pronouncement that he will speak after Gawain has struck, vv. 405-414; the decapitation and its aftermath, vv. 415-461; description of the lace, vv. 1830-1854; reappearance of Green Knight, vv. 2221-2234; Green Knight's explanation, vv. 2445-2463. GCC - The fabulous Sir Ironsyde, vv. 67-102; the Carl's pets, vv. 224-245; the Carl, vv. 247-270; Spear Test, vv. 382-402; disenchantment by decapitation, MS. Br. Mus., vv. 379-410. AA - Unnatural darkness, vv. 75-82; description of ghost, vv. 83-132; departure of ghost, vv. 324-329. WG - Description of the Hag, vv. 228-252; disenchantment and its aftermath, vv. 641-699, 739-759. TG - Description of Turk, vv. 12-15; Turk's offer to exchange blows, vv. 16-18; the passage underground, vv. 66-74; mysterious banquet, vv. 89-106; marvelous castle, vv. 125-130; the king's giants, vv. 131-136; huge tennis ball, vv. 140-142; tennis game, vv. 172-194; three adventures, vv. 195-197; strength of the Turk, vv. 198-223; the Turk invisible, vv. 232-237; cauldron of boiling lead, vv. 238-249; Turk's second feat, vv. 250-258; Turk's third feat, vv. 259-267; disenchantment by decapitation, vv. 268-297. We shall observe later on that the influence of the marvelous extends far beyond the total of these verses. It informs a large part of the romances. To put it another way, the presence of the marvelous, no matter how slight the episode or passage might be, alters the whole tone of the narrative, providing, in a sense, a different set of rules or standards by which it must be judged.

romances marvels occur much less frequently. Therefore we have taken The Marvelous to be a condition, or atmosphere, induced by the presence of marvels, to be sure, but enlarged to a commanding significance. It is the marvelous atmosphere which makes a romance, which supplies the peculiar set of rules, or standards, by which it must be comprehended and judged. When Gawain speaks with the ladies in the Green Knight's hall we judge his behaviour according to its conformity with the code of conduct peculiar to courtly society. When Gawain agrees to accept the Carl's injunctions, however, we discover that we have no standard by which we may measure, or judge, his conduct. Instead of wishing to judge the hero, we find our interest has been turned in another direction, and we ask, not how did he behave, but what will he do. We have moved from the real world to the romance world. We have, therefore, been able to demonstrate that one appearance of a ghost and four disenchantments account for the presence of the marvelous atmosphere in the five romances.

If we regard the marvels in any romance as the source of the necessary marvelous atmosphere we may avoid attaching too much significance to them as objects per se. Much has been said, for example, about the green silk lace, or girdle, which Bernlak's wife gave to Gawain before he met the Green Knight at the Green Chapel. Clearly it possessed a magic virtue:

> For quat gome so is gorde with þis grene lace,
> While he hit hade hemely halched aboute,
> þer is no haþel vnder heuen to-hewe hym þat my3t;
> For he my3t not be slayn for sly3t vpon erþe.
> (GGK, vv. 1851-1854.)
>
> (for whatever man is girded with this green lace,
> while he has it fittingly wrapped around him, there
> is no man under heaven who might cut him to pieces;
> for he might not be slain by any earthly means.)

The lace is a marvel indeed, but Gawain takes it, as we have suggested, not as a love token or a magic surety, but as an object which might possibly save his life.[123]

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[123] Cf. n. 15 and 38, supra.

It is a gamble which Gawain, in a moment of human weakness, accepts readily. He does not know for sure that the lace can protect him; neither does he profess any belief whatsoever in its efficacy. Our interest in it lies in discovering if it actually will be of value or use to the hero. As it turns out, the lace has no part in Gawain's test. Bernlak withholds his blows on purpose, and we do not know if the lace would have protected Gawain or not. Furthermore, we have no reason to believe that the lace gave Gawain a sense of security, or made him more courageous and confident. We have, on the other hand, every reason to believe that with or without the magic lace Gawain would have knelt to the Green Knight and bared his neck. Therefore the proper meaning to attach to the lace is that which most readers easily recognize - it is a symbol of Gawain's human weakness. It, with the other marvels in the romance, is important chiefly because it creates the romance atmosphere.[124]

In the four romances which contain the enchantment elements the significance of magic must be clearly understood. The point here is that each of the persons Gawain meets, the Green Knight, the Carl, the Loathsome Hag, and the Turk, has been enchanted by someone else who possessed the power of casting

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[124] Professor Loomis attaches a much greater significance to the lace itself. See his persuasive argument in "More Celtic Elements in Gawain and the Green Knight." JEGP, XLII (April, 1943), 149-184. The Celtic provenience of the lace seems well established, but certain remarks concerning its function appear slightly misleading. Thus: "Presumably Bercilak was wearing it when he appeared as the Green Knight at Arthur's Court, for some magic influence enabled him to come through the beheading alive." (p. 149.) And: "...in all three (GGK, Wigalois, Diu Krone) Gawain encounters him (a stranger) in the ax test or in combat; in all three the outcome is dependent on the talisman." (p. 153.) It seems more likely that Bernlak survived the beheading because of the power of Morgan le Fay's spell - see GGK, vv. 2444-2459. Compare the description of the lace (vv. 1829-1833) with the description of the ax the Green Knight carried in Arthur's hall (vv. 217-220). Surely, if Bernlak carried the lace with him, it is not the green belt he wore, but the lace wrapped about the ax helve. And we have suggested that Gawain did not depend on the lace to save his life. Structurally the lace does not seem to be as significant as Professor Loomis takes it to be. The lace is significant as it contributes to the romance atmosphere.

a magic spell.[125] The Green Knight is the agent of magic, the others are its victim. Magic, therefore, is seen to assume a significant influence in forming the marvels. Furthermore, since all these people must meet a normal human being to fulfill their function - three of them to be released from their spells, the other to carry out a specific test - magic, too, is important as it helps to establish the romance atmosphere.

Since our remarks indicate that the marvelous serves a purpose other than to provide excitement and surprise - although this too is one of its purposes - a word might be said about its function in the Gawain romances. One of the chief objects of the romances is to display Gawain, the perfect knight, to show what might be expected of the best man. In a very real sense, the hero is being tested, and the test is always carried out in the romance atmosphere. Thus Gawain is compelled to contend against unnatural, marvelous situations and people. Our interest is quickly touched as we observe the hero in unpredictable situations. When Gawain moves from the real world to the marvelous world we discover that our attention is directed to the principal question raised in romance - What can a man do? Therefore we think that the marvels and the atmosphere they create in the narratives have the function of providing the un-real opposition which tests the hero. If the opposition is real, as, for example, it is in the persons of Galeron and Golagros, we know exactly what to expect of the hero, we can predict the outcome. But when the opposition presents itself in the form of a Green Knight, or a Foul Hag, the outcome is in doubt, and we must rely on the hero to show the way. In providing this indispensable opposition, we feel, the marvelous fulfills its proper function. It has been our first aim to describe the marvelous elements

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125 GGK, vv. 2444-2459; MS. Br. Mus. Add. 27879, vv. 398-410 in Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle: In Two Versions, ed. A. Kurvinen (Helsinki, 1951) - not in GCC; WG, vv. 691-699; TG - cause of enchantment not given, but see vv. 281-297.

in these narratives. Nevertheless it seemed desirable, at the same time, to suggest what might be their proper function.

20. Miscellaneous - Unlikely Behaviour

Our final analysis of the narrative material in our seven romances is concerned with a group of incidents and episodes which do not fall naturally into any of the categories already established. They are neither realistic nor marvelous, right nor wrong. That which characterizes them is their unlikelihood: they might, or could, have happened, but it does not seem likely that they would have. They have, therefore, been set aside at the end of this section on the romances.

Two of them are, essentially, romance conventions. When the King of Man asked Gawain to sit to dinner with him, Gawain replied that he would not. "I do not believe an errant knight shall sit down in a king's hall before he sees an adventure." (TG, vv. 166-171.) Surely this is an allusion to the better known habit of Arthur in the romances: he, at a feast, frequently would not eat until he had seen a marvel or heard of one. We find him so represented in the opening passages of GGK. In actual practice, of course, no knight would be so discourteous to his host, especially to a king. A knight riding his horse into the castle hall is the other conventional device. The Green Knight rode his horse into Arthur's hall; every reader is familiar with the disturbance which that caused. In similar fashion Galeron and his lady burst in upon Arthur dining in the hall at Carlisle:

> Ther come two setolers in, with a symbale,
> A lady, lufsome of late, ledande a knyghte.
> Scho rydes vp to þe heghe desse, by-fore þe royalle,
> And askede Sir Arthure, fulle hendely on highte.
> (AA, vv. 348-351.)
>
> (Two persons, playing citoles and a cymbal, entered;
> a lady, lovely in appearance and manner, leading a

knight. She rode up to the raised dais, before the nobles, and addressed Arthur courteously.)

She asked the king to grant justice to her knight, Galeron. It is quite likely that petitioners approached the king to seek redress, but it is almost certainly false to suggest that, in the 15th century, an armed knight rode into the king's banquet hall to make his entreaty. Both incidents, Gawain refusing to eat before he had seen some adventure and Galeron riding into Arthur's hall, could have happened. Neither one is impossible, nor marvelous. Yet it is not likely that either action, in the 14th-15th centuries, ever would have occurred.

A third incident is nothing more than a curious situation brought about by the existence of two variant versions of the same romance. Arthur, pleased with the banquet which the Carl prepared for him, made the monstrous carl a knight. If we read the MS. Brit. Mus. version, in which it is related that the Carl, beheaded by Gawain, regained his proper shape, we regard the Carl as a knight who had been transformed, by enchantment, into an ogre. Released from his spell, and possessed of normal human shape, it is not astonishing that Arthur should have welcomed him into the fellowship of the Round Table. In the Porkington MS. version, however, the Carl is not portrayed as the victim of an enchantment. He renounces his inhuman practices (GCC, vv. 514-552), but retains, so far as we know, his inhuman appearance. Even so, Arthur knights him (GCC, vv. 628-633); henceforth he is Karlyle of the Round Table. If the Carl had not been put under a spell, but had behaved so inhumanly for twenty years simply because of an impetuous vow he had made to kill any visitor or guest who did not obey instantly his most capricious whim, then it is indeed strange that Arthur should have knighted him. Although his style of living is more that of a proud baron than a carl, his manners are those of a carl, and it is most unlikely that his behaviour would be rewarded with knighthood. It

was not impossible for an uncouth creature to have been knighted, but it is most unlikely.

All the remaining incidents are found in GG. They are, moreover, the important actions of the romance. This is one of the romances, it will be remembered, which does not contain any evidence of the marvelous whatsoever. In what may be regarded as an interesting departure from the normal romance pattern, the unknown author of this romance appears to have substituted unlikely behaviour in place of the marvelous. There are five such key actions.

The first twenty-six verses describe the movement of Arthur and his entire retinue overland, through Tuscany, on their way to Jerusalem. There is nothing odd or unusual about a pilgrimage, but no king and court, en masse, ever made such a journey. Moreover, the similarity between this journey and that which motivates Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne strikes this reader as more than accidental. At any rate, such a journey, although not impossible, is unlikely. It is on this journey that Arthur sees the splendid castle of Golagros. Describing it as the best sight he had seen, Arthur asks Spynagros who the overlord of that land might be. "The lord who owns that fief," Spynagros replied,

> ... haldis of nane leid....
> Bot euer-lesting but legiance, to his leving,
> As his eldaris has done, enduring his daw."
>
> ("holds of no person, but [rules independently]
> forever without allegiance during his life, as
> his ancestors before him did.")

The unwritten laws of feudalism made no provisions for such independence: Golagros ought to have owed allegiance to an overlord. It is a most unlikely circumstance, and Arthur speaks for the age when he exclaims, "Heavenly God! How could such a thing happen? Has any wise man ever heard of such a fantastic thing?" (GG, vv. 265-266.) And he vowed at once to return, on his way home from the Holy Land, to force Golagros to submit to him. It is this vow,

of course, which causes the main action of the romance, Gawain's combat with Golagros.

Other unlikely incidents occur as a result of the siege of the castle. Golagros refused Arthur's plea for peaceful submission (vv. 428-452), Gawain agreed to Golagros' request that he pretend he really lost the combat to Golagros (vv. 1092-1115), Golagros led a large group, in the dead of night, to Arthur's camp to explain the true situation (vv. 1252-1271), and, most unlikely of all, after all the fighting, and in spite of his original vow, Arthur returned the fief to Golagros (vv. 1352-1362). These are strange situations. All except the last, however, are structurally necessary; all are substitutes for the marvelous. The return of the fief to Golagros, although it is a good invention, appears to be nothing more than a gratuitous show of generosity on Arthur's part.

All these instances of unlikely behaviour - and they are few - might have been recorded in one or more of the categories established previously. In one sense we might say that all the marvelous is unlikely. Yet the nature of the unlikelihood of these incidents is quite different from the nature of what we have called the marvelous; a different cause accounts for each. Even more obviously these incidents do not belong among the realistic elements. The best solution, then, was to list them separately as miscellaneous items. Actually, after the real and the un-real has been accounted for, there is very little to dispose of in this manner. This bespeaks a tighter structure for the romances than is generally accorded them.

With all the evidence from the British Gawain romances now before us, an accurate judgment of the Late Literary Gawain can be established. The most important single observation to record is that Gawain is still regarded as a normal human being. He is a superior knight, to be sure, in fact an ideal

knight, but nowhere in our romances does he at any time possess superhuman or supernatural characteristics. He is a superbly strong man in a fight, but his strength is a natural strength: it does not, like the sun, wax in the forenoon and wane in the afternoon. Neither does he possess a "sword of light" nor an extraordinary horse. His sword is the good steel brand of the normal warrior and knight, and Gringolet is nothing more than a first rate destrier. But if Gawain is a normal human being, he certainly is not an ordinary man. Clearly he represents the ideal of knightly perfection, and it is to be doubted that any one knight ever lived up to Gawain's total achievement. Edward III and the Black Prince may, at times, have approached Gawain's chivalric behaviour; Bertrand du Guesclin was probably every bit as good a fighter as Gawain; Guillaume le Maréchal, two hundred years earlier, was perhaps as complete a man as Gawain. Yet no one man could equal Gawain.

Sir Gawain, Knight of the Round Table, nephew of Arthur, is, above all else, the flower of knighthood. In these 14th and 15th century British romances he is represented as the ideal of human perfection. His courtesy was unequalled. His loyalty and obedience were above reproach. He possessed a level head and uncommon tact and finesse. His generous and chivalric behaviour earned him the highest favor and reputation. In appearance and dress he was faultless, but, more important, he was able to act the part expected of an outstanding knight. When it was demanded of him, his courage, moreover, was never found wanting: with sword or lance, mounted or on foot, Sir Gawain was the supreme fighter. With good cause, then, the "Gawain poet" emblazoned Gawain's armorial standard indelibly, in bright gules and gold, on the pages of his romance. For the "pentangle" fits only Sir Gawain: surely, in the eyes of the authors of these romances, all the knightly virtues were "...harder happed on þat haþel þen on any oþer."

Summary

In the last two chapters we have been concerned with the development of Gawain's career and personality at the hands of British writers over a period in excess of three hundred years. It is desirable to draw together, if we can, what we have discovered about this British hero, to provide, in a sense, a clear reference point which will be of value for any future consideration of Gawain. Our starting point, it will be recalled, was the Primitive Gawain. But from the Gwalchmei-Gwri-Pryderi complex nothing positive was learned. The Welsh prototype of Gawain remains obscure. For all practical purposes the British conception of Gawain, as far as extant written narratives are concerned, is met first in Geoffrey's Historia.

The Early Literary Gawain, the Gawain of the pseudo-histories, plays a minor role in the Arthurian sections of those narratives. His career, from birth to death, is recorded. His mother and father are identified - King Lot and Princess Anna - and, more important, he is established as Arthur's favored nephew, his sister's son. He lived not more than twenty-eight years. His greatest accomplishment was his fighting skill: it was as a warrior that he achieved renown. As a fighter only Arthur excelled him, and few were his peer. His only shame was to have been the brother of the traitor, Modred. At no time in his life was he distinguished for either courtesy or chivalric behaviour. Aside from his skill with horse, sword, and lance, his only other mark of distinction was his unusual education: he was tutored and taught the principles of knighthood by the Pope's men. Never, in the pseudo-histories, is he regarded as a superhuman or supernatural being. He is always a very human Gawain, the king's trusted nephew and most valiant fighter.

The Late Literary Gawain, the Sir Gawain of the romances, is a different man. In some respects, of course, he is still the Gawain of the pseudo-

histories. His family relationship has not changed, although it has expanded: he has acquired two wives and fathered one son. He is still the same superb fighter he always was. But he has taken on new, softer manners. He has time for such diversions as hunting and love. His early rashness has been replaced by wisdom and a level head. By far the greatest change, however, is the addition of courtesy, generosity, and chivalric behaviour to his other accomplishments. Nothing has been taken from him, to be sure, yet the great distinction placed on these late attributes so outweighs his earlier achievements that the Sir Gawain of the British romances is chiefly distinguished for his courtesy and other knightly virtues. In spite of his superlative qualities, however, he is regarded still as a normal human being. He is a superior man, but not a superman.

As we look back at his long development in British literature we see in Gawain a clear reflection of ideal human behaviour as it was conceived in the successive ages of his transition. For reasons unknown to us Geoffrey seized upon an obscure primitive Welsh hero and moulded him into a representation of the ideal fighting knight of the early 12th century. Some two hundred years later, native British writers made good use of this same hero. Following French leads, undoubtedly, but still retaining all the early British characteristics,[126] the authors of our seven romances fashioned, from Gawain, the ideal courtly knight. The difference between the early and the late Gawain is the difference between the two ages. The most important observation to be derived from this extensive review of his British development is this: throughout his career he was, by British writers, regarded always as a human being. For those readers who have regarded the British Gawain as a superman,

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126 The primitive Gawain seems to have been quite unknown to the native British romance writers.

or who have felt that his character and actions somehow reflect an earlier status as a sun god or demi-god, this may be shocking news. The romances, however, support this observation. Gawain is a human being. From barbarian to courtly hero: that was Gawain's development. The central figure in this literary transition was, in the opinion of the present writer, Geoffrey of Monmouth. Whatever the real sources of his information may have been, it is to Geoffrey's skill as a narrative artist that we owe the fixation of Gawain as the ideal knight among Arthur's retainers. To the Anglo-Norman Wace and the Englishman Laȝamon we owe the conception of the fellowship of the Round Table. Finally, later British writers, using their own eyes and ears to a greater extent than is usually acknowledged, were from a rather simple origin, able to construct Sir Gawain, the very fashion plate of 14th-15th century British society, the chief British literary embellishment of the age.

Perhaps the significance of Gawain's true British character can be seen in sharper relief if it is compared with that of other romance heroes. Such a comparison, were it carried out extensively, of course, would entail a much larger effort than that which is now contemplated. A thorough investigation would, moreover, reveal certain parallels between Gawain and other heroes, as well as a certain amount of over-lapping among various heroes' careers. In other words, Gawain, in some ways, would be seen to be much like any other romance knight. That is to be expected; Gawain, of course, cannot be divorced from his kind. By focusing our interest on all similarities which might be established, however, we should vitiate Gawain's individuality. It seems advantageous, then, to direct our attention to obvious differences in the hope that Gawain's characteristic human nature, as it was conceived by British writers, will be more acutely apparent.

The <u>enfance</u> of a hero, since it is a most important segment of his career, provides an interesting as well as a natural point of departure. Gawain's

natural birth and early training for knighthood reflect a perfectly normal human behaviour. It is unlikely, but not unnatural, that he was trained at the Papal Court. All the details of his early career which we should like to have are, as we have seen, not recorded, but those which we do have lead us to believe that the first fifteen or sixteen years of his life were not much different from what a real youth in a comparable situation might have experienced. This is not only human but also unusual. One thinks of Percival, the "Blockhead Boy", reared by his mother in complete isolation from society. In real life, in the 12th and 14th centuries as well as the 20th, such a situation is almost unthinkable. One thinks, too, of Lancelot. The son of King Pant and Queen Clarine, his childhood was most extraordinary. As an infant he was snatched from his parents. His father killed, his mother, in great distress, fled with the child.

> Then there came a fay of the sea, with a mist like a wind, and took the child from the queen and carried it with her into her land.... A lady took it, a wise mermaid who was a queen, better than any who live now. She had ten thousand ladies in her land who had never known a man nor man's array....All the year around their land was abloom as in the middle of May, and moreover the realm of these ladies was splendidly broad and long, a beautiful enclosure. The mountain was a crystal, round as a ball, on which stood the strong castle.[127]

Here in this happy land, far removed from the real world of men and their affairs, the young Lancelot was reared by women. He learned manners and courtesy, and to sing and play the harp. The lady, at the proper time,

> ...sent for mermen and had them teach him to use sword and buckler. In this exercise he would never give up before he had to. He had also to play prisoner's base, to jump extraordinary distances, to wrestle strenuously, to hurl stones, both big and little, a good distance, to throw darts (he was never wearied by any of his instruction), to still-hunt, to hawk, to chase with full pack, and

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127 Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, Lanzelet, tr. K. G. T. Webster (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1951), pp. 27-28. Ulrich's poem was selected to show that this conception of the hero was accepted all over Western Europe.

> to shoot with the bow. Those men who came from the sea gave him skill. In all ways he was wise and manly, but about knightly horsemanship he knew nothing whatever, for he never mounted a horse, and he was ignorant of armor. And so he grew to be fifteen years old in that land.[128]

Lancelot's curriculum is, in fact, quite correct. Were it not for the sea fairy and her mysterious abode, we should judge this to be a realistic passage. Nevertheless, we assume that the Pope's retainers taught Gawain all that Lancelot learned, and more, and we are assured that his tutors were not sea fairies, mermaids, and mermen.

As a mature knight, Gawain is usually level headed. We have seen that he was never, like Lancelot, Love's servant, nor was he, like Tristan, a passionate lover. His conduct with Dame Ragnell, once the affair is consumated, is normal, and with the Green Knight's wife, of course, he behaves wisely, never as a lover. This too is unusual. For the ideal Courtly lover one must turn to Chretien's Lancelot, who will accept disgrace and shame to serve his lady, or to the English Ipomydon, who swears to his tutor that, in love with a lady whom he has never seen, he must leave his father's court to serve her. The love which must have stirred the imagination of any feudal mistress who found herself yoked to an undesirable baron is most eloquently expressed by Ulrich von Liechtenstein. To this minnesinger love was the supreme passion, the goal of every knight, and one can only guess how a passage such as this might have inspired the lady in the castle:

> "Let me e'en lie
> Where it shall please thee I remain:
> But not that I
> Shall be unguarded slain.
> Should they find me, warn me straight, as thou art true:
> If I draw my sword, then in God's name, and who
> Avoids me not, must shed his blood."

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[128] Lanzelet, pp. 28-29.

The bolts she drew;
And in the prison of her arms
She pent him through
The day, and shielded him from harms.
Went the anxious day in fear of spies? Ah no!
Their joy was such they recked not of the foe.
So short a day he ne'er had spent.[129]

The British Gawain knows nothing of this kind of love. If Gawain ever had a reputation as a great lover, if he were ever noted for his service to a lady, the British writers do not appear to have known about it.

Romance heroes who are now obscure, but who may have enjoyed large reputations in an earlier age, afford an interesting contrast. One such knight is Sir Ironsyde. Early in GCC his career is inserted, for no structural reason, to be sure: he is just one of the knights on the hunt. But his career was of interest to the author of GCC, as it is to us now.[130]

Ironn'-syde, as i wene,
Cat þe kny3t of armus grene
On' a lady bry3t.
Sertenly, as i wndur'-stonde,
The fayr' may of blanche lonnde.
In bour' þt louely wy3te.

Iron'-syde, as I wene,
I-armyd he wolde ryde full' clene
Wer þe sonn' nevyr' so hoot.
In wynttyr he wolde armys bere;
Gyanttys & he wer euyr at were,
And all'-way at þe de-bate.
Fabele-honde hy3te ys stede,
His armys and his odir' wede,
Full' fayr' and goode hit was.
Of asur for' sothe he bare,
A gryffyn' of golde full' feyr',
I-set full' of golde flourrys.

He coude mor' of venery & of wer'
Then all' þe kyngys þt wer ther',

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129 Tr. J. Bithell, The Minnesingers (London, 1909), I, 127-128.

130 Cf. Ackerman, Index of Arthurian Names, p. 128 for other notices of Sir Ironsyde. It should be observed, however, that, in this romance, he is more than "a name in a list".

Full' oft a-say hem' he wolde.
Brennynge dragons hade he slayn',
And wylde bullys mony won',
That gresely wer i-holde.
Byge barrons he hade i-bonde,
A hardyer knyght myȝt not be fonde,
Full' herdy he was and bolde.
Ther-for ha was callyd, as i hard say,
The kyngys fellowe, by his day,
Wtt worthy knyȝttys i-tolde.

A lyon' of gold was his creste,
He spake reyson' out of reste [unhesitatingly],
Lystynn, and ȝe may her'.
Wher-euyr he went, be est or weste,
He nold for'-sake man' nor' best,
To fyȝt fer or' ner'.
(GCC, vv. 67-102.)

Ironsyde is the complete man, the too perfect knight. Nothing, one gathers, could upset this fellow. Giants or dragons, wild bulls or mighty barons - all fell before Sir Ironsyde. Equally skilled at love and hunting, he was a fit companion for a king. As exaggerated as some of Gawain's accomplishments are, they pale before a portrait such as this. Gawain is always probable: this knight is almost impossible. And the only difference between the two is that the British Gawain is endowed with human restraint. Ironsyde, we feel sure, would never blush.

Comparisons are never conclusive, and certainly the limited one we have sketched here does not, by itself, validate the principal conclusion reached about the British Gawain. Yet it reinforces that conclusion. When placed beside other romance heroes, Gawain, after we come to know him, is different. We have suggested that Ironsyde would never blush: that Gawain does blush[131] dramatizes the real difference between him and other typical romance heroes. Gawain is human, and, like any other human being, he can blush when he is embarrassed or shamed. It is a commonplace for courtly ladies and Love's

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131 GGK, vv. 2371-2372.

servants to pale or blush,[132] but no author of a romance could possibly cause his hero, in a non-Courtly Love situation, to blush unless he had, all along, committed himself to presenting that hero as a human being. The results of the analyses of the British Gawain and the differences suggested by the brief comparison indicate, with little room for doubt, that the British writers always considered Gawain a human being.[133]

We have also been interested in the background against which Gawain has been displayed. The problem posed amy be restated in this manner: if we remove every reference to Gawain from the British pseudo-histories and romances, how much, of what remains, may be called realistic, how much marvelous? It is an important question. Not only have misleading claims been proposed about these romances because the nature and extent of the marvelous in them have been misunderstood, but also the key to their structure is the exact relationship between the marvelous and the realistic. Therefore we have, at some length, isolated the realistic and marvelous elements in the British Gawain literature. The primary result obtained establishes the fact that the extent

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132 See W. A. Neilson, The Origin and Sources of The Court Of Love ("Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology And Literature," VI [Boston, 1899]), s. v. "Symptoms of Love". Thus Chaucer's Troilus: so "burned" by love he "lost his color sixty times a day"; the effects of love showed in his color. (Troilus & Criseyde, ed. R. K. Root, I, vv. 435 ff., 484 ff.)

133 The imperfect romance, The Jeaste of Syr Gawayne (in Syr Gawayne, ed. Sir F. Madden (London, 1839), pp. 207-223), does not qualify as "native" British, since it is a close rendering of a known, French original. The character of Gawain in The Jeaste, it may be noted, is much different from the British conception. The haste of the love affair and the casual tone of the successive combats would fit the temper of an Ironsyde, not the British Sir Gawain. The late 14th century alliterative Le Morte Arthur, ed. J. D. Bruce, EETS, Extra Series No. 88 (London, 1903) has also been omitted because (1) its "non-Gawain" narrative surely is a redaction of what is to be found in Geoffrey and French sources and (2) the "Gawain" episodes rely on the French prose Lancelot. See the remarks of Lucy Allen Paton in her introduction to Morte Arthur: Two Early English Romances, Everyman's Library No. 634 (London, 1936).

of the marvelous is relatively slight.

Without resorting to statistical manipulation, it is possible, simply by listing percentages, to show at a glance the relative attention which the British writers have devoted to each of the isolated elements of their subject matter. These elements, of course, are identical with the categories heretofore established. Certain reservations attend this proposal. Unavoidable overlapping among several of the categories will cause apparent discrepancy. In spite of the fact that every sentence of the prose and every line of the poetry have been analyzed, a considerable proportion of them do not turn up in the final accounting. The explanation, of course, is that not every line contains "subject matter" which may be fitted into any category: many lines are structurally, but not materially, important. Then too, descriptions of other characters, Arthur, for example, will account for the largest share of the "missing" verses. Repetitive devices for the convenience of a listening audience, discourse formulas, framework information, and the like will account for a share of them. Perhaps some lines have been omitted, say from "Love" or "Hunting", which another reader might have included. That is a subjective difficulty which besets any humanistic criticism: it can never be dismissed entirely, and one must appeal to the justness of the whole work to meet such criticism. Finally, we shall be forced to allow Lazamon to stand for the entire group of pseudo-histories, for there appears to be no practical method for counting and adding prose. Yet, even with these reservations in mind, the charts which follow are as accurate a representation of the constituent parts of these narratives as we are likely to get. One simply does not add up the parts of an imaginative narrative form and derive a mathematically perfect total. We must settle for an approximate total, for art does not submit to the rules of arithmetic. We have tried, consistently, to be as accurate and objective as possible, and in that spirit, with a certain dash

of the "for what it is worth" added, the following "statistical summary" is offered.

Early Literary Gawain
(Laȝamon's Brut, vv. 19252-28345: 9093 lines)

Subject	No. of vv.	% of total
Gawain's Family Relationship	67	0.74
Gawain's Age	25	0.27
Gawain's Education and Training	10	0.10
Gawain's Fighting Skill	107	1.17
Gawain's Skill with Words	79	0.85
Gawain's Bold Spirit	32	0.35
Gawain's Gentility	26	0.28
Gawain's Courtesy	0	0.00
Gawain's Death	20	0.22
Gawain's Reputation	82	0.91
Total Gawain:	448	4.89
Feudal Warfare	4338	47.71
Arms and Equipment[134]	48	0.53
Feudal Society	1509	16.59
Dreams and Astrology	157	1.73
Christian Society	377	4.15
Natural Description[135]	78	0.90
The Marvelous[136]	1043	11.48
Total accounted for:[137]	7998	87.98
Total unaccounted for:	1095	12.02

Late Literary Gawain
(The seven romances: 7645 vv.)

Gawain's Family Relationship	20	0.26
Gawain's Fighting Skill	240	3.14
Gawain's Courage	115	1.50

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[134] Does not include frequent references to swords, shields, lances, etc.

[135] There is no natural description in Geoffrey and the Welsh Bruts.

[136] Arthur's fight with the giant on St. Michael's Mount does not occur in WB, and only Laȝamon has the Round Table and Prophecies of Arthur.

[137] With the exception of Gawain's Age, where the three other pseudo-histories devote a bit more space, and the Marvelous, where Laȝamon devotes more space, it is believed that these figures represent the other narratives accurately.

Gawain's Common Sense	17	0.22
Gawain's Generosity	10	0.14
Gawain's Chivalric Behaviour	112	1.47
Gawain's Loyalty	185	2.42
Gawain's Courtesy	201	2.69
Gawain's Personal Appearance	11	0.14
Gawain's Human Behaviour	158	2.07
Gawain's Reputation	281	3.66
Total Gawain:	1350	17.49
Gawain's Horse - Gringolet	36	0.44
Feudal Society - including Warfare	2084	27.26
Hunting	602	7.87
Love	509	6.66
Christian Society	717	9.35
Geography and History	168	2.19
Natural Description	158	2.09
The Marvelous	696	9.11
Miscellaneous - Unlikely Behaviour	171	2.20
Total accounted for:	6491	84.68
Total unaccounted for:	1154	15.32

The professional statistician could, no doubt, suggest that the results of this summary are not absolutely valid. He would be appalled at the number of verses "unaccounted for", 12.02% for the first group, and 15.32% for the second group. They have, it is hoped, been explained satisfactorily. The literary critic, however, will find it more interesting to note that, quantitatively, there is more of the marvelous in Laȝamon's Brut than there is, on the average, in the seven romances. Then too, these charts are an accurate graphic representation of the entire analysis which forms the bulk of the last two chapters of this study. They show at a glance the relatively minor role Gawain plays in the pseudo-histories, the increased attention given to Feudal Society in the romances, and the preponderance of warfare in the pseudo-histories. Perhaps the most surprising result is the slight percentage for the marvelous in the romances, and, almost as surprising, the fact that more space is given, in the romances, to Christianity than to Love or Hunting.

There remains only the need to say something about the theory of Gawain's divinity. From the very first we have, on purpose, belabored our thesis that

Gawain, as he is seen in British literature before Malory's Morte D'Arthur, is uniformly presented as a representation of a human being. It seemed desirable to direct attention to Gawain's human nature repeatedly in order to counteract what, to the present writer, at any rate, appear to be unnecessary references to his supposed origin in Celtic mythology, or to his early status as a sun god. All too frequently his true character has been obscured, and instead of throwing light on the very real problems which the knight in literature faced, it has been the intent of a great part of Arthurian scholarship to suggest that Gawain is either a mythological personage, a supernatural person, or a superhuman man. The results of these efforts are truly astonishing. The reader who wishes to know something else about the Sir Gawain he has first met in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, say, will surely discover that the hero "goes back" to a Celtic sun god, or that he can, after all, "be identified" with Cuchulainn, the Irish "solar deity". His mind stimulated by the mythical hypothesis, such a reader will find that the complex romance he has read has become even more mysterious, that, far from being elucidated, the story has been further, and unnecessarily, complicated. His attention once drawn away from Gawain's true human qualities will not soon find its way back to what is, after all, the principal point of interest in that romance, to declare for all time what a splendid man Gawain is, and how such a man behaves in very strange situations.

The early studies of such scholars as Miss Weston, A. C. L. Brown, Nitze, and Kittredge, to name but a few, established the Celtic provenience of much of what is to be found in the matière de Bretagne. Perhaps encouraged by the findings of the Celticists, other scholars have attempted to show that the prototype of the heroes of the later British Arthurian romances are to be found among the gods of Celtic mythology, and that the late hero cannot be completely understood without a knowledge of his supposed early status. Thus

we must always remember that Arthur was originally the Culture Hero and Gawain a solar deity. Somehow, so the suggestion seems to go, our comprehension of the actions of Sir Gawain must be tempered by our recognition of his latent god-like qualities. No matter where the student turns, he will find that the theory of Gawain's divinity is expressed vigorously.

We have already seen, in the first chapter, Miss Weston's demonstration of Gawain's divinity. As early as 1891, moreover, J. Rhys had written that "...the explanation is still to be sought why he [Gwalchmei] should be so called [Hawk of May], and all that one can say is that the reference to the month of May suits the Solar Hero well enough...."[138] And further: "The reason for this predilection for a hawk nomenclature in the case of the sun-god is not very apparent; but we may compare that of the Greek Helius, who was sometimes assigned the form of a hawk or falcon."[139] A few years later A. Nutt set down the foundation of what has proved to be a persistent theory. He suggested that Cuchulainn was certainly a solar deity, and that Gawain was to be identified with Cuchulainn. Gwalchmei, the Welsh hero, and Cuchulainn, the Irish hero, were, according to Nutt, the same being.[140] No doubt owing to the attention which was directed to it by renewed interest in Mr. Eliot's The Waste Land, there was reprinted in 1941 Miss Weston's stimulating book, From Ritual to Romance. In this work Miss Weston suggests, first, that Gawain was the original hero of the quest for the Holy Grail, and, second, that the hero undoubtedly is a god who, participating in vegetation rites, seeks to restore fertility to a barren land. Proposing to ask "...whether

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138 Studies in the Arthurian Legend (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1891), p. 13.

139 Ibid., p. 168; see, too, pp. 226 ff.

140 Cuchulainn The Irish Achilles (London, 1900), pp. 39-45.

the task allotted to the heroes, Gawain, Perceval, Galahad, is one that has been undertaken and carried out by heroes of other ages, and other lands...",[141] Miss Weston demonstrates the universality of the myth. What, we may well ask, has become of the British Gawain, and where might one turn for a demonstration of Gawain's essential human nature?

Let us suppose that the student turns to the standard reference works. In the Encyclopaedia Britannica, including the latest edition, he will find Miss Weston's article, and he will conclude that Gawain is a mythological personage. In The Oxford Companion to English Literature he will read that it is "...noteworthy that Gawain's strength increased daily until noon and then declined (Malory, VIII. xviii.), the characteristic of a solar deity. For his relation to Gwalchmei, the sun-god of Welsh mythology, see Rhys, 'Arthurian Legend'."[142] Spence's Dictionary of Medieval Romance will yield the following statement: "Gwalchmei [Gawain], like most of the knights of The Round Table, was probably a form of hero-god, demi-god, or deity in course of deterioration...[not improbable if] we derive him from...Ogmios...the prototype of the Irish Ogma. Some authorities, however, describe him as the lineal successor of the sun."[143] If he is a young student, meeting Gawain for the first time in a survey course of English literature, he might well read in the introductory remarks that the "...figure of Gawain is a Welsh divinity,

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141 From Ritual to Romance (New York, 1941), p. 22. The book was first printed in 1920.

142 The Oxford Companion to English Literature, ed. Sir Paul Harvey. 3d Ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 312.

143 L. Spence, A Dictionary of Medieval Romances and Romance Writers (London, 1913), pp. 130-131.

and all the important names in the story [GGK] are also Celtic."[144] Should he be directed to the Funk and Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend, he will find the most complete statement of Gawain's divinity, even the origin of his very name "...in the gleaming rays of the sun."[145] Finally, to cut this short, the student will surely look into Wells' Manual. There he will find due notice of Gawain's mythological characteristics.[146]

We have carefully avoided any direct criticism of the mythological hypothesis. In the first place, we have discovered no evidence which would enable us to attack it; but neither have we uncovered any evidence which would support it. The extant texts show very clearly that, from the first, native British writers regarded Gawain as a human being. That is all we have sought to demonstrate. We have felt, however, that inquiries concerning the origin of the Arthurian materials, especially its heroes, are not directed at the problem of greatest concern, that of understanding the romance hero and his actions as they are presented to us. To comprehend romance, it is more important, we feel, to concentrate our study on the human hero and the adventures he participates in. Such inquiry will yield, ultimately, the most stimulating reward. Surely it is one purpose of all literature which portrays the action of human beings to show us something of ourself. We have therefore insisted that Gawain, everywhere we have found him in native British literature, is

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144 The Literature of England, ed. G. K. Anderson et al. (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1953), p. 67. The same statement appears in The World in Literature, ed. G. Warnock and G. K. Anderson (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1950), I, Pt. II, 88.

145 Funk and Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend, ed. Maria Leach and J. Fried (New York, 1949), I, 442.

146 J. E. Wells, A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1400 (New Haven and Oxford, 1916), pp. 51-54.

a human being. So, apparently, he was regarded by other Mediaeval writers. William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, who noted the discovery of his tomb, speak of him as a man. Robert of Gloucester regarded him as the Flower of Courtesy. Robert Mannying states that men always spoke of Gawain as a man of great honor. Even to Holinshed Gawain was a faithful gentleman, preeminent because of his honor, truth, and loyalty.

In the Gawain literature which has survived the hero is presented as a human being. His waxing and waning strength is noted in the Morte D'Arthur, but it is never given any structural importance. It may be true that Gawain "goes back", through Gwalchmei, "Gwallt-advwyn", Gwri-Pryderi, and Cuchulainn, to a Celtic solar deity. It is entirely possible that, centuries before our earliest records were set down, primitive Celts did worship a sun god who, centuries later, when the belief in gods passed, appeared once again in popular stories as Gawain. Such deterioration from the status of a god to that of a man is possible. We have found, however, that this theory, in spite of its attractiveness, offers little help in understanding the British Gawain. We have found, moreover, that no native British writer whose work has survived was aware of Gawain's earlier divinity. Most important of all, we have found that our comprehension of the hero is enhanced when we acknowledge Gawain's human nature. The most fruitful subject for further study in the British Gawain romances, we feel, is the effect of magic, not mythology. Our inquiry should not be directed to what the hero is, or what his origin is, but to what he does, and how he behaves. Then, it seems, we will be in a better position to understand the "best of all knights".

Conclusion

We have observed the development of Gawain in British literature from the time of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia to that of the late metrical romances of the mid-15th century. Throughout this period, roughly three hundred years, British writers favored the nephew of Arthur. The ideal knight, the perfect model of courtesy, Gawain, esteemed by friend and foe alike, has earned a distinction to which few literary characters can lay claim. Indeed, no other figure in all the rich British Arthurian literature seems to have attracted more interest and attention from readers or critics than Sir Gawain has. Arthur himself, the tremendous figurehead who stands as the leader of the loyal knights of the Round Table, Lancelot and Guinevere, two of the world's famous lovers, Modred, the traitor, and Merlin, the crafty magician-seer, are also known throughout the Western world. But it is Gawain who has captured the mind and fancy of ardent Arthurians and general readers. This is the knight we have studied.

Perhaps our most stimulating reward is our discovery that behind the glittering facade of the hero-knight there is reflected a representation of a real man. There can be no doubt that the British Gawain is an accurate representation of a human being. British writers, throughout the period we have covered, always regarded Gawain as human. Not once have we discovered that Gawain possessed a single superhuman or supernatural characteristic. While thoroughly human, Gawain is not, however, an average man. He is always the ideal knight, always showing what perfection of knighthood

could accomplish. For two ages, the 12th century and the 14th-15th century, he reflects the ideals of his society. He has no visible flaws: he represents, if not exactly perfection, the highest reaches of human behavior. His knightly qualities, the social virtues of his age, are exaggerated. His prowess, generosity, courage, chivalric behaviour, loyalty, and courtesy are set in a key which no man could reach, much less sustain. Still, he is a real man. He is, in short, a magnificent literary figure who stood, in his age, as an unwavering signpost pointing to the best possible human behaviour. For over three hundred years he served British society well.

There is no need, surely, to bring our principal conclusions into close view here. The lack of clear information about Gawain before Geoffrey's Historia, the degree of realism and fancy in the pseudo-histories and romances, our disposition of such matters as Christianity, Love, Hunting, and Geography - these have been our chief findings, and they seem well enough established to require no further comment at this time. There are, however, a few miscellaneous observations we should like to record.

First of all, the calm entree en matiere of the romances is interesting. Without exception the characters are first seen either outside hunting or inside the castle hall eating or at ease. In other words, the most natural, least startling indoor or outdoor pastime of the age is selected as the opening scene. No explanation need be given for gathering people together in either place. It is a feature of the romance world, we feel, that from the most unpretentious beginnings unexpected excitement can emerge. When Stevenson recorded his favorite romance opening scenes in his valuable "Gossip On Romance", he preferred Scott's "A stag at eve had drunk his fill", or a weatherbeaten sign creaking in the wind on a dark, rainswept night. His 19th century "romantic" sensitivity would probably have found little sympathy with the very "un-romantic" beginnings of the British Gawain romances.

Another interesting observation comes to mind. Twice Gawain is provided with a guide who leads him on his journey. The Turk takes Gawain all the way to the court of the King of Man and plays an important role in the romance. Gawain relies on him. But the Turk, really, is a guide in name only; his guiding is incidental. We were thinking mainly of the guide who leads Gawain from the castle on the way to the Green Chapel, and who, unlike other famous guides in literature, turns back. Gawain is able to procede alone. How unlike Sir Guyon he is, who needs the Palmer at his side to keep him on the right path, or Christian, who would never have kept to the straight and narrow path had not Hopeful been with him to offer encouragement. The romance hero must go alone. Much of our interest in him is stimulated by our observation of what man alone can do.

Finally, it has occurred to us that a word might be said about the failure of romance to concern itself with the question of justice. Unlike tragedy which seeks to account for events, romance has no room for "poetic justice". Here it is akin to the amoral world of the fairy tale. Things just happen: there is no accounting, or justification, for them. Our attention is primarily directed to what happens: seldom are we asked to consider why it happens. An exception might be made of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, where an explanation - Morgan la Fay's vindictiveness, although it is not explained, or accounted for - is offered, and where many readers, thinking back on it, might feel that Gawain "got no better than he deserved". But this is faint justice, and ordinarily romance ignores the question of justice. These few remarks are not a statutory part of our study, but they occurred to the writer, and it seemed worthwhile to bring them together here.

There we should stop. One, however, cannot spend as long a time as the writer has with the deeds of Gawain and not admire him. He is a likeable person, and we admit a strong bias in his favor. It would somehow not

seem right to bring this study of him to a close without devoting the last words to Gawain himself. A long time ago it was suggested that somebody ought to write a biography of Gawain. We have not done exactly that, but the result of that suggestion is the present study. We have no biography, and there is no need for an epitaph. The pages of the romances are a sufficient testimony. Yet we do not wish to let Sir Gawain of Britain go without indicating what it is that excited our admiration of him. Primarily it is his humanity. He does not, because of artificiality, exclude our sympathy. He invites it. As a representation of an ideal, of course, he stimulates admiration too. Take him where you will, either as the perhaps too eager confidant of Arthur who tells the king that he will do anything to save him, even marry the Foul Hag, or as the spirited, overjoyed guest of Bernlak de Hautdesert who basks in the comforts of his host's castle, or as the perplexed, anxious knight who does all that the Carl demands; take him at his worst or his best, he is always inspirational. And yet he is not too good, or overweening. He never fails to remind us that he is, after all, but a man. But he is the sort of man we should all like to be, and although we know we cannot, we bear him no grudge.

If we were to choose the one incident which caused our admiration to soar highest, winning us to his side forever, we should unhesitatingly pick that instant in Arthur's hall when, amidst the long faces of the court retinue who tried to comfort him as he prepared to set out on his search for the Green Chapel, Gawain alone remained calm, and replied to his fellows:

> ...'quat schuld I wonde?
> Of destines derf & dere
> What may mon do bot fonde?'
>
> ("Why should I hesitate?
> Against a hard and costly fate
> what can a man do but try?")

We should like to be a friend of this man and, if we could, abide his advice. All the effort put into our study was justified when we met this Gawain. Should he ever require an epitaph, he who starts to write it will discover that Gawain has already spoken it.

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