"THE HOLY GRAIL"

ALFRED LORD TENNYSON'S

"THE HOLY GRAIL"

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INTRODUCTION

In 1868 Tennyson had overcome the difficulties that had previously plagued him, and that had prevented him from adapting the Grail legend to his projected Arthurian cycle. But once the problems had been surmounted he wrote "The Holy Grail" quickly in 1868, and published it in 1869 with "The Coming of Arthur", "Pelleas and Ettarre", and "The Passing of Arthur". With these publications the allegorical intention of his full Arthurian cycle, the tale of "the Ideal Soul of Man coming into contact with the warring elements of the flesh"[1], became clear. The four idylls he had published in 1859 assumed a more than general significance, for now these exemplary tales of the true and the false, the good and the evil, could be seen to fit more closely, and more subtly into the emerging theme.

Tennyson intended "The Holy Grail" to play a very central role in the Idylls, and to convey to his readers a specific ethical-religious theme: that complete devotion to mystical-spiritual imagination or insight is detrimental to the well-being of the social-moral order. However, within the poem itself Tennyson treats sympathetically the questers, their quests, their reasons and their problems -- Tennyson did feel a certain emotional sympathy for Galahad, Percivale, and Lancelot.

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[1]Alfred Lord Tennyson, The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson, Eversley Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1908), III, 443, n.1. Hereafter cited as Eversley.

Did this emotional sympathy that Tennyson felt for the seekers of the Grail conflict with his dedication to the moral theme that finds its fullest expression in the person of Arthur? A detailed examination of "The Holy Grail" will show that Tennyson's sympathy for the questers was profound and imaginative, but that, far from detracting from the forcefulness of the moral theme, it adds depth and breadth to that theme through the irony of the presentation.

In the first chapter I will detail the biographical and historical events that led to Tennyson's composing "The Holy Grail" as a central poem in the Idylls to show the importance he attached to the moral theme of the poem, and to the whole of the Idylls. I will also examine the part played by "The Holy Grail" as it fits into the developing moral theme of the completed Idylls to show what theme Tennyson specifically wished the poem to convey.

In the second chapter I will compare the use of the legend of the Grail by Tennyson with that in his basic source, Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur. This comparison will show the original use of the legend by Tennyson, and will illustrate the purpose and the function of the Grail in Tennyson's poem.

The third chapter will examine the meaning and significance of the Grail, and the quests for it to show the depth of the poet's sympathy, and to show how this sympathy enhances his moral theme through the irony of the presentation.

The final chapter will examine the structure and technique, the mode of presentation, to show that "The Holy Grail" is designed to

incorporate the poet's sympathy for the questers -- who, with the best of intentions, destroy an Ideal Order -- into the moral theme the poet wishes the poem to convey to his readers.

After examining the poem in this manner I will conclude with an assessment of the poem as an example of Tennyson's mature handling of a traditional legend in a contemporary context, and an assessment of his handling of the conflict between the individual and the society that is a recurrent theme in his poetry.

CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF "THE HOLY GRAIL"

When Tennyson published "The Holy Grail" he intended it to take its place in a complete Arthurian cycle that was slowly emerging. He assigned to "The Holy Grail" a specific role in the developing theme of the whole work, the Idylls of the King. In order to fully understand the importance and significance that Tennyson attached to "The Holy Grail" as part of the Idylls, it is necessary to understand how the story of the Grail fits into the pattern and development of the total work, how it progresses from earlier idylls, and how it leads to later ones. It is equally important to understand how Tennyson's life-long attraction to the Arthurian legend, and to stories of quest and vision, could result in a poem such as "The Holy Grail". A third element, and an essential one in setting the background for the poem, and an essential for a complete understanding of the poem, is an examination of Tennyson's purpose and intent in writing the Idylls and "The Holy Grail". In 1859 Tennyson felt that he could not write of the Sangreal, but events and developments in his life and thought between then and 1868 made possible, and even necessary, his handling of the legend as part of the Idylls.

It took Tennyson almost forty years to produce his long-awaited Arthurian cycle, and one of the keys to an understanding of "The Holy Grail" is the development in his handling of Arthurian themes that eventually led to the Idylls of the King. Tennyson was inspired by the

Arthurian theme after reading Malory as a boy in his father's library, and he dubbed the old tales of Arthur "the greatest of all poetical subjects".[1] This inspiration, and the attraction of the legends, remained with him throughout his life. He wrote the fragment "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere" in 1830, but his earliest completed poem on an Arthurian subject was the haunting lyric "The Lady of Shalott". In 1833 he wrote a prose draft of an epic on King Arthur, but the plan of an epic was forsaken. In "The Epic" (1842), which stands as prologue to "Morte d'Arthur" (later to be incorporated into "The Passing of Arthur") he explains why this epic was not completed. The poet in the poem, Everard Hall, and a friend explain that,

> "He thought that nothing new was said, or else
> Something so said 'twas nothing -- that a truth
> Looks freshest in the fashion of the day;
> God knows; he has a mint of reasons; ask.
> It pleased <u>me</u> well enough." "Nay, nay," said Hall,
> "Why take the style of these heroic times?
> For nature brings not back the mastodon,
> Nor we those times; and why should any man
> Remodel models? these twelve books of mine
> Were faint Homeric echoes, nothing-worth,
> Mere chaff and draff, much better burnt."
> [11. 30-40]

Not only did Tennyson decide against the epic as the form for the development of his Arthurian cycle, but he felt that any such treatment must appeal to a modern audience, that it must say something to a modern reader and not just remodel old models. But as yet Tennyson had no comprehensive scheme for integrating the Arthurian stories into a

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[1] <u>Eversley</u>, III, 440.

nineteenth-century poem. From the evidence of a manuscript draft of 1833-1840 it appears that Tennyson considered putting the theme into dramatic form,[2] but this plan was never fulfilled.[3] By 1855 Tennyson had settled on the idyll as the form for his Arthurian cycle.[4]

But Tennyson's problem with the Arthurian legends was not only with the mode of presentation. He could not, for some considerable time, decide on the thematic development or the allegorical drift that should be established in the poem in order that it have something to say to a nineteenth-century reader. Around 1840 he had planned an allegorical poem that involved Arthur as religious faith, one Guinevere as primitive Christianity, a second as Roman Catholicism, and a Round Table which would represent liberal institutions.[5] But this plan was never fulfilled. In 1859 when Tennyson published The True and the False: Four Idylls of the King,[6] the theme had not developed to any more than a very general treatment, in realistic fictional style, of the battle of good and evil. The title indicates the general approach, and the four stories are "exemplary and didactic with Enid and Elaine as types of fidelity, Nimuë and Guinevere as types of the false and unchaste." But

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[2] Ibid., III, 439.

[3] In 1872 Tennyson again said that, if he were free to choose, he would give "Gareth and Lynette" a more dramatic form to eliminate the many "said's" and its varieties. Ibid., III, 490-491.

[4] Ibid., III, 440.

[5] Ibid., III, 438.

[6] The idylls were "Enid", "Elaine", "Nimuë", and "Guinevere".

the "moral message" is very general.[7] Although these poems form the bases for five idylls in the completed Idylls of the King, they were to be redeveloped to find an organic place in the whole thematic pattern that Tennyson would work out.

Although Tennyson had settled on the form for his long work, and had established a more or less completed scheme for it around 1860, he did not immediately put his plan into action. In the early 1860's Tennyson still felt that he could not resolve all of the aesthetic problems inherent in his materials. There needed to be an integrated design into which the four idylls of 1859 would fit, and into which future idylls would fit. He felt that there had to be a unity of tone and a uniformly high standard throughout the whole work. A failure in adapting any one part of the legend would have the consequence of detracting from the whole work. He expressed this feeling in 1862 when he wrote:

> I have thought about it, and arranged all the intervening 'Idylls', but I dare not set to work for fear of a failure and time lost.[8]

Tennyson was still plagued with the difficulty of incorporating traditional material into a poem of contemporary reference and significance. As early as 1859 he had outlined part of this problem in a letter to the Duke of Argyll (3 October, 1859) which states:

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[7] F.E.L. Priestley, "Tennyson's Idylls of the King", in John Killham, ed., Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 240.

[8] Eversley, III, 441.

> As to Macaulay's suggestion of the Sangreal, I doubt whether such a subject could be handled in these days, without incurring a charge of irreverence. It would be too much like playing with sacred things. The old writers <u>believed</u> in the Sangreal.[9]

But by 1868 any difficulties Tennyson had previously encountered with the subject had disappeared, or had been overcome. Between April and September of 1868 he wrote "The Holy Grail". Shortly thereafter he added "The Coming of Arthur", "Pelleas and Ettarre", and "The Passing of Arthur", all of which he published in 1869. The moral significance of the <u>Idylls</u> was now becoming clear to readers and critics alike, and Tennyson found himself in the rather new position of having to defend himself against the cries of the aesthetes who felt betrayed by the poet.[10] In his early years with Hallam and the Apostles Tennyson had been urged to surrender his aesthetic view of art and commit himself to contemporary problems. The early "The Lady of Shalott" (1832) can be considered the tale of the death of artistic sensibility when the artist forsakes an imaginative castle for the social world of men. But in "The Palace of Art" Tennyson shows the conflict between an aesthetic view of art and a social-moral view of art. The aesthetic view is ideal but is the cause of despair when the artist is confronted with the real world. Yet, at this stage, the aesthetic view is not completely surrendered, for the soul leaves the palace only to return when it has completed a penance in a lowly cottage in the world. Tennyson was not

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[9]Quoted in Hallam Lord Tennyson, <u>Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir</u> (New York: Macmillan, 1897), I, 456-457.

[10]<u>Ibid</u>., II, 91-92.

only becoming more aware, but he was becoming more convinced, that the poet has a moral obligation to speak of and for the times, that to hold a creed of art for art's sake involves living in an imaginative and lonely ivory tower, and, for Tennyson, a deeply committed and highly responsible artist, such a creed was inevitably impossible. The world at large needs a voice too, and the poet could provide that voice. And Tennyson's poetry reflects this growing social-moral concern that must take precedence over the aesthetic. "The Lotos-Eaters" and "Saint Simeon Stylites" reflect indirectly the fact that there is such a social-moral concern that is more important than individual imaginative considerations. From the point in his early poetry where there is a conflict between the aesthetic and the moral views of art Tennyson was moving towards a view of art that would concern itself with the problems of the age. And it is worthy of note that just as many of the best of Tennyson's early poems seem to derive much of their force from a conflict inherent in them between two views of art, so, admittedly more indirectly, does "The Holy Grail": the impulse to retreat from life to the ivory tower finds embodiment in Galahad, the impulse to involve oneself actively with life, in Arthur.

In Memoriam A.H.H. (1850) was accepted by Victorian readers, including the Queen, as an article of faith, an article of belief in the highest human capabilities, and in a creation progressing towards some far-off divine event where the human would merge with the spiritual. From this poem his readers optimistically grasped at a hopeful philosophy in a time when critical attitudes and scientific discoveries threatened

to shake man from his pedestal, and his beliefs from their foundations. Before the Idylls were written all aspects of religion, faith, and belief in Victorian England were put to the test by such publications as Essays and Reviews, Darwin's Origin of Species, and Strauss's Vie de Jésus. The very fundamentals of life, the Bible, Christianity, the Soul, and morality were being questioned and examined by the scientific minds of the day. The ideals upon which life, action, and society had always been based were being overthrown, to be replaced with new, and often materialistic, views.

In Memoriam is the most obvious and powerful example of Tennyson's insistence on entering the arena of contemporary problems. For he now recognized that he must speak of and for his age, and his appointment as Laureate in 1850 only confirmed his belief.[11] The Laureate's task was not merely ceremonial, to write public verses, but to be "the prophet as well as the priest of the community, the Vates who sees deep into the realities of the spiritual and moral life, and is capable of revealing to society the state of its own soul."[12] In Maud, his first volume as Laureate, he lashed out at the base materialism of his age, at, for instance, the money-grabbing, speculative, cotton merchants whose views he thought never rose above the world of commerce, trade, and gain. And Tennyson felt that the morals, ethics, and ideals

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[11]Valerie Pitt, Tennyson Laureate (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), pp. 148-150.

[12]Ibid., p. 149.

upon which social life and action were based were being insidiously undermined by such materialistic desires. He felt he had to speak out against such a life. In the later "Aylmer's Field" the pride of the parents in their position in life has led them to break a bond of love, to break a social bond that resulted in disorder and revolution, as, on a larger scale, it earlier had in France. Their pride is dangerous because it is detrimental to the preservation of social and moral order, as materialistic desires in Maud had been detrimental.

But Tennyson was not only concerned with opposition to the utilitarian-naturalistic-materialistic ethic he could see pervading and undermining society, with the resultant collapse of social and moral values. He was vitally concerned with the ideals, values, faith and belief upon which moral and social life were based. His concern with this latter problem led him to respond with very high hopes to the idea of a Metaphysical Society in 1868, composed of the best minds of the most varied shades of belief and non-belief, with the avowed purpose of "submitting to searching criticism the intellectual foundations of the spreading positivism and agnosticism."[13] To the very first meeting of the Society in 1869 Tennyson presented for reading "The Higher Pantheism" with its view of a soul-vision that refutes the "reality" of the material world. If one could but see and hear with the soul, to behold the phenomenal world would be to behold God. But men are too restricted by

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[13]Sir Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 381.

the material world, which is insubstantial in the light of the soul-vision of God and man, and the faith that is sanctioned by it. This soul-vision, and the insubstantiality of the phenomenal world, form a basis for belief, a basis for action, and a way of rededicating life to the ideal. Tennyson felt, now more than ever, that "only under the inspiration of ideals . . . can a man combat the cynical indifference, the intellectual selfishness, the sloth of will, the utilitarian materialism of a transition age."[14]

For more than thirty years Tennyson had lived and worked with the Arthurian legends, revising his plans and schemes, trying to establish an allegorical theme for his long poem, searching for a form for the presentation, and trying to incorporate the old legends into a poem of contemporary relevance. It was his dedication of his poetry to the teaching of his age that a loss of ideals will lead to social ruin and chaos that made possible, and even necessitated, his return to the Arthurian theme in 1868. He found a purpose and a theme for his poem in the belief that a life guided by spiritual ideals will lift man up the progressive stages to the spiritual realm. He felt that this theme of spiritual ideals, when coupled with the warning that rejection of them will result in ruin and chaos, would bring the old tales alive for his readers and give them a meaning and significance specifically applicable to a transition age.

In 1869 the moral and social significance of Tennyson's

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[14]Hallam Lord Tennyson, ed., Eversley, III, 444-445.

Arthurian cycle became clear to readers and reviewers. But it wasn't until 1885 that the Idylls were given their final shape and the whole pattern was presented to the public.[15] Baum contends that this extended and seemingly haphazard writing and publication of the various idylls refutes any claim the Idylls of the King can have to being an integrated artistic whole.[16] But the Idylls does present a completely integrated whole with each poem playing a distinct part, separate, yet adding to the cumulative effect of the whole by its relation to the overall theme. It is only by an examination of all the idylls, taken as an integrated and completed structure, that the significance of each and all can truly be appreciated.

In summing up the sources for his father's Idylls, Hallam Tennyson adds the comment that the poet

> has made the old legends his own, restored the idealism and infused into them a spirit of modern thought and an ethical significance, setting his characters in a rich and varied landscape; as indeed otherwise these archaic stories . . . would not have appealed to the modern world.[17]

Tennyson had used the traditional past before, notably in such poems as

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[15]"The Last Tournament" was written in 1871, "Gareth and Lynette" in 1872, and "Balin and Balan" in 1885. The four idylls of 1859 were revised to form five in the final form: "Geraint and Enid", "The Marriage of Geraint", "Merlin and Vivien", "Lancelot and Elaine" and "Guinevere".

[16]Paul F. Baum, Tennyson Sixty Years After (Hamden: Archon Books, 1963), p. 205.

[17]Eversley, III, 436.

"Ulysses", "The Lotos-Eaters", and "Lucretius", but never had his treatment been so comprehensive or so purposive. His own comments about the theme of the Idylls show his intent in writing this long work:

> The whole is the dream of one man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin. Birth is a mystery and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the tableland of life, and its struggles and performances. It is not the history of one man or of one generation but of a whole cycle of generations.[18]

On his eightieth birthday the poet added:

> My meaning in the Idylls of the King was spiritual. I took the legendary stories of the Round Table as illustrations. I intended Arthur to represent the Ideal Soul of Man coming into contact with the warring elements of the flesh.[19]

Tennyson presented to his readers a spiritual allegory of the cyclic progress of man who begins life ruled by the soul but eventually lets the elements of the flesh corrupt his values until chaos and ruin are the consequences. The poem is the story of a cycle of generations, the story of creation, not now a linear upward progression as in In Memoriam, but a cyclical story of birth, growth, decay, and collapse.

The Idylls of the King presents in dramatic-narrative form the inception, growth, decay and collapse of an ideal society that is guided and ruled by the ideal soul of man dedicated to spiritual values and the eventual salvation of all mankind. The drama arises from the conflict of the ideals that can establish and maintain such a society with the passions, emotions, and aspirations of men. Arthur, as the representative of the spirit or soul, is the highest form of humanity, "Ideal manhood

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[18] Ibid., III, 443.

[19] Ibid., III, 443.

closed in real man", and symbolizes those ideals and values that can establish order from chaos, bring peace and justice, and develop humanity through the symbolic zones of progress to the spiritual.[20] In "The Holy Grail" this progressive development through four stages that the ideals, and the figure, of Arthur oversee is thus suggested:

> And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,
> And in the second men are slaying beasts,
> And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
> And on the fourth are men with growing wings,
> And over all one statue in the mould
> Of Arthur.
>
> [11. 234-239]

In the first of the Idylls, "The Coming of Arthur", Arthur, with the aid of the wisdom of Merlin, overcomes materialistic objections to his authority and validity, and is accepted, either intuitively as a king, or for the benefits that accrue to his kingship. He joins himself to the flesh and body by his marriage to the beautiful Guinevere, for the spirit needs the flesh to be effective in the world:

> For saving I be join'd
> To her that is the fairest under heaven,
> I seem as nothing in the mighty world,
> And cannot will my will, nor work my work.
>
> ["The Coming of Arthur", 11. 85-88]

And Arthur creates the Order of the Round Table with knights sworn to the strictest of vows to "fulfill the boundless purpose of their King" in order that his ideals may be actualized in the real world of men. In the springtime of Arthur's reign all were of one accord to do his work:

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[20] Priestley, op. cit., p. 240. I am indebted to Priestley's exposition of the Idylls of the King for my tracing of the developments in the whole work.

> And Arthur and his knighthood for a space
> Were all one will, and thro' that strength the King
> Drew in the petty princedoms under him,
> Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame
> The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reign'd.
> ["The Coming of Arthur", ll. 516-520]

But even here reference is made to forces that threaten to destroy the realm. In "Gareth and Lynette", the first of the Round Table idylls, the ideals and the Order of Arthur are functioning in perfect harmony within the world of men. The innocence, purity, aspirations, and desires of Gareth accord exactly with Arthur's ideals and his will, and Gareth finds freedom to serve in subjecting himself to Arthur. He can overcome all physical and worldly obstacles, and triumph in the glory of his dedication and service to the King.

In the two Geraint idylls, "The Marriage of Geraint" and "Geraint and Enid", the whispered rumour of an illicit affair between Lancelot and Guinevere, as yet but a whisper, highlights the pride of Geraint and leads him to doubt and despair and futile wanderings in the wasteland of Doorm. He is not, in his lonely quest, fulfilling Arthur's purpose or obeying Arthur's will although he does recognize the validity of the King's rule. He must overcome his own individualistic desires and passions and subject himself and his whole life to the will and the ideals of Arthur to restore the necessary peace and order to the realm. Geraint can, by admitting his fault, and by an effort of will, repent, and subject his passion to the King, and peace returns. But there is, in these two idylls, the ever-increasing hint of difficulties in the realm. The royal love affair within the court is accompanied by wastelands, bandits, and "slothful officers"

without. In "Balin and Balan" the sin and hypocrisy within the court has grown and magnified to the point where its effects are more widespread and less easily remedied. The meeting of Lancelot and Guinevere in the garden, overheard by Balin the Savage, can drive him into the wilderness and can cause despair, havoc, and death, and can ultimately aid the enemies of the realm. Balin tries valiantly, after the success of Geraint, to suppress his passions and live in harmony with the Order, but the sin and hypocrisy of the lovers drives him to his former savagery where he falls prey to the hate and discordant entreaties of Vivien, the avowed enemy of the King. The result is chaos and ruin within the realm. The pattern of internal decay has now begun in earnest.

Subsequent idylls illustrate the growing decay in ever-magnifying proportions, and with ever-widening results. "Merlin and Vivien" presents a pervading sense of doom caused by the errors and hypocrisy of the court and the attempts of Vivien, the materialist, to spread disaffection in the Order. Merlin, the guiding wisdom and the prophet, succumbs to his enemy, the sensual Vivien. The Order is left with only empirical means of verification when its wisdom has fallen, and this empiricism can never establish or verify the authority and validity of Arthur. The original, and the greatest bulwark against questioning and rejection of Arthur has fallen. In "Lancelot and Elaine" the authority, validity, ideals and values of the King are openly rejected by the person who can cause most damage to them, Guinevere. Her speech to Lancelot about their love is a condemnation of the King, of the ideal

man, by an appeal to the natural:

> Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,
> And swearing men to vows impossible,
> To make them like himself: but, friend, to me
> He is all fault who hath no fault at all.
> ["Lancelot and Elaine", ll. 129-132]

Similarly Tristram in "The Last Tournament" rejects the authority of Arthur's spiritual values in his appeal to naturalism:

> The vows!
> O, ay -- the wholesome madness of an hour --
> They served their use, their time; for every knight
> Believed himself a greater than himself,
> And every follower eyed him as a God;
> Till he, being lifted up beyond himself,
> Did mightier deeds than elsewise he had done,
> And so the realm was made; but then their vows --
> First mainly thro' that sullying of our Queen --
> Began to gall the knighthood; asking whence
> Had Arthur right to bind them to himself?
> Dropt down from heaven? wash'd up from out the deep
> They fail'd to trace him thro' the flesh and blood
> Of our old kings: whence then? a doubtful lord
> To bind them by inviolable vows,
> Which flesh and blood perforce would violate.
> [ll. 669-684]

The open rejection by the Queen leads to deception, brutality in the joust, and the death of the innocent and pure Elaine.

Into the society that has decayed so much appears the Sangreal. The quests grow out of a sense of disappointment and frustration at the loss of ideals and values that guide life, and out of the compelling desire to establish new certainties and new beliefs. In a time of strife the knights grasp at this new possibility of acquiring spiritual insight and of achieving redemption; instead of working within the Order and realm as Arthur does, they seize upon the quests. They attempt to achieve a degree of certainty through faith rather than

through duty, action, and work within the ideals of Arthur. The quests result in the values and ideals of the King being rejected in the search for new ones, and the Order suffering further decay and destruction from which it can never fully recover. The end result for the Order is a loss of effectiveness in the world of men.

In "Pelleas and Ettarre" the cumulative effects of decay and rejection are seen in the inability of a new knight to subject his aspirations and desires to the code of Arthur. He reverts, through the despair caused by the hypocrisy, sin, and treachery within the Order, to naturalism and materialism and becomes the opposite of Arthur's ideals, and the avowed enemy of Arthur. In "The Last Tournament" the values of the Order, and the authority of the King are openly flouted and mocked by the materialistic Tristram who, in the Order as it now stands, is the hero of the tournament. "Guinevere", the last of the Round Table idylls, shows that, although the Queen now recognizes Arthur as the true noble King, her defection from him to live an ascetic life away from the court results in his loss of control over the physical world. His Order of the Round Table has virtually fallen, and is now prey to the materialism of a Gawain or a Tristram, no longer dedicated to the will and the work of the King. Arthur's union with the flesh is dissolved and all contact between the ideals of the Soul and the world of men is broken. He laments the great harm done to his Order by the sin of Guinevere, but he forgives her and moves on to his last battle amid the brutality and savagery of his knights who are not now fighting for the ideals of the King, but simply for self-preservation. The Order

collapses, the King dies, and his ironic repetition of his statement at the inception of his realm that "The old order changeth, yielding place to new", accentuates the fact that his realm was but one step in the complete progression of all creation. "The Passing of Arthur" culminates the whole of the Idylls of the King not only with the death of the King, but with the knowledge that the world was better for accepting Arthur's reign for a time, and that the whole cycle must be repeated many times before that far-off divine event will actually be realized.

Priestley suggests that the quality of the Idylls is essentially dramatic allegory.[21] The twelve idylls as finally published fall into three divisions of four idylls each, much like a three-act play, and give considerable dramatic power to the Idylls as a whole. The first act, beginning with "The Coming of Arthur" and ending with "Geraint and Enid", establishes the Order and shows its growth and success. The general theme is the triumph of ideals and the conquering of evil by good by the subjection of passions to the ruling and valid ideals of the spirit. The second act, opening with the grim "Balin and Balan" and progressing moderately through "Merlin and Vivien" and "Lancelot and Elaine", culminates with "The Holy Grail", and shows the process of decay that begins slowly in individuals and reaches a climax of destructive power in the quests for the Sangreal. The last act opens with the irony of the misplaced zeal of Pelleas who is a later-day Gareth, and proceeds through the rejection of knightly vows in the

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[21]Priestley, op. cit., p. 252.

discords of Tristram. "Guinevere" presents the dénouement, concluding in the sadness of "The Passing of Arthur".

"The Holy Grail" serves the essential and climactic purpose in the Idylls of culminating the process of decay. To this purpose Tennyson had to adopt and adapt the traditional materials. In the battle of Soul versus Sense, the Sangreal highlights the cumulative effect of the passions and desires of worldly men that have undermined the Order to such an extent that sensitive knights feel compelled to search outside the ideals of the established Order for some sense of certainty. And any search, beneficial to the individual or not, that is external to the Order established on a set of ruling ideals and values that have authority and validity, whether thay are accepted or not, is detrimental to that Order and is a social and moral evil because it does not "fulfill the boundless purpose of their King".

The Holy Grail appears in a society that is becoming increasingly aware of its own hypocrisies, evils, and errors, or, as MacCallum states it, when

> the first enthusiasm for the order is dead, when the promise it held out of reconciling all parts of man's life has been falsified, when reason no longer works on its behalf, and treasons of imagination and sense are committed against its majesty.[22]

The cumulative effect of the evils and errors against the ideals and authority of Arthur is a sense of doom, and of frustration and

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[22]M.W. MacCallum, Tennyson's Idylls of the King and Arthurian Story from the XVIth Century (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1894), p. 382.

disappointment in knights such as Percivale who cries out, with his sister, against

> the scandal of the Court,
> Sin against Arthur and the Table Round,
> And the strange sound of an adulterous race.
> [11. 78-80]

Against this feeling of doom and frustration, and always present in the background, are the established ideals of Arthur, symbolically represented in the beauties of Camelot and the hall, the four zones of development, the golden statue of the King, and the actions of Arthur who is fulfilling his purpose, actively carrying justice to the people in his defence of an outraged maiden, while most of his knights are inactive. Ironically the knights cannot accept the significance of Arthur and are obsessed with the corrupt appearance of the realm which they do nothing to correct. Instead of following Arthur's example they seize upon the soul-vision of the Grail as a possibility of grasping certainty and salvation through faith.

The knights accept the first vision of the Grail as an authentic one, and pray and fast in order that the Grail may be universally seen and the world healed. While the Grail is seen by none but Galahad during the summer storm, the will to believe, and the will to achieve some certainty of belief, drive the knights to vow to pursue the quest despite the direst prophecies of Arthur that they follow wandering fires, and that many will fail in the quest and will return no more.

The quests themselves are studies in individual reactions to the

conflict of the world of men with the ideals of the Soul highlighted by the mystical insight as achieved by Galahad and the nun. Each quest reflects the limitations, desires, hopes and problems of the quester. Galahad is ideally triumphant in rejecting the world and achieving spiritual union with the Grail in the Spiritual City. Percivale is a social man who wishes the world better than it is. He seizes upon the Grail for its corrective powers, but his wanderings after a cloud lead him to reject the world of men because he feels, on one hand, that the world grants him no stability of belief and because, on the other hand, he cannot emulate Galahad's achievement. Without either the social world or the Grail, he assumes a monk's life. Lancelot is torn between his allegiance to the King and his love for the Queen which are mutually destructive forces in his mind. He is led, through his quest, to a renunciation of both as the only means of allaying the torture of his mind. Bors is rewarded for his self-sacrificing love for others by a vision of the Grail which only leads him to disappointment because of his inability to use it to help Lancelot. Gawain, the sensuous materialist, surrenders all ideals in the pleasures of the moment. The result of each quest, and the cumulative results of all quests, are losses to the Order with the inevitable consequence of disorder, chaos, and ruin. From these losses the Order can never fully recover, and can never regain its effectiveness.

Arthur, in his judgement on quests and questers, rebukes the knights for their folly in forsaking their sworn vows, obedience to which would eventually result in social salvation, to follow individual

aspirations and dreams which are attempts at individual salvation but are detrimental to the group. When Arthur speaks of the duty of the King he is speaking of the duty of all men, for each has a duty:

> Seeing that the King must guard
> That which he rules, and is but as the hind
> To whom a space of land is given to plow.
> Who may not wander from the allotted field
> Before his work be done.
>
> [11. 901-905]

The King is re-affirming the belief in the moral order in which each, from the highest to the lowest, has a duty following the ideals and values of that order, to act so that the whole of society may progress to the far-off divine spiritual realm. And such duty must take precedence over any individual search for happiness or for contentment. Individual and social well-being depend on the duties and responsibilities of each towards the whole. Any individual acting solely for himself is only a detriment to the group, and individually-oriented actions will lead to a rejection of society and a return to chaos.

"The Holy Grail" grew out of Tennyson's life-long attraction to the Arthurian theme, and his growing concern for the state of faith and belief, the state of ideals, the state of society, and the state of the individual within the society in nineteenth-century England. He had a specific purpose in writing his poem which necessitated his adapting traditional legends to contemporary problems and producing an original treatment of the Grail. The theme of "The Holy Grail" is a specific moral one, used in defense of the moral-social order. But in writing the poem Tennyson handled the problems and hopes of men in a very sympathetic manner. He sympathized with, and understood, the questers,

but this sympathy did not detract from the moral theme of the poem. In fact, the sympathy engendered for the questers ironically enhances the breadth of the theme, ensuring that it is embodied in a complex, and intellectually and aesthetically satisfying, form and not merely presented as propaganda.

CHAPTER II

TENNYSON AND MALORY

In 1868 Tennyson felt that he could write of the Sangreal without treating it irreverently, a thought that had plagued him earlier, yet without the belief in the Grail that he thought that earlier writers had shared. Tennyson now had a purpose, and a specific intent to which he must adopt, and adapt, the legend of the Sangreal. He now had a comprehensive social-moral theme for his Arthurian cycle into which the old legend would fit so that it would be meaningful and significant for nineteenth-century readers.[1] Yet Tennyson knew that neither he nor his readers could share a belief in the Grail with earlier writers and readers. Traditional material, with all its divine, religious, and supernatural connotations, presented a particular problem for Tennyson. He must adapt the legend to his theme, but he must also take care that the spirit of the legend be maintained. Although belief in the Grail as a divinely authoritative object was not possible for his readers, they might take offence to a handling of the legend that destroyed the traditional connotations of it. For the Arthurian theme had a great appeal for Tennyson's contemporaries, and the nineteenth century had

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[1]Although "The Holy Grail" was the first of the idylls to be written within the complete theme and development of the Idylls of the King as we now know them, Tennyson had, at the time, the complete scheme in his mind so that, when writing of the Grail, he wrote it as a part of the total work. Eversley, III, 440-441.

seen a revival of interest in the matter of Britain at home and abroad.[2] Any adaptation of the Grail legend must be handled carefully and sensitively; perhaps even more so than other parts of the legends of Arthur because of the religious connotations of the Grail.

As Tennyson himself pointed out, his Idylls of the King were founded on a great number of sources which included Le Morte d'Arthur of Sir Thomas Malory, Layamon's Brut, Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Mabinogion, old chronicles, old French romances, and Celtic folklore.[3] Tennyson's study of Arthurian legends even included a journey into Wales to learn of the country and folk tales at first hand. Although all of the sources for Tennyson's Arthurian poems are more varied and more widespread than perhaps even he states, the original, basic, and most extensively used source is Malory's collection of tales. He had derived his earliest inspiration for the theme from reading Malory as a boy. For the legend of the Sangreal Tennyson was indebted to Malory, not only for the original attraction of the tale, but for the basic significance and handling of the materials which he then supplemented from his very wide reading of other sources.[4] A comparison of the two works will show the similarities, and will show to what

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[2]Arthurian material was handled by Arnold, Lytton, Morris, Hawker, and Knowles, among others, and was very popular with readers. For a summary of Tennyson's contemporaries at home and abroad who handled Arthurian themes see MacCallum, op. cit., pp. 214-288.

[3]Eversley, III, 436.

[4]A complete source study is beyond the scope of this paper, but a consideration of Tennyson's indebtedness to Malory is important for full comprehension of the poem.

extent Tennyson was indebted to Malory. But even more important, a comparison will show, from Tennyson's judicious selections, his rejections, and his modifications, what total effect he wished to present by using the legend, and to what extent his handling is truly original.

Malory's story of the Sangreal is the tale of a quest after an authoritative, divine, religious force which will result, for successful questers, in spiritual salvation.[5] Knowledge of the Sangreal, its authority, its validity, and its sacred connotations are universally accepted as good, right, and worthwhile. In the tale of the Sangreal, its appearance, the swearing to the quests, and the success or failure of the quests are all predestined events. Galahad is especially chosen, before birth, to overcome all obstacles and achieve the ultimate triumph. Other characters, as worldly men, are predestined to success or failure in direct relation to individual limitations, hopes, desires, and purity of faith.

Although knowledge of the Grail as a universally powerful force is widespread before the quests begin, Malory's recounting of the legend of the Sangreal really begins with the begetting of Galahad on Elaine by Lancelot. Elaine's father is the keeper of the Grail and knows Galahad will be the chosen knight -- chosen to succeed in the quest, and chosen to draw other knights into the quest. In the

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[5]Sir Thomas Malory, Le Morte d'Arthur, Everyman's Library Edition (London: J.M. Dent, 1953), II, 163-270.

Pentecostal scene Galahad passes the tests of recognition and ability, takes his place in the Seige Perilous, and the Grail appears to the assembled order. Even Arthur, although he reflects that the quests will destroy his order, acknowledges the Grail as a divinely-sent sign. The quests begin and Galahad proceeds to overcome all obstacles, never faltering, never swerving, moving always closer to his achievement and eventual triumph. Percivale the Pure, although tempted away from the quest in the wasteland, rejects temptation, joins Galahad, and shares in spiritual success as the purest of all worldly men. Bors is ranged closely behind the leading pair. He must fight to overcome obstacles in the path to salvation, but he succeeds in witnessing the triumph of the others, and returns to the court a better man. Lancelot is the sinner, the best of knights, but the one with least purity of soul. His quest is a self-tortured path to repentance which eventually results in his becoming a holy man. Gawain surrenders a futile quest when he learns that to achieve he must mend his ways.

The bulk of Malory's tale concerns the adventures of knight errantry that provide an exciting aspect for the quests. But these adventures are interwoven at every turn with a religious allegory that must be interpreted for the questers by the ever-present holy man. This allegory does serve to lift the quests from the worldly to the religious-spiritual level, and to differentiate between success in the world of men and success in a spiritual realm. For the Grail belongs to the spirit, not to the world. And success can only be attained through purity of spirit. But for the realm of Arthur the quests are disastrous.

His order is decimated because of the many who swore to quest few returned. And some, like Lancelot, have returned changed men.

That Tennyson would be attracted by the story of visions of a mysterious Grail, devotion to it, and search for it, is supported by the recurrent themes of vision and quest in his poetry. From the very early "Timbuctoo", through "The Mystic" of 1830, through "Ulysses" of 1833, through "The Voyage" of 1864 to "Merlin and the Gleam" of 1889 the themes of vision and quest were constantly in Tennyson's mind. Although his treatment of the themes varied, his attraction to them was constant. Not only did he consider the Sangreal an essential episode in his Arthurian cycle, but the beauties of the old tale appealed to him sufficiently for him to adopt it into his scheme.

Tennyson adopts Malory's major characters, and has them play the roles generally assigned in Le Morte d'Arthur. Arthur is still the ruler of his order, bringer of peace and justice, and judge of the quests in relation to his order. He is the dire prophet of failure and doom, but also the standard by which action in the world must be judged. Lancelot is the worldly man torn by his sinful affair with Guinevere, and tormented by his guilt to seek some relief through the Grail. He wanders the land, almost achieves the Grail, and is led through it to a realization of how he has ruined his life, and where he can find a meaningful code to live by. Bors is the loyal servant rewarded for his steadfastness, and love. Percivale is still called the pure, second only to Galahad the ideal quester, absolutely dedicated, unswerving, and unreal in his dedication. Gawain is still the sensuous, unrepentant

materialist who surrenders a fruitless quest.

The scenes and actions in which the characters participate are also strikingly similar in both works. Tennyson adopts from Malory's tale the storm scene at Arthur's hall during which the Grail appears, the knights' swearing to quest for the Grail, Arthur's displeasure, the parting from Camelot and the tournament, the wanderings of Percivale in the wasteland, Galahad's complete success, Gawain's failure and renunciation, Lancelot's trip to the Grail castle, and the disastrous results on the Order of the Round Table. Frequently Tennyson does little more than versify Malory. Thus, for instance, Malory paints the Pentecostal storm that heralds the Sangreal as follows:

> Then anon they heard cracking and crying of thunder, that them thought the place should all to drive. In the midst of this blast entered a sunbeam more clearer by seven times than ever they saw day, and all they were alighted of the grace of the Holy Ghost. Then began every knight to behold other, and either saw other, by their seeming, fairer than ever they saw afore. Not for then there was no knight might speak one word a great while, and so they looked every man on other as they had been dumb. Then there entered into the hall the Holy Greal covered with white samite, but there was none might see it, nor who bare it . . . And when the Holy Greal had been borne through the hall, then the Holy Vessel departed suddenly, that they wist not where it became: then had they all breath to speak.
>
> [Book XIII, Chapter 7]

In Tennyson's "The Holy Grail" the storm and the appearance of the Grail are rendered thus:

> And all at once, as there we sat, we heard
> A cracking and a riving of the roofs,
> And rending, and a blast, and overhead
> Thunder, and in the thunder was a cry.
> And in the blast there smote along the hall
> A beam of light seven times more clear than day:
> And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail
> All over cover'd with a luminous cloud,

> And none might see who bare it, and it past.
> But every knight beheld his fellow's face
> As in a glory, and all the knights arose,
> And staring each at other like dumb men
> Stood, till I found a voice and sware a vow.
> [11. 182-194]

The closeness of the parallels in the treatment of the public appearance of the Sangreal by the two writers is only one example of Tennyson's indebtedness to Malory. Tennyson was undoubtedly attracted to Malory's version and found parts of it admirably suited to his own purpose and taste. But the striking similarities and close parallels, besides showing Tennyson's indebtedness and attraction to Malory's tale, highlight more clearly than anything else could that those parts of the tale that Tennyson modified, those parts that he rejected, and those parts that he added, are really essential elements for defining his intent, purpose, and attitude in writing of the Grail as part of the Idylls of the King. For all of Malory's tale did not suit Tennyson, and the changes he made show a decided difference in approach and attitude.

Perhaps the most significant modification that Tennyson made to the legend was in the attitude to the Sangreal itself. For Malory the Sangreal is a legendary, very holy, very sanctified object recognized by all as a symbol of religious faith, and universally acknowledged as a valid and authoritative sign. And the Grail is symbolic of man's need for supernatural intervention if he is to rise from his fallen state. The Grail, for Malory, is also a healing object that has magical medicinal properties. As far as his story of the Sangreal goes, Malory believes in the efficacy of the Grail as a divine sign, and in the validity and worth of the quests despite their destructive result on the

realm of Arthur.

Tennyson did not believe in the Grail as a magical, divine, religious object. Ambrosius, a kind of spokesman for formal religion, suggests that the Grail is not a significantly authoritative religious sign; perhaps more significantly its authority is also denied by Arthur. Tennyson could, however, believe in a Grail that was a symbol of man's spiritual imagination or mystical insight, a sign of possible spiritual salvation through devotion to the ideal realm of the spirit or soul. It could, for Tennyson, be a symbol of the soul-vision such as he proposed in "The Higher Pantheism" devotion to which will lift the individual from the phenomenal world to the spiritual. But the Grail lacks authority, and because it does, the quests lack the justification of being divinely ordained, and become searches for individual salvation. To fit his purpose and intent Tennyson had to modify the quests. He was primarily interested, as Malory was not, in the destructive aspect of the quests.

Because the Grail lacked any authority, and the quests any divine justification, Tennyson was able to supply a motive for the quests that shows the prime difference between his poem and Malory's tale. In Malory, Percivale's sister is a pious maiden, devoted to the Grail, who acts as guide, interpreter, and participant in the latter stages of the quests of Galahad, Percivale, and Bors. Tennyson modifies her character to be a pious maiden whose heart is filled with such a love for the world that she desires the healing powers of the Grail. Her exaggerated asceticism, her piety, and her intense desire result in a soul-vision that initiates the participation of all others when they accept her

personal vision as a guarantee of the presence and efficacy of the Grail. But, by making this modification, Tennyson removes all motivation for the quests from the divine. The onus for belief, quest, and result rests fully with the individual who accepts the Grail.

From these modifications that Tennyson made to the traditional material it can be seen that he was fitting the legend to his overall theme that called primarily for an interest in the destructive nature of the quests in reference to the realm of Arthur. Tennyson wished to show how the motivation for the quests arose from the pattern of internal decay established in "Balin and Balan", "Merlin and Vivien", and "Lancelot and Elaine", and to show, then, how devotion to individual, spiritual salvation was detrimental to social-moral welfare. By modifying the Grail to a non-authoritative spiritual symbol, belief in which, and search for which, was an individual's desire, he showed that the responsibility for the quests and for any results must rest squarely with the individual.

Tennyson rejects the bulk of Malory's tale that concerns knight errantry, feats of arms, magical and supernatural portents, allegorical battles, and constant references to the religious interpretations of all events, dreams, and portents by a series of holy men. Tennyson does not utilize the themes of adventure, magic, supernaturalism, Christian allegory, or worldly goodness that are integral to Malory's work, for "The Holy Grail" is not an adventure story, nor is it really religious allegory. "The Holy Grail" is a study of men who seek a spiritual goal in the light of a soul-vision, and who succeed or fail because of

specified reasons and individual limitations. The poem is a series of analyses of these reasons and limitations, the successes or failures, the individuals, and, most important, the results of the whole venture on the society.

The additions that Tennyson made in his presentation of the legend of the Sangreal are also essential in showing the direction he intended his poem to take. The glowing and beautiful descriptions of Camelot, the hall, the statue of Arthur, and Arthur's active role in bringing peace and justice to the realm when he scourges a band of robbers who are molesting maidens, all of which are symbolic of the Order of Arthur, establish, in the poem, a background against which belief in the Grail and the results of the Grail quests must be judged. Percivale's periodic denunciations of the apparent sin and hypocrisy of the society are essential to the development of the theme of internal decay, and are essential in setting the stage for the quests. By these two major additions, both referring to the society and ideals of Arthur, Tennyson ties his handling of the Grail more closely to his total theme in the Idylls and makes the Grail story an integral and well-related part of the total pattern. But he also assures that any results of the Grail belief, and the Grail quests, will have an effect on the social world, and must ultimately be judged by the social-moral norm that is represented primarily by the person of Arthur.

Tennyson's indebtedness to Malory, and the close parallels and similarities in the handling of the legend by both authors assure the poet and the reader of a sensitive and sympathetic handling of the

traditional legend. Tennyson did not reject all aspects of the legend that did not suit the development of the social-moral theme of the Idylls. He adopted the spirit of the legend of the Sangreal and followed his basic source closely to maintain that spirit by a sympathetic treatment equal to that of his source. He absorbed that traditional legend of an universally acknowledged divine force, the quest for which was worthy and good, but he created a poem that studied individuals and society caught by the destructive consequences of the soul-vision of the few. He modified parts of the legend, rejected parts, and added material of his own so that the legend would fit more closely with his purpose and theme in the Idylls of the King. He created a new motivation for the quests, analyzed that motivation, the resultant quests, and the consequences of the quests, to show how and why those quests were detrimental to the society. As a part of the Idylls Tennyson was interested in the Grail primarily as a destructive force. He could not believe in the validity of the Grail and quests as Malory had, but he could believe wholeheartedly in the ideals and Order of Arthur that the Grail and quests helped to destroy. The difference in belief, the difference in motivation, and the difference in end result show that Tennyson's poem was not a poetic imitation of Malory's prose version, but a highly original and imaginative work designed to fulfill a specific purpose in the Idylls of the King.

Tennyson himself was convinced of the originality of his poem. In a letter to Palgrave on 24 December, 1868, Tennyson wrote:

> I can't conceive how the Grail M.M. [Max Müller] mentions can well be treated by a poet of the 13th century from a similar point of view to mine, who write in the 19th, but, if so, I am rather sorry for it, as I rather piqued myself on my originality of treatment.[6]

It is precisely because Tennyson wrote from a nineteenth-century point of view, and to a nineteenth-century audience that his poem is original. He adapted and modified the legend of the Sangreal to integrate it with the thematic development of the whole of the Idylls. And the theme of the Idylls grew out of the nineteenth century, and was designed for that century.

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[6] Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir, II, 61-62.

CHAPTER III

THE HOLY GRAIL AND THE QUESTS

It would be futile to attempt to establish one concrete meaning for the Holy Grail, or to try to find a one-to-one relationship between Tennyson's use of the legend and any specific nineteenth-century phenomenon. There are many different meanings and significances associated with the Grail in Tennyson's poem, and any interpretation of the poem must take these into account. Much the same problem is encountered throughout the Idylls. No specific meaning can be attached to Arthur, or Excalibur, or the Lady of the Lake. Their significances shift and vary with the context and with the developing pattern and themes within the total work. Tennyson is not only using historical and literary traditions, parts of which he accepted and parts of which he rejected, in an attempt to write a poem of specific contemporary reference. Within the poem the Grail assumes various connotations. The Grail means different things to the society to which it appears, to the individuals to whom it does or does not appear, and to Arthur and Ambrosius as judges of actions and events. All of these facets must be given consideration if the Grail and its results are to be understood, and the poem to be assessed at its real value. And we need to ask why the Grail was so willingly accepted, so fervently believed in, and so convincingly sought. Knights bound to the ideals and authority of Arthur, dedicated to his work of raising the world to that spiritual

far-off divine event, should have no need of belief in the Grail.

It is equally as difficult to attach one specific meaning to the quests. All the knights are not, in fact, looking for the same thing in the same way. There is little similarity between the quests of Lancelot and Galahad for they are not bound by devotion to the same cause, nor do they suffer equal limitations; and at the extreme, there is, all alone in his excessive triviality, Gawain, who really goes along because it's the thing to do.

If no specific meaning can be attached to the Holy Grail or to the quests for it, it would be best to examine the Grail and the quests as individual reactions to the conflict between the reality of the society, and the appearance of the society. For within the poem there is a conflict between the society of Arthur and all it represents, and the individuals who are dissatisfied with this society that appears corrupt to them. It is this basic conflict that causes a will to believe in the Grail as some kind of external beneficent influence which in turn leads to the quests for it. The quests become, in effect, examinations of the individual's relation to, and reaction to, the society of Arthur. The Grail serves to highlight the conflict that had been established in earlier idylls, to force that conflict out into the open, and to necessitate some consideration of this conflict by the individuals involved. "Ulysses" shows a similar development with the hero giving his views of society and his imaginative memories as they interact in his mind to necessitate some action on his part. The Grail helps to establish, within the poem, a dialectic with the thesis as the ideal

moral code of Arthur and the antithesis as the individual's reactions to that moral code when confronted with a spiritual sign. Tennyson sympathetically develops each side of this dialectic, using the irony of presentation and the irony of the situation to show that the synthesis, the moral judgement of Arthur, does result from the working out of this dialectic. Whereas it might be argued that Arthur's judgement does not square with the poem in itself, that it is a moral superimposed on an interesting narrative, an examination of the poem as a dialectic will show the moral judgement to be a true synthesis.

The society into which the Grail appears is one that has a ruling set of ideals and an accumulated set of beliefs and values, and a responsibility and a duty associated with those ideals. Arthur is the representative, as he is throughout the Idylls, of this moral code. The beautiful and glowing descriptions of Camelot, the hall, his statue, his active role in the world, all of which are rife with symbolic overtones, represent in "The Holy Grail" his side of the dialectic. Arthur provides the social norm, the aspect of working towards a goal in the light of spiritual ideals so that all of society may find the salvation of that far-off divine event. But, as "The Holy Grail" begins there has been a pattern of internal decay established through "Balin and Balan", "Merlin and Vivien", and "Lancelot and Elaine" that has blinded knights like Percivale to the beauties of Arthur's way, and has left them with a sense of disappointment and frustration with the appearance of a society in which they can see no spiritual guide. Percivale cries out against the apparent lack of spiritual aim in the

society, and sees only

> vainglories, rivalries,
> And earthly heats that spring and sparkle out
> Among us in the jousts, while women watch
> Who wins, who falls; and waste the spiritual strength
> Within us, better offer'd up to heaven.
> [11. 32-36]

Ironically, as in "Ulysses" whose hero bemoans a crude and unimaginative world while leaving to Telemachus any attempt to correct the situation, the knights leave to Arthur the active role of fulfilling his purpose by bringing peace and justice to the world of men. From this basic conflict between Arthur's attitude towards the rules that ought to govern society and the knights' despair that Arthur's ideals are impractical, the dialectic of the poem develops.

Even the nun, Percivale's sister, is caught up in this conflict. In "her earlier maidenhood" the nun was characterized by a fervent human love that burned within her, which was somehow rudely extinguished, and she turned to a life of prayer. In this life she is now characterized as having a heart "pure as snow". Her innocence, purity, and holiness are acknowledged by all from Percivale to Arthur. But even in her holy life she is concerned with the state of society:

> And yet,
> Nun as she was, the scandal of the Court,
> Sin against Arthur and the Table Round,
> And the strange sound of an adulterous race,
> Across the iron grating of her cell
> Beat, and she pray'd and fasted all the more.
> [11. 77-82]

To this end she desires the Holy Grail to come, that it may heal the world. Her mixture of deep piety and love for the world result, through

her exaggerated asceticism, in the much desired vision: the Grail comes to her as a mixture of red and white fusing together in their fluctuations in the darkened cell:

> And then
> Stream'd thro' my cell a cold and silver beam,
> And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail,
> Rose-red with beatings in it, as if alive,
> Till all the white walls of my cell were dyed
> With rosy colours leaping on the wall;
> And then the music faded, and the Grail
> Past, and the beam decay'd, and from the walls
> The rosy quiverings died into the night.
> [ll. 115-123]

The Grail comes to her on a silver beam but is itself red and colours her white world with this redness. Her means of seeing the Grail is through her purity and devotion, through prayer and fasting and a heart "pure as snow". But the Grail itself is representative, not of her purity, but of her intense desire to heal a corrupt world. In the usual pattern of colour imagery in Tennyson's poetry whiteness is associated with innocence, purity, goodness, and worth; redness is associated with sensual passion, desire, evil, and carries a note of censure or condemnation.[1] Despite the redness of her vision there is no censure or condemnation of the nun herself or of her vision. Tennyson portrays her as a near saint because of the living power she derives from her mystic insight or soul-vision. Her intentions are of the best for she only wishes to heal society in the one way she knows, that is,

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[1]This pattern in colour imagery is explicit in Maud, and is carried into the Idylls especially in "Lancelot and Elaine" where Elaine's colour is white, and in "Balin and Balan" where Guinevere's colour is red.

by supplanting rejected or lost values by belief and faith in an external but divine portent. She fully believes in the Grail as a divine, religious force with healing powers.[2] Any potential censure of the nun is immediately silenced by Arthur who acknowledges her holiness and piety, grants her the validity of her vision, and squelches Gawain's materialistic condemnation of her. Alone as a personal soul-vision or mystic insight there would be no condemnation of the nun's desire which tinges her vision red. But, ironically, her vision, which comes from her purity and holiness, is the source of a destructive force, a hot destructive passion, within the realm, and in that way lies the condemnation.

The power of the nun's living vision and her wraith-like appearance are accepted as authoritative guarantees of the Grail's powers. Percivale, upon seeing her, describes this power in her eyes as:

> Beyond my knowing of them, beautiful,
> Beyond all knowing of them, wonderful,
> Beautiful in the light of holiness.
> [11. 103-105]

Percivale convinces others of the authority and efficacy of the nun's vision, not as a personal soul-vision, but as a healing power of universal value: "So perchance the vision may be seen . . . and all the world be heal'd." In this reception of the Grail vision there is a conflict between what the Grail should mean to all, and what it is made to mean, a conflict that stems from the basic problem of the poem of the difference between Arthur's society and the knights' reception of that

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[2] See 11. 83-97.

society. This vision of the Grail widens the dialectic by showing Arthur's reception of a personal soul-vision opposed to the knights' reception of an universal divine portent. The ironic reception of the nun's vision instills in the knights a will to believe in the power and presence of the Grail that is reflected in the second, and more public, vision of it.

The summer storm that hits the beautiful hall of Arthur is interpreted by the knights in the light of their new-found will to believe in the Grail. Although none but the believing and devoted Galahad can see the Grail, most of the knights assume that it must have been present, and swear to search for it. In this case the Grail appears as:

> A beam of light seven times more clear than day:
> And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail
> All over cover'd with a luminous cloud.
> [11. 187-189]

The Grail is characterized, not by colour imagery, but by the brightness and opaqueness associated with it. Both of these qualities in the Grail, or in the reception of it, are symbolic of the blindness it has instilled in the knights. They are dazzled by their will to believe, and by their associating the Grail with the means to cure their world; and they are blinded by this association from knowing what the Grail actually is.

The storm in which this Grail appears is symbolic of the violence being done to the Order and to the society by the knights' wrong-headed attraction to the Grail and their swearing to pursue it. Knights sworn to the purpose of the King should see, as Arthur does, an element

of impending danger and destruction in the storm. For the King is concerned

> lest the work by Merlin wrought,
> Dreamlike, should on the sudden vanish, wrapt
> In unremorseful folds of rolling fire.
> [11. 259-261]

For Arthur the storm inculcates a sense of doom that his Order may be fallible, may be on the verge of collapse. But also, the storm, as it is traditionally used, is an omen. It can here be associated with divine disapproval of the neglect of spiritual values in the world to seek individual and unspecified aims. But the knights see in the storm only the blinding light of the Grail. Because of these many connotations the storm, at this point, represents a violent climax of events for it draws the lines of conflict that the Grail had highlighted, and brings the parties of the conflict face to face.

When Arthur learns of the swearing to the quests, and comments upon it he highlights his own sense of doom and the note of divine disapproval that the storm had instilled. He acknowledges the validity of a soul-vision for the few like Galahad and the nun, but in the universal reception of the Grail he sees " a sign to maim this Order" because knights will leave their rightful place and duties to follow the soul-vision of the few into a wilderness and quagmire from which few will return. But, with terrible sadness, even Arthur's direst prophecies and warnings are ineffectual. The knights are so convinced of the authority and efficacy of the Grail visions that they feel that Arthur, too, would have sworn had he been present to witness

the scene, and that he is being overly hard on them for their participation in the event.[3] Consequently they participate in Arthur's tournament with high hopes and light hearts, convinced of their rightness in swearing to pursue the Grail. The parting from Camelot is for the knights a martial demonstration, but for Arthur, the Queen, and the people it has funereal associations. The significance attached to the Grail by individuals has resulted in their taking certain actions considered right and necessary to attain some degree of stability of belief in the conflict of their lives. But, ironically, the steps they take are only more destructive than their inactivity was.

The quests for the Grail are individual reflections on the meaning and significance of the Grail for each quester, and grow out of the individual's participation in the conflict that his society, and his view of society present to him. All of the quests, except Gawain's, are treated very sympathetically by Tennyson. He could understand a man's reaction against his society, his quest for stability of belief, devotion to a mystical vision, and the problems and dilemmas inherent in such actions, and all the more because the poetic problems of his early poems are analagous to the social-moral one here. Because Tennyson could understand and sympathize he presents the quests in all their splendour, glory, and colour to show them as individual psychological studies in the antithesis of the dialectic. But he also

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[3]Ambrosius, as the representative of formal religion, rejects the Grail as authoritative or condoned, while Arthur, as representative of ideal society, rejects the efficacy of the Grail in that society.

makes it abundantly clear that these quests are not to be condoned.

Galahad represents the ideal epitome of searchers for the Grail. He is a man set apart by the mystery of his birth,[4] and by his appearance:

> And there was one among us, ever moved
> Among us in white armour, Galahad.[5] [11. 134-135]

From the moment he meets the nun he is persuaded by her belief, by the power of her conviction, and by her mixture of love, purity, holiness and insight to dedicate himself wholly to the realization of this spiritual vision. The bond between the nun and Galahad is very strong, and is symbolic of the part he is to play in the Grail story. The sword belt fashioned from her own hair, her speech "My knight, my love," and the "deathless passion in her eyes" that she sent through Galahad represent this bond between them, as does Percivale's comment that

> His eyes became so like her own, they seem'd
> Hers, and himself her brother more than I.
> [11. 141-142]

This bond between the nun and Galahad not only illustrates his conviction in the Grail, but his suitability for the quest through a

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[4]This mystery is similar to the mystery of Arthur's birth, and is one of the points of comparison between the two.

[5]In the early "Sir Galahad", published in 1842, Tennyson had presented Galahad as a strong knight, pure of heart and faith ("My strength is as the strength of ten,/ Because my heart is pure."), who searches through the physical world, yet participating in that world, for he must conquer it to achieve the Grail ("All-arm'd I ride, whate'er betide/ Until I find the Holy Grail.) Now, the physical world, the world of action, feats of arms, and society exist only incidentally for Galahad who is devoted to a spiritual goal.

purity, innocence, and devotion that are equal to the nun's. This bond is representative of the fact that the Grail is to be truly known and shared by kindred mystic spirits, and not by all who happen to wish it.

Galahad is led, through his conversion by the nun, to an intense devotion to the Grail, not to a belief in the healing power of the Grail. The Grail means for him that true world of the spirit where the physical does not exist, and he is willing to lose himself in the Grail, renounce the world for the Grail, in order that he may find the true spiritual goal. He attains his vision of the Grail during the summer storm, and obeys his heart's command to follow. And even Arthur concedes Galahad's suitability, and his ability:

> "Ah, Galahad, Galahad," said the King, "for such
> As thou art is the vision, not for these.
> [11. 293-294]

But in order to achieve his vision he must renounce his responsibilities to the kingship of Arthur, who for Galahad now becomes merely "Sir Arthur".

Galahad's zeal, devotion, and dedication to his vision are as intense as Gareth's earlier zeal had been to the ideals and values of Arthur. Gareth was an Arthur figure completely dedicated to the social-moral values of the King, and to the fulfilling, in the world, of the King's purpose. And Galahad can be compared to the young Gareth, for in his intense dedication and purpose Galahad, too, overcomes all obstacles, and conquers his enemies. Yet Galahad's single-minded victory is reminiscent of Geraint's single onslaught into the realm

that Arthur considered useless, futile, and foolhardy because it was not ruled by a repentant will subjected to the social-moral ideals of the realm. Through the various associations that Galahad has to Arthur, Gareth, and Geraint, his character is built up to give him the stature of an Arthur figure, too, but, in this case, an Arthur with no social conscience. And these associations widen the significance of Galahad's visions and quest. He retains all the individual connotations of the ideal quester, yet the connotations of his quest and visions flow out from him to include Arthur, and others of the Order. He is not alone in his quest, but in many ways represents the ideal knight who has become devoted to something other than the Order of the King.

Galahad sees the Grail continuously and clearly:

> Never yet
> Hath what thy sister taught me first to see,
> This Holy Thing, fail'd from my side, nor come
> Cover'd, but moving with me night and day,
> Fainter by day, but always in the night
> Blood-red, and sliding down the blacken'd marsh
> Blood-red, and on the naked mountain top
> Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below
> Blood-red.
>
> [ll. 468-476]

The whole material phenomenal world is, for Galahad, now but a hazy illusion through which his soul-vision and his spiritual goal shine in "blood-red" clarity. He has rejected the reality of the phenomenal world for the reality of the spirit.[6] In one of the most beautiful

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[6]Galahad's soul-vision is precisely the type of vision that Tennyson felt, in "The Higher Pantheism", would create a bond between man and God, would reject the phenomenal world, but would give meaning and significance to man and his endeavours. Tennyson felt that such a soul-vision, in so far as it is a personal experience, is a worthwhile

passages in the poem Tennyson portrays Galahad's union with the Grail and his reception into the Spiritual City. Galahad achieves the goal, individually, to which Arthur wishes to direct all mankind,[7] and his achievement of Camelot in its ideal form[8] is a victory over the world, over death, and is a triumph for the mystic man.

The intense and complete redness of Galahad's vision of the Grail is symbolic of his intense dedication to this holy and compelling passion to achieve the spiritual despite its cost. But this passion of Galahad's for individual salvation is destructive socially despite its own spiritual, mystic, and holy qualities. Galahad becomes the goad that drives Percivale to emulate this spiritual victory. It is as a standared of human endeavour that Galahad's passion is destructive, involving as it does, a rejection of moral and social values and responsibilities. Despite his success, his triumph, his spiritual victory, the violence of which is reflected in the storm that he ignores, Galahad, ironically, is culpable because his mysticism is a rejection of man as a social being, and presents a standard of emulation that is destructive of the social-moral norm. Consequently his vision of the Grail, intensely spiritual, is intensely red, the red

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and valid achievement.

[7]Arthur has the aim, the clearly sighted goal, and the desire to help others achieve that goal that Matthew Arnold associated with his father, in "Rugby Chapel", who willingly helped others achieve salvation, leading, dragging or even pushing them to that goal.

[8]J.H. Buckley, Tennyson, The Growth of a Poet (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 188.

of destructive passion. His triumphant attainment of the spiritual goal is a violent final and climactic renunciation of the real, material and social world of men, and the spiritual ideals that guide that world. And Arthur re-iterates this irony in Galahad's achievement in his summation of the quests:

> And one hath had the vision face to face,
> And now his chair desires him here in vain,
> However they may crown him otherwhere.[9]
> [ll. 896-898]

Galahad develops the dialectic of the poem by presenting through his visions and his quest the ideal form of devotion to spiritual-mystical conviction and a life lived in that conviction. There is no conflict in him with the reality or appearance of Arthur's social world, but only with the ideals by which man can achieve a spiritual goal. Galahad chooses the individual way, the way that is ideally antithetical to "the boundless purpose of the King". And Galahad's way is ironically wrong because it has no social value despite its individual value.

Percivale, however, was from the beginning much more of a man and much more of a crusader than Galahad was, or really wished to be.

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[9]The irony of Galahad's success is akin to Pellam's devotion to his relics and pseudo-symbols which obscure from him the true value of his individual belief if it were put in a social context. But Pellam renounces the world for his pseudo-saintly life which Tennyson censures. See "Balin and Balan". Tennyson's treatment of Galahad, despite the emotional sympathy, is akin to his comic treatment of the "saint" in "Saint Simeon Stylites" when individual belief, resulting in spiritual pride, puts the individual on such a pedestal, or at such a distance from men, that social, moral, and ethical values are completely lost from this belief no matter how good or effective it might be in itself.

Percivale is convinced of the efficacy of his sister's vision to heal a corrupt world. He is attached to the social world of Arthur, although its reality is obscured for him to such an extent that he can bemoan the present state of error and hypocrisy in it and can hope that the Grail will come and heal this world. It is largely through Percival's acknowledgement of the realm of Arthur and the beauties of it that the standard and norm of Arthur are represented in the poem. For Percivale is attached to, and attracted by, the society and fellowship of Arthur, the ideals they represent, the order and beauty they bring, and the progress they wish to instill in the world of men:

> O brother, had you known our mighty hall,
> Which Merlin built for Arthur long ago!
> For all the sacred mount of Camelot,
> And all the dim rich city, roof by roof,
> Tower after tower, spire beyond spire,
> By grove and garden-lawn, and rushing brook,
> Climbs to the mighty hall that Merlin built.
> And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt
> With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall:
> And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,
> And in the second men are slaying beasts,
> And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
> And on the fourth are men with growing wings,
> And over all one statue in the mould
> Of Arthur, made by Merlin, with a crown,
> And peak'd wings pointed to the Northern Star.
> And eastwards fronts the statue, and the crown
> And both the wings are made of gold, and flame
> At sunrise till the people in far fields,
> Wasted so often by heathen hordes,
> Behold it, crying, "We have still a King."
> [ll. 225-245]

And although Percivale is more conscious than most of the reality and ideals of Arthur's reign, he is, ironically, also more conscious of the errors and evils of the society, and they prey more strongly on him. He accentuates the wickedness of the world, and finds in himself a

feeling of despair, and a sense of disappointment and frustration at his inability to find stability in the real society of Arthur because of the apparent corruption and evil of it. And, with a finely dramatic touch, this feeling of his is all contained in his interjecting into the story of his sister's vision what really is a mournful plea for the Grail direct from the heart:

> Ah, Christ, that it would come,
> And heal the world of all their wickedness!
> [11. 93-94]

And yet despite this sense of frustration, Percivale, even in retrospect, considers himself a part of the Order and is ready, from his monastery, to defend the Order from scandal:

> Sister or brother none had he; but some
> Call'd him a son of Lancelot, and some said
> Begotten by enchantment -- chatterers they,
> Like birds of passage piping up and down,
> That gape for flies -- we know not whence they come;
> For when was Lancelot wanderingly lewd?
> [11. 143-148]

The irony of the situation is that even in retrospect he cannot differentiate between the real ideal society of Arthur and the society he considers corrupt. For he defends the very corruption of that society, and is loyal to it. Even now he cannot see what has always been in front of his face.

Although Percivale feels a bond, a loyalty, and an attraction to the Order of Arthur, he grasps at his sister's vision of the Grail as a force that will heal the apparent wickedness of the world, as a belief that will grant him a degree of certainty in a time that, for him, is one of strife. Percivale witnesses his sister's condition as a

result of her faith in a living force that has entered her life, and witnesses the strong bond that grows between the nun and Galahad, but never interprets these events as a reflection that the vision of the Grail is a mystical-spiritual portent only for select individuals. His will to believe, ironically, is so strong, that despite his evident association with Arthur, he interprets the Grail as a sign that will come to all men if they fulfill the nun's formula, and he sees in the summer storm, not destruction or warning, but a sign of the presence and validity of the Grail.

But the irony of Percivale's reception of the Grail does not end with his interpretation of the storm. At the entry of Arthur, Percivale can rejoice in the King's active exploits in destroying a robber band, but he cannot see that Arthur's actions under his ideals make the knights' visions and vows to pursue the Grail ironically futile and foolish. The knights should be doing as Arthur is doing instead of following clouds. But Arthur's warnings and dire prophecies are ineffectual for Percivale because he feels in his heart that the King, too, would have sworn had he been present. With further irony Percivale includes himself as a suitable and able quester for the Grail when Arthur states to his knights:

> "What are ye? Galahads? -- no, nor Percivales"
> (For thus it pleased the King to range me close
> After Sir Galahad).
>
> [11. 306-308]

Arthur does recognize Galahad's suitability, but in warning his knights he says that they are not Galahads, nor even Percivales. Percivale is the pure knight, but that does not render him suitable for the quest.

The knight interprets the King's statement as approval for his quest, and as designation of his suitability for it. At the tournament Percivale interprets his success in the light of Galahad's newly acquired power:

> For a strength
> Was in us from the vision.
> [11. 333-334]

Even the funereal parting from Camelot, and the passing through the gate "where Arthur's wars are render'd mystically"[10] cannot bring Percivale to his senses. All these events are interpreted by him, not as a warning that the quest and visions are nor for him, but as signs of his suitability and ability for he concludes that:

> I was lifted up in heart, and thought
> Of all my late-shown prowess in the lists,
> How my strong lance had beaten down the knights,
> So many and famous names; and never yet
> Had heaven appear'd so blue, nor earth so green,
> For all my blood danced in me, and I knew
> That I should light upon the Holy Grail.
> [11. 361-367]

Brought face to face with the source of his strength, and his efficacy in the world, that is in the world of men, tournaments, and Arthur, Percivale is still so blinded by the Grail and his will to believe in his achieving of it, that he cannot see the reality of the situation.

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[10] Percivale's parting through these symbolic gates to quest for some externally enlightening force recalls his earlier comment on the mystical representation of Arthur's wars that:

> All the light that falls upon the board
> Streams thro' the twelve great battles of our King. [11. 249-250]

Percivale, of course, does not see the irony of his situation in looking for something outside the Order that he can only find within. But the irony is virtually complete with his next statement that "I should light upon the Holy Grail."

Although Percivale is blinded to the reality of his own situation, he must be given credit for acting with the best of intentions. He desires the Grail, not as a Galahad for the individual spiritual perfection that can be attained, but for the belief and stability it can bring to a society Percivale feels is collapsing. The conflict of society and individual, of reality and appearance, necessitates for Percivale his will to believe, even if it is wrong-headed.

In the wanderings in his personal wasteland the images of the city and its life return to torment him and force him to recognize the violence of the conflict established within him, and to reach some decision. The traditional association of the wasteland in Grail literature has been one of man-made destruction that will be miraculously righted by achievement of the Grail.[11] Tennyson uses the wasteland, ironically, to show the destructive powers of the Grail in the social world of men. He said that the key to the poem lies in a careful reading of Percivale's visions.[12] For these visions play a central role in the ironical development of the quests, and show that the affectation of mystical enthusiasm is destructive of social well-being. At first Percivale's own doubts about his ability to achieve success, following directly on his proud confidence, result in loneliness and desolation, but soon the mirage-like images of "deep lawns, and then a brook" where he might rest, a woman spinning at a gracious house who bids him rest,

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[11]Jessie L. Weston, From Ritual to Romance (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1920, 1957), pp. 12-24.

[12]Eversley, III, 495.

the golden knight to whom all bow in fealty, taunt him to renounce his quest. These visions inevitably recall Percivale's attraction to the social life of Camelot as they recall his glowing and beautiful, and symbolic description of the city.[13] But, while recalling the warnings of the King, Percivale pushes onward in the quest ironically unaware that he is, in fact, following a wandering fire. And because he is pursuing his quest, even though unsuitable to it, all vestiges of his former social life turn to dust, and Camelot (which once would have rejoiced at his coming and his prowess) becomes a deserted city, void of life, and void of meaning to him. The Grail quest, although Percivale does not fully realize it, is an individual concern, and to dedicate oneself to the pursuit of the Grail is to renounce and reject society. Ironically, Percivale, who sought the Grail to heal society, pursues it to destroy his bond with society. The hermit tells Percivale that he must renounce his past if he is to achieve the Grail, and then when Percivale is faced withthe power of Galahad's belief, his conversion from society is complete:

> While thus he spake, his eye, dwelling on mine,
> Drew me, with power upon me, till I grew
> One with him, to believe as he believed.
> [ll. 485-487]

In one of the most beautiful passages in the poem the difference between Percivale's belief and Galahad's is clearly pointed out. Accompanying Galahad, Percivale is ever conscious of the dreadful

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[13]See ll. 225-245.

phenomenal world of which he is a part, the storm that is a destructive force, the scenes of death which present a barrier to him, and the Great Sea, the limitless world of spirit onto which he cannot venture. Percivale does not yet share, because he does not yet realize the intensity necessary for sharing, Galahad's absolute spiritual enthusiasm which enables him to disregard the material physical world, death, and the barrier most men find before the regions of the spirit. Galahad's devotion is complete, and so is his success over the world, and his triumph in the world of the spirit. Although Percivale is forced to recognize his inability to emulate Galahad, he is not led by that recognition to repent his folly and renounce his spiritual aims. His witnessing of Galahad's triumph and the interpretation he gives to it are contained in the similar lines:

> And o'er his head the Holy Vessel hung
> Clothed in white samite or a luminous cloud;
> [11. 512-513]
> And o'er his head the Holy Vessel hung
> Redder than any rose, a joy to me.
> [11. 520-521]

The first pair of lines shows that Percivale accepts Galahad's victory, and his own vision of the Grail that he associates with Galahad's victory, as a spiritually religious scene, a scene of living power and efficacy.[14] The second set of lines shows that the first feeling of

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[14]These lines take us inevitably to the Lady of the Lake, the spirit of religion, "Clothed in white samite" who gives Excalibur, the force of religion, to Arthur. Excalibur is "the blade so bright/ That men are blinded by it." Ironically Percivale interprets the scene in the wrong way, but yet in a way that is meaningful for him.

Percivale's has developed into a ruling passion reflected in the redness of the Grail, and this passion in the end is the most destructive for it renders Percivale unable to repent his folly and return to Arthur.[15]

During his quest Percivale is offered the opportunity of becoming another Arthur in a worldly realm where he will have loyalty, love, peace, society, and have them all without the evils he associates with Arthur's realm:

> We have heard of thee: thou art our greatest knight,
> Our Lady says it, and we well believe:
> Wed thou our Lady, and rule over us,
> And thou shalt be as Arthur in our land.
> [ll. 602-605]

But, ironically, Percivale cannot now even become another Arthur, for the wandering fire he is dedicated to pursue, he says,

> Burnt me within, so that I rose and fled,
> But wail'd and wept, and hated mine own self,
> And ev'n the Holy Quest, and all but her;
> Then after I was join'd with Galahad
> Cared not for her, nor anything upon earth.
> [ll. 607-611]

Ambrosius, the foil in his simplicity to the rampant enthusiasm of the knights adds the final ironic touch to Percivale's quest:

> But O the pity
> To find thine own first love once more -- to hold,
> Hold her a wealthy bride within thine arms,
> Or all but hold, and then -- cast her aside,
> Foregoing all her sweetness, like a weed.

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[15]The similarity between the lives and quests of Geraint and Percivale is striking. Geraint also, when faced with a conflict between reality and appearance, the society and the individual, wandered into a wasteland of despair that was a rejection of Arthur's way. But the major difference lies in the fact that Geraint was able to repent his errors and live a life of peace, love, duty, and worth. Ironically, Percivale, in his passion, cannot repent.

> For we that want the warmth of double life,
> We that are plagued with dreams of something sweet
> Beyond all sweetness in a life so rich, --
> Ah, blessed Lord, I speak too earthlywise.
> [11. 618-626]

Upon the return to Camelot Percivale tramples over the ruins of Order and establishment, the ruins of Camelot:

> heaps of ruin, hornless unicorns,
> Crack'd basilisks, and splinter'd cockatrices,
> And shatter'd talbots.
> [11. 714-716]

Even now Percivale is unaware of the violence he had done to the Order. The storm which is a symbolic omen of divine disapproval of the Grail quest, and of the violent destruction of the Order of Arthur, is, ironically, for Percivale a means to religious contemplation by renunciation of the world through his association with the Grail.

Although Arthur is willing to acknowledge that Percivale is blessed in the degree of his sight of the Grail "if indeed there came a sign from heaven," he is not willing to allow Percivale the rightness of his decision that resulted from the quest. Percivale

> hath beheld it afar off,
> And leaving human wrongs to right themselves,
> Cares but to pass into the silent life.
> [11. 893-895]

In Arthur's comment one can clearly see Percivale's fault and his guilt. The Grail may be a sign from heaven, the quest for it and vision of it may be blessed, but to renounce the rightful duties of men because of this spiritual enthusiasm is the grossest of all crimes against society. Percivale, who began the most devotedly social of the knights, has, ironically, become the most culpable villain in the society aside from

the materialist, Gawain. But Percivale cannot understand Arthur's judgement that while visions will come, man's duty to the social realm must take precedence. And Percivale ends the poem with the crowning irony of his whole association with the quest, the problems it presented him, the problems of his decision, and the problem of his association with the King and with the Grail by stating:

> So spake the King: I knew not all he meant.
> [1. 916]

The plight and the problems of Percivale are treated very sympathetically by Tennyson. He examines the problems that drive Percivale to seek some solution, and at every turn of events he analyzes Percivale's reasons for the choice he makes.[16] But into the dialectic that Tennyson is presenting Percivale's plight fits smoothly, and gives added depth to its development. For Percivale is a social man bound by desire and love to the values and authority of Arthur, but one who, in his inability to see through the appearance of the Order, seizes upon a Grail that he cannot understand as the easiest solution for his conflict. The Grail and the quest are unsuited to

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[16] In 1847 Charles Kingsley had examined in Yeast: A Problem (London: Macmillan, 1879) the problems of the conflict between the individual and society, conviction and action in as sympathetic a manner as Tennyson did. Neither author had much use for saints, and both could applaud man assuming an active role in the world. Kingsley eventually has his hero, Lancelot Smith, guided to a realization that conviction and action in the world must come simultaneously and remain inseparable. But action by the individual in the social world is a necessary part of conviction, or belief, or faith in any higher verity. Tennyson knew Kingsley's work, and although he did not agree with the naturalism of Kingsley, he did agree with his assessment of the active role of the individual in society.

such a man whose whole life, and whose whole ability to live, exist only in the social sense. Percivale's inability to understand the events in which he is caught result in a passion for the Grail that is destructive of the social-moral norm. And the part Parcivale plays in the presentation of the antithesis is central to the poem, and gives added dimensions to the synthesis proposed in Arthur's final judgement by associating the Grail not so much with a divine portent as with a socially destructive passion.[17]

Lancelot's belief in the Grail, and the meaning and significance he attaches to it are different from Percivale's, although Lancelot attaches some healing significance to the Grail, and they are also different from Galahad's. But the result of Lancelot's quest is as inconclusive and as destructive as Percivale's or Galahad's. Lancelot is a man tormented. He is torn between allegiance to the fellowship, love and spiritual values of Arthur, and sensuous passion he feels for the beautiful Guinevere. There two forces are mutually destructive in Lancelot who feels he cannot, simultaneously, love the spirit and the flesh with the full intensity both demand; and together these forces are destructive of Lancelot's ability to live and to act his part as the right arm of Arthur. He seizes upon the Grail as a means to escape

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[17]In Browning's "An Epistle, Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, The Arab Physician" there is a situation similar to Percivale's. Lazarus, because he has seen Christ, is incapable of transferring his acquired divine knowledge into action in the world of men, while Karshish, the searcher after knowledge, becomes slowly convinced and believing while remaining dedicated to the helping of men. Percivale is like Lazarus. Having seen the power of the Grail he now cannot act on his own acquired knowledge or belief.

from this conflict:

> But in me lived a sin
> So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure,
> Noble, and knightly in me twined and clung
> Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower
> And poisonous grew together, each as each,
> Not to be pluck'd asunder; and when thy knight[s]
> Sware, I sware with them only in the hope
> That could I touch or see the Holy Grail
> They might be pluck'd asunder.[18]
>
> [ll. 769-777]

The Grail for Lancelot represents, not a divinely authoritative or efficacious religious force or a mystical-spiritual soul-vision, but a means of escape from his dilemma, and, perhaps, a means of deriving strength that will enable him to confront his problem. He learns, however, very early in his quest that he must separate the two forces, for a quest for the Grail is a spiritual quest, and any materialistic passions must be rejected. But within Lancelot, any attempt at separation of these two forces results in confusion, despair, and madness. Lancelot had realized after the death of Elaine that the soul-searching necessary for rejection of Guinevere was not possible for him alone. In his confusion and despair Lancelot finds himself, the greatest of knights, ineffectual in the world of men where he is "beaten down by little men". He no longer has the ruling will, or ruling spirit that formerly assured him of success; in his allegiance to sensuous passions he is less than other men, and his life becomes a

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[18] Flowers, and their colours, had, in "Balin and Balan" represented for Lancelot the attraction of the spiritual on one hand, and the attraction to sensuous materialism on the other. But the flowers were not so intertwined as they are now. He could keep the whiteness and the redness separate then, but now he cannot.

wasteland of violent torment, devoid of beauty:

> And while I yearn'd and strove
> To tear the twain asunder in my heart,
> My madness came upon me as of old,
> And whipt me into waste fields far away;
> There was I beaten down by little men,
> Mean knights, to whom the moving of my sword
> And shadow of my spear had been enow
> To scare them from me once; and then I came
> All in my folly to the naked shore,
> Wide flats, where nothing but coarse grasses grew.
> [ll. 782-791]

But even in his madness or confusion, Lancelot does see that he must renounce his passion of sense, and rededicate himself completely to the spirit. On encountering Bors in his wanderings Lancelot admits his folly and his tardy recognition of his crime, and prepares the way for his rededication:

> I have been a sluggard, and I ride apace,
> For now there is a lion in the way.
> [ll. 642-643]

His passion for Guinevere has become an animal desire, and a force to be conquered. What Lancelot does not, ironically, realize is that rejection of his love for the Queen, repentance, and rededication to the spirit of Arthur would solve his dilemma and enable him to resume an active and effective life. So Lancelot pays no heed to the warning of the storm, the divine disapproval of his actions, and none to the damage he will cause in the Order if he continues with his quest. The storm for Lancelot only means physical violence, and the violence of his own mind, that is akin to his self-destructive wish. During the storm, he dedicates himself to the spiritual quest, not that he may find a true goal, but only that he may lose the violence of his

torment:

> I will embark and I will lose myself,
> And in the great sea wash away my sin.
> [11. 802-803]

Ironically, this dedication to the spirit is a sign that Lancelot does not understand his own problem, or the solution to it. The only way to lose oneself in the great sea is Galahad's way, but then one must have a purity and the intense desire for a spiritual goal that Galahad had, not just a desire to escape into the realm of the mystic from the realm of the material.

In the realm of the spirit Lancelot revisits Camelot in the form of the enchanted towers of Carbonek. For Lancelot, this is the desired real Camelot, a city founded solidly upon the ideals of spiritual man, ruled by the soul, and dedicated to the spirit. Ironically, Lancelot finds his way barred by, not one, but two lions, for in his dedication to this mystical-spiritual realm Arthur, too, has become a barrier to his complete realization of escape.[19] Lancelot is beckoned onward, to have faith in his eventual success, to move past his allegiance to King and Queen, through the deserted and meaningless castle, ever beckoned onward by:

> A sweet voice singing in the topmost tower
> To the eastward.
> [11. 831-832]

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[19]Lancelot's inability to do violence to these beasts occurs again in "Guinevere" with his desire to protect the Queen at all costs, and with his inability to commit violence against the person of Arthur even when joined in battle against him.

In Eliot's "The Waste Land" a similar line, borrowed from Verlaine's "Parsifal" -- "Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole" -- is the song the Grail quester hears as he nears his goal. The song beckons the quester on, as Lancelot is beckoned up to the topmost tower where he will find the Grail that will replace in his mind the golden statue of Arthur, facing eastwards, that represents the ruling spiritual ideals that govern the world of men.

At the end of his long and painful climb past the materialism of Guinevere, and the spirit of Arthur, Lancelot sees the Grail:

> Up I climb'd a thousand steps
> With pain: as in a dream I seem'd to climb
> For ever: at the last I reach'd a door,
> A light was in the crannies, and I heard,
> 'Glory and joy and honour to our Lord
> And to the vessel of the Grail.'
> Then in my madness I essay'd the door;
> It gave; and thro' a stormy glare, a heat
> As from a seventimes-heated furnace, I,
> Blasted and burnt, and blinded as I was,
> With such a fierceness that I swoon'd away --
> O, yet methought I saw the Holy Grail,
> All pall'd in crimson samite, and around
> Great angels, awful shapes, and wings and eyes.
> [ll. 832-845]

The Grail that Lancelot sees is symbolic of his desire to achieve the Grail for the personal salvation it will bring. The Grail for him becomes an awful, nightmarish religious force symbolic of possible salvation, but in its burning, violent intensity it is a barrier to his salvation because of his own sense of sin, and inability to repent. Without in some way repenting his sin he can never dedicate himself so completely to the Grail that it will be possible for him to achieve it. The Grail, "All pall'd in crimson samite" is ironically a destructive,

if religious, force in Lancelot's life. He does not, yet, realize the need for repentance and confession of his crime against Arthur. Yet the Grail for him has these ironic religious overtones that conflict with the spirit and force of religion of Arthur's ideals. The Grail as a possible means of salvation represents individual religious and spiritual passion that is destructive of allegiance to Arthur, his realm, or his ideals. Lancelot can never again be the right arm of the King. The Grail which is destructive of Lancelot's allegiance to Arthur, does not show him the path to salvation through confession and repentance.

The whole of Lancelot's quest is presented by Tennyson with a dream-like quality that enhances the soul-search motif embodied in it, and adds an emotionally sympathetic note to Lancelot's problem, his desire to solve it, and the path he takes to the destructive result. In the search for some final resolution of this great sin that had established the decay pattern of the Idylls, and had corrupted the whole Order, the Grail antithesis is shown to be a force powerfully destructive of social cohesion, and by no means an inevitable route to salvation for the individual. The antithesis has caused the loss of allegiance in the best and chief of Arthur's knights, the man whose loss is most acutely felt by Arthur. And through Lancelot, and the results of his quest, the full destructive power of the Grail belief and the Grail quest is most evident to the society.

Lancelot sums up his quest, ironically stressing his inability to see the Grail as a sign of his unsuitability, whereas he could not

see because his unsuitability derives from his unrepentant approach. Arthur, in his comments, feels that Lancelot is perhaps as blessed as the others for his vision, although the knight will not believe he saw. And although Arthur does not, perhaps, understand the enormity of Lancelot's sin, his advice to him is sound:

> Nay -- but thou errest, Lancelot: never yet
> Could all of true and noble in knight and man
> Twine round one sin, whatever it might be,
> With such a closeness, but apart there grew,
> Save that he were the swine thou spakest of,
> Some root of knighthood and pure nobleness;
> Whereto see thou, that it may bear its flower.
> [ll. 877-883]

For there still exists for Lancelot the possibility of rejection of the Queen, repentance, and rededication to the nobility and purpose of Arthur. And Lancelot eventually does follow Arthur's advice. He looks to that one "flower", the spiritual, and dies a holy man. But, ironically, the Grail has not taught Lancelot that lesson, but has increased his sense of sin to a destructive force by eliminating the possibility of repentance to Arthur.

The stark simplicity of the narrative of Sir Bors' quest, as it exists amid the splendour and beauty of the other quests, stands out as the most human approach to the Grail quest, and the one with the most human results. And as such Bors' quest illustrates the futility and foolishness, even amid splendour, of the other quests. Bors attaches no meaning or significance to the Grail, other than that which Arthur gives it, as perhaps a holy sign, and therefore perhaps worth the quest. Yet he would gladly sacrifice his quest, and any vision, if he could but help Lancelot:

> He well had been content
> Not to have seen, so Lancelot might have seen,
> The Holy Cup of healing; and, indeed,
> Being so clouded with his grief and love,
> Small heart was his after the Holy Quest:
> If God would send the vision, well: if not,
> The Quest and he were in the hands of Heaven.
> [11. 650-656]

Bors' values, which are the values of Arthur in a real man within the real world, would not be accepted by naturalists or materialists, or men of no valid faith by whom he would be surrounded in the real world. But in this world of darkness, Bors, has faith and belief in Arthur, his ideals and authority, and in God. And this faith frees Bors from the prison of the world of men by showing him

> thro' the gap
> The seven clear stars of Arthur's Table Round.
> [11. 680-681]

And simultaneously with this renewed vision and faith in Arthur and, coupled with this familiarity and joy in Arthur, Bors sees:

> Across the seven clear stars -- O grace to me --
> In colour like the fingers of a hand
> Before a burning taper, the sweet Grail
> Glided and past, and close upon it peal'd
> A sharp quick thunder.
> [11. 689-693]

And Bors' vision of the Grail is representative of his affiliation with Arthur, his faith, yet, in a God above Arthur, and his love for others in the world. The colour of the Grail is the colour of a hand, pink, or the appropriate blend of red and white that is symbolic of human devotion and love. The one peal of thunder is his warning that even yet, this love may be destructive. And it is destructive, in "Guinevere", when Bors, because of his overpowering love for Lancelot,

joins in the battle against the King.

But the Grail is a disappointment to Bors. He accepts his vision of it as it is sent from the God he loves, but with the vision he realizes that it cannot help Lancelot in any way. And without this social, human value, however small, the vision is not for Bors significant enough for complete devotion:

> Sir Bors, on entering, push'd
> Athwart the throng to Lancelot, caught his hand,
> Held it, and there, half-hidden by him, stood,
> Until the King espied him, saying to him,
> "Hail, Bors! if ever loyal man and true
> Could see it, thou hast seen the Grail;" and Bors,
> "Ask me not, for I may not speak of it:
> I saw it;" and the tears were in his eyes.
> [11. 749-756]

Although Bors realizes that the Grail, despite its holy and divine connotations, cannot replace the social values of Arthur or his love for Lancelot, it is destructive in the sense that it highlights his overpowering love for <u>one</u> man which will eliminate his sense of duty to <u>all</u> men.

Within the dialectic of the poem Bors shows that the Grail, while it can be given divine significance, need not be destructive of the social bond. And in his closeness to the values of Arthur, Bors brings the working of the dialectic ever closer to the synthesis that Arthur expounds. But, while contributing this element, Bors ironically shows that devotion to the Grail is not the only destructive passion. Complete dedication to the social-moral values is essential for the salvation of all mankind, and although a man may not fall in the quest of the Grail, he may fall somewhere else and prove as destructive of the Order as Galahad. And it is part of the sadness of the whole of the

Idylls that the values and ideals of Arthur are never guaranteed universal acceptance.

Gawain is the materialist. He swears to the quest in the pleasure of the moment, and abandons the quest in the pleasure of the moment. He bears the brunt of the heaviest censure from Arthur and Tennyson for his summation of the Grail fervour, and the quest in his materialistic way:

> My good friend Percivale,
> Thy holy nun and thou have driven men mad,
> Yea, made our mightiest madder than our least,
> But by mine eyes and by mine ears I swear,
> I will be deafer than the blue-eyed cat,
> And thrice as blind as any noonday owl,
> To holy virgins in their ecstasies,
> Henceforward.
>
> [ll. 858-865]

In his own way, however, Gawain enhances the sympathetic treatment Tennyson has rendered to the working out of the dialectic. The heavy censure of Gawain insures the other questers of sympathy for their quests because they at least had a desire to face problems, seek a resolution, and face the spiritual possibility of salvation even if only on an individual level. It were much better for them to seek the spiritual goal as individuals than to renounce any recognition of the spiritual in the pleasures of base materialism. And Arthur's castigation of Gawain shows that he recognizes the better of the two desires:

> "Deafer," said the blameless King,
> "Gawain, and blinder unto holy things
> Hope not to make thyself by idle vows,

> Being too blind to have desire to see.[20]
> But if indeed there came a sign from heaven,
> Blessed are Bors, Lancelot and Percivale,
> For these have seen according to their sight.
> [11. 866-872]

The dialectic of the poem has devolved through the ideal triumph of Galahad, through the sympathetic analyses of the problems and conflicts of Lancelot and Percivale, through the faith and love of Bors, through the materialism of Gawain to the point of synthesis and conclusion. For despite the sympathetic treatment and emotional involvement, despite the splendour, glory, and fascination of the quests and visions, Tennyson has worked his dialectic out to the true synthesis of Arthur's conclusion. The Holy Grail may be a sign from heaven, it may be a desirable mystical-spiritual phenomenon that leads to spiritual salvation for the individual, it may be a means of healing the world or the conflict of one man. It may be all of these, but it is destructive of social cohesion, social effectiveness, and allegiance to the ideals that rule social endeavour and social salvation. And all of the quests, from Galahad's to Gawain's, show this destruction of the social bond. For all quests had individual connotations, and visions had only an individual significance. Even Galahad, whose quest was not the pursuit of a wandering fire, destroyed a social bond. The others, whose quests were pursuits of wandering fires, have seen according to their sights, but their quests are also destructive even if they did return.

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[20]This reference by Arthur to Gawain's being too blind to have desire to see is reminiscent of "The Coming of Arthur" where many men were too blind to have the desire to see the authority of Arthur.

In the "spiritually central lines of the poem",[21] Arthur's concluding speech presents, not only the moral theme of the poem, but the synthesis of the poem that has been devolved from the working out of the whole dialectic. Tennyson said Arthur's speech was "intended to be the summing up of all in the highest note by the highest of men."[22] For Arthur can stress the precedence that social duty must take while giving due credit to visions that will come to sensitive and imaginative men:

> And some among you held, that if the King
> Had seen the sight he would have sworn the vow:
> Not easily, seeing that the King must guard
> That which he rules, and is but as the hind
> To whom a space of land is given to plow.
> Who may not wander from the allotted field
> Before his work be done; but, being done,
> Let visions of the night or of the day
> Come, as they will; and many a time they come,
> Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
> This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,
> This air that smites his forehead is not air
> But vision -- yea, his very hand and foot --
> In moments when he feels he cannot die,
> And knows himself no vision to himself,
> Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
> Who rose again.
>
> [ll. 899-915]

In the final analysis Tennyson's sympathy rests with Arthur, the spiritual man, dedicated to the salvation of all humanity through spiritual ideals. For Tennyson felt a definite bond between himself and Arthur. In January, 1869 the poet said:

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[21] Hallam Lord Tennyson, Eversley, III, 488.

[22] Ibid., III, 488.

> Yes, it is true that there are moments when the flesh is nothing to me, when I feel and know the flesh to be the vision, God and the Spiritual the only real and true. Depend upon it, the Spiritual <u>is</u> the real: it belongs to one more than the hand and the foot. You may tell me that my hand and my foot are only imaginary symbols of my existence, I could believe you; but you never, never can convince me that the <u>I</u> is not an eternal Reality, and that the Spiritual is not the true and real part of me.[23]

And it is apparent that Tennyson could join Arthur in his sympathetic attitude to the Grail questers, and equally as apparent that Tennyson could be as sad as Arthur over the destruction of his Order. For Arthur gives due credit to the Grail, the spiritual quest, and the problems of men, and in the saddest note in the poem he sums up his whole attitude towards men who destroy with the best of all possible intentions:

> Ye have seen what ye have seen.
>
> [1. 915]

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[23] <u>Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir</u>, II, 90.

CHAPTER IV

STRUCTURE AND TECHNIQUE

J.H. Buckley, in his study of Tennyson, defines the idyll generally as "a picture of mood, character, or gesture",[1] and adds that each of Tennyson's idylls "moves through a series of sharply visualized vignettes towards its pictured climax, its moment of revelation."[2] Although any definition of the idyll as Tennyson uses it must necessarily be a very general one to account for the twelve different examples in the Idylls of the King, "The Holy Grail" appears sufficiently different from all the other idylls to justify some special consideration. "The Holy Grail" by its structure is essentially more dramatic than any of the other idylls. All action, character, mood, and atmosphere are given by the exchange of dialogue, and, although each actor speaks within character, all is retold by an actor-narrator to a distinctly drawn and emotionally involved audience. Yet within the story of the Grail there is very little action, or character interplay in a realistic fashion that can be dubbed truly dramatic. The drama arises from contrasts and comparisons of the aspirations, hopes, thoughts, ideals, and values of the characters

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[1] Buckley, Tennyson, p. 172.

[2] Ibid., pp. 172-173.

within themselves, with each other, and as individuals in a social group. In "The Holy Grail" the time sequence is more involved than in the other idylls. All action and development are contained within a framework of historical time, and the action within the "vignettes" varies from one or two days to a whole year, with time being constantly recalled and repeated. The overall structure of "The Holy Grail" does not exactly fit Buckley's definition of a series of vignettes progressing to a conclusion. There is an intricate and well-wrought structure into which each scene fits. The whole structure is a well-connected series in which each scene develops the action one step closer to the climax and the conclusion.

In "The Holy Grail" characters serve, while participating in events or commenting upon events, as functionaries who have an explicit and specified role in advancing and explaining the whole theme of the poem. The one character who best serves his well-defined functional role is the audience, Ambrosius. Considerable time and space are devoted in the poem to outlining his character, comments, and emotional involvement.[3] It is the deep love between Ambrosius and Percivale that leads to the telling of the tale:

> And one, a fellow-monk among the rest,
> Ambrosius, loved him much beyond the rest,
> And honour'd him, and wrought into his heart
> A way by love that waken'd love within,
> To answer that which came.
>
> [11. 8-12]

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[3]In "The Coming of Arthur" King Leodogran served a similar function to Ambrosius's but his involvement was not so acute, nor was his role in the thematic development as important as Ambrosius's.

Ambrosius establishes, by his questions, the direction of the narrative, and, perhaps more important, he acts as an audience who is interested, but must be convinced[4] that Percivale's decision to flee from the Round Table and accept a silent life of prayer and meditation is justified. Ambrosius sets the scene for this major consideration of Percivale's reasons at the beginning of the poem:

> Tell me, what drove thee from the Table Round,
> My brother? was it earthly passion crost?
> [11. 28-29]

By his question Ambrosius becomes a listener to whom information must be given; and that information must be sufficient, and valid enough, to warrant Ambrosius's conviction in Percivale's answer. Ambrosius serves thereby as a means of extracting information which perhaps may not be essential to direct narrative, but is essential for other reasons. The beautiful description of Camelot by Percivale, for instance, is not essential to direct narrative; but Ambrosius had never seen Camelot, and in describing it Percivale reveals just how attached he is to the society of Arthur. Percivale is forced, by the character and presence of Ambrosius, to reveal in detail his dissatisfaction with the appearance of society, his attraction to the ideals and Order of Arthur, and his love affair on the quest. And the effect of this audience role, Ambosius's prime function in the poem, is to allow Tennyson to present in detail, yet in a reasonably natural way and while keeping his poem

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[4]Loedogran also serves these two functions in "The Coming of Arthur".

dramatic, the complete development of the character of Percivale, through its conflicts and strife, through its search, to the result he eventually reaches.

Ambrosius also has the function of asking those very pertinent questions that direct the narrative, and keep it progressing along necessary lines. However, as the drama unfolds and as events progress to their climax, the questions become fewer and fewer. Up to the time of the swearing of vows to pursue the Grail he asks four questions. One is to get Percivale to begin his tale, two concern the Grail's history, and the fourth enables Arthur to be brought into the story. Of the three questions that follow the swearing, one gets Percivale to relate his love affair, one involves Bors' adventures, and the last returns again to Arthur. These questions can be divided into two categories. One series, those concerning the Grail, the love affair, and Bors, are tied directly to Ambrosius's function as listener for he is, by them, eliciting information necessary to enable him to form a valid judgement of Percivale's actions. In the other category, those questions that involve Arthur, Ambrosius sets up a return to the norm and standard of judgement within the poem, and the Idylls, to enable all events and actions to be judged and assessed. The latter category of questions establishes Ambrosius's direct connection to the development of the moral theme in the poem by providing the occasion for Arthur's case to be presented, and the occasion for Arthur to sit in judgement.

The first category strengthens and widens Ambrosius's function as listener, and gives added weight to the poem as a psychological

study of man in conflict by stressing those points essential to a sympathetic development of character. However, by these questions, and by his role as listener, Ambrosius adds indirectly and ironically to the development of the moral theme. The love affair which Percivale is forced to relate is not essential to the strict narrative of the Grail quest, or to a linear presentation of the tale. Percivale had already outlined his quest, his reasons, his failure, and his return to Camelot. But the love affair is essential to a full development of the conflict which drives Percivale to a decision, to a full progression of his psychological study, and to a full amplification of his reasons for rejecting the whole social world of men. Besides enhancing the sympathetic study of Percivale, moreover, this narration of the love affair shows the complete destructive force of this passion for the Grail in Percivale's life. Given the chance to be an Arthur in his own realm, Percivale finds himself rejecting social life, love, and duty, to follow his consuming passion for a wandering fire.

But Ambrosius is still more than a listener or a questioner. In his stressing of a simple faith willingly believed not scrutinized, a simple life accepted for its good however small, and love, family, home, land and duty, he is, in his own simple way, stressing those points which Arthur stresses in the ideal. His description of his own simple life is a beautiful and warm-hearted song of praise for life lived:

> [I] then go forth and pass
> Down to the little thorpe that lies so close,
> And almost plaster'd like a martin's nest

> To these old walls -- and mingle with our folk;
> And knowing every honest face of theirs
> As well as shepherd knew his sheep,
> And every homely secret in their hearts,
> Delight myself with gossip and old wives,
> And ills and aches, and teethings, lyings-in,
> And mirthful sayings, children of the place,
> That have no meaning half a league away:
> Or lulling random squabbles when they rise,
> Chafferings and chatterings at the market-cross,
> Rejoice, small man, in this small world of mine,
> Yea, even in their hens and in their eggs --.
> [ll. 546-560]

In his comments Ambrosius accentuates, indirectly, the very type of life which Percivale desires, for which he vainly strives, but which he cannot find. Ambrosius ironically points out the folly of Percivale's surrendering life in the call of spiritual enthusiasm in which he expected to find life. Percivale surrenders the simple faith that makes life tolerable for the affectation of spiritual enthusiasm which makes life completely intolerable for him.

In his simplicity, besides acting as an alter-ego for Percivale, he acts as a contrast figure to the enthusiasm of the knights. Hallam Tennyson said his father "would also call attention to the babbling homely utterances of the village priest Ambrosius as a contrast to the sweeping passages of blank verse that set forth the visions of spiritual enthusiasm."[5] Almost from the beginning of the poem Ambrosius exists in this function with his comments on the Grail itself. Ambrosius has a simple formal faith in which the spiritual-mystical enthusiasm caused by the Grail can play no part:

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[5] Eversley, III, 495.

"O brother," ask'd Ambrosius, -- "for in sooth
These ancient books -- and they would win thee -- teem,
Only I find not there this Holy Grail,
With miracles and marvels like to these,
Not all unlike; which oftentime I read,
Who read but on my breviary with ease,
Till my head swims.

[11. 540-546]

And this contrast role is carried through the poem by the wording of the questions that Ambrosius asks:

What is it?
The phantom of a cup that comes and goes?

[11. 43-44]

Came ye on none but phantoms in your quest,
No man, no woman?

[11. 562-563]

In his comments that are appended to Percivale's narration Ambrosius also fulfills this contrast role. In his delight in the simple life as it is juxtaposed with Percivale's description of his quest and the splendour of Galahad's triumph, and in the monk's comments on Percivale's rejection of the lady's love and her kingdom he carries his contrast role to its loftiest heights. And this contrast role has the effect of depicting not only the glory and splendour of the quests, visions, and triumphs but also their foolishness and futility. Ambrosius's joy in, and association with, Bors and his quest serve to highlight that knight as a contrast figure also:

Sir Bors it was
Who spake so low and sadly at our board;
And mighty reverent at our grace was he:
A square-set man and honest; and his eyes,
An out-door sign of all the warmth within,
Smiled with his lips -- a smile beneath a cloud,
But heaven meant it for a sunny one:
Ay, ay, Sir Bors, who else?

[11. 697-704]

As well as establishing this contrast role, Ambrosius, in his setting at the abbey, provides the external framework around which, and through which, the various "vignettes" are presented. The whole of the action and dialogue of "The Holy Grail" is contained within the framework set at the abbey, in a time several years after the actual events. One of the elements inherent in this historical time-setting is the gestation period that it provides for Percivale's ideas. He can now view his past, and his dilemma, almost objectively. But there is no evidence within this time-setting to show that Percivale feels his decision is wrong. Despite events that must have happened in the realm of Arthur in the intervening years, Percivale is still not of the opinion that his choice or his actions have been wrong. This historical presentation adds telling power to Percivale's tale, to the irony of his actions, and to the characterization of him as a man caught up in events he could not understand. This whole framework adds power to that one line that culminates the poem and summarizes Percivale's part in it:

> So spake the King: I knew not all he meant.
> [l. 916]

Ambrosius, then, aside from his direct narrative function, has attached to his role certain accumulating effects that add dimensions to the poem that would not be available through straightforward narrative technique. Ambrosius forces the tale to assume certain directions, forces Percivale to detail his complete participation, provides a simple standard for which Percivale strives, provides a

contrast to the enthusiasm of the knight, and provides an historical setting for the narrative. In all of his functions Ambrosius calls attention to the central position of Percivale within the poem, and develops the poem as an analysis of Percivale's initial conflict with society, his compelling reasons for seeking a solution, and the reasons and actions that led him to renounce society. Percivale is forced to defend his actions while these actions are put in relief against a background of Arthur's ideals and Ambrosius's joyful, simple life. And Percivale's defense is telling in its failure, and telling in its portrait of his destructive passion that ruins the Order of Arthur. Through the character and function of Ambrosius can be seen the main technique that Tennyson uses. There is a sympathetic bond between audience and quester that assures the quester of compassionate treatment of his participation, or at least, of a fair hearing. If there is to be condemnation it must come from the quester himself, and from the aesthetic structuring of the poem.

Ambrosius, in his many functions, points to Percivale as the central character in the poem. Other characters also point to Percivale as such, and in doing so they define "The Holy Grail" as a sympathetic study of a confused man ruining the society he loves with the best of possible intentions.

Galahad as the ideal quester illustrates the power of spiritual enthusiasm in its truest form. He serves the prime function of showing, within the poem, the conviction, devotion, and dedication necessary to achieve the spiritual triumph he does. But Galahad also

serves as a contrast figure for Percivale and the other questers by showing the conviction, dedication and devotion necessary for success in the Grail quests, and by showing that any belief in the Grail unlike Galahad's will not result in success. The difference between Galahad and Percivale, from the beginning as equals, is accentuated and magnified until Percivale is completely debarred from emulation of Galahad's success. The role of Galahad in "The Holy Grail" is on one hand to trace the sympathy with which Tennyson could present an ideal quest,[6] and to show that the developing theme of the poem lies in the problems and dilemma of Percivale and his foolhardy dedication to the Grail.

Lancelot is a comparison figure to Percivale. The chief knight's quest is as confused and as unsuccessful as Percivale's, but this quest shows, better than Percivale could have, the complete and overwhelming destructive power of the Grail quests. Bors is an Arthur-figure whose social dedication and love are rewarded. But Bors serves an essential purpose in broadening the scope of "The Holy Grail". While acting as a contrast to the enthusiastic fervour of the others, Bors adds the note of sadness by showing that Arthur's ideals and values could never be universally accepted even if the Grail did not represent such a potent force for antithetical belief.

Gawain serves the essential role of showing that the desire for spiritual values is a worthwhile and beneficial desire. He adds to the sympathy aroused for the questers and shows the evils and corruption

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[6]Galahad does achieve success. He wins the spiritual goal alone to which Arthur wished to direct all mankind.

possible if men are not desirous of spiritual values.

Arthur, like the Arthur of The Faerie Queen represents the ideal man which other men strive to become, and represents, in his person, those ideals and values that should govern the world and the behaviour of men. Through these values and ideals he provides a standard and a norm by which all actions must be judged for good or ill. But this norm is given living substance and significance by Arthur's actions. For, like Spenser's Arthur, this Arthur is an active participant in events, and an emotionally involved character. He shares, through his sympathy and love for his knights, an attraction for the visions and the quests, shares the successes and failures, and shares in the problems. This active role, and his role of providing a standard combine in Arthur when he becomes the man who must judge, must deliver the final word on the Grail and the quests. And his final words are a blend of his sympathy for the actions of his knights, and his dedication to his own ideals.

"The Holy Grail" is not a haphazard series of pictured scenes which, taken altogether, support the moral judgement of Arthur that concludes the poem. Instead "The Holy Grail" is an intricately wrought dramatic presentation that develops through a series of sharply visualized scenes, each building on the others, that progress to a climax and a conclusion to which Arthur's final speech is a summary or epilogue. "The Holy Grail" is like a drama in three acts with prologue, epilogue, cast of characters, actions, scenes, and character development. The first seventeen lines of the poem

constitute a prologue that introduces the drama, and sets the stage for Percivale's narration of his participation in the quest. But this prologue is given a spring setting:

> Beneath a world-old yew-tree, darkening half
> The cloisters, on a gustful April morn
> That puff'd the swaying branches into smoke.
> [ll. 13-15]

And the ironic tone for the whole poem is set within this framework. Instead of this spring being a time of rebirth, regeneration, or re-establishment of belief, as it is in "The Coming of Arthur", it is a mournful, death-filled, aged and decaying scene. Within this spring framework the whole narration exists, and within it Percivale is led, not to a rebirth through a consideration of his participation and belief, but to his age-old and destructive confusion.

The first act of the poem comprises 342 lines from line 18 to line 360. The first scene [ll. 18-67] introduces Percivale and Ambrosius and sets the nature of the poem as a retelling of Percivale's participation and belief in the Grail as a means of convincing Ambrosius of Percivale's need to quit the world of men. In this scene the initial conflicts are established. Percivale relates the waste of "spiritual strength" in the corrupt world, and expounds his belief in the Grail. But Ambrosius adds the note of doubt about the authority of the Grail, and the note of destructive qualities in Arthur's knights:

> For good ye are and bad, and like to coins,
> Some true, some light.
> [ll. 25-26.]

The second scene [ll. 68-165] builds on the first scene by detailing the nun's dissatisfaction with the world of men, her desire

to heal, and her belief and vision. These events are carried to her convincing of Percivale and Galahad of the power and efficacy of the Grail, and the establishing of the bond between herself and Galahad. The difference in belief between the three participants is detailed to show the true nature of the Grail, and to show, by contrast, that Percivale's initial belief is not of a true spiritual nature sufficient to achieve the Grail. The second scene builds on the first by illustrating the instigation of belief developed from social-individual conflict, and by showing the true nature of the Grail as a spiritual force.

The third scene [ll. 166-257] is the climax of act one in which the summer storm at Arthur's hall, in its violence and warning, draws together the opposing forces, on one hand the knights with their will to believe in the Grail, and on the other the social world, the city, and the actions of Arthur. In the storm previous events are shown to have led to the swearing of vows. But against this violence the world of Arthur is placed as a standard of judgement, and a standard for comparison. The social norm of Arthur is introduced here as a separate element in the poem for the first time to show that the conflicts that led to the will to believe stemmed from the appearance of Arthur's world not from the reality of it. Arthur's norm is still a valid and authoritative standard. When juxtaposed with the swearing of vows to pursue the Grail it accentuates the irony of the situation and paves the way for Arthur's concluding remarks. In the fourth scene [ll. 258-360] Arthur concludes the act with his warning that the

knights follow a wandering cloud, and hints at impending violence to the Order. But the knights are not affected by the remarks, and they go through the jousts and parting with happy hearts firm in their individual beliefs in the Grail. But scenes three and four play an essential role in the developing of Percivale's character by showing his attraction to the world of Arthur, his love of the King, and his ironic attaching to all events his new-found belief in the Grail even when these events should suggest his attachment to the world of men.

Throughout act one Ambrosius acts as a transition figure asking those questions that elicit the information about the Grail, the nun, and Arthur so that the complete case for Percivale's defense can be established from widely separated events. Each scene builds on previous events all stemming from Percivale's need to defend his belief in the Grail and his belief in the corruption of Arthur's world, and builds up through conviction, will to believe, and the swearing to pursue the quests to Arthur's ineffectual warnings, and paves the way for the quests. Act one supplies the information that is necessary for an understanding of Percivale's problems, his grasp at the Grail, the nature of his belief, and the field in which his true and simple beliefs really do lie. Throughout act one a pattern of imagery is established in the white of purity contrasted with the red passion of the Grail, and the dazzling and blinding qualities of the Grail. Also the imagery of the city in all its beauty and allegory is established. The storm imagery of violence, warning and destruction is built up along with the pattern of physical imagery, especially the eyes of the

nun and Galahad to denote power of belief, and the golden countenance of Arthur to denote richness and worth. Act one paves the way for an analysis of belief in the Grail through the quests by providing information essential to an understanding of the reasons for questing, and by giving a standard upon which actions and events can be judged.

Act two comprises 270 lines from line 361 to line 631 and constitutes a detailed examination of the development of Percivale's belief and his problems. In the first scene [ll. 361-439] Percivale's mental conflict is examined in his wanderings in the wasteland. Following the wandering fire of his new belief Percivale is confronted with the opposition of the life he desires in his mirage-like visions of his past life in the realm of Arthur. The destructive nature of his Grail belief is such that he can no longer establish conviction with the world of men which becomes empty and meaningless for him. The imagery of the city established in the first act accentuates the developing nature of Percivale's quest as all of his former beliefs and loves turn to dust in the light of his dedication to a wandering fire. Ironically he is determined to continue his quest, haunted by his memory of Arthur's warnings and his own belief that he is suitable. In scene two [ll. 440-488] Percivale is confronted with the knowledge of what true belief in the Grail really is. The hermit and Galahad combine to show Percivale the extent to which he must dedicate himself to the spirit if he is to succeed. The power of Galahad's belief draws Percivale to a similar belief, and to a wish to achieve as Galahad, unaware that even Galahad's "blood-red" vision is destructive of social

well-being. But Percivale does believe in Galahad's power:

> While thus he spake, his eye, dwelling on mine,
> Drew me, with power upon me, till I grew
> One with him, to believe as he believed.
> [11. 485-487]

But there is no change in Percivale's countenance as true belief in the true spiritual power of the Grail would entail.

In scene three [11. 489-539] Percivale, in the impurity of his belief, accompanies Galahad and witnesses the young knight's triumph. Amid the violence and warning of the storm, act two reaches a climax with Percivale presented with Galahad's victory, a sense of Galahad's power, and a glimpse of a Grail which he acknowledges as a religious force. Against this violent background and its connotations for Percivale as he stands in the wasteland of past beliefs that have crumbled, a decision about his future life and belief is necessitated and made.

But full information concerning the extent of the destructive passion of the Grail in Percivale's life is not complete until Ambrosius forces him to tell, in scene four [11. 540-631], of his involvement with the Lady. The Grail has led Percivale to a complete rejection of social conscience for he is unable, in the quest for his wandering fire, to become an Arthur in his own realm where love, peace, loyalty, and justice would be assured. And this scene is a fitting conclusion to Percivale's belief in the Grail and his quest for it.

In act two the recurrent imagery pattern of the Grail, the city and the storm enhance the developing character of the act to show the progression of Percivale's problems to the decision he feels is

necessitated. Act two is tied in with act one through these recurring patterns of imagery, and the meaning and significance of the act in the defense of Percivale's rejection of the world is enhanced by these imagery patterns. The role of Ambrosius changes subtly in this act from a questioner who occasionally comments to a commentator whose humility contrasts with the enthusiasm of Percivale and Galahad, and who occasionally questions so that all information can be presented. His role of contrast figure is accentuated as it appears after the splendour of Galahad's victory, and after Percivale's splendid rejection of a kingdom to act as a splash of cold water on enthusiastic fervour when opposed by simple belief and simple life well-dedicated and well-lived. The comments by Ambrosius, while not judging Percivale's actions, enable those actions to be assessed against a realistic and valid standard and prepare the way for a complete judgement of them.. But his comments also accentuate the confused state of Percivale's mind. He began his quest with a definite purpose, but at the end of the act his confusion was so acute that he could resolve his dilemma only by postulating a third and external possibility for his life.

Act three provides two elements essential to an understanding of Percivale's actions as they are allied with, and destructive of, Arthur's norm. This act consists of 245 lines from line 632 to line 878, and develops the story of Percivale from an individual to a social level. The first scene [ll.632-707] presents Bors as an Arthur figure in contrast to Percivale. Bors represents what Percivale might have achieved, even in the quest if he had continued with it, if

he had not completely surrendered his social conscience. For success in the Grail quest is possible if a social conscience is maintained, even if the success is not as Galahad's. The stark simplicity of Bors' quest, his human vision, his allegiance to others, and Ambrosius's association with him, all contrast with the nature of Percivale's quest and his failure.

The second scene [ll. 708-762] puts the setting in Camelot for the climax of the act. The destructive consequence of the quests is introduced by the ruins of the city, the waste of the Order, and the ruined statue of Arthur. Arthur, on his seat of judgement and while faced with the destructive evidence, is presented with the evidence of belief and quest for the Grail by Percivale, Bors, and Gawain, and the way is prepared for his judgement. The setting, much like a court room transfers the significance of the quests from a purely individual level to the level of social conduct. For now all evidence is presented in the court of that society. But, before judgement can be given, it must be shown that individual actions are truly subject to social judgement.

The third scene [ll. 763-849] details Lancelot's belief in the Grail and his quest. One of the most significant elements in Lancelot's quest is that it shows that the most individual problem, and most personal quest, is really the most socially meaningful and most socially destructive. And by means of this quest Tennyson shows concretely that individual personal considerations must take second place to social considerations if the well-being of society is to be preserved. Lancelot, as a comparison figure to Percivale, while

outlining his own problems, shows the destructive effect of individual desires on the society. And the storm scene in which Lancelot decides to pursue his quest is the climax of the act for it recalls, finally, the storm of the swearing of vows to pursue the Grail, the storm of Galahad's success and Percivale's decision, the storm of Bors' vision, and the storm of destruction of Arthur's statue, and combines all of these events into the most socially destructive quest for stability and salvation that leads to a rejection of Arthur and his values for purely personal reasons.

The information and development of the poem are complete. From the simple beginning Percivale has related the whole series of events, his participation, and has unwittingly shown the results of that participation. In the fourth scene [ll. 850-898] Arthur summarizes the visions and quests and tallies the results for his Order. He gives full credit to those who have desire to see spiritual values and thus gives an added note of sympathy to those who sought. But his final comment and summary is a condemnation of men who forsake their duty to follow wandering fires. For the ideals and values of a valid social order have been rejected and the effectiveness of that order has been reduced beyond repair. But Arthur, in this final comment, is only summarizing the poem. Throughout "The Holy Grail" there was sympathetic treatment of the quests and the desire to see, but the end result was destructive of social well-being. Arthur's comments are an apt conclusion to the poem that has developed through its sharply visualized and inter-connected scenes to that conclusion.

In act three Ambrosius, through his association with Bors and his forcing the return of the narrative to Arthur, prepares the way for the final consideration of all quests, and particularly Percivale's, in the social context of Arthur. The recurrent imagery patterns of the Grail, the wasteland, the storm, and the city tie in all past developments in acts one and two to move to the destructive climax illustrated in Lancelot's quest to show the final social judgement that must be rendered upon quests and questers. In conclusion Arthur summarizes and gives the necessary judgement.

The final 18 lines of the poem constitute an epilogue spoken by Arthur, with the last line being a return to the original setting, fulfilling the cyclic pattern of the poem, and constituting the crowning irony of Percivale's situation. The epilogue shows the sadness of "The Holy Grail" by illustrating through Arthur the extent of the sympathy that is felt by the King, and the poet, for the spiritual reality for which men strive. Spiritual desire is a good and worthwhile desire. But there is a duty to fellow men that must take precedence over individual visions even if those visions are so compelling that they seem to renounce the world of men as a real entity. A.H. Clough has expressed a view similar to this but in much stronger words:

> To believe such spiritual communion possible is perhaps not unwise; to expect it is perilous; to seek it pernicious. To make it our business here is simply suicidal.[7]

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[7]Quoted by Sir Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, op. cit., p. 385.

The final line returns Percivale to his starting point and shows that he still has not learned the true nature of his quest. His defense was a self-condemnation. The spring setting was a time of final death of belief and not rebirth.

"The Holy Grail" is a well-designed poem in which the characters play specific roles in presenting the passion that helps to destroy society. Ambrosius in his many functions ties the whole presentation together, providing transitions from scene to scene, and playing an involved role in the assessment of character and action. Each scene is sharply presented, and each plays an important and connected part in the whole presentation. Each scene presents one step in Percivale's defense, accumulating all necessary information until the defense becomes self-condemnation. The poem is designed to present the theme in a progressive and connected series of scenes that enhances the dramatic power of "The Holy Grail" and make the design a key to an understanding of the theme. The theme is so much a part of the poem itself that it cannot be said to exist only in the final comments of Arthur. Arthur's words are a summation. The whole of the poem presents the information and the developments, and the condemnation that Arthur summarizes.

CONCLUSION

In Tennyson's poetry the theme of the individual in conflict with the world around him is relatively common. "Ulysses", "The Lady of Shalott", "The Two Voices", "Lucretius" and "Maud" present in different ways the conflicts and problems of individuals when faced with a world they cannot understand or share. But the developing nature of this theme supports Tennyson's intention to use his poetry as a teaching means, to become the voice of his age. From the tragic death of artistic sensibility when confronted with social reality in "The Lady of Shalott" this theme developed through In Memoriam to a state in "Maud" where the individual, driven mad by social pressures vows to purge himself in the service of that society. In Memoriam had given Tennyson the clue to a higher verity than the individual. All creation was tending to some far off divine event where the human would merge with the spiritual. For this progressive tendency, and the faith it sanctioned, would give meaning to life and action for society and for the individual.

The Idylls of the King stands as the longest and best expression of the ideals, based upon the progressive development of mankind, which give meaning to life, action, society, and the individual. But Tennyson could never renounce the claims of the individual. He himself was ever conscious that a man did have hopes, aspirations, dreams, and passions with which the social world conflicted.

And the drama of the Idylls arises in all cases from the confrontation of individual desires with social ideals. Tennyson is most interested in that world of real men where the conflict of individual and social aims arises. The protagonists of the idylls, especially the Round Table ones, Gareth, Geraint, Balin, Lancelot, Pelleas, are real men with real and human desires and hopes. The value of the Idylls lies in this social-individual conflict, in a sympathetic treatment of individuals and a sympathetic treatment of social ideals, the working out of which presents the dramatic synthesis of the moral theme of the whole work.

"The Holy Grail" stands within the Idylls in a climactic and central position. It climaxes the process of decay, and illustrates the final rejection of social ideals by individuals. But Tennyson has by no means adopted an old legend and simply given it a didactic moral. As in "Ulysses", "Tithonus", "Lucretius", and "The Lady of Shalott", the best use of old myths and legends by Tennyson occurs when he reinterprets and revivifies the old stories with his own personal insight and feelings. "The Holy Grail" stands out as one of Tennyson's best uses of old legend. For he took the tale of Malory and adapted it to his overall thematic design. But in doing so he instilled into the legend his own fervent belief in the reality of the spiritual realm, and the insubstantiality of the material. This infusing of personal insight into the old legend makes it come alive and gives it added significance and meaning. Because of the personal insight in the poem Tennyson could easily sympathize with the Grail questers. The beauty

and splendour of Galahad's triumph, and Lancelot's madness, arise directly from the sympathy Tennyson felt for them.

Tennyson also fused into the legend of the Grail his own insight and understanding of the problems, hopes, and dreams of individuals. And this insight enabled him to develop an understanding and sympathetic approach to Percivale. For "The Holy Grail" is designed as the defense by one man of his motives and actions in participating in the destruction of an ideal society. Throughout the poem, by the use of imagery, technique, structure, and mode of presentation, Tennyson presents an understanding and compassionate analysis of that man.

It is fully to Tennyson's credit as an artist, and essential in defining the value of "The Holy Grail" that he could combine his personal insight, his personal knowledge and understanding, his attraction to old legends, into a poem that is a dramatic synthesis of his overall theme. For Tennyson did not superimpose the moral onto the tale. All events in the poem, the conflicts, hopes, and desires of men for spiritual goals and salvation, are presented in an ironic and intricate pattern that synthesizes the moral theme directly from the working out of the dialectic. And while "The Holy Grail" is designed to present a sympathetic treatment of the individual, it is also, and more fully designed, to show that individual desires, even in the spiritual realm are detrimental to social well-being.

The true value of "The Holy Grail" in Tennyson's work lies not so much in the synthesized theme that represents his belief in an

effective and ideally guided human society, but in his sympathetic and imaginative presentation of all sides of the conflicts, problems, and dilemmas that constitute the drama of the poem. Not even in "Ulysses", or "The Lady of Shalott", or "Lucretius" had all aspects of the conflict been so thoroughly and sympathetically analyzed. And never had the analysis presented such a dramatic working out of the dialectic in a concerted, planned, and intricate design to present a synthesis that exists as a result of the dramatic texture of the poem itself.

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