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THE THREE DAYS'
TOURNAMENT

Jessie Weston
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*The Three Days' Tournament / A Study in Romance and Folk-Lore. Being an
Appendix to the / Author's 'Legend of Sir Lancelot':*

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Jessie L. Weston

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PREFACE

The Study comprised in the following pages should, as the title indicates, be regarded as an Appendix to the Studies on the Lancelot Legend previously published in the Grimm Library Series. As will be seen, they not only deal with an adventure ascribed to that hero, but also provide additional arguments in support of the theory of romantic evolution there set forth. Should the earlier volume ever attain to the honour of a second edition, it will probably be found well to include this Study in the form of an additional chapter; but serious students of Arthurian romance are unfortunately not so large a body that the speedy exhaustion of an edition of any work dealing with the subject

can be looked for, and, therefore, as the facts elucidated in the following pages are of considerable interest and importance to all concerned in the difficult task of investigating the sources of the Arthurian legend, it has been thought well to publish them without delay in their present form.

In the course of this Study I have, as opportunity afforded, expressed opinions on certain points upon which Arthurian scholars are at issue. Here in these few introductory words I should like, if possible, to make clear my own position with regard to the question of Arthurian criticism as a whole. I shall probably be deemed presumptuous when I say that, so far, I very much doubt whether we have any one clearly ascertained and established fact that will serve as a definite and solid basis for the construction of a working hypothesis as to the origin and development of this immense body of romance. We all of us have taken, and are taking, far too much for granted. We have but very few thoroughly reliable critical editions, based upon a comparative study of all the extant manuscripts. Failing a more general existence of such critical editions, it appears impossible to hope with any prospect of success to 'place' the various romances.¹

Further, it may be doubted if the true conditions of the problem, or problems, involved have even yet been adequately

¹ Professor Foerster's edition of the poems of Chrétien de Troyes are probably the most satisfactory critical texts we at present possess, but the value of these is greatly impaired by the controversial use made of the prefaces attached to them.

realised. The Arthurian cycle is not based, as is the Charlemagne cycle, upon a solid substratum of fact, which though modified for literary purposes is yet more or less capable of identification and rectification; such basis of historic fact as exists is extremely small, and for critical purposes may practically be restricted to certain definite borrowings from the early chronicles.

The great body of Arthurian romance took shape and form in the minds of a people reminiscent of past, hopeful of future, glory, who interwove with their dreams of the past, and their hopes for the future, the current beliefs of the present. To thoroughly understand, and to be able intelligently and helpfully to criticise the Arthurian Legend, it is essential that we do not allow ourselves to be led astray by what we may call the 'accidents' of the problem—the moulding into literary shape under French influence—but rather fix our attention upon the 'essentials'—the radically Celtic and folk-lore character of the material of which it is composed.

We need, as it were, to place ourselves *en rapport* with the mind alike of the conquered and the conquerors. It is not easy to shake ourselves free from the traditions and methods of mere textual criticism and treat a question, which is after all more or less a question of scholarship, on a wider basis than such questions usually demand. Yet, unless I am much mistaken, this adherence to traditional methods, and consequent confusion between what is essential and what merely accidental, has operated disastrously in retarding the progress of Arthurian

criticism; because we have failed to realise the true character of the material involved, we have fallen into the error of criticising Arthurian romance as if its beginnings synchronised more or less exactly with its appearance in literary form. A more scientific method will, I believe, before long force us to the conclusion that the majority of the stories existed in a fully developed, coherent, and what we may fairly call a romantic form for a considerable period before they found literary shape. We shall also, probably, find that in their gradual development they owed infinitely less to independent and individual imagination than they did to borrowings from that inexhaustible stock of tales in which all peoples of the world appear to have a common share.

Thus I believe that the first two lessons which the student of Arthurian romance should take to heart are (*a*) the extreme paucity of any definite critical result, (*b*) the extreme antiquity of much of the material with which we are dealing.

But there is also a third point as yet insufficiently realised—the historic factors of the problem. We hear a great deal of the undying hatred which is supposed to have existed between the Britons and their Saxon conquerors; the historical facts, such as they are, have been worked for all they are worth in the interests of a particular school of criticism; but so far attention has been but little directed to a series of at least equally remarkable historic facts—the deliberate attempts made to conciliate the conquered Britons by a dexterous political use of their national beliefs and aspirations.

In 1894, when publishing my first essay in Arthurian criticism, the translation of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, I drew attention to the very curious Angevin allusions of that poem, and the definite parallels to be traced between the incidents of the story and those recorded in the genuine Angevin Chronicles. I then hazarded the suggestion that many of the peculiarities of this version might be accounted for by a desire on the part of the author to compliment the most noted prince of that house by drawing a parallel between the fortunes of Perceval and his mother, Herzeleide, and those of Henry of Anjou and his mother, the Empress Maude. Subsequent study has only confirmed the opinion then tentatively expressed; and I cannot but feel strongly that the average method of criticism, which contents itself merely with discussion of those portions of Wolfram's poem which correspond to other versions of the *Perceval* story, while it neglects those sections (*i.e.* the Angevin allusions and the Grail 'Templars') to which no parallel can be found elsewhere, is a method which entirely defeats its own object, and one from which only partial results can be obtained.

For critical purposes, and for determining certain central problems of the location and growth of the Arthurian Legend in literary form, I doubt whether the *Parzival* be not the most important extant text of the entire cycle: once realise—as if we thoroughly understand the historic conditions of the time we can scarcely fail to realise—that those two first introductory books could not possibly be written at the date of the composition of

the German poem, and we shall then begin to recognise the extreme importance of discovering the when, where, and why of their original composition. Could we solve the riddle of the date and authorship of the earlier poem, that containing the Angevin allusions, the Grail Temple with its knights, and, we may add, the numerous Oriental references, we should, I believe, hold in our hand the master-key which would unlock the main problems confronting us. In all probability that unlocking when it comes will furnish us with more than one surprise.

The Arthurian problem is one which appeals not only to the literary critic but also to the historian. Have we not in the past been tempted to regard it too exclusively as the property of the one, and to hold that a British chieftain of whose name and exploits such scanty record survives can scarcely be a worthy subject of serious historic research? But if the study of history fails to elucidate much concerning the personality and feats of Arthur, it may yet discover much with regard to the growth and development of his legend.

The Arthurian cycle, both in literary value and in intrinsic interest, forms undoubtedly the most important group in Mediæval literature. Is it not a reproach to scholars that to-day, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there should be such an utter lack of knowledge of the proper order and relation of the members of that group? The most brilliant Arthurian scholars can offer us no more than an accurate acquaintance with certain texts, and, perhaps, an hypothesis as to their relative order. The

result is that a period extending over some fifty years or more of unusual literary activity, and far-reaching influence, lies at present outside the area of scientific knowledge, and is, for teaching purposes, practically non-existent. We cannot write the history of Arthurian literature, we cannot teach or lecture with confidence upon any portion of it, until a more determined and systematic attempt at unravelling its many puzzles be made.

Is it not time to seriously consider the desirability of co-ordinating the labours of individual scholars? At present each works, as Hal o' the Wynd fought, for his own hand, and it is only by a happy chance that the work of one supplements and supports that of another. Is not the time ripe for the formation of an International Society, composed of those students, in France, Germany, America and England, who are sincerely interested in the elucidation of this important section of Mediæval literature, and who, working on an organised and predetermined plan, shall co-operate towards rendering possible the compilation of a really accurate and scientific history of the Arthurian cycle? Those who took a share, however small, in such a work would at least have the satisfaction of knowing that they were contributing, not to the ephemeral curiosity or pleasure of the passing moment, but to the enduring profit and permanent intellectual wealth of the world.

Dulwich, *September 1902.*

THE EVIDENCE OF THE IPOMEDON

*Sul ne sai pas de mentir lart
Walter Map reset ben sa part.*

Ipomedon, fo. 82, ll. 29-30.

These words of the author of the *Ipomedon* were, some years ago, commented upon by Mr. Ward in his valuable *Catalogue of Romances in the British Museum*, vol. i. He there remarks that the allusion is especially valuable as being the direct ascription, by a contemporary, of the character of romance-writer to Walter Map, and that in apparent connection with the romance most persistently attributed to him—the *Prose Lancelot*.

The suggestive remarks of Mr. Ward do not appear hitherto to have attracted the attention they deserve. Recently, having occasion to write a brief notice of Walter Map, they came, for the first time, under my notice, and, taken in connection with certain points of the *Lancelot* study in which I had for some time been engaged, assumed an unexpected importance. It became evident to me that the whole question of the connection of the *Ipomedon* with Arthurian literature, and the light which the words of the author might throw upon the relation to each other of different forms of the same story, was well worth study; and

might eventually be of material assistance in determining the much debated question of the position of Chrétien de Troyes in the Arthurian cycle.

In the following pages I propose to examine, first, the exact nature and value of the evidence of the *Ipomedon* as regards Arthurian tradition; second, its bearing upon the versions of a popular incident in romance—the appearance of a knight at a tournament on three consecutive days, in the disguise of three different suits of armour—especially with relation to the versions of the *Prose Lancelot*, the *Lanzelet* of Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, and the *Cligés* of Chrétien de Troyes.

To begin with the *Ipomedon*. As is probably known to most scholars, the scene of this story is laid in the south of Europe—Sicily, Calabria, Apulia—and the names of the characters are largely borrowed from classical sources. The poem relates at considerable length the wooing of the Princess of Calabria, known as *La Fièrè*, by Ipomedon, son of the King of Apulia. (In the second part of the poem the hero's father is dead, and he is, himself, king.) The lady has made a vow to wed none but the bravest of knights. Ipomedon, disguised as her cup-bearer, wins her love, and at a three days' tournament, in a varying armour of white, red, and black, wins her hand, but disappears without claiming it, under the pretext that he has not won sufficient fame to satisfy her pride. In the second part of the poem the lady is threatened by an unwelcome suitor, in the person of a hideous giant. Ipomedon, aware of her plight, disguises himself as a fool,

and goes to her uncle's court, knowing that she will send thither for aid. He demands from the king the gift of the first combat that shall offer, which is granted as a mere joke. On the appearance of the messenger sent by *La Fièvre*—the favourite friend of the princess—Ipomèdon claims the fulfilment of the king's pledge, much to the disgust of the maiden, who will have nothing to do with him at first, but whose confidence he wins by his valiant deeds on the journey, defeats and slays the giant; and hindered from evasion by her gallant cousin, who proves to be his own unknown brother, finally marries *La Fièvre*, and, we learn, is eventually slain with his brother before Thebes.

The author of this poem calls himself Hue de Rotelande, and says that he lives at Credehulle, which Mr. Ward identifies with Credenhill, near Hereford. After completing the *Ipomedon* he wrote a sequel, *Prothesilaus*, which he dedicated to his patron, Gilbert Fitz-Baderon, Lord of Monmouth. This Gilbert, the only one of his family so named, was Lord of Monmouth certainly from 1176 to 1190-91, and may have succeeded to the dignity earlier, as the last mention of his father is in 1165-66; but the payment by Gilbert of a fine for trespassing in the royal forests in 1176 is the first mention we have of him. As in the *Ipomedon* Hue refers to the siege of Rouen in 1174, it is clear that both his poems fall between that date and 1190, the year of Gilbert's death, but we cannot date them more exactly.² It is, however,

² These and other details will be found in Mr. Ward's article on 'Ipomedon,' *Catalogue of Romances*, vol. i.

certain that he wrote his poems on English ground, consequently it follows as a matter of course that any incident of Arthurian romances to which he may allude must have been known in England at that date.

Now what are the indications of familiarity with Arthurian tradition which we find in the *Ipomedon*? Setting aside for the present the Three Days' Tournament, the main subject of our study, we may point out certain other incidents which have attracted the attention of scholars. Professor Kölbing,³ in his study of the English versions of the poem, remarks justly that every reader must be struck with the close resemblance between the circumstances under which, in the second part of the poem, Ipomedon undertakes the defence of *La Fièvre* and the opening of the *Bel Inconnu* poems.⁴ It may be pointed out that while in the first instance the parallel is with the English rather than with the French version, *i. e.*, Ipomedon, like Libeaus Desconus, demands the *first combat* that shall offer, while Bel Inconnu simply asks that the first request he shall make be granted, the feature that the maiden leaves the court without waiting for her unwelcome defender agrees with the French rather than with the English version: in the latter both depart together. As in all romances of the *Bel Inconnu* cycle, the messenger is accompanied by a dwarf, who endeavours to induce a more gentle treatment of the knight, and as in all she continues to flout the hero till confuted by

³ *Ipomedon* in drei englischen Bearbeitungen: Breslau 1889.

⁴ *Supra*, p. xxix.

his deeds of valour. In the *Ipomedon*, certainly the conversion is more complete, as she offers the hero her love, if he will renounce the quest and accompany her to her own land. It is impossible to read the *Ipomedon* and to doubt that the author was familiar with the story of Gawain's unnamed son.⁵

Again, the seneschal of King Meleager, Cananeus, Caymys, or Kaenius, as his name is variously spelt, with his sharp tongue and overbearing manner, is strongly reminiscent of Sir Kay; and the parallel is further brought out in the encounter with Ipomedon, where that hero thrusts him from his steed, '*tope over taylor,*' breaking in one version his shoulder-blade, in another his arm.⁶ This should be compared with Lanzelet's joust with Kay, and its result '*er stach hern Keiin so das im die füeze harte hô ûf ze berge kaften und dem zalehaften daz houbet gein der erde fuor;*'⁷ also with *Morien*,⁸ where Arthur reminds Kay of the result of his joust with Perceval—'*Hine stac u dat u wel sceen dat gi braect u canefbeen, ende dede u oec met onneren beide die vote opwerd keren.*'

Professor Kölbing also points out that the position held by Cabaneus, nephew of King Meleager, is analogous to that of Gawain, in the Arthurian cycle (to which I would also add that

⁵ The fact that, as we have pointed out, he sometimes agrees with one, sometimes with the other version, seems to indicate that he knew the common original of both.

⁶ *Ipomedon*, A. l. 5500.

⁷ *Lanzelet*, Von Zatzikhoven, ll. 2911-15.

⁸ *Dutch Lancelot*, vol. i. ll. 42,819 *et seq.*

the name of *La Fièvre* recalls that of *L'Orgueilleuse de Logres* in Chrétien), and decides that the romance, as a whole, 'schliesst sich nach tendenz, characterzeichnung und handlung diese klasse (i.e. dem artus-kreise) unverkennbar an.'⁹ That is, the genre of composition was by 1174-90 so well established that it was freely imitated in romances entirely unconnected with the cycle by subject-matter.

When, therefore, in direct connection with an adventure of which several versions are preserved in the Arthurian cycle—the Three Days' Tournament—we find the author of the poem excusing himself for somewhat embroidering his tale, and quoting Walter Map as one who practises the same art, our minds naturally turn to the romances of that cycle, and to Map's reputed connection with Arthurian story.

As is well known, the question as to the share which may rightly be assigned to Walter Map in the evolution of the Arthurian legend is one of the problems of modern criticism. At one time or another, with the exception of the *Merlin* and the *Tristan*, all the great prose romances of the cycle, the *Lancelot*, in its completed form, the *Grand S. Graal*, *Queste*, and *Mort Artur*, have been assigned to him,¹⁰ and till quite recently writers on early English literature did not scruple to accept the tradition. Probably even to-day the majority would name Walter Map as

⁹ *Ipomedon*, p. xxviii.

¹⁰ For the various epilogues and ascriptions of authorship, cf. *Die Sage vom Gral*, Birch-Hirschfeld, chap. vii.

the populariser, if not the inventor, of the Grail legend. Those, however, who are familiar at first hand with the romances in question have long since realised that in their present form they represent the result of a long period of accretion, and have undergone many redactions; they cannot possibly, as they now stand, be held to be the work of any one writer, certainly not of one who took so active and leading a part in public affairs as did Map. Further, his own statement, in the famous words recorded by Giraldus Cambrensis, to whom they were addressed, '*Multa scripsistis et multum adhuc scribitis et nos multa diximus. Vos scripta dedistis et nos verba,*' with the application that follows, have been held by Professor Birch-Hirschfeld and other scholars to be a direct denial on his part of any literary activity.¹¹ At the same time we know Map did write, and was interested in romantic and popular tales, further that he had the reputation of being a poet,¹² and the persistence of the tradition connecting him with the Arthurian cycle can hardly be set aside. The question is, do these words of Hue de Rotelande throw any light upon this disputed point? Can we hope by the aid of this contemporary of Map's to arrive at a conclusion which may assist us in determining the real nature of his contribution to the development of this famous cycle, and will the ascertaining of this fact help us, as the definite establishment of a single fact often does, to solve other problems closely connected therewith?

¹¹ Cf. Birch-Hirschfeld, *supra*.

¹² *Vide De Nugis Curialium*, ed. Wright, p. viii.

Mr. Ward, when he wrote the article to which I have referred above, expressed a decided opinion on this point; and it appears to me that by following up the lines of research there indicated we shall attain results far more important in themselves, and far more startling in their ultimate effect than he then suspected.

First, let us see exactly what Hue says. The passage in question (which will not be found in the translations) occurs at the end of the first portion of the poem. The author has just been relating how his hero, who is living at King Meleager's court, in the assumed character of body-servant to the queen, scouts the idea of attending the tournament which is to decide who shall wed *La Fièrè* of Calabria, loudly expressing his preference for the pleasures of the chase. Each morning he leaves the court before daylight, announcing his departure by loud blasts of the horn; but having reached the forest, where his servant awaits him with steed and armour, he sends his 'Master,' Tholomy, to hunt in his stead; and arming himself each day in a different suit of armour, white, red, and black, proceeds to the tournament, where he carries off the prize for valour, unhorsing all the principal knights on either side, even to the king himself, and his valiant nephew Cabaneus. Each evening he returns to the forest, reassumes his hunter's garb, and with the spoils of the chase won by Tholomy takes his way to the court, where he vaunts the skill of his hounds above that of the unknown knight, and is roundly mocked for his lack of prowess by the ladies. After the third day he leaves secretly, to return to his own land, sending to the king,

by the hand of a messenger, the spoils of his three days' victory. The seneschal, Cananeus, volunteers to bring him back, and is punished for his officious interference, as related above.¹³ At the conclusion of this episode, Hue states that he is not lying—at least not more than a little—and if he be 'tis but the custom of the day, and all the blame should not be laid upon him, Walter Map is just as bad.'

*'Ore entendez seignurs mut ben
Hue dit ke il ni ment de ren
Fors aukune feiz neent mut
Nuls ne se pot garder par tut
En mendre afere mut suvent
Un bon renable hom mesprent
El mund nen ad un sul si sage
Ki tuz iurz seit en un curage
Kar cist secles lad ore en sei
Nel metez mie tut sur mei
Sul ne sai pas de mentir lart
Walter Map reset ben sa part.'*

—P. 82, ll. 19-30.

Now shall we understand this merely as a general allusion, without any special significance, or was there anything in the story which Hue had just been relating which might reasonably be supposed to have brought Map to his mind? Mr. Ward very

¹³ Cf. *supra*, p. 5.

pertinently draws attention to the fact that this appearance at a tournament on successive days, in different armour, is precisely an adventure attributed to Lancelot, and the *Lancelot* is the romance most persistently attributed to Map. The parallel to which Mr. Ward refers is that contained in the earlier part of the *Prose Lancelot*.¹⁴

Lancelot first appears at Arthur's court in white armour: he is known as 'le Blanc Chevalier.' On his first absence after receiving knighthood he is taken prisoner by the Lady of Malehaut, who detains him in her castle. A tournament, of a very warlike nature, taking place between Arthur and Galehaut, the lady releases Lancelot, who, disguised in red armour, performs deeds of surpassing valour. He returns to prison, and on the encounter between the kings being renewed, again appears, this time in black. Finally, he reveals himself to the queen, and tells her that all the feats of arms he has achieved in the characters of white, red, and black knight were undertaken in her honour.

The general resemblance is, as Mr. Ward remarks, too striking to be overlooked; though, as he does *not* remark, there are certain differences which seem to indicate that the version of the *Prose Lancelot* has undergone some modification. Thus, there are not three consecutive days, but Lancelot's appearance in the three characters occurs at widely separated intervals. Further, Mr. Ward does not seem to be aware that this is but one instance out of three in which the same, or a similar, adventure is attributed

¹⁴ Cf. P. Paris, *Romans de la Table Ronde*, vol. iii.

to Lancelot.

In the latter part of the *Prose Lancelot*, the section represented by the Dutch translation, we find Arthur holding a tournament, which has been suggested by Guinevere with the view of recalling Lancelot, who has long been absent, to court, and heightening his fame. Lancelot returns secretly, unknown to all but the queen, who sends him a message to come and discomfit the knights who are jealous of him. Lancelot appears in *red* armour and overthrows them all. The queen demands another tournament in three days' time, when Lancelot appears as a *white* knight, with the same result. After this he reveals himself to Arthur.¹⁵

But the best parallel is that contained in the *Lanzelet* of Ulrich von Zatzikhoven. Here Lanzelet makes his first appearance at court at a three days' tournament; the first day dressed in *green*, the second in *white*, the third in *red*; overthrows all opposed to him, including Kay,¹⁶ and takes his departure, without revealing himself.

With these repeated parallels before us, it seems impossible to doubt that when Hue de Rotelande referred to Walter Map, in connection with the tournament episode of *Ipomedon*, he had in his mind a version of the *Lancelot*, which also contained such a story, and which was attributed to the latter writer.

But what could this version have been? Certainly not the *Prose Lancelot* in its present form. As we remarked before, this

¹⁵ Cf. *D. L.*, vol. i. ll. 19,595 *et seq.*; *Legend of Sir Lancelot*, p. 235.

¹⁶ Cf. *supra*, p. 5.

romance is the result of slow growth and successive redactions, and the two parallels contained in it bear marks of modification and dislocation. In my recent studies on the Lancelot legend¹⁷ I have pointed out that in the process of evolution it certainly passed through a stage in which it was closely connected with, and affected by, the *Perceval* story. Gradually the popularity of the hero of the younger tale obscured that of the elder; and in the *Lancelot*, as we now have it, the traces of *Perceval* influence have almost disappeared from the majority of the printed versions, though interesting survivals are still to be found in certain manuscripts and in the Dutch translation. Now one of the best known adventures attributed to Perceval is that in which the sight of blood-drops on new-fallen snow—caused by a bird having been wounded, or slain, by a hawk—recalls to his mind the lady of his love, and plunges him into a trance; in which he is rudely attacked by Kay, who would bring him by force to court. He retaliates by unhorsing the seneschal with such force that he breaks, in one version both arms, in others, an arm and a leg.¹⁸

¹⁷ *The Legend of Sir Lancelot du Lac*, Grimm Library, vol. xii.

¹⁸ Cf. the reference to this adventure in *Morien*, quoted *supra*, p. 5.

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