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FRIDAY EVENING, MAY 6, 1881.

Lancaster Intelligencer.

THE FALSE GAWAIN.

dy Read by Mr. O. F. Adams Befor His Class in English Literature April 26, 1881.

The knights of the Table Round were by no means men of singleness of purpose and loftiness of aim and thoroughly in sympathy.with the designs of the blame less king, their head, but men who had been fused together at first in the glow of feeling, and who, alas, were doomed to fall asunder when the heat died out. At Arthur's marriage feast
"In stainless white,

"In stainless white,
The fair beginners of a nobler time,
And glorying in their vows and him, his
knights
Stood round him and rejoicing in his joy.
And holy Dubric spread his hands and spake,
Reign ye, and live and leve, and make the

world
Gther, and may thy queen be one with thee,
And all the order of thy Table Round
Fulfill the boundless purpose of their king. On the threshold of a great enterprise where all hearts seem united, Hope backons on her followers with joyous anticipation, and disaster and deteat are undreamed of. So was it in this instance. The knights were all unsuspicious of their own infirmity of purpose, and it appeared a comparatively easy task to persevere in the fulfillment of their vows in which we are told that they gloried, but nevertheless there lay even now a faint shadow across the threshold over which Hope lured the threshold over which Hope lured them on, for the new queen was not "one" with her lord. When 'King Leod-ogran had consented that his daughter Guinevere should marry Arthur, the latter had send the bravest of his knights, Sir Lancelot, the Fillwer of Chivalry, to bring her to his court, and she, mistaking him for Arthur, had let herself love the messenger, and when undeceived the love was not to be recalled. But all this was unsuspected, and the two strove yet to be

"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.

There lay the secret of success, for they were "all one will." Afterwards when the greatest of the work seemed to be done, there came an opportunity for the display of in-dividual frailties and passions, which there had not been leisure for before, for, after all, the greatest of the work remained in-complete since few of the knights had conquered themselves. In the bitter reproaches of the king to Guinevere, lying low before his feet in shame and humility, we learn of what the knights had sworn

"I made them lay their hands in mine and To reverence the king, as if he were

their king,
their king,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs, To ride abroad redressing human wrongs, To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it, To lead sweet lives in purest chastity. To love one maiden only, cleave to her, And worship her by years of noble deeds. Until they won her; for indeed I knew Of no more subtle passion under heaven Than is the maiden passion for a maid, Not only to keep down the base in man, but teach high thought, and amiable words And courtliness, and the desire of fame, And love of truth, and all that makes a man."

High-hearted purpose, worthy of a king, but the tiny shadow unperceived at first o'erspread at length the whole fair de-

"And all this throve until I wedded thee!

Believing 'lo mine helpmate, one to feel
My purpose, and rejoicing in my joy.'
Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt,
Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt,
Then others, following these my mightlest
knights,
And drawing toul ensurable from fair names.

And drawing toul ensumple from fair names,

When the heathen were at last overcome and the heat of incessant action had passed, the glow of feeling that animated the commonness of purpose of the one hundred and fifty knights of the Table Round had likewise faded out in most hearts, save in simple natures like that of the good Sir Bors, and in fresh, pure hearts like those of Gareth, Perci-vale and Galahad. The love of Lancelot for Guinevere, so long a secret, was now known to all the court except the sweet Sir Pelleas and the blameless king and a rank growth of sin sprang up in the shel-

Of the knights of the Table Round three were Arthur's nephews, the sons of his sister Bellicent, the queen of Orkney, Modred, Gawain and Gareth. Modred, the eldest, was moody and sullen, one in whom small injuries rankled-

"and ruffled all his heart,
As the sharp wind that ruffles all day long
A little bitter pool about a stone
On the bare coast"—

and it was he who made himself the direct cause of the king's downfall, as Lancelot was the indirect. Gareth, the youngest, was the tallest of the three, a lad of a pure, generous spirit, in whom baseness could have no part. Between the two was Gawain-

"a prince In the midmight and flourish of his May, Gawain, surnamed the courteous, fair and strong, And after Lancelot, Tristram and Geraint,

And Lamoracke, a good knight, but there-withal Sir Modred's brother, of a crafty house,

It was he whom Arthur sent in quest of the unknown knight, who, in the tournament, had won "The last great diamond of the nameless

with orders to deliver to him the jewel and to return not till the quest was ended He was little pleased at his errand, preferring the excitement of the court to doing the bidding of his king, but, with smiling face and wrathful heart, he went and rode through "all the region round" until he came to Astolat, where the lily maid awaited the return of Sir Lancelot and Lavaine, and to her father he explained that he was commissioned to find the knight who had won the prize in the great

"but had ridden wildly round To seek him and was wearled with the search." He was a lover of his case, this fine Gawain, not hard to be swayed from his purpose by circumstances and for the present it suited more with his disposition to ac-cept the proffered hospitality of the Lord of Astolat and remain his guest till they should hear further than to continue his quest, for, said the old man,

'Needs must we hear.' To this the courteous prince Accorded with his wonted courtesy Courtesy with as touch of traitor in it.
And stay'd; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine;
Where could be found face dainter? then her

Where could be found face dainter? then her shape
From forehead down to foot perfect—again
From foot to forehead exquisitely turn'd;
'Well—if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!'
And oft they met among the garden yews,
And there he set himself to piay upon her
With sallying wit, free flashes from a height
Above her, graces of the court, and songs,
Sighs, and slow smiles, and golden eloquence
And amorous adulation."

Well practiced was the courteens.

Well practised was the courteous, traitor knight in the art of beguiling inno-cence, as perfect a master of such lore as the wily Vivien was mistress in her degree, but when he saw the shield the knight had left with Elaine and knew it to be Sir Lancelot's, his purpose was changed since Lancelot was the stronger. "Far be it for me To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves!

And, damsel, for I deem you know full well Where your great knight is hidden, let in

My quest with you: the diamond also.

Then he gave,
And slightly kissed the hand to which he gave
The diamond, and all wearied of the quest
Leapt on his horse, and carolling as he went
A true-love ballad, lightly rode away." That was his gay parting. No more was

he to see her till-"Under tower and baleony, By garden wall and gallery, A gleaming shape she floated by, A corse between the houses high, Silent into Camelot."

It is like the light, frothy nature of the man that when he saw her next, we only know of him that-

'He came and wonder'd at her.' Lancelot mused at her, and we know his feeling; the queen "pitied;" Percivale and Galahad bore her "reverently;" but this man only "came and wondered at her." With light excuse he lays the result of his search before the king on his

"I failed to find him, tho' I rode all round The region ; but I lighted on the maid, Whose sleeve he wore, she loves him, and to ber

Deeming our courtesy is the truest law I gave the diamond; she will render it; For by mine held she knows its hiding place. Careless, selfish natures easily satisfy themselves of the wisdom of their course and take it as a personal affront that others are not as easily satisfied. There is nothing like the union of selfishness to essentially light trifling natures for blunting the moral perceptions.

The seldom frowning king frowned and replied.
'Too courteous truly! You shall go no more
On quest of mine, seeing that you forget
Obedience is the courtesy due to kings.'
He spake and parted. Wroth but all in awe,
For twenty strokes of the blood, without a

word, Linger'd that other, staring after him; Then shook his hair, strode off and buzz'd abroad About the maid of Astolat and her love,"

Another glimpse of Gawain we have when the knights, hearing of the vision of the Holy Grail seen by the nun, the sister of the meek Sir Pereivale, have sworn to

loyal, the one to his king and the other to " A twelve month and a day in quest of it, And Gawain swore and louder than the rest.' Later, when the time was ended and the knights returning told to Arthur what they had seen, the king asked-

"Of Gawain, 'Gawain, was this quest for thee?"
'Nay, lord,' said Gawain, 'not for such as I. Therefore I communed with a saintly man, Who made me sure the Quest was not for me For I was much awearied of the Quest, But found a silk payilion in the field. But found a silk pavilion in the field, And merry maldens in it; and then this gale Tore my pavilion from the tenting pin, And blew my merry maldens all about Wish all discomfort; yea and but for this, My twelve month and a day were pleasant to

The king makes no answer to this perfumed Paris" of his court and empoldened by this silence which is a contemptuous one, though Gawain perceived it not, the latter speaks again.

"'O king, my liege,' he said. When have I stinted stroke in foughten field:
But as for thine, my good friend Percivale.
Thy holy nun and thou have driven men mad.
Yea, made our mightiest madder than our But by mine eyes and by mine cars I swear, I will be deater than the blue-eyet cat,
And thrice as blind as any noonday owl,

To holy virgins in their eestasies, Henceforward. Denceiorward.'
Denfer,' 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.'"

But the fine Gawain was not all knave at heart, else had he never formed one of table Table Round, and his spirit, though not finely touched nor to fine issues, could yet vibrate in response to the call of knightly valor as ence when-

"Bound upon solitary adventure, he saw Low down beneath the shadow of those

towers

A villainy, three to one: and thro' his heart
The fire of honor and all noble deeds
Flash'd and he called, 'I strike upon thy side—
The caitiffs!' Nay,' said Pelleas, 'but forbear;
fle needs no aid who doth his hady's will.'
So Gawain, looking at the villainy done,
Forbore, but in his heart and eagerness
Trembled and quiver'd, as the dog, withheld
A moment from the vermin that he sees
Before him, shivers, ere he springs and kills."

It is pleasent to record this poble indi-It is pleasant to record this noble indig-

nation in so faulty a man ; pleasant to detect the presence of a thread of fine gold, though ever so slender, mingling itself with the baser metal of his nature. Upon the story of the sweet Sir Pelleas, we need not dwell at length. He loved and hopelessly the scornful Eterre. Slights

innumerable she had placed upon him, and doomed him to many indignities all of which he bore most patiently for-"These be the ways of ladies," Pelless thought
'To those who love them, trials of our faith.

Yea, let her prove me to the uttermost,
For loyal to the uttermost am 1." With this boy knight, the youngest of the

Table Round, and of those that Arthur "to fill the gap

the fine Gawain makes an agreement that in three days he will engage to turn the maiden's heart toward Pelleas, pledging himself by the honor of the Table Round, an almost empty pledge in those late days had Pelleas but known it. The scheme was briefly this. He was to take the horse and arms of Sir Pelleas and enter the castle of the scornful lady declaring he had slain him, and then "from prime to vespers" he would sing the praises of Sir Pelleas until her heart was turned and she should long to have him alive again. Perhaps at this time no thought of treachery entered Gawain's heart. He may have fully meant to carry out his promise to his friend, trusting to his own graces of speech and moved by a sort of pity for the

"Then Pelleas lent his horse and all his arms, Saving the goodly sword, his prize, and took Gawain's, and said, 'Betray me not, but help— Art thou not he whom men call light of love?' 'Ay,' said Gawain, 'for women be so light.' As he had foreseen on declaring that he

ad slain Sir Pelleas he was readily admitted to the presence of Etarre, to whom he repeated what he had said before the castle 'Pity on him,' she answered, 'a good knight,

But never let me bide one hour in peace."

*Ay.' thought Gawain, 'and ye be fair enow:
But I to your dead man have given my troth,
That whom ye loathe, him will I make you
love." This last does not look like premeditated treachery and so far, I think, we may ac-

quit him. But the three days passed

heavily with Sir Pelleas waiting-

"until the third night brought a moon With promise of large light on woods and ways." Then follows one of those charming passages where narrative is interwoven with exquisite description, the quiet tone of the whole being, as it were, the hushed pause before the shameful denouement:

The night was hot; he could not rest, but rode Ere midnight to her walls, and bound his Hard by the gates. Wide open were the And no watch kept, and in thro' these he And heard but his own steps and his own heart
Beating, for nothing moved but his own self And his own shadow. Then he crost the

court.

And saw the postern portal also wide
1 awning: and up a slope of garden, all
0 froses white and red, and wild ones mix'd
And overgrowing them, went on, and four d
Here too, all hushed below the mellow moon,
Save that one rivulet from a tiny cave
Came lightening downward, and so split
itself

Among the roses and was lost again?

Among the roses and was lost again." The treachery of Gawain you foresee and close upon Pelleas's discovery of this comes one of those passages which help to

make this idyl of Pelleas and Etarre the most dramatic of the ten.

"Then he turn'd and laid sword athwart their naked throats,
There left it and them sleeping: and she lay,
The circlet of the tourney round her brows,
And the sword of the tearney seross her
throat."

Maddened with his discovery, and with all the sweetness of his nature turned to bitterness, he rushed forth and meeting sometime after the meek Sir Percivale, he learnedfrom him that neither wasGuinevere sinless, nor Lancelot without blot, these whem Sir Pelleas reverenced above all the world beside. Henceforward there was no peace or rest for Pelleas, since, if the highest names were not without a stain, his faith in purity and goodness no longer remained. On his way to Camelot he met Sir Lancelot, closed with him, and was overthrown and after passed into the city into the presence of the queen. The lat-ter learning from Lancelot that he and Pelleas have fought, but not the reasons why, attempts to soothe the latter's ruffled

'Hath the great heart of knighthood in thee so far thou caust not bide, unfrowardly,
A fall from him?' Then, for he answer'd not,
Or hast thou other griefs? If I, the queen,
May help them, loose thy tongue and let me
know.'"

Not one of the ten idyls closes more powerfully than this of Pelleas and Etarre, that of the Last Tournament approaching it most nearly in vigor and dramatic force. "But Pelleas litted up an eye so flerce She quail'd ; and he, hissing 'I have no sword,' Sprang from the door into the dark. The

queen
Looked hard upon her lover, he on her;
And each foresaw the dolorous day to be;
And all talk died, as in a grove all song
Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey;
Then a long silence came upon the hall,
And Modred thought, 'The time is hard at

I do not think I am mistaken in my esimate of this shuddering ending of a mournful story as one of the very finest passages that Tennyson has ever written. We have in this paper examined more or less imperfectly the character of Gawain as developed in one and another of the idyls. We have seen him a careless, pleasure loving knight, not devoid of good impulses, but easily influenced by circumstances and loving the gratifications of his own desires beyond everything else. He is faithless to the behests of the king, deeming strict obedience of less importance than his own love of ease, and we have seen him shrink back from the quest of the Holy Grait because he found it a hard and wearisome task. Lastly we find him forgetful of his promise to Sir Pelleas in the smiles and blandishments of a fair woman. His is not a hard character to read. It is not wilfully bad, but lacks the power of sustaining principle. Many of his impulses are generous, but there is no resolution behind them, and when the moment comes to test their strength, lo! they are as ropes of sand and he is at the mercy of circumstances. The Gawains of actual life are not few. the wayside. They are men of shallow, outwardly generous, natures, loving and impulsive, ready to do a good action should it not compromise their own ease too much, first and foremost in any loud sounding enterprise, but skulking to the rear when the difficulties are to be encountered. So long as their selfish ends are not disturbed, so long as they are not exposed to severity of temptation they pass for good men enough, albeit of a rather trifling and unsubstantial texture. but some day the Gawains, who have sought only their own gratifications in

this world, must realize the emptiness of all, and as once-"the ghost of Gawain blown Along a wandering wind * * * * Went shrilling, 'Hollow, hollow, all delight,'" so in the last dark hour may there be the auswering echo in their hearts: " Hollow, hollow, all delight."

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