

## THE PERCEVAL LEGEND IN LITERATURE.



OF the various cycles into which the romantic literature of the Middle Ages groups itself, none, for the average English reader, can compare in charm and fascination with that devoted to the deeds of King Arthur and his knights. It is true that till within the last fifty years or so our knowledge has been mainly restricted to the extracts from the later prose romances compiled by Sir Thomas Malory, but the very scantiness of our knowledge has, by deepening the mystery, increased the charm which surrounds these semi-heroic, semi-mystical, tales.

Of late years attempts have been made in various directions to throw light upon the origin and growth of this perplexing body of literature, but so far we cannot be said to have done more than make manifest the extent and complexity of the problems involved; in no single direction is the ground as yet sufficiently clear to enable us to take more than a partial and preliminary survey of the question. Such data as we possess are liable at any moment to change their significance and value in the light thrown by some newly discovered text.

A complete bibliography of any one branch of the cycle is a boon which, however desirable, we dare not as yet expect. In the meantime students

of the literature may be glad to be put in possession of the best available data relative to the most charming, and at one time certainly the most popular, romance of the cycle, of which unfortunately no critical edition exists.

The main outlines of the story of Perceval have, through the use made by Wagner of the German version of the tale, become tolerably familiar. Few probably know the legend at first hand, but many have a general idea of its character—how the boy, brought up by his widowed mother far from the haunts of men, simple, untaught, almost a fool in his apparent lack of mental and spiritual development, gradually becomes a valiant knight, and passing successfully the tests imposed upon him, eventually wins the sacred talisman of the Grail and becomes lord of the Grail castle and kingdom. So much many of us know, but few have a closer knowledge of the details, of the characteristic touches by which the boy's ignorance of the world and simplicity of mind are revealed; his literal interpretation of his mother's counsels, and the difficulties in which he is thereby landed; his equal obedience to the letter of the worthy knight who gives him his first lesson in chivalry, an obedience which leads to his failure at the Grail castle; the doughty deeds by which he won his lady-love, and the long wandering, consequent on the curse of the Grail messenger, before he was deemed worthy to achieve the quest, and win the Grail kingdom. It is not my purpose here to record these deeds in detail, but rather to give such information as may aid those desirous of studying the story for themselves.

Our main authority for the tale I have sketched above is the poem of Chrétien de Troyes, written towards the end of the twelfth century, and, unfortunately, left unfinished by the author. The source of the poem was, he tells us, a book delivered to him by Count Philip of Flanders, at whose command he undertook to '*rimoier le meillor conte qui soit conté en cort roial*.' What were the contents of the book, and for how much of his material Chrétien was indebted to earlier writers, are questions the discussion of which lies outside the scope of this article. It may, however, safely be postulated that Perceval was already a well-known hero, and that his adventures had formed the theme both of popular *lais*, and more elaborate literary compositions.

The exact date of Chrétien's poem is not known. Philip, Count of Flanders, was guardian to the young king, Philip Augustus of France, and the allusion to the '*cort roial*' has led some critics to conclude that the commission was given while Philip was at the height of his power, acting as Regent for his ward. The late M. Gaston Paris, however, was inclined to suggest an earlier date, and considered that the work was composed towards the beginning of the decade 1170-1180. The popularity of Chrétien's theme is attested by the eagerness with which versifiers seized upon the unfinished poem; how many hands worked at it we cannot as yet definitely say, but three names in especial are associated with the romance in its present form, those of Gautier de Doulans, Dourdans, or Denet (the name is variously written),

Manessier and Gerbert, who is almost certainly identical with Gerbert de Montreuil, author of the 'Roman de la Violette.' Chrétien's work had reached the respectable length of some 11,000 lines, the sum total with all the continuations is over 60,000. This alarming figure is, however, only reached in one manuscript, the ordinary versions, which do not include 'Gerbert,' run to about 45,000 lines.

In comparison with such prose romances as 'Lancelot' and 'Tristan' manuscripts of the 'Perceval' are rare, but though limited in number they show considerable variation in incident and detail; even in the section due to Chrétien, where the incidents do not vary, the wording of the text differs remarkably. It is probably due to this that the long-promised critical edition is so slow in appearing; the reconstruction of the text will incontestably be a matter of considerable difficulty.

Of the extant manuscripts the 'Bibliothèque Nationale,' Paris, possesses the lion's share, six out of seventeen. These are: (1) 12576, thirteenth century, complete, numbering 260 leaves, and, moreover, the only manuscript which contains the section by Gerbert. Of this I propose later on to give an abstract, as it is practically unknown and of great interest. (2) 12577, fourteenth century, 272 leaves, with two lacunae, covering about 350 lines. This manuscript, which is the best written of the group, and finely illuminated, gives a series of adventures by Gawain only found elsewhere in the printed edition of 1530. (3) 794, thirteenth century, about 90 leaves, bound up with other

romances by Chrétien, is incomplete, breaking off suddenly in the middle of the adventure of the stag's head. This manuscript differs from the others in distinguishing Chrétien's work from that of his continuators by the insertion of the words, '*Exphycyt Perceval le viel.*' (4) 1450, thirteenth century, incomplete both at beginning and end, Chrétien's introduction being absent, and the poem breaking off after the conclusion of the combat between Gawain and Giromelans. (5) 1429, thirteenth century. Here the first leaf, which was apparently written in a different hand, is missing all but a fragment, and the manuscript begins in the middle of Perceval's meeting with the knights in the forest; it is also incomplete at the end, the conclusion with Manessier's name being absent, but the bulk of the poem, 380 leaves, is given. (6) 1453, fourteenth century, covers the same ground, beginning about twelve lines earlier and ending about fifty later, and numbers 280 leaves.

The Berne Stadt-Bibliothek possesses two 'Perceval' manuscripts, No. 354, which contains Chrétien's poem only, ending at the line where B.N. 794 interpolates the rubric referred to above; and No. 113, containing a portion only of the first continuation, to which a few lines of somewhat vague introduction, and a conclusion based upon Borron's romance, have been added.

Besides these manuscripts, all of which I have personally examined, there is one in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh, which, though it has lost several pages, consists of 258 leaves, and must therefore contain a large proportion of the whole; one at Mons,

and one at Montpellier, these two last having been utilized by M. Potvin for his edition. This, which was published in 1866-71 gives the text of the Mons manuscript, with additions from that of Montpellier, and the first of the six volumes contains the prose romance of 'Perlesvaus' from the manuscript in the Brussels Library. The libraries of Clermont-Ferrand, 'Riccardi,' Florence, and Heralds' College, London, also possess Perceval manuscripts. Of these the first and third are incomplete. I have no information as regards the Florentine.

There is also extant a very good Low German translation of the latter part of the 'Perceval,' modified so as to make it harmonize, more or less, with the 'Parzival' of Wolfram von Eschenbach. Of this translation three manuscripts are known, one at Donauesching, which is the original, one at Strassburg, and one at Rome. A special point of interest in this version is that it contains the introduction referred to above, and only found in the Mons manuscript. This version is generally known as the 'Wisse-Collin,' from the names of the translators, and was edited from the Strassburg text in 1882.

A prose version of the complete poem, always excepting that portion due to Gerbert, was published in Paris by Longis, Saint-Denis, and Galliot du Pré in 1530. There also exists a mediaeval Dutch translation of the latter part of Chrétien's work, and the first leaves of the continuation, this was published by M. Jonckbloet in 1850, in his 'Roman van Lance-loet,' of which the extract forms a part. This Dutch version differs in some notable points from any known French text.

We have thus seventeen manuscripts of the 'Perceval,' of which fourteen represent the original French text, and three a translation from that text. We have, moreover, five printed editions: two French (Paris, 1530, and Potvin, Mons, 1866-71), and three translations (Strassburg, 1882, Jonckbloet, 1850), and the Flemish fragments. None of these, however, save the 'Wisse-Collin' text, is easily available.

Before turning to the much more extensive bibliography of the German version, the 'Parzival' of Wolfram von Eschenbach, I propose to give a somewhat detailed summary of the Gerbert continuation. As I have stated above, the poem exists in one manuscript only, and unfortunately M. Potvin, when printing his edition, instead of giving in full this practically unknown and unavailable section of the work, contented himself with a brief, and by no means correct, summary. Mr. Alfred Nutt, in his abstract of the romance, prefixed to his 'Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail,' followed this summary, with the result that the real extent and remarkable interest of Gerbert's work has hitherto been ignored by the critics. The following abstract is therefore absolutely the first full and detailed account of this unique version to appear in print.

The section commences after Perceval's failure to resolder the sword of the Grail castle, as related by Gautier. During the night he is awakened by a great light, and hears a voice bidding him hasten to the rescue of his sister, who is in sore need of aid. Leaving the castle at daybreak he comes to an enclosure, surrounded by a wall, parti-coloured, red

and white, within which he hears the sound of folk 'making merry, and of sweet music, harp, viol and organ. Desirous of entry he knocks loudly at the gate with his sword, and no one appearing repeats the summons so vigorously that the weapon breaks in his hand. An old man then appears and tells him that he has lengthened his penance by over seven years. He may not enter now, but should he ever return and achieve the quest he may do so. Perceval asks if his sword may be mended, and is told only by him who forged it, who will know how and where it was broken. The old man then gives Perceval a letter of such virtue that no man having it 'spread beneath his head' can be deceived by the devil or deprived of his senses. He tells the hero he has beheld the Earthly Paradise, which cannot be won by prowess, valour, or riches. Perceval rides off, but ere he has gone a bowshot there is naught to be seen, all has vanished. He finds the country through which he rides well tilled and marvels much; yestereven 'twas waste land. He sees a peasant sowing corn, and is bidden by him to go to a castle near by, where he will be well received. The folk of the castle come forth with cross and procession to meet him, telling him that they owe to him the restoration of their lands and the goods that they had lost. The lady of the castle, Escolasse, receives him courteously, greeting him 'en bel François,' and explains that when he asked concerning the Lance and the Grail the land became fertile and the folk prosperous. As they sit together on the window-seat Perceval sees the flame of a forge 'more blue than azure,' and asks if there be a smith



in the castle. The maid replies there is one of great age, a king gave him his dwelling in reward for three swords which he forged; over the forging of the last he spent more than a year, and foretold that it should never be broken, save in one peril, which he alone knew, and that none but he might reforge it, but when that should come to pass he should have but a short time to live. The forge is now guarded by two serpents, and none save the servants of the smith may enter. Perceval asks the name of the castle, it is Cothoatre, and 'tis the 'manor' of King Frolac. That night Perceval sleeps on a couch, at each corner of which hangs a bell; no man, however sick, could lie on that bed but he would be made whole of his sickness. Escolasse offers herself to Perceval, and on his refusing, on the ground that it would be a sin to break his or her virginity, explains that she had felt bound to do so as the only return she could make for the benefits her land and folk had received through him.

Next morning Perceval arms himself with an axe, and accompanied by the maiden rides to the forge. After a fierce fight he slays the guardian serpents (clearly, from the description, dragons), and penetrates to the old smith, who knows at once what he seeks. He tells him the sword was broken at the gate of Paradise, and once mended shall never break again for any blow that a hero may smite. Perceval has braved many perils in search of the Grail, and passed many winters and summers in the quest, and shall pass many more, but he, the smith, has now but short while to live. Perceval rejoins the maiden, but in spite of her entreaties, and those of

her folk, will not remain at the castle. He rides off, but ere he has gone far he hears all the bells toll; the smith Trebuchet, who reforged his sword, is dead.

Riding on our hero finds two maidens tied by their hair to a tree, and two knights fighting desperately; Perceval asks the reason, and is told that they have been to Mount Dolorous, and failing to achieve the adventure have lost their reason—they are Segramor and Agravain. He tests the virtue of the old man's letter upon them, and they regain their senses. They all spend the night at a house near by, and the next morning Perceval departs, leaving the two knights, who are wounded, to the care of the host. After a week's riding he comes to the forest of Carlion, where he meets Arthur and his court, who are hunting the white stag. Perceval is warmly welcomed by King and Queen; but Kex mocks him, saying he will be old and bald-headed ere he find the Grail. They return to court, where a great feast is held. Perceval sees on the dais a chair wrought of gold and precious stones; he marvels that none sit in it, and thinks it is reserved for the King. Arthur bids him ask anything he will; he would know why none sit in the chair. All weep and curse the sender. Perceval asks the reason and is told a fairy sent it to the King, bidding him place it on the dais at every high feast; none but he who shall achieve the quest of the Grail, and win the world's honour, shall be worthy to sit in it. Six have already dared the adventure and been swallowed up by the earth. Perceval says he will test the Perilous Seat; and, in spite of the opposition of King and courtiers, carries

out his intention. As he seats himself the chair gives forth a loud 'brait,' and the earth cleaves asunder beneath his feet; but he gives no sign of fear. From the gulf thus made the six who have previously vanished come forth, whole and sound, and kneel before Perceval. The earth closes—'*ceste aventure est achievée.*' In the midst of general rejoicing Arthur asks the recovered knights how they fared in the earth; they say, but ill, and describe the punishment that awaits sinners, especially those who commit unnatural sins.

A maiden rides past the hall, weeping: Perceval, taking leave of King and Queen, follows her and asks her woe. She proves to be his cousin, who, having yielded under promise of marriage to the prayers of her lover, has been forsaken by him. He is now about to wed another, and has defiantly told her can she find a kinsman to avenge her she can send him on that errand. Her cousin she knows is valiant enough, but he is seeking Lance and Grail. Perceval, without revealing his identity promises to aid her. They arrive as the bridal procession is on its way to the minster. The priest '*crie le ban,*' and bids any who knows reason against the marriage speak. The maiden forbids the banns, on the ground that the bridegroom is betrothed to her. Her faithless lover bids her be silent, or he will have her flogged off the ground. Perceval rebukes him for his discourtesy, and repeats the accusation. The knight gives him the lie direct, and defies him to combat: the bride also threatens him; he shall be hanged, and she will look on. A fierce combat ensues, and Perceval, victorious, forces the

knight, Faradien, to keep his word to his cousin, Ysmaine. Having seen them married he sends them to Arthur's court, bidding Faradien say he has been overcome by the knight who sat in the Perilous Seat, whereby the former knows he has been vanquished by the best knight on earth, and is comforted. Perceval accepts the hospitality of the priest and is directed by him on his road.

Coming to a wayside chapel he enters and prays; then lies down to sleep beneath a tree outside. To him there appears the Devil, in the semblance of a fair maiden riding a black mule. She offers herself to him, telling him she is daughter to the Fisher-King, and if he will accept her love she will reveal to him all the secrets of the Grail. Perceval refuses scornfully, and the fiend departs in a mighty tempest. The knight draws a circle with his sword round himself and his steed and falls asleep. The next morning he rides off and comes, after a week, to his mother's house, where his sister receives him gladly. The two visit their uncle, the Hermit, where Perceval makes confession of his sins, and is told none may hope to win the favour of God by vain glory, but by penitence and confession; so will he have the sword with two edges—the one to defend Holy Church, the other to execute righteous judgement; now the one edge is blunted, and the other used for worldly purposes; and to one who bears such a sword the gate of Paradise is barred. Perceval listens meekly to his teaching, and departs with his sister. The next morning he rides away, taking the maiden with him, to the great grief of her household; they have guarded and

cherished her for ten years, when no kinsman took thought for her, and look upon her as a holy thing, '*une sainte chose*.'

On their way they met a knight who would carry off the maiden, but is overthrown by Perceval, who sends him prisoner to Arthur—he is Mordred. The hero and his sister come to the Castle of Maidens, where an old lady in white demands his name, and that of his parents, before she will grant him a lodging. Perceval tells his name: his father was Gales li Caus, but he knows not who was his mother; disinherited, she lived in '*martyre*,' and none knew her name, her land, or her lineage. The old lady says she was her kinswoman, and admits them to the castle. In the hall they find eighty ladies and maidens clad in black robes with white veils. (In Gautier's section the inhabitants of the castle are all of one age, golden-haired and clad in green. The fairy castle has here become a nunnery!)

Their hostess informs them that their mother's name was Philosofine; they two were cousins, and crossed the sea together, when, by the command of God, they brought the Grail into that country. Later, in punishment for the sins of the folk, it was borne by angels to the land of the Fisher-King, where Perceval had seen it. She bids him leave his sister in her care, which he does on his departure next day.

The story now relates the arrival of Faradien and Mordred at court, and their discovery of the name of their conqueror.

We have next an important section, amounting to upwards of 1,500 lines, devoted to Tristan, and

relating certain adventures of that hero not met with elsewhere. This, which is referred to later on as '*la luite Tristan*,' is clearly the working over of an earlier and independent poem. As an edition of this text is about to be published it will be unnecessary to summarize it here. Towards the end of this section Perceval appears on the scene, at a tournament, and, after overthrowing Lancelot and Tristan, reveals his name to Gawain.

The next day the knights separate, Perceval in quest of the Grail, Gawain going to Mont Esclaire, and the others returning to court. The story follows the adventures of Perceval.

After many days he comes forth from the forest, and sees before him a castle, and four knights leading a fifth, who is desperately wounded. Perceval salutes them, and is invited to lodge with them that night, no other dwelling being nigh at hand. The wounded knight is father to the four; on entering the hall he revives, and seeing Perceval, says he much resembles the lad he knighted. He is Gornumans de Grohaut. Perceval says he is indeed that boy, and asks how Gornumans and his sons come to be in such evil case. Gornumans tells him they must fight daily with forty knights, each evening they leave them dead on the field, each morning they find them alive and ready for fight. He is now too sorely wounded to renew the strife. Perceval promises to take his place on the morrow. He then tells of his failure to resolder the sword, and asks if it be on account of his omission to fulfil his promise of marriage to Blancheflor, Gornumans' niece? The old knight tells him that was the reason; he must

wed the maiden, hear mass devoutly, and he will achieve the quest.

Next morning Perceval aids the four brothers, and the forty foemen are slain, the last two, dying, tell Perceval he will have his pains for naught, they will be alive and whole on the morrow. The hero, binding up the wounds of his comrades, sends them back to the castle, he himself will keep watch all night, and, if possible, solve the mystery. It is bitterly cold, and he walks up and down to keep himself warm. Towards midnight the moon shines brightly, he sees a great light on a hill-side near at hand, and hears a terrible cry. He makes the sign of the cross and beholds the hillside open, and a hideous old hag issue forth. She bears two small barrels of ivory, hooped with gold and precious stones; from one of these she takes a drop of balsam, with which she anoints the lips of one of the slain, who forthwith comes to life. She does this to four before Perceval bethinks him he had best interfere ere matters go further. He mounts his steed and rides at the hag, who is much dismayed, recognizing him at once: she fears none save him, for he alone could achieve the adventure. She bids Perceval guard the barrels well, for so rich a relic never belonged to any of his lineage; 'tis the balsam with which our Lord was anointed when laid in the tomb: so long as she lives Perceval will never find the Grail. Perceval says she has lived too long already, but why make war on Gornumans? It is by command of the King of the Waste City, and in punishment for having knighted Perceval. While speaking, the hag brings another knight to life, and

Perceval, hesitating no longer, strikes off her head. He then fights with and slays the resuscitated knights, and tries the effect of the balsam on the most valiant. He would spare his life, would he ask for mercy, but he refuses, so Perceval slays him. At daylight he returns to the castle, where he is received with joy, and heals the wounds of father and sons. He expresses his intention of going at once to Belrepaire and wedding Blancheflor, as he is wishful to lead a chaste life. (Here follows a passage reflecting severely on the morals of monks and priests, showing plainly that the author of the poem Gerbert was following distinguished clearly between chastity and celibacy.)

The next day he departs, accompanied by Gornumans; they arrive at Belrepaire and are joyfully welcomed by its mistress. Perceval, in the presence of her 'men,' makes formal request for her hand. 'My lords,' he says, 'I come to ask your lady to wife in all good faith, as it behoveth me to do.' They assent gladly. That night Blancheflor comes to Perceval's bedside, and they spend the night together, yet in all innocence; they will not anticipate the moment when they can come together without shame. The next morning they are wedded in great state by the Archbishop of Landemeure, and the Bishops of Lumor and Lumeri. (Gerbert's names are often very perplexing.) We have then a long passage devoted to the wedding festivities, a contrast being drawn between the generosity that prevailed of old, when the minstrels came poor, and went away rich, and the meanness of the present day, when the robes promised to the minstrels are



ofttimes given in payment to the barbers. (All this has a personal note which is most curious and interesting as throwing light upon the character and social status of the writer, and the customs of the day.) After the feast the marriage couch is blessed by an imposing company of archbishops and bishops. Among the names given are Dinas Clamadas, Rodas, the already-named Lumor and Lumeri, S. Andrew 'en Escoche,' S. Pol de Lion, and S. Aaron 'en Gales.' When left alone Blancheflor speaks to Perceval, 'Virginity surpasses chastity, had they not better keep both?' He agrees, they arise and pray, and lie down again. Perceval is awakened by a voice which foretells that of his lineage shall be born a maiden who shall wed a rich king, but without blame on her part shall be in peril of death by burning. She shall be rescued by her son. She and her lord shall have other children, who shall conquer great lands, one above all shall have at first the form of a man, and be most fair to see, but later he shall become a bird, whereof father and mother shall be in great grief. To the elder brother shall befall a fair adventure, for he shall wed a maiden, whose lands he shall deliver by combat, and of them shall be born a daughter, whose offspring shall be pleasant to all folk, for of him shall come three sons who shall conquer Jerusalem and the true Cross.

(This prophecy clearly refers to the well-known story of the Swan Knight, and more especially to that version which is connected with the family of Godfrey de Bouillon, the conqueror of the Holy Sepulchre. As it stands, however, the promise is

meaningless. Perceval has but two relatives, a hermit uncle and a sister, both vowed to a life of celibacy. There can, I think, be little doubt that this passage, together with the previous detailed account of the marriage, belonged originally to a version in which the union was one in fact and not merely in form, and the Swan Knight Perceval's direct descendant. We have such a version in the 'Parzival' of Wolfram von Eschenbach, where Parzival demands the maiden's hand from her barons, weds her, and though he leaves her maid on the marriage night, subsequently becomes the father of twin sons, of whom the younger, Loherangrin, is the Knight of the Swan. As evidence in favour of the existence of a French source for the 'Parzival,' other than Chrétien, this section of Gerbert's continuation is of the highest importance.)

The next morning, after hearing mass, Perceval receives the homage of the barons, commits his wife to the care of Gornumans, and rides off in quest of the Grail. Here the story breaks off, and in a long and often quoted passage Gerbert names himself or is named by the reciter. He tells how Chrétien left his poem unfinished at his death, and how he, Gerbert, continued it when all others had laid it aside, but now has he finished his *laisse*, according to the true history. May God grant him strength to attain to the end of the tale, which he began where Perceval resoldered the sword and asked concerning Grail and Lance. 'From that point Gerbert "selected" the tale I tell ye, but the *luite de Tristan* he arranged in its entirety, *amenda il tot a conpas*, nor did he miss aught of it.'

After this digression, the true significance of which has never been threshed out, but which appears to denote a change of source at this point, the tale relates how Perceval comes to a hermit, who gives him shelter for the night. There is but one castle near at hand, and the lord of that shames all comers. Next morning a knight rides up with a lady, whom he is cruelly ill-treating; he has slain her lover, and would marry her by force. The knight requests the hermit to wed them; he refuses to do so unless the lady is willing, which she is not. Perceval, interposing, tells the knight if a man marry a wife with her goodwill he oft has trouble and sorrow, how much more if he wed her without! The knight bids him not interfere; they fight, and Perceval is victor. The knight, Dragonel li cruels, is sent prisoner to Arthur. The lady remains at the hermitage and is much disturbed at the scanty fare offered to her. Perceval tells her, better fast and keep soul alive than feast and lose soul, to which she assents. Next morning they ride together in search of the lady's lover, whom they find not dead but badly wounded; Perceval sends him to Blanche-flor, with a message bidding her heal him with the hag's balsam. The hero rides on, and meets a maid lamenting herself. The lord of the castle near by has an ill custom; all who pass that way must leave horse and armour or joust with him and his four sons; if overthrown he does them great shame. Her lover had been overthrown in the fourth encounter, and she would not remain to see his shame. Perceval rides on to the castle, and finds them about to harness the knight, who is stripped

to his shirt, to a cart, on which are the shields of his victors and a hideous dwarf. He is to draw the cart through the town. Perceval interposes, overthrows the five knights, and forces the lord to renounce the evil custom of the castle. Next day he continues his journey, with the rescued knight and his lady. They come to two roads, the right-hand one leads to 'durecestre' (Dorchester?), and folk may travel it safely, the left-hand one is *la voie aventureuse*, and beset with peril; they part, Perceval going to the left. For a week he rides through a waste and deserted land, then he meets two maidens making great lamentation over a litter, in which is a knight severely burnt. He asks them what has happened, but they give no answer. A little later he meets a squire weeping, and bearing a knight badly burnt about the head and neck. Perceval again asks an explanation, but, as before, receives no answer; he rides on, marvelling much.

Presently he comes to an open glade, in which stands a cross; at the cross are two hermits, the one beating it with rods, the other adoring with clasped hands. Perceval would fain know the reason, but can win no answer. As he looks on, the 'Bête Glatissante' comes forth from the forest; the knight pursues it till it can run no further, when the young issue from its belly, tear it in pieces, and falling on each other, fight till they too are killed. Night falling, Perceval sees a light, and goes toward it to seek shelter. He finds an enclosure within which are fourteen hermits, supping on bread and water. They receive him kindly, and make him welcome

to their fare. A maiden rides up, bearing round her neck a white shield with a red cross, within which is a piece of the true Cross; no man save the destined Grail winner can take the shield from the maiden's neck, and any save the most valiant of knights must perish if he attempt it. Perceval hastens to dismount the maiden, and takes the shield, whereon she hails him as the best of knights. The maiden bears with her wine and pasties, which she shares with Perceval; he would fain offer some to their hosts, but the servant tells him they eat no meat and drink no wine, and their King alone may speak at meals. They may talk freely to the King, and ask of him counsel, and the explanation of any marvel they have met with on their way. His name is Elyas Anias. Perceval asks of the hermits and cross—one smote the cross in vengeance for Our Lord's sufferings, the other adored in gratitude for Salvation. Then of the 'Bête Glatissante'—'tis a symbol of Holy Church destroyed by her children. The King tells Perceval he is his uncle, Perceval and his sister are of royal race, but folk think little of that if poor. Perceval assents, and says his sister is now in the Castle of Maidens with St. Isabel, whereat the King is rejoiced.

Next morning, after hearing Mass, the knight and the maiden depart, Perceval bearing the shield; turning to ask the maiden concerning it he finds she has vanished, and deems she was phantasm or faërie. Soon after he meets a car driven by a maiden with garments inside out. On the car lies a knight, burnt to the waist. Perceval salutes her, and she is rejoiced at beholding his shield, as she knows he will avenge her dead

lover. Perceval asks how he met his death, and learns that he and others were victims of the Knight of the Dragon, brother to King Maragon; a worshipper of the Devil, the Foul Fiend has given him a shield on which is a dragon's head, from the jaws issue flames which consume all who would fight with him. He is now besieging the Demoiselle du Cercle d'Or, on the Pui de Mont Esclaire; there her lover had been slain, and she has sworn to wear her clothes thus till he be avenged. Perceval promises to do his best to avenge him. They come first to an Abbey, where the Abbess and nuns are nearly starved, as they depended for food on Mont Esclaire. Next morning they meet horses laden with food belonging to the Dragon Knight; the servants, who hate their master, bid them take what they will. They come to Mont Esclaire, which is on the point of surrendering through famine. Perceval sounds the bell which challenges the Dragon Knight to combat, and he appears with his fiery shield. Perceval's steed is burnt, so also is his lance, all but the blade, but when the flame touches the shield wherein is the piece of the true Cross the enchantment ceases, and the Devil in the form of a black crow issues from the Dragon's mouth, shrieking horribly. The knight taunts Perceval with overcoming him by spells, not by valour, and challenges him to lay aside his shield, and meet him on equal ground. Perceval accepts and lays down his shield, a maiden rides up and carries it off. The two fight fiercely, and the Dragon Knight is vanquished; Perceval exhorts him to repent, and sending for a priest he makes an edifying end. There is great

rejoicing in the castle, and the lady of Mont Esclaire would fain wed her deliverer, but he refuses.

Perceval now starts in pursuit of the maiden who has carried off his shield, and meets the lady of the car; she thanks him for avenging her lover, whose body she takes to the castle for burial, betaking herself to a hermitage. After riding a week through the forest the hero comes to an Abbey, where he sees through a 'grille' an old man, crowned and covered with wounds, and hears the story of Evelac-Mordrach, as related in the 'Queste' (cf. Malory, Book XIV). After leaving the Abbey he comes out on to the open plain, and sees a strong castle; riding towards it he meets a lady and child accompanied by twenty knights; he salutes them and craves a lodging, which is granted. On entering the castle he sees in the middle of the hall a coffer of ivory, banded with gold and precious stones, and a key hanging from it. He asks his hostess what is inside, she tells him no man knows; ten years ago the coffer was brought thither in a barge drawn by a swan, with a letter in French in which was writ that none save the best of knights should open it. Since then they have watched the seven highways, and taken prisoner all the valiant knights who pass, but none can open the chest. Yesterday they had taken Sir Gawain captive, he had made a stout resistance till they sent ladies to take him, when he yielded himself prisoner! Since he failed to open the coffer they are keeping him captive. The lord and his brothers arrive, and bid Perceval test the adventure; he does so, and the coffer opens; within lies the embalmed body of a knight, with a letter

saying that he who opens the chest is the slayer. The host recognizes the body as that of his father, who had gone to Arthur's court and never returned; Perceval, on his part, knows the dead man for the Red Knight, whom he had slain on his first visit, as a mere boy, to court. The lord of the castle attacks Perceval, who seizes the child with one hand, and an axe with the other, and threatens to use the child as a shield. The host, whose name is Leander, allows him to arm, on condition that he fights with him and his three brothers in turn. Perceval accepts, and he and Leander fight fiercely till nightfall, when the combat is postponed till the morrow. The lady of the castle treats Perceval well, binding up his wounds, and bringing him food, his arms, and a light in case of need. A minstrel relates a tale to him till he falls asleep.

In the castle are four kinsmen of the lord, treacherous and cruel; they know themselves to be regarded with scant favour, as it was by their counsel that the Red Knight went to the court of King Arthur, where he met his death; they resolve to slay Perceval, arm themselves, take torches and proceed to break down the door. The minstrel, who is sleeping in the same chamber, rouses the knight, helps him to arm, and taking an axe himself aids him valiantly in the combat. The lady, wakened by the noise, warns her husband, who fearing that he will be shamed should Perceval, to whom he has promised a truce, be slain under his roof, arms his men and hastens to the rescue. The minstrel, after doing yeoman's service, has been slain on the threshold; the four traitors, though reinforced by four



serjeants, have failed to effect an entrance, Perceval having already slain three of their number. Leander seizes and binds the survivors, swearing to do justice on them for breaking his truce and slaying his minstrel. Next morning he hangs the traitors, burns their bodies, and banishes their heirs. The minstrel is buried with great honour in the church of St. Augustine, with an inscription on the tomb to the effect that all minstrels should hereafter be held in honour for his sake.

Perceval remains at the castle till his wounds are healed, when his host insists that he is bound in honour to avenge his father, and that the combat between them must take place. It does so, and Perceval is victor; peace is made with the other brothers, who recognize that Leander, who is the most valiant among them, being overcome, it would be folly on their part to fight. The prisoners are released, and ignorant of what has happened think they are going to their death. All make lamentation save Gawain, who, seeing Perceval, thinks he too is a prisoner; and is more concerned for his friend's fate than for his own; did he but know Perceval was safe, he swears by St. Laurence, '*le vrai martyr, la mort sachez tot vraiment passerai plus legierement*,'—a charming touch, and one worthy of the best traditions of Gawain's character. Perceval tells him the truth, and all are set free.

Leander does great honour to Perceval and Gawain, and would fain have kept them with him; but Gawain says he must go to Mont Esclaire. His host tells him the siege is raised, and the Dragon Knight slain; but he knows not by whom. Perceval

holds his peace. The next morning all depart. They come to three roads; the centre, and best, leads to Bretagne; that on the left, to Mont Esclaire; that on the right is beset with perils—none who go that way return. Gawain goes to the left, Perceval to the right, while the remainder follow the main road to Arthur's court. The tale now concerns itself with Gawain.

He comes to a tent where he is well received by a maiden of surpassing beauty but treacherous disposition. Gawain makes advances, to which she responds, telling him he may share her couch that night. This is a ruse to compass his death; she has already slain twenty knights with a weapon concealed beneath the covering of the couch. Gawain, making the sign of the Cross, detects the trap, throws away the weapon, and forces the maiden to yield to his will: she admits she is rightly punished. Two cousins of the lady, foes of Gawain, appear and attack him; he slays one and the other flies. The lady binds up Gawain's wounds, and promises him her love. Her brothers have meanwhile been warned, and come in hot haste, followed by twenty knights; Gawain slays four of his assailants, and outrides the others. After escaping from his foes he comes to a castle where he is well received; the lord has a custom that all guests whom he harbours shall, after meat, recount all that has befallen them that day. Gawain tells his adventures truthfully, and his host, rising in great excitement, declares 'tis his daughter he has dishonoured, and his sons whom he has slain. At this moment the knights arrive with a bier, on which lie the dead bodies of the

sons; as they pass the doorway the wounds break out afresh, and all cry on the host to take vengeance on the slayer. The daughter urges her father not to break the custom of the castle, but to intrust Gawain to her care for the night; she will see he does not escape. The father, not knowing that her feelings towards Gawain have undergone a change, consents, and she takes the knight to her chamber, where the two have much joy of each other. In the morning the lady arranges a comedy for her father's delusion; giving Gawain a sword she bids him make feint to attack her, while her maidens cry for help, saying that the prisoner has escaped, and is about to slay their mistress. All play their parts so well that the father, deceived, allows Gawain to leave the castle on condition that he fights with him at a place he fixes near by. The lord of the castle is vanquished; Gawain spares his life at the request of the lady, and bids her go to Arthur's court, and await him there. He next comes to a hermitage, where he finds the maiden whose lover had been slain by the Dragon Knight, and learns that Perceval has achieved the adventure. He decides that it will now be useless to go to Mont Esclaire. Next morning he meets Arthur and Guinevere, with four thousand knights and as many ladies, on their way to demand his release from prison. After a joyful meeting all ride together to Nicole (Lincoln) where a great feast is held.

The story now returns to Perceval, who rides through a waste land till he comes to a hermitage, and asks if there be a lodging near at hand? The hermit counsels him to return, telling him all have

fled that land on account of the marvels therein; none who go that way ever return; he has been there a hundred years, so knows. Perceval sleeps there that night, and on the morrow, despite the hermit's warning, continues his journey. Presently he hears a hideous cry, thrice repeated, but can see nothing. Nigh at hand is a marble 'perron'; he seats himself upon it, and a voice from beneath prays for release. Perceval says he cannot lift the stone; but the voice bids him draw out an iron spike protruding from it. As he does this a small worm issues forth; thunder, smoke and flame follow, and the knight knows that the Devil has deceived him. A great serpent appears, with the head and face of a man, and reveals himself as the Old Serpent which tempted Eve: she saw but his head, had she seen his body she had not been deceived. Merlin had imprisoned him in that stone lest he lead the Grail questers astray; but he had previously wasted and destroyed all that land. Perceval professes to doubt that he can be the worm he saw; and the Devil, changing back into that shape, creeps into the hole; whereon the knight, seizing his opportunity, replaces the spike. Asked why he tempts good folk, the fiend explains that 'tis because God gives him sinners without labour on his part, but others he must win for himself: Perceval will be tempted many times ere he win the Grail—he will say no more. Perceval mounts and rides on through a land burnt and wasted. At even he comes to a meadow, wherein are a cross and the image of a maiden; an armed knight makes bitter lamentation before the figure. He challenges Per-

ceval to fight, but is overcome, and the victor demands the reason for his conduct. He explains that his mistress was murdered in that place a year ago by a knight who had besought her favours and been refused. He has buried her there, raising the image to her memory, and fights with all who come, hoping eventually to slay the murderer. Perceval asks his name and that of his lady, the knight, as he is about to name her, falls dead. Perceval is overcome by sleep, and when he awakes in the morning there is no corpse but a fair tomb, with an inscription bidding all pray for the soul of the knight, Lugarel.

Riding on his way, he next comes to a fountain, wherein is a maiden up to her neck in water. Her lover has put her there out of jealousy, because she said Perceval was the better knight; she shall stay there till he whom she has praised comes to take her out. The lover appears, they fight, and the jealous knight is slain. Perceval lifts the lady out of the water, she dresses herself, and they sit down together. The hero falls asleep, and as he slumbers a squire rides up and asks his name. The lady says he is a cowardly and treacherous knight who has slain her lover; if the squire will avenge her on him he shall have her love. He declines, on the ground that she would probably treat him in the same way, and wakes Perceval to tell him what she has proposed; the knight had already heard what passed, and when the maiden would excuse herself, he stops her, remarking, 'tis a pity her *bonté* does not equal her *beauté*, he will bid her Good-day. He rides off and meets a pilgrim, who shares his viands with

him. Coming to a valley he hears loud cries, a maiden runs up and beseeches his aid; she is the daughter of the King of Scotland, and has been carried off by two knights. Attacked by others she had fled on foot and has eaten nothing for three days. Believing her story, Perceval dismounts to lift her on his steed, when he is beset by five robbers, who have used the maiden as a decoy. Perceval slays the five, and rides on to the Black Manor, which is the stronghold of the band. A shepherd meets and warns him of the danger he runs, the band number two hundred, and the maiden belongs to them. Nothing daunted, the hero enters the house, slays three robbers and the maiden, who attack him, throws the body of the latter down a well, and sets fire to the hold.

After this he reaches the castle where he is well received, lord and lady being overjoyed to hear of the destruction of this nest of robbers. The next night he spends with a hermit, who counsels him rather to enter a monastery than to spend his life slaying folk. Next day he meets and fights with an unknown knight; after a sharp struggle Perceval gets the better of him, and bids him go to court and yield himself prisoner to Arthur. He proves to be the knight of the 'Cote mal taillie,' and both are alike rejoiced at the meeting. Perceval is next attacked by a giant, whose brother he has slain, and who proves a dangerous foe. The knight, remembering his ancient skill with the 'javelot' tries a cast with his lance, and pierces the giant through the head. That night he lies at the house of a vavassor, who presents him with new

shield and hauberk, as is his custom with all knights errant whom he lodges.

The tale now relates how the knight of the 'Cote mal taillie' comes to the court of the King of Ireland, where he finds Arthur and his knights, who have come thither for a tournament. All are rejoiced at hearing news of Perceval, and the next day set out in force to seek him. Kay and Gollains ii chaus meet, but fail to recognize him. They joust, and the two knights are overthrown. Perceval rides off, telling them he knows who they are, but they do not know him! Whereat the two are very wrathful. After a day and night in the forest, Perceval comes to a cross at the parting of three ways; taking the middle road he speedily arrives at a castle, which proves to be that of the Fisher-King. Here the version reverts abruptly to the account given by Gautier, with the sole difference that the resoldering of the sword is successfully accomplished, and the King declares Perceval to be lord of the castle. The passage is, however, very confused, whole lines being identical with those of the previous account. It is thus exceedingly difficult to say the exact point at which Gerbert's poem concludes. The fact that the writer does thus revert to the earlier account of the hero's visit to the Grail castle, must, I think, be taken as a proof that he was not aiming at an independent conclusion, but rather at a lengthening of the story. In other words Gerbert's poem is an interpolation to which no satisfactory ending has been attempted.

At the same time the fact that he manifestly drew from sources other than those followed by

Gautier and Manessier, and the character of those sources, gives his work a special value. He has certainly preserved for us a hitherto unknown 'Tristan' poem, he has most probably also preserved a fragment, and an important fragment, of the lost source of Wolfram von Eschenbach; for these reasons alone, apart from the intrinsic interest of his stories, often very high, the 15,000 lines contributed by Gerbert to the evolution of the 'Perceval' are among the most fascinating and important contributions made by any writer to the romantic literature of the Middle Ages.

JESSIE L. WESTON.

POSTSCRIPT.—While this article was in the press, a note by M. Paul Meyer appeared in the 'Romania' for October, 1903, in which that distinguished scholar expresses his opinion that the writer hitherto known as Gautier de Doullans (see p. 61) is identical with a certain Wauchier de Denain, known as the translator of various 'Lives' of Saints. MS. 12576 B. N., and the German translation, which closely agrees with it, give the name respectively as Denet and Dünsin, which appears to support M. Meyer's theory.

It may also be noted that the Mons manuscript (p. 63) contains two independent fragments, printed by M. Potvin as an introduction to Chrétien's poem. They are by different writers, and represent a varying tradition. The first is also contained in the Low-German translation, and, under the title 'Elucidation,' is included in certain copies of the 1530 edition. This edition appears to have been printed from a manuscript differing from any now extant, as it includes not only the 'Gawain' adventures of B. N., 12577, but also a small, and evidently interpolated, group of 'Perceval' incidents, which, so far, I have found only in 'Mons' and B. N. 1453.

The Perceval manuscript at Montpellier is No. 249 in the Bibliothèque de l'Ecole de Médecine. It is complete, and gives a text identical with B. N. 1429.

Two Flemish fragments of the 'Perceval' have been published by Von Veerdinghen. I have not yet examined these.