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Idylls of the King

Alfred Tennyson

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Alfred Tennyson

Idylls of the King Alfred Tennyson
The Arthurian legend of Camelot has been told many times, but never better than by Alfred Tennyson. Employing some of the most stirring and beautiful blank verse ever written, Tennyson crafted his version of the Knights of the Round Table over the course of nearly fifty years, completing it in 1885. Despite the length of time, Tennyson managed to maintain a high level of style and continuity throughout. His gift for sublime and evocative metaphor and simile has never been matched, and in this case has produced some of the most memorable lines of narrative poetry in the history of English literature.

Although Sir Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* has been called the backbone of the Arthurian legend, Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* is the flesh and blood. Tennyson's epic poem consists of 12 loosely connected episodes of the knights at Camelot, Arthur himself appearing as an almost Christ-like figure among them. However, though Arthur's knights represent the highest and most virtuous ideals, they sometimes fail to live up to those ideals, and their tragic flaws eventually lead to disaster. But it is this very tension between the flawed knight struggling with his own weaknesses as he confronts evil that gives *Idylls of the King* its compelling qualities. Some of the most dramatic scenes in the poem concern the vicissitudes of love and the daunting ethical challenges such love poses for a knight: jealousy, betrayal, and adultery.

Tennyson's vision of glorious quests, Christian valor, doomed love, manly jousts, and bitter destiny have dazzled readers for well over 100 years. These endlessly inspiring, enduring lines of verse are not only entertaining, but enlightening as well. The timeless *Idylls* will no doubt continue to enthrall mankind for centuries to come.

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