

*Excerpt from Blackwood's Magazine, January, 1822.
(Variant spellings are retained as they appear in the original.)*

SIR TRISTREM, IN GREEK AND GERMAN*

The author of this little Tract, already famous by his edition and by his translation, in modern German, of the *Nibelungen-Lied*, the Ilias of the Teutonic tribes, has made, four years ago, by order of the King of Prussia, a literary journey through Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, for examining the different libraries of those countries, in search of ancient manuscripts. After having published an abstract of his cursory remarks in *Briefe in die Hegmath*, (Homeward Letters,) he is now about to elaborate the valuable stock of knowledge collected by him and his fellow-travellers, among whom we distinguish Professor Frederic von Raumer, who is preparing a history of the German Emperors of the House of Hohenstauffen. The first part of Von der Hagen's literary harvest is now presented to the literati of Europe, under the title, "Poema Græcum de Rebus Gestis Regis Arturi, Tristani, Lanceloto, Galbani, Palamedis aliorumque Equitum Tabulae Rotundae, e Codice Vaticano, Editio prima."

This fragment of a larger poem, unhappily lost, will interest the more British readers, as belonging to the cyclus of poetical fictions, taking their origin from the first inhabitants of that island, and shewing how these popular and chivalric tales were spread all over Europe. The first living poet of the country has not disdained to edit and illustrate the exploits of Sir Tristan, or Sir Tristrem, a knight of that famous table-round; and if it is permitted to a foreigner to judge on the merit of such a man, we believe that a great part of his poetical achievements, and of the deep impression his works are making on every feeling heart, may be ascribed to his deep and accurate knowledge of the popular and chivalric songs and romances of his forefathers.

The fragment whereof we shall give an account, contained in the Codex Vaticanus, No. 1822, page 200–205, is written on paper of cotton, in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, in *political verses* (στίχοι πολιτικοί) but quite as prose in one continual series of rows. With a slight transposition of the leaves of the Codex, the whole gives a little, but quite coherent episode, beginning, v. 1-13,—

Νίοι παιδίσκαι, σὺν αὐτοῖς, μητέρες εὐτεκνοῦσαι,
Καὶ ῥήγες ὑποκείμενος, ῥηγὶ τῷ Βρετανίας.
Ἐώρων ἐκπληττόμενοι, τὸ θάρσος τοῦ πρεσβύτου,
Τὸ κάλλος δ' ἐπεθαύμαζδὸν τῆς ἐπελθούσης κόρης.
Ὁ Παλαμήδης σὺν βοῇ, βαρβαρικῇ καὶ σθένει
Ὡθεῖ τὸν ἵππον κατ' αὐτοῦ, βάλλει τῷ δορατίῳ,
Ἀτρέμας δ' ὁ πρεσβύτατις, ἴστατο ῥωμαλέος,
Ὡσπερ τις λίθος ἀκλινής, σκοπὸς τοῖς βαλλοθμένοις.
Ἐν τῇ χειρὶ συνέτριψε, τὸ δόρυ Παλαμήδης,
Κάξ ἐφεστιρίδος κατὰ γῆς, ἐκπετασθεῖς ἐρρίφθη,
Ὡσπερ τις λίθος ἀφειθείς, ἐκ πετροβόλου σκενύος,
Πρὸς πέτραν δὲ παραβαλὼν, αὐθις παλινδρομεῖται,
Πρηγῆς τῇ κλίνῃ κείμενος, μὴ φέρων τὸ πρακτέον.¹

After this ignominious defeat, Palamedes is going shameful to his lodgings, putting himself on his bed. After him Gaulgabus (Gawyn,) nephew of King Arthur, is asking his permission to fight with the old man, which is granted to him. The old man tries to dissuade the knight, alleging the gratitude he is bearing for the mother of the knight, Morgaine, and for his ancestor, Uterpendragon, foretelling him that he will be put down like his friend Palamedes. But Gawyn, anxious to fight, begins the trial, and is vanquished as it was predicted to him. On the same manner, Galawtos, and many knights of the table, excepting only Tristenos and Lancelotos, are fighting with the old man, who is putting them down one after the other, still refusing to declare his name. Lancelot of the Lake asks Tristan to let himself fight with the old man. Tristan gives him leave to fight; but Lancelot, highly prized by the old man splintering his lance on Lancelot's breast, is put down like the other knights. After him comes Tristan, but he shares the lot of the other champions. Now Arthur becomes angry, and though Tzenebra (Genievre) prays him on her knees not to fight, puts on his armor, and runs down to the field of battle, whereof the poet makes this beautiful description, v. 149, 150.

Ἄλλ' ἦν ῥῆγὶ πρὸς παίγνιον, τῶν θεραπόντων θρῆνος,
 Καὶ κατελθὼν τοῦ δώπματος, παρίσταται σταδίῳ,
 Οὐκ αὐτῷ χαίπε προσεῖπ' ὄν, οὐ δεξιᾶν ἔκταίνας,
 Ἄλλ' ἔστη βλοσυρόμματος, ὥσπερ λεόντων σκύμος.
 Τοῦτον δ' ἰδὼν ἰστάμενον, ἰπότης ὁ πρεσβύτης.
 Ἐργνω τῶ ῥῆγα ἀληθοῦς, τυγχάμειν τὸν ἐλθόντα.²

The old man now begs him not to fight, acknowledging to be ready to become likewise knight of the table, whereupon the king embraces him, and asks that he may go with him to dine at the hall. But the oldman refuses to follow his invitation, and to disclose his name.

In this moment a damsel, unjustly spoiled of her castles and lands, arrives to implore the aid of King Arthur, or one of his knights of the table-round. The king relates to her how all of the knights have been vanquished by the old man, and that she may solicit his help, who, though he refuses in the beginning to lend her his arm, already weakened by the many duels fought with the knights, at last cedes to her solicitations, and goes with the virgin to her castle, where they arrive the same evening. But deposing there his armour the ladies of the castle see how old and grey-headed is, and are blaming the virgin on the choice of so weak a defender, having wanted a young and valiant knight of the table-round. They go to rest, and the next morning, when they are apprised that the enemy is approaching, the old man asks to eat and to drink. Having finished his breakfast, he puts on his armour, and looks quietly on the issue of the battle between the people of the castle and the enemy. Then, after the first are put to flight, he inquires about the cause of the war, and being informed of it, he asks, that the enemies may restore the flocks they have driven away, and the prisoners they have made. But these scorning his proposition, laugh at him, whereupon he takes his arms, and beats them terribly. Now the inhabitants of the castle come out of its walls, receive him with the highest honours and triumph, conducting him to the castle. Great festivities are given, and the virgin tells how the knights of the table-round have all been vanquished by the old man, who takes next morning leave of the castle, refusing all its treasures offered him, only praying the virgin to carry a letter he is giving her to King Arthur. The fragment concludes with these words:

Ὁμολογεῖ τὰς χάριτας, δεσποίνῃ καὶ τοῖς οὔσι,
 Γέρας τ' αἰτεῖται παρασχεῖν, αὐτῷ τῶν πονημάτων,
 Ὅτι τὴν χόρην ἀπελθεῖν, πρὸς ῥηγικοῦς τοὺς δόμους,
 Καὶ δοῦναι τὸ γραμματίον, ῥῆγὶ τῷ Βρατανίας.
 Καὶ ταῦτ' εἰπὼν ἀπηλλάγη, ἔχων γέρας ἄξιον.³



The late Mr. Henry Weber gave already a short, but very elegant, account of the German Poems on the History of Sir Tristrem, by Thomas of Erceldonne, edited by Sir Walter Scott. Some very slight errors only have crept into this account, that we shall here amend.

There are known four widely different German poems on the history of Sir Tristrem:

1. A German Translation of the French Poem of Chrestian de Troyes, not yet discovered, but mentioned in other German contemporary writers and poets.

2. A German original Poem on Sir Tristrem, but Eilhart von Hobergin, whereof a manuscript is found at the Royal Library of Dresden, consisting of 7727 verses, (not 7699, as Mr. Weber says.)

3. The third German Poem is by Segehart von Ba`benberg, (or Bamberg, in Franconia,) now at the library of the University of Heidelberg, among the manuscripts restored by the Pope from the Vatican Library, where they were brought in the war of 30 years.

4. The fourth is by Gotfrit von Strasburgh, with two Continuations, one by Heinrick von Vriberg, the other by Ulrick van Turheim. This poem, with the Continuation of Heinrik von Vriberg, has been printed in the Magliabecchian Library at Florence, in Müller's Collection of German Poems of the Twelfth, Thirteenth, and Fourteenth Centuries, (Berlin, 1785, 4.) This edition, made in a shameful, hasty, and incomplete manner, has been now superseded by Mr Von Groote, who, after having consulted different manuscripts, has now published the poem of Gotfrit von Strassburg, with the continuation of Ulrick von Turheim. The value of this continuation, more poetical and beautiful than that of Heinrick von Vriberg, is more adequate to the value of the poem of Gotfrit von Strassburg, of whom Ulrick von Turheim is not an unhappy imitator. This new edition has been made by comparing six manuscripts, quite as we do with the classical writers, filling up all the oncoherencies, and adorned by a very well elaborated Glossary of the old German language, so that we may say Sir Tristrem is now making his appearance in Germany, in the same dignified and beautiful shape, as Britain admired him already so long ago.

EREMITA HAMBURGENSIS.

*1. Monumenta medii Aevi plerumque inedita, Graeca, Latina, Itala, Franco-Gallica, Palaco-Germanica et Islandica. Specimen Primum, quo locum Professoris ordinatii in Ordine Philosophorum rite initurus, ad Orationem de Aeginetis habendam die xxx Julii Hora x invitat Fredericus Henricus von der Hagen, Professor Ordinarius designatus. Vratislaviae, 1821, 8. 35 pages.

2. Tristan von Meister Gotfrit von Straesburg met der Forsetzung des Meisters Ulrich von Turheim in Swey Abtheilungen herausgegeben von E. Von Groote nebat einem Steindrucke. Berlin, Krümer, 1821, 4.



Translations from the Greek are taken from Owens, James J., transl., *King Arthur and the Ancient Knight*, Tucson, Thorn Books, 2022

1. Youths and maidens, along with mothers with children,
And kings who give obeisance to the King of Britain,
Were watching the admirable courage of an old man,
At the same time admiring the beauty of a maiden who was approaching with him.

But Palamedes with a barbarous cry and strength
Urged his horse toward him and launched a lance.
The old man quietly stood there, confident in his power,
The image of an immovable rock, the bane of javelin throwers.
The bruised hand of Palamedes held a spear,
And he was thrown from his saddle to the ground,
Like a rock let loose from the hand of a slinger,
Driven backwards from the rock,
So it would seem that a weaker missile had been thrown back at him.

2. When that old and venerable knight saw him there present
He knew without a doubt that the King had come,
And he got down from his saddle onto the ground of his own accord.
When he had approached him, suppliant like a servant, he greeted him.
Saying, "Go away, Sir, lest something evil happen.
For it is my granddaughter who is the reward for the knights.

3. But he in gratitude refused the ladies' gift.
Instead, as a reward for his labor, he ordered
The royal maiden go to the residence
And give an account to the King of Britain.
On saying this, he left, satisfied with his reward.